

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2019

Present: Professor G Boyne, Professor K Leydecker, Professor P McGeorge, Professor R Wells, Professor M Campbell, Professor A Speight, Dr G Gordon, Professor E Welch, Dr M Bain, Professor K Bender, Professor G Paton, Professor E Pavlovskaia, Professor G Nixon, Professor G Macfarlane, Professor K Shennan, Dr M Ehrenschwendtner, Mrs L Tibbets, Dr J Lamb, Dr L McCann, Dr A Zangelidis, Dr A Sim, Professor P Nimmo, Professor J Schaper, Dr G Hough, Dr A Cecolin, Dr R Shanks, Dr E Curtis, Dr H Martin, Dr S Thomson, Dr T Rist, Dr SJ Kim, Dr RB Taylor, Mr S Styles, Dr A McKinnon, Dr I Xypolia, Professor D Anderson, Dr M Barker, Dr D Lusseau, Professor M Pinard, Dr G Norton, Dr S Woodin, Dr M Delibegović, Professor L Erskine, Professor I McEwan, Dr F Murray, Dr J Pettit, Dr J Rochford, Professor A Lee, Dr D Skåtun, Dr S Miller, Dr D Watts, Dr D Scott, Professor J Jayasinghe, Dr A Rajniecek, Dr K Kiezebrink, Dr M Brazzelli, Professor N Vargesson, Dr D MacCallum, Dr J Hislop, Dr P Murchie, Dr M Jackson, Professor D Jovcic, Professor D Pokrajac, Professor M Wiercigroch, Dr B Rea, Dr N Schofield, Dr J Oliver, Dr M Spagnolo, Dr C North, Professor G Coghill, Dr P Henderson, Mr L Ogubie, Mrs D Connelly, Mr O Kucerak, Miss K Richie-Lawless, Miss I Drdakova, Miss R Chowdhury, Miss J Paneva, Mr J Lumsden and Mr Kirectepe,

Apologies: Dr P Sweeney, Dr DR Smith, Professor A Sahraie, Professor P Fowler, Professor P Edwards, Professor D Jolley, Professor I Guz, Professor A Jenkinson, Professor M Brown, Dr R Neilson, Mr D Auchie, Dr M Hole, Dr J Bohan, Professor W Naphy, Mr E Usenmez, Dr T Fahey Palma, Professor H Hutchison, Dr B Marsden, Dr A Bryzgel, Dr F Jürgensen, Professor O'Connor, Dr I Couzigou, Dr A Simpson, Professor P Hallett, Professor C de Bari, Dr J Macdiarmid, Dr A Jack, Dr G Jones, Professor H Wallace, Professor A Akisanya, Dr Y Tanino, Professor J Feldmann, Professor C Grebogi, Dr M da Silva Baptista, Dr R Hepworth, Dr N Oren, Mr A Vodentzis, Mrs S Littlejohn, Miss L Bacon, Miss M Jensen, Mr K Graham, Mr T Theurar and Mr H Chalklin

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- 40.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of the Senate to the meeting. He reminded members that the meeting would be audio recorded and asked that they introduce themselves before contributing to discussion to allow for an accurate minute. The Principal noted that, as a consequence of the lighting, it can be difficult for those at the front to clearly identify individuals wishing to contribute.
- 40.2 The Principal invited members to approve the agenda. He noted that no items for routine approval or information had been brought forward for discussion.
- 40.3 The Principal invited Professor McGeorge, Vice-Principal (Education) to raise an issue with the agenda. Professor McGeorge informed the Senate that since the papers for the meeting had been circulated, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) had published the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) outcome and technical reports. He noted that the reports identified instances where 'the level of autonomy given to Schools could create variation and inconsistency in the student experience.' Professor McGeorge acknowledged that one of the ELIR high level recommendations was that the University reflects on the balance between Institutional level and School level implementation of policy and practice, to assure itself that those studying at the University had parity of student experience. In view of this and the need to consider and be seen to consider to the recommendation, Professor McGeorge proposed that the consideration of item 6.2, the Weighting of Honours Years, be postponed until the

May meeting of the Senate to allow for further reflection at Committee level and across the Institution as a whole. He reiterated the need for the University to be seen to have appropriately considered the recommendation. Professor McGeorge stated that he was unsure if he needed the proposal to be seconded, however, stated that the Education Officer, the Director of Teaching for Biological Sciences and the Head of the School of Law were all prepared to do so. The Principal reinforced the point that the University needed to be seen to have taken an appropriate period of time to reflect on the ELIR recommendation. A short discussion ensued, the main points of which were as follows:

