UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2021


APPROVAL OF AGENDA

44.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of the Senate to the meeting. Senate members were reminded that the meeting would be audio recorded and asked that they introduce themselves before contributing to discussion to allow for an accurate minute. Members were asked to please refrain from using the comments function during presentations and reminded of the mechanism for voting through Microsoft Teams.

44.2 Scott Styles, School of Law, requested that the Senate meeting take place from 1pm to take into consideration childcare responsibilities. Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that the Senate Business Committee was acting in accordance with the guidance on meeting times for no formal meetings between 12pm and 2pm. The Principal stated that this would be reflected upon.

44.3 The Principal invited members to approve the agenda. Members of the Senate approved the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES
45.1 The Principal invited members of the Senate to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2021. No objections were raised, however amendments to the attendance were noted.

**UPDATE FROM PRINCIPAL**

46.1 The Principal reflected on the rights and responsibilities of the Senate, noting that respectful critique and challenge was welcome to allow the Senate to carry out its business effectively and make decisions based on the quality of arguments expressed. The Principal outlined the conduct expected by Members and requested that any inadvertent breach of these standards is approached in a spirit of forgiveness.

46.2 The Principal provided an update on the funding cuts for overseas research amounting to £120 million for the sector. Marion Campbell, Vice-Principal for Research, and the Principal had met a Senior Executive at UK Research and Innovation and informed the Senate that additional information to grant holders was expected to be issued in the coming week. The University would be allocating resource to compensate in part for the loss of UKRI funding and to enable ongoing projects to be successfully completed. It was emphasized that it was important for research activity to be increased once Government restrictions allowed this.

46.2 Members noted the University’s position regarding the Scottish Government’s roadmap out of national lockdown, with further guidance specific to Higher Education expected in the near future. It was emphasised that the University would use full discretion in its interpretation of the guidance provided. It was hoped that a framework for the remainder of the 2020-2021 academic year and an indication for the first term of 2021-2022 would be available at the next meeting of Senate.

46.3 The Principal emphasised the importance of wellbeing and inclusiveness to the University as outlined in Aberdeen 2040 and acknowledged the responsibility the University holds in relation to these matters.

46.4 Frauke Jürgensen, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, asked that the University would make a commitment to review and consistently implement the anti-bullying and harassment policies, specifically in relation to zero tolerance.

In response, the Principal confirmed this was incorporated in the review and plan for the Aberdeen 2040 commitments.

46.4 It was noted that one question had been submitted to the Principal and circulated to members prior to the meeting of Senate. The question was presented by Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy on behalf of six Senate members (Ben Marsden, Tony Heywood, Irene Couzigou, David Anderson, Amy Bryzgel and Lindsay Tibbetts).

_A problem has come to light in the last few weeks that may have far-reaching implications for the University's international research agenda._

*Researchers in numerous disciplines at leading research institutions worldwide commonly employ research assistance in other countries for a variety of essential research and research-related tasks. An example is to employ a local researcher to spend time consulting books or documents in a library or archive that cannot otherwise be accessed easily for want of time,*
money and/or other reasons. The value of such collaborations has been all the more apparent over the last year with so many restrictions placed on international travel as a result of the pandemic.

However, a block has in effect been recently imposed for UoA staff on this research activity. Applications for a Temporary Services Contract are being refused by HR on the grounds that by employing someone living in another country the University exposes itself to tax and social security issues which are different for each country, and that the requisite outside tax advice costs about £5,000 per country - obviously a prohibitive sum.

If only UoA researchers are affected by this reasoning, then the UoA will be at a competitive disadvantage both within the UK and internationally. If all UK HE institutions are now following this logic, then the UK HE sector will be hampered internationally. Either way, this situation is not conducive to promoting research excellence and internationalisation. This approach doesn’t seem to be in line with the University’s 2040 plan to increase interdisciplinary education and internationalising our institution and research.

