UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2020


Apologies: Marion Campbell, Greg Gordon, Russell Williams, Michael Brown, Gary Macfarlane, Mirela Delibegović, Harminder Battu, Hazel Hutchison, Jerry Morse, Alexandros Zangelidis, Allan Sim, Stephanie Thomson, Amy Bryzgel, Ralph O’Connor, Ilia Xypolia, Isla Graham, Fiona Murray, Jonathan Pettit, Gareth Jones, Maria Wiercigroch, Sofia Puentes Ferreira and Louise Henrard

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

2.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of the Senate to the first non-extraordinary meeting of the Senate of the 2020/21 academic year. Senate members were reminded that the meeting would be audio and video 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.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

3.1 The Principal invited members of the Senate to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2020. No objections or comments were raised regarding the minutes and the meeting proceeded.
MEMBERS OF THE SENATE NOTED THAT THE PRINCIPAL HAD RECENTLY HELD AN OPEN SESSION (ON 14 OCTOBER) AND CIRCULATED A WRITTEN UPDATE (ON 16 OCTOBER). THE PRINCIPAL BRIEFLY PROVIDED THE SENATE WITH A RECAP OF THE KEY POINTS COVERED BY BOTH. MEMBERS OF THE SENATE NOTED THAT STUDENT NUMBERS LOOKED SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER THAN ANTICIPATED, PUTTING THE UNIVERSITY IN A BETTER FINANCIAL POSITION THAN EXPECTED. MEMBERS NOTED THAT THE UNIVERSITY WAS STILL EXPECTED TO HAVE A DEFICIT, HOWEVER, THE PRECISE FIGURE COULD NOT YET BE DETERMINED, AS THIS WOULD PARTLY DEPEND ON THE JANUARY 2021 INTAKE. MEMBERS OF THE SENATE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT (PGT) JANUARY INTAKE PROGRAMMES HAD BEEN GREATLY EXPANDED. THE PRINCIPAL INFORMED MEMBERS OF THE SENATE THAT HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT NO FURTHER FINANCIAL ACTION WOULD NEED TO BE TAKEN FOR THE UNIVERSITY TO REMAIN SOLVENT IN THE CURRENT ACADEMIC YEAR. THE PRINCIPAL NOTED THAT THE UNIVERSITY WOULD NEED TO RETURN TO BEING SUSTAINABLE IN 2021/22 AND BEYOND, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THIS WOULD BE CHALLENGING IN PART DUE TO EXTRA REVENUE CURRENTLY IN PLACE, FROM THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT TRUST, AMOUNTING TO APPROXIMATELY £10 MILLION, NO LONGER BEING AVAILABLE IN 2021/22.

IT WAS NOTED THAT THREE QUESTIONS HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE PRINCIPAL, PRIOR TO THE MEETING OF SENATE. DAVID ANDERSON, REPRESENTING THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE, ASKED:

**Why has university stopped posting of the total number of positive Covid infections at the University Aberdeen?** Will it resume posting these figures? *Will it consider publishing important contextual data on the number of tests administered, data on the numbers of staff self-isolating and reporting a positive step, and perhaps republish the publicly available Covid statistics for the neighbourhoods surrounding the University?*

The Principal explained that figures would be published but that this must be done in alignment with NHS Grampian. Karl Leydecker, Senior-Vice-Principal, was invited to explain further. Karl informed the Senate that numbers had been and would continue to be published. He noted that the Incident Management Team (IMT) had now been stood down, but that an agreement had been reached with the IMT and NHS Grampian to publish an update of positive tests every Friday. It was noted that weekly updates would therefore be provided on the University’s webpages, encapsulating the cumulative total and the preceding week’s new cases amongst the student population. Additionally, Karl informed members of the Senate that information around support being given to self-isolating students would also be publicised. It was noted that it was hoped that the webpages would also allow users to access further related publicly available information. A link to the University’s webpages in this regard was provided to members of the Senate.