- Dr North asked whether this would present further opportunity for Schools and subjects to feed into discussion, rather than it taking place in isolation. Professor McGeorge confirmed this would be the case.
- Dr Rist expressed concern regarding the paper on the Weighting of Honours Years and that it appeared to contain visible track change comments. It was confirmed that this had been a deliberate act, following feedback received at Committee level, to demonstrate where changes had been made to the paper following its consideration by Committees. It was noted that this approach had been used previously, in the Learning Analytics Paper. The Principal proposed that an alternative, more appropriate way of demonstrating such changes be sought to be reassuring for members of staff.
- Dr Martin asked that the ELIR report be sent to members of the Senate. It was noted that it was publically available and could be sent to members.

40.4 The Principal moved to undertake a vote on whether members were content to postpone discussion on the paper until the May meeting.

In favour of the proposal to postpone discussion	63
Not in favour of the proposal to postpone discussion	4
Abstaining from the vote:	1

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal to defer the item on the Weighting of Honours Years had been approved and that the item would be deferred.

40.5 No further objections or comments were raised in regards to the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

41.1 The Principal invited members of the Senate to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2019. No objections or comments were raised in regards to the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

UPDATE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

42.1 The Principal, in providing an update to the Senate, began by thanking those members of the Senate who had volunteered to be a part of the steering groups for the workstreams. He stated he was grateful for the level of interest and noted that there had been hundreds of exceptionally strong applications. He expressed his apologies that it had not been possible to accommodate all applications and hoped that anyone who had applied but been unsuccessful would continue to contribute to the activity of the workstreams as they moved forward. The Principal informed the Senate that the workstreams were now up and running and that the International workstream had met

for the first time. He thanked the Senate for their enthusiasm in contributing to the work of the University in the years ahead. Secondly, the Principal informed the Senate that the University was proceeding with the arrangements for borrowing to invest in the King's buildings and the MacRobert building. He noted that the agreement was not quite complete and that due diligence was being undertaken, with the potential investors undertaking a visit of the University to inspect the buildings. He stated that he did not expect that this stage would prevent the agreement from taking place. The Principal informed Senate that the 50 Teaching and Research posts had been approved and that the advertisement was underway and expected imminently. Lastly, the Principal noted that the European Union (EU) flag was being flown from the Cromwell Tower. He stated that this is a symbolic commitment of solidarity with European students and staff and was not a political statement. He thanked Mr Styles for suggesting that the flag should be flown.

- 42.2 Mr Styles, with regards to the workstreams, sought the publication of the membership of the groups. He also expressed concern that the process was top-down and stated that the process of determining who should act as members of the groups was opaque and non-transparent. Professor Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, informed members of the Senate that the names of the members of the groups would be published as soon as possible. With regards to the identification of applicants to act as members of the workstreams, he informed the Senate that a small group comprised of himself, the Vice-Principal (Research) and the Student Association President had been delegated by the Senior Management Team (SMT) to look across the piece at the applications. He further noted that the Vice-Principal co-conveners had then also been engaged in the process. Professor Leydecker stated that the task had been very difficult and that every attempt had been made to balance factors such as gender, location and expertise in achieving a reasonable spread of representation in the composition of the groups. Professor Leydecker apologised if the process had not seemed transparent.

HEALTH SAFETY AND WELLBEING

- 43.1 The opportunity for Senators to raise any issues regarding health, safety and wellbeing was provided. No issues were raised and the meeting proceeded.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERISTY COURT

- 44.1 The Senate received an update from Professor Schaper on behalf of the Senate Assessors on the meeting of the extraordinary meeting of the University Court held on 26 January 2019 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minute). Professor Schaper informed the Senate of the key issues arising as follows:
- The primary purpose of the meeting was to finalise the University's proposals to secure future borrowing through a bond to invest in facilities. Professor Schaper noted receipt of three papers, including an update on the securing of a bond and the associated financial regulations and repayment parameters and proposed future development of the Estate that the investment might support. He noted plans for the transformation of King's.
 - Professor Schaper also noted that members had received a brief report on the progress of the Senior Governor.
- 44.2 Mr Styles stated his delight at the plans for the refurbishment of King's and asked that the plans made available to Court members be circulated to Senate in order that all academic staff and students would have some input into the development process. Responding, Professor McGeorge, Vice-Principal (Education), informed the Senate

that he would be acting as project sponsor to the work. He stated that the plans seen by Court were draft only and assured members that as plans were further developed, the views of students and staff across the University would be sought. It was agreed that the mock plans seen by Court would be circulated to the Senate with the caveat that they are initial plans only at this stage.