In recent past, a few researchers were able to employ overseas research assistant to carry out research in other countries. Could SMT please tell us what has changed in the legislation to impede to employ research assistant abroad under a temporary Services contract? How can SMT solve this issue asap, given traveling restrictions due to the ongoing pandemic?

In addition to the question, Alessandra added that having overseas Research Assistants is cost effective and an environmentally friendly method of accessing materials abroad and expressed concern about the disadvantage to the University. Alessandra requested a timetable for a resolution.

Responding, Debbie Dyker, Director of People, noted that there had not been a change in policy, however the associated risks had been highlighted by the pandemic. The University would explore alternative approaches that are compliant with internal and external regulations. The matter would be considered by the Senior Management Team.

**REPORT FROM COURT**

47.1 Joachim Schaper, Senate Assessor, presented a summary of the paper to Senate highlighting key points raised in the Extraordinary meeting of Court on the 23rd February 2021.

- The Court noted the Senior Management Team’s decision to close the Sri Lankan medical pathway as a consequence of a University’s partner in Sri Lanka withdrawing from the arrangement.
- The Court received recommendations about the recruitment of a Senior Governor and all matters in relation to it: remuneration, role, and election rules. It confirmed the recommendation by the Governance and Nominations Committee regarding remuneration, details of which are available in the Court Digest. The advertisement and recruitment of a Senior Governor is ongoing with the election to be held on 5-8th May 2021. Court also received recommendations from the Governance and Nominations Committee regarding the recruitment of three independent members to fill current and future vacancies.
- The annual financial reports, accounts and the auditor’s reports were received for year ending 31 July 2020, reporting a surplus of £6.5m. The Audit and Risk Committee reported an analysis of the University as a going concern, the financial
situation of the University is more positive than had been predicted at the start of the pandemic.

47.2 There were no questions or comments on the Court report.

REPORT ON FINAL REF SUBMISSION

48.1 Marion Campbell, Vice Principal for Research, provided Senate with an overview of the University’s REF submission. The key points were summarised as follows:

- The University has prepared 22 units of assessment which will be presented from across the University. In total over 5000 papers were assessed and from those 1730 were identified and submitted. Around 23% of the University’s submission is identified as interdisciplinary. In addition, the University has 71 impact case studies which is supported by 700 pieces of evidence and 22 environment statements.
- The submission has been tested in the system and all but three verification errors have been resolved, with those remaining to be corrected imminently. All documentation is now in the final stages and the expectation is for the submission to be sent on Monday.
- The University will enter an audit period for three months following the submission where queries will be addressed. The REF panel will conclude in February 2022 with results expected in April 2022.
- Marion reiterated the importance of REF to the University, stating that it is worth around £140 million to the University over the REF period. It is also a key measure used in league tables and to our reputation.
- Marion thanked staff from across the University for the work and commitment involved in preparing the REF submission. The Principal echoed these sentiments.

48.2 The Principal invited Members to ask questions and comment on the paper, a short discussion ensued with the following points:

- Amy Bryzgel, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, sought clarification about whether internal peer review was a requirement of REF from UKRI, though it was noted that it was part of the University’s procedures. Responding, Marion Campbell explained that whilst peer review was not explicitly required, the intention is to mitigate the risk of unconscious bias. Discussions were held across the sector and the outcome of this was to have internal peer reviews and a sample for external benchmarking. The University incorporated this into the Code of Practice to demonstrate to the Scottish Funding Council how it would ensure unconscious bias was addressed.
- Amy Bryzgel expressed concern around internal funding for PhD students who are co-supervised by two schools, stating that the school effectively loses money using the current method. Marion Campbell confirmed that this was to be considered under interdisciplinarity. Graeme Nixon, Dean of Postgraduate Research, added that the University is exploring the issues surrounding interdisciplinary PhD students with regards to credits, fees and workload.
- Amy Bryzgel further queried whether staff will have a protection from disadvantage policy to mitigate the impact of Covid measures on research. Marion Campbell stated that the REF panels are acutely aware of the detriment caused by Covid and it is hoped it would be discussed at the sector level.
• Ben Marsden, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, asked to compare the number of REF eligible staff for this submission against that of our last submission in 2013. Responding, Marion Campbell stated that there was a reduction of 12% over that period. The Principal added that it is a key reason for the University’s focus on building revenues and therefore being able to increase this number.