AMY BRYZGEL, REPRESENTING THE SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, MUSIC AND VISUAL CULTURE, ASKED:

*In line with the motion passed by Senate on 13 December 2017, “Motion on Evidence Based Strategy,” a number of elected Senators would like to request the evidence behind adopting a Blended Learning approach for the second half-session. We refer specifically to points 5 and 6 of that motion, “that is there should be a minimum expectation that institutional changes to policy, procedure and practice are supported by reference to and development based upon the best available evidence including peer-reviewed academic publications, local expertise and learning from experience,” and that “this approach includes making justificatory evidence more widely available within the institution and open to additional scrutiny, as is the model in peer-reviewed publications.”*
Responding, the Principal wished to reaffirm the commitment to using the best available evidence when making policies and operational decisions. It was noted that available evidence can be wide-ranging, contradictory and inconsistent meaning that the local context must be taken into account. Ruth Taylor, Vice Principal (Education), was invited to discuss the practicalities further. Ruth wished to reiterate the comments about the importance of evidence in the University’s decision making. A variety of evidence was applied to a number of areas including student learning, student experience, student intention and recruitment. The Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group (BLITFG) and University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) had ensured that the decision making around the learning experience was grounded in evidence. These groups had been engaged in horizon scanning and informal networks in the UK and beyond, such as meeting with other Vice-Principals for Education. Evaluation of the University’s blended learning was ongoing, and the evidence used would be further clarified in this. Alan Speight, Vice-Principal for Student Recruitment, added that rolling international student surveys were being monitored to gauge the view on modes of delivery. It was clear from these surveys that the attitudes towards blended learning from prospective students were improving. Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, was interested in views on the revelation that SAGE were giving different advice to the Government from that which the Government adopted meaning that the University’s actions may be out of step with SAGE advice. Tom also wished to ask if in-house expertise was consulted when developing policy, for example, virologists. The Principal clarified the role of SAGE, which was to provide advice on how best to suppress the coronavirus. It was also acknowledged that it was not necessarily the role of Government to take decisions based solely on this objective. On the matter of in-house expertise, the Principal was pleased to hear this point raised and is committed to drawing upon it. The Senior Vice-Principal noted that an open session by the University’s public health experts was planned to help the University as a community interpret the current context and so the scientific basis of many of the recent decisions could be discussed. The IMT also allowed the University to work closely with public health expertise, some of whom are members of the University community of staff. Siladitya Bhattacharya, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, echoed that the University worked closely with public health clinicians who are also clinical academics and who provided much of the data that informed policies and procedures over the last few months. The Principal reiterated that the University has a commitment to evidence-based decision making and proposed convening a separate meeting to focus on this topic.

4.4 Scott Styles, School of Law, asked:

*Given the enormous uncertainty generated by the Covid pandemic to future the income of the University does the University still intend to spend the money borrowed on a bond on refurbishment and new buildings on the King’s College Campus or will it wait until the pandemic is over before committing these funds to building or some other purpose?*

Responding, the Principal explained that a decision would be made before the pandemic was over, as the end point could not currently be ascertained. A paper would be presented to the November meeting of the University Court recommending that the University proceed with these investments. The grounds on which the proposals were made are still in place, with international students still interested in face to face teaching with high demand for business programmes. Scott suggested that there were misgivings about proceeding with these plans against the context of financial uncertainty. The Principal noted that this development would take place cautiously in stages allowing plans to be amended should the context change.
5.1  Lindsey Tibbetts, Senate Assessor and representative of the Business School, was invited to deliver the report from the University Court. For the benefit of new members of Senate, Lindsey explained that the Court’s principal role was to oversee the management of the University’s revenue and property. The Court approves the strategic vision of the University and has a number of corporate and legal responsibilities. The Court has 25 members including four appointed by Senate. Senate members’ attention was drawn to the Court’s presence on the Intranet and the establishment of a new Teams site to facilitate communication between Senate meetings. It was acknowledged that the agenda and minutes are distributed as part of a Court digest.

5.2  Lindsey noted that reports for the meetings of the Court held on the 21 August and 30 September had been provided to the Senate, for information. With regard the meeting held on 21 August:

- It was noted that the meeting held had focused on the Oscar review of payments to the former Principal and the ongoing review of Governance. Lindsey informed the Senate that the Oscar report had been made available to the community in July 2020 and had noted a number of failings in the decision making primarily around the renumeration Committee and its accountability to Court. As a response to these criticisms a formal review of governance, led by the interim secretary, presented a working draft paper to Court. It was acknowledged that this paper would be brought back, and a detailed matching would take place between the SFC and the Oscar reviews requirements.
- The regular report from the Senior Governor reported back on meetings held with other Senior Governors of other institutions in the sector around the Covid-19 response.
- The Senior Governor also noted the sad loss of Mr Ronnie Scott Brown, a distinguished alumnus of the University and former senior member of the University Court. The Court wished to offer its condolences to his family.
- The Court also considered a report about the data breach that had taken place in relation to the development trust where a cyberattack through an external provider allowed access to the alumni database system. Although the development trust is independent of the University, the breach does have implications for the University as a whole. The breach was therefore reported to Oscar and the Information Commissioner in addition to steps taken by the Development Trust, with a third-party audit planned of the University’s procedures in relation to GDPR compliance.
- The Court also considered a report from the SFC who are reviewing the coherence and sustainability of the Scottish sector. Court approved a response to this review and understood that there would be no action related to this review until after the May 2021 election.
- Two staff members of Court are due to step down and Jenny Fernandes and Martin Mills were thanked for their service. Court approved the process for the nomination and election of their replacements and Senators were invited to encourage staff to take part in the voting process.