DEGREE CLASSIFICATION – BORDERLINE ZONE AND CRITERIA

- 45.1 Professor Shennan introduced the paper on the Borderline Zone and Criteria. She noted that the paper had previously been considered by the Senate for an academic view in December 2018 and had subsequently been considered by two rounds of the Teaching and Learning Committee structure, providing lots of opportunity for staff to feed into discussion. Professor Shennan stated that the key point of the paper was to identify whether or not there should be a borderline zone and, if it was agreed that there should be, should the existing borderline zone be reduced. She noted that data accompanying the paper demonstrated how changing the borderline zone would have affected the 2017/18 graduating cohort. Professor Shennan proposed votes 1 to 3 be considered before discussion on the other votes.
- 45.2 Professor McGeorge, Vice-Principal (Education), thanked Professor Shennan and all those who had input into the paper. He stated that the issue of borderlines was a hot topic across the UK as part of wider discussions into degree classification. He noted that the tightening of and clarity around criteria within the area was one of the biggest issues faced. Professor McGeorge proposed that rather than taking the multiple votes listed in the paper, that Senate undertake the vote (vote 3 refers) on the reduction of the border from 1.0 to 0.5 first, which, if passed, removed the need for votes 1 and 2. This proposal was seconded by Mr Styles.
- 45.3 The Principal moved to undertake a vote on whether members were content to reorder the votes, to take vote 3 first, as proposed.

In favour of the proposal to reorder the votes:	66
Not in favour of the proposal to reorder the votes:	8
Abstaining from the vote:	0

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had been passed.

- 45.4 The Principal invited members to discuss the issue in further detail. A discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:
- Dr Rea sought clarity as to why following debate and agreement to move to a system of GPA, which presents the opportunity to avoid all issues in respect of borderlines, the issue was being raised. He stated that under the GPA the system should be numeric and without discretion and the inequalities associated with this. Responding, Professor Shennan contested that a move to an algorithmic process would avoid the use of discretion. She stated the importance of a level of flexibility and discretion to examiners to take into account possible inaccuracies in marking.
 - Dr North stated that the GPA is inherently weak and flawed and that there are all sorts of scenarios which result in an unsatisfactory outcome through use of the GPA. He noted that he would be uncomfortable, in the consideration of the individual, with total reliance on an algorithm.

- Dr Schofield stated his agreement with Dr North and noted the need for reliance on the borderline in considering degree class in the case of individual students. He stated that sole use of an algorithm would make both him and External Examiners uncomfortable.
- Professor Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, acknowledged that he had joined the University late into the debate with regards to Aberdeen, however, noted his previous experience as a Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching). He stated that he proposal under vote 3 had a lot to commend it. He stated it was sensible and proportionate to reduce the amount of discretion and that it was a prudent move to ensure the safeguarding of the University's academic standards. He further noted the need for minimising discretion, to ensure consistency of practice, but maintaining a small margin to allow for circumstances where it is both helpful and necessary.
- Dr Watts stated that the view among School members at Foresterhill would be to vote for this proposal. He acknowledged this was for the reasons already stated. He queried, however, why there was a need to retain alphanumeric characters.
- Professor Pavlovskaja, on behalf of the Postgraduate Taught Committee, noted that although there was not unanimous agreement, the majority of Committee members, following consultation with their Schools, were supportive of the proposal to reduce the borderline to 0.5.
- Dr Zangelidis informed the Senate of his experiences as an External Examiner at institutions where there had been no borderline zone. He stated that Examiners meetings had been very dry and without opportunity to talk about individual cases. He noted that he felt the ability to discuss and reflect on individuals and the circumstances they had faced was important. Dr Sim stated that the individual circumstances of students should be discussed separately, at extenuating circumstances boards. Dr Zangelidis acknowledged this but stated there were characteristics which could be identified for discussion, such as mark trajectory and exit velocity.
- Ms Paneva stated the importance of clarity for students. She noted that she had not previously been aware of the borderline zone. Ms Paneva stated that she agreed with the borderline being set at 0.5 and the importance of exit velocity in calculating degree class.
- Ms Connelly stated the importance of transparency for students.
- Professor McGeorge informed the Senate that the issue of transparency in degree algorithms and the way in which degrees are awarded is a very hot topic across the UK. He stated that Universities would likely be required to publish much more information, possibly at discipline level, about exactly how degree classifications are reached.
- Dr Skåtun expressed concern that, in light of the issue of exit velocity having been raised, that the issue of the borderline was not independent of the discussion on weightings. Responding, Professor Shennan noted that while the issue of exit velocity would depend on which weighting was chosen, the paper had been designed to take into account the different scenarios based on the final weighting.
- Dr Rea expressed concern that both discretion and transparency had been stated as important. He stated that if discretion was used, there would always be opaqueness. He noted that while he was not in agreement with the use of the GPA, its use had been agreed upon.