PROTECTION FROM DISADVANTAGE:
COMPREHENSIVE MEASURES FOR FAIR AND CONSISTENT ASSESSMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

49.1 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education), gave a presentation to Senate on the Comprehensive Measures for Fair and Consistent Assessment in the Context of Covid-19, a copy of which is filed with the principal copy of the minute.

49.2 Following the presentation, a discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

• Cecilia Wallback, Student Association President, acknowledged the support staff have provided to students to date and supported the policy, citing the challenges students have experienced. This was an opportunity for the University to demonstrate the commitment to supporting students through these challenges. The Principal thanked Cecilia for these sentiments.

•Frauke Jürgensen, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, expressed concern about the negative narrative emerging from the student body regarding the support provided by staff members, reiterating that measures have been in place throughout the academic year to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. The policy could be viewed as a general policy for specific situations. Responding, the Principal thought that the meaning of Cecilia’s statement was to recognise the support provided to date.

• Ava Lindberg, student representative, provided support for Cecilia’s statement and acknowledged the pressures staff have experienced. The intention of the policy was not to detract from the measures already taken, but to ensure consistency and manage expectations. Additionally, Ava noted that the impact of the pandemic is likely to extend beyond the end of restrictions.

• Ondrej Kucerak, Vice President for Education, thanked Senate for the opportunity to discuss the policy again. Ondrej wished to add evidence to the discussion, reporting that Student Council had voted 98% in favour of the policy with the remaining 2% abstentions. Further evidence can be found in the student survey data, emphasising that students had to work harder to achieve academically.

• Brice Rea, School of Geosciences, asked for classification data over a 10-year period to provide a balanced perspective. Using the data provided, Brice noted a gradual trend towards grade inflation and expressed concern about grades increasing during a period where staff numbers were declining and suggested that this is considered by Senate in the future. Additionally, Brice noted that students should use the processes already in place to report the challenges they are experiencing and the impact on their studies and queried whether a blanket policy is necessary to address this. Finally, Brice asked what the advice was for academics providing employer references specifically pertaining to whether an Aberdeen degree for a student graduating in 2021 is comparable to those awarded before Covid, stating that the automatic upgrade of those in the borderline constitutes an automatic grade inflation and does not allow for assessments to be considered fairly. Brice supported the remaining two recommendations. Responding, the Principal clarified that the query regarding references would likely be confirmation that
the degree received is comparable to other universities, taking into consideration the circumstances, rather than a comparison to previous graduating cohorts at the University.

- **Neil Vargesson, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition**, thanked Cecilia for the recognition of the support provided by staff. Neil expressed support for this proposal on behalf of the School’s Director of Teaching.

- **Taylan Campbell**, student representative, expressed gratitude to the staff involved in creating the proposal and the work this had entailed. Taylan referred to anecdotal evidence from students suggesting that they were working harder and longer hours in order to achieve the same level of academic outcomes and the impact this has on their mental wellbeing. It was important not to assume that because students are achieving comparable grades to pre-Covid, that they are not facing challenges.

- **Amy Bryzgel, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture**, acknowledged that the rhetoric that followed the rejection of the No Detriment procedures at the last Senate was disheartening for staff, reiterating that the decision was based on rational debate and did not represent a lack of support for students. Amy noted that the proposal formalises many of the measures already in place and that staff recognise the challenges to students. The Principal added that there were legitimate reasons for Members to disagree with the previous policy, and that providing appropriate support to students was at the heart of the debate.

- **Abbe Brown, Dean for Student Support**, expressed support for the proposal and noted the additional evidence strengthened the discussion. Students require reassurance at this time and although there is evidence that some students are performing well, others are finding it challenging and the impact on this term is not yet visible. Abbe noted that the proposal is consistent with the academic integrity of the Aberdeen degree. Furthermore, there would be support available to staff to deliver the measures. It was reiterated that the University should be encouraging students to utilise the processes and support available to them but also to be aware of the circumstances which mean a student is not able to do so.