5.3  With regard to the meeting held on 30 September:

- It was noted that the meeting had largely focused on an update around the Covid-19 numbers and student numbers. Lindsey did not wish to repeat ground previously discussed by the Principal but echoed his points.
The Court had been given access to the outturn for draft financial numbers for the previous year with a surplus of £6.5 million against the £3 million deficit suggesting the University may be in a strong position to recover after the pandemic.

The Court considered the Sri Lankan medical pathway and issues associated with these, relating to political changes in the country. An international partnerships update would be considered later on the Senate agenda.

The Governance Review was reconsidered with a further update to be delivered as part of the Senate meeting.

A report on equality, inclusion and diversity was considered by the Court along with updates on REF preparations. The Court also approved items by routine circulation.

5.4 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, suggested that it would be helpful for Senate to receive information on the Aberdeen 2040 implementation, operational plan and the 9 commitments focused on for the current year. It was agreed that these would be circulated to the Senate following the meeting.

5.5 Scott Styles, School of Law, expressed disappointment that the election for Court members used a “first past the post” system. It was requested that a single transferrable vote system be used instead. Steve Cannon, Interim University Secretary, confirmed that while changes could not be made for the current voting cycle, accelerated to have full membership in place for the November meeting, the Court would be asked to reconsider prior to future elections.

GOVERNANCE REVIEW UPDATE

6.1 Steve Cannon was invited to provide an update to the Senate on the Governance review. It was noted that Senate would have the opportunity to comment on the proposed recommendations as the process continued. It was noted that the paper presented was provided as an update and to provide background to the reasoning behind the review. It was emphasised that the document reviewed by the Court in August 2020 was draft, designed to gauge support for the direction planned. Members of the Senate noted that the Court had agreed that the review was heading towards its target and identified elements for refinement.

6.2 Members of the Senate noted that one identified element was the issue of academic governance, for which Court has oversight. It was noted, however, that the Court took the view that the Senate was best placed to advise on how oversight would be best executed. Members of the Senate acknowledged that such oversight was currently exercised through several joint committees, a process which it was suggested could be improved. Members of the Senate noted that the Senate Effectiveness Review (SER) may be an appropriate vehicle through which a review in this regard is led. Members noted that the SER had been put on hold due to Covid-19 but, with the Senate’s approval, could be reinstated with the additional responsibility to review the oversight function of the Court.

6.2 The Senate was asked to raise any questions or concerns regarding the proposal to monitor the oversight of academic governance as a function of the SER. Scott Styles, School of Law, commented that he was supportive of the proposal. He noted concern, however, at the draft proposal contained within the paper to reduce the number of Senate Assessors from four to two. Scott noted concern that this number would make it impossible to have a balance of representation. Steve acknowledged that this proposal needed further review. Neil Vargesson, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition offered further reassurance that this required further review and there was little appetite in Court to instigate this change.
6.3 Senate approved the proposal to monitor the oversight of academic governance as a function of the SER.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS UPDATE

7.1 Richard Wells, Vice-Principal (International Partnerships), was invited to provide an update to the Senate on the University’s International Partnerships. A copy of the presentation is filed with the principal copy of the minute. Following the presentation, a discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Javier González Cuervos, Education Officer Vice-Chair, queried what measures were in place in light of Brexit to ensure that there was not a large drop in student numbers. Responding, Richard confirmed that work was underway to identify markets in which the University would be attractive, the development of a scholarship and support package for European students and an ongoing commitment to the University’s position as a European University. It was believed that the University be able to maintain the recruitment of a diverse student population. Alan Speight, Vice-Principal Student Recruitment, added that a task and finish group had been established to explore dimensions of European student recruitment. A proposal on scholarships to mitigate the change in status to international for EU students had been put forward in order to ease the transition in the change of fees. Entry requirements were being reviewed against the changing context and methods of support were being explored. The Principal noted that the Scottish Government’s scheme for EU students was expected in early 2021.