- 45.5 The Principal moved to undertake a vote on vote 3, as listed in the paper, on whether members of the Senate agreed that the borderline should be reduced to 0.5.

In favour of the reduction of the borderline to 0.5:	71
Not in favour of the reduction of the borderline to 0.5:	7
Abstaining from the vote:	4

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had been passed and that the borderline would be reduced to 0.5.

- 45.5 The Principal invited Professor Shennan to introduce the remaining votes, concerning borderline students. Professor Shennan informed the Senate that the votes were designed to ensure clarity for staff and students as to the kinds of things which could be considered at an examiners meeting for borderline students. A discussion amongst members ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Dr North stated that all and perhaps more, were required, as a consequence of the individual circumstances of students. Regarding anonymity, he noted that it could be discussed, for example, that a particularly low mark be ignored if not representative of a student's potential. He informed the Senate that within Geology, the independent project work is looked at as an indicator of a student's ability. In assessing project work, he noted that the department obtains feedback from External Examiners. He stated that progress is looked at.
- Professor McGeorge, Vice Principal (Education) noted the need for consistency and the fine line between consistency and a limited amount of discretion. He stated that he was less comfortable with the use of viva examinations, for pragmatic reasons in addition to the need for comparators. He further noted that, at Undergraduate level, it was not a robust method of ascertaining student ability.
- The Principal acknowledged the potential issues of bias associated with viva examinations.
- Professor Anderson informed the Senate of discussion of the paper amongst his constituents. He noted that a constituent had raised an issue with the wording of exit velocity. He further noted concern regarding the use of 'average GPA' when the GPA is already an average. He noted the confusion caused by this terminology. With regards the definition of exit velocity, he stated this as a crude definition where one year was higher than the other, without specification that in order for there to be exit velocity the student would have had to achieved a first at level 4. He provided an example of inequity where a student may have achieved a 17.5 and 17.6 in level 4 and have velocity, whereas a stronger student might have 17.9 in level 3 and 17.8 in level 4 but wouldn't have velocity. He stated that this should be specified to remove ambiguity.
- Dr Woodin suggested that the use of the grade profile is not helpful as it doesn't allow for transparency. She further stated it places a reliance on the grade bands as being more important than actual grades. She noted a student with 5 first class marks and 3 second class marks might be judged better than a student with more second class marks but higher first class marks.
- Professor Leydecker stated his strong support of Professor McGeorge regarding viva examinations. He agreed with Dr Woodin and that looking at grade spectrums was a problem and would favour the use of exit velocity, ideally built in to the method of the weighting of honours years and allowing for the use of discretion only where there are extenuating circumstances present.
- Mr Styles agreed with Dr Woodin and Professor Leydecker and the agreement of Senate to move to the GPA and away from the use of a grade spectrum. He

noted the importance of exit velocity and recognised that it is built in within some disciplines, including Law. He stated that extenuating circumstances should correctly be considered at separate boards and his agreement that there was no place for viva examinations.