- **Andrew McKinnon**, representing the School of Social Science, acknowledged the circumstances that students are facing but expressed caution when considering the student survey as evidence as it represented less than 3% of the undergraduate student population.

- **Greg Gordon**, representing the Law School, expressed support for the proposal, noting that this was not an appropriate time to take a stance on grade inflation and that the unprecedented circumstances will be recognised across the sector. Greg noted the change to the use of the grade spectrum this year may have a deflation effect on the measures, though this is difficult to quantify and evidence, therefore the proposal for automatic upgrade will be transient. Greg highlighted the points made by Abbe, acknowledging that the current term was likely to have a larger impact since there has been no on campus teaching during this time.

- **Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences**, agreed with comments made in support of the proposal and noted that the proposal is unlikely to cause a significant inflation of grades though this is an area that should be monitored in the future. It can also be unhelpful to compare grade inflation from year to year as the cohort numbers and abilities differ each year, instead he suggested that external examiners reports are considered as the key measure for grade inflation. In response to Brice Rea’s concern about employers’ references, Alex believed that a student’s grade profile can be used to confirm a student has consistently worked at that level and is capable of the classification.

- **Scott Styles, School of Law**, was of the view that the Students’ Association created the narrative around dissatisfaction with the support provided to students and noted that there was a wide range of measures already in place and that the proposal adds to those.
Scott expressed support for all measures proposed except for automatic upgrading and presented Members with evidence of grade inflation prior to the pandemic, adding concern around employers’ perspectives of the Aberdeen degree and reiterating the measures in place to consider mitigating circumstances. Responding, the Principal informed Members that the sector had experienced some grade inflation during the Covid-19 period and that this was separate issue to the proposal.

- Yvonne Bain, School of Education, noted the passion Members have shown in debating the proposal, balancing support for students and maintaining academic standards and to this end the School of Education support all aspects of the proposal. Yvonne added that staff would normally be aware of specific student circumstances and have a willingness to support them.

- Kirsty Kiezbrink, Dean for Educational Innovation, clarified that grade inflation is where the University awards a degree higher than the student is capable of and that the University is monitoring this, however what has been discussed is awarding students the degree they would have achieved prior to Covid. Kirsty expressed admiration for students working through these circumstances and noted that grade inflation is a separate issue.

- Sarah Woodin, School of Biological Sciences, expressed sadness that it has been implied that the University is not supporting students adequately, and provided an alternative view that students have indicated a positive experience. Sarah wished to note that the measures the University has put in place since the start of the pandemic and the support provided to students amounts to no detriment, and that other Universities’ measures are equal to those we currently offer. The Principal acknowledged the support staff have provided to students but noted that more could be done to provide reassurance.

- Chris Collins, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, added support for all of the measures proposed. Chris noted that the issue of grade inflation was a red herring in the context of the proposal, indicating concern about students at the University of Aberdeen not achieving the same award they would have elsewhere. Regarding concerns raised by Members about a blanket policy, Chris noted that not all students will be comfortable or able to alert the University to their circumstances and that this can have an impact on equality.

- Ben Marsden, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, noted that the School had held consultations and though there was support for the proposal, concerns were raised about the automatic upgrade. Ben stated that although grade inflation has occurred at the University, it has been uneven across Schools. It was reiterated that the policy may need to be revisited for students graduating in 2022 to ensure fairness and consistency considering they will have studied part of their Honours during the pandemic.

- Zeray Yihdego, Law School, expressed support for the proposal on the grounds that the evidence presented gave clarity and strength to the measures and that students required this level of support. Zeray agreed with previous points that grade inflation should be considered as a separate issue.

- Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, emphasised that the key intention of the proposal was to provide reassurance to students. Tom suggested an annual report for Senate about grade inflation may be useful to inform the debate around grade inflation. The Principal agreed that this is an important point.