- Diane Skatun, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition, wished to offer her appreciation for the point noting the active engagement of the project board to ensure that an appropriate standard of human rights was in place for the construction of the second campus in Doha. Diane also appreciated the increased focus on encouraging research. Richard echoed the view on the importance of ensuring human rights are supported and that an independent observer was a critical part of this commitment. The Principal noted that there was a strong appetite amongst the University’s Qatari partners to develop a research programme.

- Scott Styles, School of Law, expressed that it was important that the University actively commit to Europe in light of Brexit. It was suggested that strategic partnerships could be developed with European Universities. Norway was suggested as a possible fruitful location for partnership activity in addition to Universities in the United States. Richard confirmed that strategic partners were being sought worldwide, including within Europe. The strength of relationships with Norway was acknowledged, particularly in certain subject areas. Historical relationships were recognised as a source for building bespoke partnerships. The Principal added that the University is a member of the Aurora network.

- Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, queried if there were plans to establish a partnership between research and student exchange as the focus currently appeared to operate in one direction. This could also increase diversity by inviting students to visit, as well as members of staff. Richard explained that this was an aim of widening and deepening relationships with partners enabling a greater breadth of opportunities including exchanges such as this. This is simpler in cases such as Qatar where the same courses are taught on each campus, but relationships such as this could also be considered more widely.

- Janet Gautier, student representative of the School of Psychology, wished to ask about English proficiency for International Partnerships, particularly those on the Sri Lankan
medical pathway. Janet enquired if there were provisions in place to support students who require English as a Second Language support, either in Aberdeen or in Sri Lanka. Richard clarified that the University does have an active English language centre which offers pre-sessional and post-commencement support highlighting the importance of students having a level of English proficiency to participate in the programme. Additional subject specific support is also available. It was confirmed that the level of English proficiency required is higher for medical programmes and that these qualifications are acquired prior to commencement of the programs.

- Russell Williams, Dean for the Qatar Campus, provided a further update on activity in Qatar. Russell informed members of the Senate that one student had come to Aberdeen from Qatar in the previous session. A significant uptake in applications in the current year from one student to twelve was noted, however, such activity had unfortunately been postponed. Members of the Senate noted that an application had also been received to study in Qatar from Aberdeen, illustrating that student mobility was happening. On the topic of research, Russell added that faculty sufficiency, part of which is about academic outputs, is a requirement for AACSB accreditation subject to the same requirements for the faculty in Aberdeen. It was expected that this would drive the workload in Qatar and put the focus on research as well as teaching. The Qatar campus was now seeing its first graduates from postgraduate programmes and with this, increased interest in students desiring to pursue PhDs with the University. It was understood that initial applicants were applying to study part-time with the University of Aberdeen and that there may be an increase in demand in that area in the future. Members of the Senate noted that work had been proceeding in regard to recruitment onto new and existing programmes in Qatar, with Heads of School looking at what other programmes might fit the national vision and where adaptation might be required. Russell explained that ways of attracting students, who may not be able to secure visas to come to the UK, to the Qatar campus were also being looked at to widen the University’s reach across the globe. It was noted that blended learning had done a lot for resilience in Qatar in strengthening the co-operation with the School and the sharing of the commitment to moving part of learning online. It was noted that lockdown began earlier in Qatar and it was observed that some of the experience from this was able to inform the response of the Aberdeen campus.

- Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature and Visual Culture, drew the attention of Senate to an article regarding internationalisation published in The Times on 17 October. Tom shared a quote from the article regarding the Universities UK publication of a report on the risks of foreign collaboration to UK Universities and recommending that governing bodies commission annual reports on international ties and their potential downsides. Tom sought the thoughts of the Principal and Richard in response to the report. As the report recommended reporting on potential downsides, it was queried what forms these may take. Richard noted that a key aspect is the recent national security law imposed in China and the effect that this has had on staff and students in Western Universities. Richard proposed that there was a need to deal with this at sector-level, in association with the Government. Reporting on downsides was an expectation it was believed that the University would have to adhere to in future. Richard noted that there were no known cases in Aberdeen of instances where negative foreign influence had been visible to students or staff, but it was clear that incidents had been noted elsewhere. A Universities UK meeting was planned later in the year to look at the referenced report and a sector-wide response was expected, which the University would be expected to note. The Principal had had the opportunity to briefly review the report and commented that it was overwhelmingly positive in tone and content regarding the contribution of
international partnerships to UK Higher Education Institutions. Tom explained that two issues of focus in the series of Times articles were academic liberty and infringement of academic freedom, particularly in relation to Confucius institutes. Tom requested a detailed response at a future Senate. The Principal responded that there would be a detailed response to Universities UK and made a commitment to this.