- Mr Ogubie queried the definition of mitigating circumstances and how they are defined. Responding, Professor Shennan stated that they would generally be anything that has impacted on a student's performance such as illness or other good cause.
- Professor Shennan stated her agreement that mitigating circumstances boards should take place, that they did entirely remove the discussion of mitigation in the determination of degree class.
- Professor Coghill stated concerns over the use of exit velocity and asked, at what level of detail would the use of exit velocity need to be sufficiently transparent in order to avoid problems arising in situations such as two people with the same marks receiving different degree classifications.
- Dr Martin stated the importance of the grade profile in decision making and her desire that this be maintained. She informed the Senate of practice at the University of St Andrews where, although their system is automated, it makes use of the median in order to allow for the consideration of the grade profile.
- Dr North stated that it can often be difficult to adjust on the basis of mitigating circumstances as course level.
- Professor Leydecker stated his agreement that it is not always possible to consider mitigation at course level and that it is therefore undertaken, anonymously, at the final Examiners meetings.

45.6 The Principal moved to undertake the votes as listed in the paper as follows:

Vote 4: For borderline students only, should Examiners' meetings consider number of credits in class above (i.e. grade profile):

In favour of the consideration of the number of credits in class above (i.e. grade profile):	46
Not in favour of the consideration of the number of credits in class above (i.e. grade profile):	34
Abstaining from the vote:	2

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had been passed.

Vote 5: For borderline students only, should Examiners' meetings consider exit velocity if L3:L4 weighted equally:

In favour of the consideration of exit velocity:	47
Not in favour of the consideration of exit velocity:	28
Abstaining from the vote:	6

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had been passed.

Vote 7: For borderline students only, should Examiners' meetings consider mitigation (if not already considered at course level)

In favour of the consideration of mitigation:	72
Not in favour of the consideration of mitigation:	10
Abstaining from the vote:	1

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had been passed.

Vote 8: For borderline students only, should Examiners' meetings allow *viva voce* exams to determine classification of borderline students

In favour of the use of <i>viva voce</i> examinations:	25
Not in favour of the use of <i>viva voce</i> examinations:	52
Abstaining from the vote:	4

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had not been passed.

45.7 With regards to vote 9 and the proposed automation of the Student Record System (SRS), a discussion amongst Senate members ensued, the main points of which were as follows:

- Professor McGeorge stated that as vote 7 had been passed, it was not possible to automate mitigation. Professor Shennan noted that the vote was meant to cover the aspects pertaining to votes 4 and 5 that could be automated.
- The Principal expressed that this was a highly operational issue.
- Professor Coghill expressed concern at the proposal of automation and stated that it was in conflict with other discussions held regarding the use of discretion.
- Dr Lamb agreed with this point and stated the importance of the judgement of Examiners meetings and that the numbers were not always appropriate to follow.
- Dr Hough queried whether the proposal was how, with clear grade profile and exit velocity criteria, individual Examiners' meetings might decide not to apply them in certain cases. He stated the inconsistency of this approach. Professor Shennan agreed this as the intention of automation, to ensure a level of consistency.
- Mr Styles stated that he didn't see what automation could achieve. He noted that matters of discretion and mitigation will be discussed, which cannot be automated.
- Dr Wooding queried the paper with regards to the definition of exit velocity within the paper with regards to both Postgraduate Taught and Undergraduate students. She stated that perhaps its definition should be distinct for each group. Professor Shennan stated that she had included 'where appropriate' to capture the distinct nature of programmes. She noted that automation had been proposed with regards to Undergraduate students.

45.8 Dr Martin proposed that vote 9 be removed from the agenda. Dr Rist seconded the proposal. The Principal therefore moved to undertake a vote on the removal of vote 9.

In favour of the removal of vote 9:	56
Not in favour of the removal of vote 9:	22
Abstaining from the vote:	0

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had been passed and that the vote would not be taken.

DEGREE CLASSIFICATION – WEIGHTING OF HONOURS YEARS

46.1 This item was postponed to the May meeting of the Senate (minute points 40.3 and 40.4 above further refer).

**DEGREE CLASSIFICATION –
EFFECT OF ROUNDING COURSE GRADES**

47.1 Professor Shennan introduced the paper on the Effect of Rounding Course Grades. She informed the Senate that the paper had been considered by two rounds of the Committee structure. She explained that the paper sought to address the effect of GPA on the previous agreement that CGS marks be rounded. Professor Shennan stated that the paper sought agreement that marks should be released to two decimal places. A short discussion of the proposal ensued, as follows:

- Dr Shanks stated her discomfort with the use of banding and, as a consequence, the inappropriateness of rounding marks up.
- Professor Pavlovskaja, stated the view of the Postgraduate Taught Committee, who were in favour of not rounding up. She noted this would improve transparency for students.
- Professor McGeorge referred to earlier comments regarding transparency in relation to course marks.
- Ms Paneva stated her agreement that students wished to receive their unrounded grade.
- Dr Watts expressed the feeling of constituents that marks not be rounded. He further stated desire for the use of alphanumeric grades to be abolished.