- Arash Sahraie, School of Psychology, echoed the previous points made about grade inflation and added that it should be considered through the lens of higher entry requirements and other factors. Arash noted that within the School of Psychology, there has been an increased use of the borderline classification regulations to bring them into line with the rest of the sector which external examiners have been supportive of.
• Kirsty Kiezebrink, Dean for Educational Innovation, recognised that the automatic upgrade was the key issue for Members. Kirsty reiterated that students were not expected to come forward with specific issues in order to benefit from the University’s policies.

• John Barrow, Dean for Entrepreneurship and Employability, emphasised that the proposed measures constitute fair and consistent assessment in the context of student wellbeing during the pandemic. John added that the automatic upgrade would have a minimal impact on grade inflation.

• Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, acknowledged the issue of grade inflation but reminded Senate that decisions were made prior to Covid that aimed to control this and emphasised that this was not the key question nor the intention of the proposal. The message that the proposal sends out to students is that the University supports them during this time and offers reassurance.

• Janet Gautier, student representative, thanked Senate for the discussion and the compassion staff have demonstrated to students, stating:

“I would firstly like to thank everyone for their consideration of this topic and fully apologise if the document I shared at all distracted from conversations. We have indeed received many student comments thanking individual members of staff for the compassion and support that they have shown to students, and are truly appreciative and cognisant of the effort that has been put in, so thank you very much for what you have done.

I would just like to share this comment from a student:

“As a fourth-year student I am still working very hard to achieve my first-class grades, despite knowing it is to the detriment of my mental health and wellbeing. This no detriment policy would allow me to take a little bit better care of myself whilst balancing my uni career. We have been learning under pandemic conditions for nearly three semesters now, and that will have a massive effect on performance. And if that effect is not being directly reflected in grades, that is likely because students are putting in 200% effort to stay afloat.”

I think this relates to an earlier comment regarding the definition of degree inflation as being undeserved. The efforts of both students and staff demonstrate that students are certainly putting in enormous effort, and I believe this policy as a whole would ensure that we accurately reflect these points. I believe that all aspects of this policy coexist together to recognise what students have managing to achieve, with the support from their school staff.

The comments that I have heard from students sometimes use words that I have never associated with our institution, and they are extremely difficult to hear. I have also been extremely upset by these feelings. This proposed policy is incredibly important to move forward as a united institution, and I feel aligns with the current QAA Enhancement Theme of Resilient Learning Communities. This would ensure that degree classifications represent the extraordinary work that students have been and continue to complete. On behalf of the student body, thank you for your time and consideration, and for your ongoing efforts. I look forward to moving forward with you all.”

• Igor Guz, School of Engineering, stated that the impact of automatic upgrading on School of Engineering would be minimal. Igor wished to note that the comments which followed the decision of Senate not to approve the No Detriment policy were the minority and Members should not be guided by this.
49.3 The Principal invited Members of Senate to vote on the three elements of the proposed protection from disadvantage policy. Senate voted to accept all three measures included in the proposal.

Vote one – proposal to extend borderlines from 0.50-0.99 GPA, to 0.01-0.99 GPA for students who were in programme year 3 or above in academic year 2020/21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Abstain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vote two – proposal to automatically upgrade degree outcomes for students in the top half of extended borderlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Abstain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vote three – proposal to relax the amount of assessment that requires to be completed to allow the examiners to award an overall course mark in the context of mitigating circumstances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Abstain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESEARCH CULTURE – PRESENTATION BY GARY MACFARLANE, DEAN FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND RESEARCH IMPACT

50.1 Gary opened the presentation to update Senate on the work of the Research Culture Task and Finish Group by defining research culture and the benefits a positive research culture brings to the University, with all the work to be viewed through the lens of Aberdeen 2040. It was acknowledged that there has been an increased focus on research culture across the UK and the University aims to shape this conversation.