45.8 The Principal therefore moved to undertake a vote on the proposal that the practice of the rounding up of course grades be abolished:

In favour of the abolishment of the practice of rounding up:	81
Not in favour of the abolishment of the practice of rounding up:	1
Abstaining from the vote:	1

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the proposal had been passed.

REPORT FROM THE SENATE WORKING GROUP ON KPIS

48.1 Dr Oliver introduced the paper from the Working Group on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Dr Oliver reminded the Senate that the Working Group had been established following a motion to the Senate in February 2016 questioning the efficacy of then-current KPIs and their implementation. Dr Oliver noted that there had been 24 members of the group, two from each of the University's Schools, student representation and the Head of Planning. He noted that the group met over a period of two years and looked closely at each of the KPIs, resulting in (i) a set of general recommendations about the process of setting KPIs and (ii) a set of specific recommendations with regards to the current KPIs.

48.2 Regarding the general recommendations, Dr Oliver noted that these were regarding the process of setting targets. He informed the Senate that the group had identified 11 points aimed to help improve this process. He stated that these sought to address issues of communication, consultation, selection and the relationship between the

realism of targets and the resources available to achieve them. He further stated the group sought to address the unintended consequences of KPIs and who had responsibility for the targets. He noted that the Working Group sought the approval of the Senate for the recommendations, to implement a community-involved, holistic and evidence-based approach to the planning and setting of KPIs and targets.

48.3 Regarding the specific recommendations with regards to current KPIs, Dr Oliver noted that these made some suggested changes to KPIs and targets as they currently stand. He noted that these included the improvement of language, to promote fairness and inclusivity, to take pressure from individuals and to emphasise teamwork. He further pointed out the importance of identifying where responsibility lies outwith academic Schools. He noted that the proposed changes with regard to language may not necessarily change the KPIs but the way in which they are presented. He noted recommendations with regard to how KPIs and targets are interpreted and how results should be interpreted and the context in which this should be done. Dr Oliver noted some slightly larger changes, including the elimination of the KPI which aims for the University to be in the top 100 Universities. He stated the importance of achievable targets. He also proposed a new KPI regarding staff satisfaction, experiences of working within the University and how staff are managed.

48.4 Following Dr Oliver's introduction, a short discussion ensued, in advance of a vote being taken. The key points were as follows:

- The Principal acknowledged the paper as being enormously positive. He noted that he had made very similar statements to Court.
- Professor Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, on behalf of the Senior Management Team (SMT) welcomed the paper, acknowledging the careful thinking of the group. He noted that the general recommendations were very helpful and very much in line with the direction of travel of strategy development and the detailed planning and setting of targets and KPIs. He stated that these will be pursued in line with the recommendations presented. He stated his desire to work with the group to ensure the capture of the approach laid out. He acknowledged the recommendations regarding the individual, existing KPIs. He noted the support from the team as a whole for the new KPIs regarding staff satisfaction.
- Professor Delibegovic thanked Dr Oliver and the Working Group for the document. She highlighted the timely nature of the report and the proposed addition of the staff satisfaction KPI, on the International Day of Happiness.
- Dr Rea suggested the modification of the recommendation regarding REF publication. He noted the suggested change of wording was not correct and required revision. Professor Campbell, Vice Principal (Research) stated that the tone of the document was useful but queried some of the specifics included, particularly with regards to the REF.
- The Principal stated his interpretation of the motions was not as the acceptance of every precise detail but endorsement of the the general principles that underlie the paper, and ensuring they feed into the strategy process and the changing of KPIs and targets. The Principal noted the overwhelming support for the proposals.
- Dr Barker sought assurances that the work of the group would continue, that the intermittent deliberations of the group be made available to the University community and that the group have access to further thoughts and opinions including that of the student body. The Principal guaranteed that the outcomes of the group would feed directly to the strategy workstreams. He noted that the consideration of future KPIs would be put off until such matters as the

characteristics of the type of University the community wishes to develop are determined.

- Professor Anderson thanked Dr Oliver and the Working Group for the paper and proposed that despite overwhelming support that a vote be taken for the purposes of its consideration at the Court.

48.5 The Principal therefore moved to undertake the following votes:

Firstly, on the recommendation to implement a community-involved, holistic and evidence-based approach to the planning and setting of KPIs and targets:

In favour of the recommendation:	79
Not in favour of the recommendation:	0
Abstaining from the vote:	3

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the recommendation had been passed.

Secondly, on the recommendations outlining changes to current KPIs and targets:

In favour of the recommendation:	80
Not in favour of the recommendation:	0
Abstaining from the vote:	2

A vote having been taken, the Principal confirmed that the recommendation had also been passed.

REPORT FROM THE VALUES AND CULTURE GROUP

49.1 The Principal moved to the consideration of the Report from the Values and Culture Group. He noted he was delighted to see the report coming forward to the Senate, not least because it reinforces, complements and directly connects with the major message that the University be true to its foundational purpose, that the University be open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others and seek to create a culture and a set of values that directly serve that purpose.

49.2 Professor Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, echoed the Principal's comments. He stated that it was encouraging that the people involved can identify that things are changing and that it is flowing into the current strategy development. He emphasised that he would ensure the issues raised were taken on board as the strategy is developed. He stated the report was well put together and reiterated the importance of values and culture.

49.3 The Principal recorded the thanks of the Senate to the group.

MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE TOOLKIT

50.1 Professor Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, introduced the draft paper on the Severance Policy and Guidance on the Use of Protected Conversations, drafted as part of the ongoing work to create a Change Management Toolkit. He noted that the paper was provided for an academic view in advance of the commencement of a formal consultation process via the Policy Review Group (PRG). He noted the paper as straightforward in terms of clarity and brevity and invited any views from members of the Senate. A short discussion then ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Professor Anderson thanked the SMT for bringing the paper to the Senate following requests for clarity on the policy. With regards to the draft, he noted that it was vague in places and sought clarity on which statutory guidelines the paper was adhering to. He noted the policy was styled for use at any level but that the majority of the stipulations made were for very senior members of staff and that it was unclear as to what protections existed for staff not at senior level. Professor Anderson stated that the general principles did not seem to reference the remarkable report in relation to Robert Gordon University (RGU) published in autumn 2018 called the Report on Lessons Learned, following the severance of a high profile individual. He noted that the joint recommendations with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) contained within the report were of importance. These included the recommendation that there be transparency in the use of large payments within the public accounts of a University and the development of a resilience plan which looks at the sudden effects of a severance on the operations of a University. He noted that the latter recommendation was particularly important since the removal of Colleges. He noted there was no mention of the obligatory consultation required before a contract is severed. Professor Anderson stated that while he welcomed the paper, he sought more work on it. Responding, Professor Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, noted that the points were well made and that the feedback would be taken on board.
- Dr Shanks, with regards to page 66, noted reference to the proposed annual review of protected conversations. Dr Shanks stated that there was no information as to how, and by whom, these annual reviews would be conducted or where the review would then go.
- Dr Rea sought clarification with regards to the second bullet point which states, *'In order to reduce the risk of an offer appearing 'out of the blue' where concerns relate to capability or conduct, a clear indication will be given at the meeting that due to concerns consideration is being given to commencing a formal process (capability or disciplinary procedure).'* Dr Rea noted that, in this instance, a protected conversation was being had either before or directly in conjunction with the suggestion that someone may not be performing their duties appropriately and may need to go into capability. He stated this should take place significantly before in order to give an individual appropriate opportunity to address issues of capability. The Principal stated that this was his understanding of the process and should be set out in more explicit terms.
- Dr Rist noted the statement regarding the appropriate use of protected conversations. He queried 'appropriate use' and suggested that some members of the Senate may feel there is no appropriate use of protected conversations, despite the legal opportunity to use them. The Principal stated contexts where they can be used for the benefit of the University and of the individual. He stated that he wouldn't wish to preclude their use, however, that some clarification around the contexts for their use may be helpful.
- Mrs Tibbetts, regarding re-engagement, proposed that the process of re-engagement be returned to the Remuneration Committee and not the Senior Vice-Principal, University Secretary or Director of People as stated. Professor Leydecker stated that this could be considered but that careful consideration would need to be given as to whether that would be prejudicial towards an individual.
- Professor Anderson added some observations with regards to the Use of Protected Conversations. He noted feedback from constituents regarding the wording of the paper. He noted that 'advance notice' and 'out of the blue' which are not appropriately defined. He noted an overriding ambiguity within the document that legal guidance allows any member of an organisation to initiate