50.2 The Senate was provided with an overview of research carried out by the Wellcome Trust. This research indicated concerns around key areas such as mental health, creativity, research environment and feeling pressured. This resulted in five key areas for action which the University will be exploring: teamwork, job insecurity, leadership skills, women in research and funders/institutions partnership. It was noted that UKRI had developed a research resource hub.

50.3 A new resume for researchers has been developed by UKRI which will be implemented across the sector and it was noted that researchers will require support to implement this.

50.4 The initial plans include communicating with the wider university community and developing a web page to detail initiatives and culminate the practices we have to promote a positive research culture. The University will undertake a survey of the research community and provide opportunities for further engagement.

50.5 The Principal invited questions and comments on the presentation and a discussion followed:

- Iain McEwan, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, raised a concern about the loss of skills due to funding constraints. Gary Macfarlane agreed that this is an issue
and it had been raised at the UKRI level. Marion Campbell added that the SFC are undertaking a long-term review of the sustainability of research and that structural changes have been raised.

- **Neil Vargesson**, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, noted the impact of caring responsibilities, particularly for female staff, and the evidence supporting this point. Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, wished to offer support for this in the context of the pandemic and asked whether flexible deadlines could be implemented for women with childcare responsibilities, noting that the impact of the pandemic will not be visible in quantifiable data for the foreseeable future.

- **Amy Bryzgel**, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, expressed concern for increased bureaucracy which has a direct impact on workload, citing the introduction of the new research award management system and the timing of mandatory training as examples of this. Marion Campbell accepted that the timing of research integrity training was not ideal, however it is essential to ensure support is available to researchers. With regards to the new research award management system, Marion encouraged staff to request support from central research support staff. Gary Macfarlane offered appreciation for the time it takes to use a new system but hoped it would be more efficient in the long-term. Brice Rea noted that experience of the new research award management system to date has not reduced the time burden.

- **Amy Bryzgel** expressed concern about inequalities arising from School’s ability to support the China scholarship and suggested this was funded centrally. Marion Campbell, responding, stated that the University was exploring a more strategic approach for central support which would include strategic investment to support Aberdeen 2040 activities.

- **Brice Rea**, School of Geosciences, shared experiences of funding structures and salaries for PhD students and post-doctoral researchers and noted the unintended consequences of funding structures.

- **Andrew Dilley**, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, noted that it was important for mid-career researchers to be considered in addition to early career researchers. Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, added that these groups of researchers have been most impacted by the pandemic with the lack of opportunities to network and attend conferences, reiterating that it is key that the University supports the most vulnerable researchers. The Principal noted that UKRI were aware of the impact of the pandemic on various groups of researchers.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR SENATE MEMBERS TO RAISE QUESTIONS FOR THE PRINCIPAL ON ANY OTHER ITEMS OF ACADEMIC INTEREST FOR DISCUSSION**

51.1 No other items of academic interest for discussion were raised and the meeting was closed.

**REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning at its meeting on 9 March 2021.

1. **Omnibus Resolution**

52.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court, the draft Resolution ‘Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees’ (copy filed with principal copy of minute).
2. Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP)

52.2 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court, the draft CHP (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

3. Update on the External Content and Implications for Teaching and Assessment for the Remainder of 2020/21

52.3 The UCTL received an update on Teaching and Assessment for the remainder of 2020/21. Members noted that there were some students on campus (e.g. students registered on healthcare programmes) including those whose attendance had been approved to ensure their studies could be completed ahead of their expected graduation date. The UCTL noted that discussions regarding the opportunities for PGT students to return over the summer months would soon take place, in line with Government guidance in this regard.

4. Preparation for Return to University for the New Academic Year, Including Transition for New Starts

52.4 The UCTL received an update on work ongoing with regards to scenario planning for the 2021/22 academic year. The UCTL noted that the Chair and Director of Online Education and Academic Services were currently undertaking visits to each School, to begin initial conversations as to what the 2021/22 academic year might look like. It was impressed upon the Committee that these conversations were intended to only begin discussion in this regard. The UCTL received the paper providing a summary of current activity and developments planned for enhancing student transition to academic year 2021/22.

5. Update on the Evaluation of Blended Learning

52.5 The UCTL noted that work to evaluate blended learning remained ongoing, with focus groups with students being held to gauge the impact of blended learning on the student experience. The Committee was further informed that a staff survey would be issued following the conclusion of the second half session.

6. Update on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

52.6 The UCTL received an update on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

7. Education Committee Structure Update

52.7 The UCTL noted that proposed changes to the Education Committee structure were currently pending final approval from the University Court. Members of the Committee were informed that, should the revised structure be approved, implementation of the University Education Committee (UEC) and its sub-committees would follow as soon as possible.

8. Updated Risk Register for Learning and Teaching

52.8 The UCTL received an updated version of an excerpt of the University’s Risk Register, listing risks specific to Learning and Teaching.

9. Protection from Disadvantage: Comprehensive Measures for Fair and Consistent
Assessment in the Context of Covid-19

52.9 The UCTL received the paper ‘Protection from Disadvantage: Comprehensive Measures for Fair and Consistent Assessment in the Context of Covid-19’. The Committee was content to approve the measures for introduction and to forward to the Senate for consideration and approval.

10. Programme Approval Process

52.10 The UCTL received a paper outlining the new Programme Approval Process, approved to support the development and approval of programmes.

11. Enhanced Transcript Update

52.11 The UCTL approved a change to the process for the consideration of initiatives for inclusion on the Enhanced Transcript. The stipulation that, in order for an initiative to be eligible for inclusion on the Enhanced Transcript (ET) the role must be an established University co-curricular role/activity* that has been running for at least 1 year, was removed.

12. Graduate Apprenticeships

52.12 The UCTL noted a paper on Graduate Apprenticeships.

13. External Examiner Report (Dentistry)

52.13 The UCTL noted the following update from the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC):

The QAC received a report from the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (Feb 2021) relating to an investigation that was carried out into concerns raised by one of the Dentistry External Examiners. The External Examiner had expressed some serious concerns regarding a lack of communication with her resulting in her having insufficient time to review assessments and grading prior to the examiners’ meeting, a false indication in a report to the examiners’ meeting that she had given approval of the assessments and standards and there were also concerns over the accuracy of the data provided at the examiners’ meeting with results spreadsheets needing to be changed post-examiners’ meeting when inconsistencies were identified. The investigation carried out by the School used a root cause analysis method to identify failures, or weaknesses, in process that could have led to the deficiencies identified by the External Examiner without apportioning blame to any particular person. The School report contained several recommendations for changes to process that could be implemented to address the issues raised by the EE. The QAC endorsed these recommendations and made them requirements of the Institute of Dentistry. These requirements have been amalgamated into an action plan that the Institute of Dentistry have been asked to complete by end Feb 2021 to indicate what actions are planned to address the requirements, who is responsible for each action and a timeframe for completion. The major themes in the action plan are around improved staff training in assessment practices, development of standard operating procedures for assessments to ensure sufficient time to check and review results, the appointment of a Deputy Assessment Lead to prevent a single point of failure and a timeline for improved communications with the External Examiners. An updated action plan, showing progress against these requirements, will be requested prior to, or shortly after, the May/June exam diet.
14. Fieldwork Guidance Paper

52.14 The UCTL noted a paper providing clarification and guidance on teaching fieldwork provision given the current restrictions in place by the Scottish Government.

15. Late Submission of Work Policy

52.15 The UCTL noted an update on the next steps for the Senate approved policy on the Unauthorised Late Submission of Work.

16. Update on Student Engagement, Monitoring and Pastoral Meetings

52.16 The UCTL noted an update on recent changes in the communications relating to the student monitoring and engagement/C6 and C7 processes and details of further invitations to pastoral meetings.

17. Deadline for the Return of Postgraduate Results

52.17 Members of the UCTL approved an amendment to the deadline for return of exam results as follows: Postgraduate Taught programmes by Friday 5 November 2021.