a protected conversation. He noted that the document is worded in reverse and is about getting rid of people. The Principal sought clarity from Professor Anderson that this phrase is not in the document. Professor Anderson stated it was not. He further stated that the implication is that there were a number of conditions where an employee will be made aware of insufficient performance but that the reverse pathway is not described, despite the fact that this may be appropriate. He noted the policy makes reference to the ACAS guidance but not that this will be adopted and footnotes documents not sufficiently clarified. The Principal stated the intention to work to the ACAS guidance.

- Dr Martin asked that the SFC review published after the RGU events be referred to.

ANY OTHER ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

51.1 Professor Anderson was invited to ask his question, as follows:

Some staff have been invited to “mandatory” training sessions on unconscious bias. Several constituents were concerned about the seminar of 6 March, the content of which they found to be inappropriate. It was reported that the attendees were advised to push forward equality and diversity issues for the university since academic staff could not be trusted to do so. It was said that academics were too specialised, could not think creatively, and many only took PhDs because they could not think of anything else to do. It was further reported that some of the vocabulary used to refer to Black or Minority members of staff was outdated. While I understand that some ranked the experience very highly, the words reported cast the work of the entire academic community, not to mention that of our students, in a shadow.

Equality and Diversity training is important. Can the Principal advise Senate exactly what consultations went into the choice of staff to lead the training? Was the content of the training designed on the basis of evidence or past failings? How might concerned members of staff constructively reshape this training so that it can take our strategic vision forward?

Responding, Ms Dyker, Director of People, issued a response as follows:

Firstly, I would stress my agreement with the statement that equality and diversity, including unconscious bias, training is important for everyone. I understand that there was previous training delivered on the topic of unconscious bias - a session developed internally (prior to the session that has been referred to) and one session delivered by an external provider. I have been advised that the most recent series of sessions you have referred to have been offered as alternatives and based on positive feedback further sessions have been offered. This session has been developed by internal resource with extensive experience in employment law. Regarding your specific comments/matters of concern about this training, I have not been able to follow up as yet with the member of staff but will do so. I would note that that I am surprised by some of the points that you have made regarding the comments some members of staff have made to you and would stress that acting in an inclusive manner is the responsibility of each member of staff. In response to your query about how staff can reshape this training I would stress that they should feedback any concerns and suggestions to me.

51.2 The Principal highlighted the importance of everyone being able to work with dignity and respect, and the importance of addressing conscious and unconscious bias within the Institution. Comments were invited from members of the Senate.

- Professor Paton noted that training on unconscious bias had recently been held for the School of Biological Sciences and that this had been a positive event.
- Dr Oliver noted that he had not attended the training, however, suggested that expertise from within the School of Social Science be considered for use in training staff.
- Professor Schaper reiterated that there may be others more appropriate to deliver the training.

The Principal confirmed that issues should be discussed with the Equality and Diversity Team.

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 19 February 2019. Dr North noted that regulations approved by the Senate aren't always appropriately reflected in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH). It was confirmed that this would be ensured, where appropriate.

1. Short Course Degree Regulations

- 52.1 On the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning (UCTL) the Senate approved the proposed Short Course Degree Regulations (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

2. Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Plagiarism against Graduates of the University

- 52.2 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the UCTL, the revised Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Plagiarism against Graduates of the University (copy filed with principal copy of minute). Members were advised that the changes made reflected the removal of Colleges.

3. Assessment and Feedback

- 52.3 The Senate noted that the Committee considered papers on (i) Weighting of Honours Years, (ii) Borderlines and (iii) Rounding up of Course Grades Classification and agreed that they be forwarded to the Senate for discussion and approval.

4. Recommendations of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) Panel

- 52.4 Members of the Committee considered the draft outcome and technical reports from the ELIR panel. The Committee specifically considered the recommendations made with regards to (i) External Examining, (ii) the Postgraduate Research School and (iii) Preparation for Teaching.

SENATE ELECTIONS

- 53.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved the timeline for the election on non *ex officio* members to the Senate and the election of Senate Assessors to the University Court (copy filed with principal copy of minute).