- Yvonne Bain, School of Education, thanked Richard for the report and added that it was recently confirmed that the IPgDE would be launching in January 2021 and that the School was very much looking forward to taking these developments further. Yvonne added that mobility and joint research was something that the team could look forward to developing and extending into further partnership areas.
- The Principal remarked that commitment to internationalisation is a core part of the Aberdeen 2040 strategy

**START DATE AND STRUCTURE OF SECOND HALF-SESSION 2020/21 AND FIRST HALF-SESSION 2021/22**

8.1 The Principal invited Ruth Taylor, Vice Principal (Education), to discuss the structure of the second half-session and the first half-session of 2021/22. Ruth briefly summarised the recommendations in the paper as follows:

- A one-week delay to the January 2021 start date to 25 January 2021, proposed following conversations and feedback expressing concern around preparation time for the second half-session. In addition, a delayed start date would provide a wider self-isolation or quarantine window;
- A flexible 13-week teaching and assessment period, allowing Schools to use one of those weeks flexibly to support staff preparations for blended learning and for a student reading week or similar.;
- The adjustment of the return of marks deadline for the second half-session by additional one week;
- The subsequent adjustment of the dates of Graduation by additional one week;
- That the re-sit diet be undertaken using alternative assessment, as it was understood to be unlikely that formal examinations would be possible. A three-week period was provided to enable flexibility for Schools to manage this appropriately;
- No change to the Summer postgraduate teaching period as this would create difficulties in commencing the subsequent academic year;
- A later September 2021 start date.

Ruth acknowledged that there were some exceptions identified in the paper where the start date could not be delayed (e.g. Medicine). It was also noted that some schools deliver teaching, including field work, over the Spring vacation. It was noted that this would need to be captured and appropriately publicised. It was further noted that the dates or duration of the Spring holidays had not changed as part of the proposal. From a student recruitment perspective, there were benefits including travel and self-isolation requirements. Members of the Senate agreed that if approval for the change was granted, messaging would be required to reach January start students as a matter of urgency. Senate members were informed that support for students staying in Aberdeen over the Christmas period was already being investigated.

8.2 Alan Speight, Vice-Principal (Student Recruitment) reiterated that there was an opportunity to provide clear and positive messaging to assist the conversion of January 2021 offer holders.
He noted that it was imperative that this was considered as the process of issuing certificates of acceptance to study for visa purposes was underway and these required the inclusion of accurate dates. Regarding the later September 2021 start date, Alan informed the Senate that this had been proposed not only due the shifting University timeline, but due to the delay in the release of the results of Highers, Advanced Highers and A-Levels. He acknowledged that the later start date in 2020 had allowed the University to respond positively to changed applicant behaviour, for both domestic and international applicants. The January 2021 offers and acceptances data indicated that later decision making continued to be a feature of applicant behaviour and it was suggested that a two-week delay to the start of 2021 academic session would provide an opportunity to respond to uncertainty and align with any sector-wide initiatives that might be available at the time. He noted that a two-week delay, as opposed any longer delay, avoided the need for more substantial changes to the delivery of teaching and assessment. It was noted that there were some exceptions to the revised start date set out in the paper. A proactive communications plan was already underway meaning a decision around the September start date was necessary presently.

8.3 A short discussion amongst members of the Senate ensued. The main tenets of which were as follows:

- Ekaterina Pavlovskaia, School of Engineering, noted that colleagues had observed potential variance in the University holidays and school holidays which could cause issues for members of staff. As a flexible reading week was proposed, Ekaterina noted that there was an opportunity to align the University holidays with the school holidays. It was proposed that the University holidays were aligned with school holidays to ease pressure on members of staff, particularly those with childcare considerations. Ekaterina also wished to make it known that the one-week shift for the second half-session was welcomed, however it was noted that the results date in January remained the same and requested that this was also moved to allow marking to be completed and students to be welcomed in a less stressful fashion. Responding, Ruth explained that the difference between University and school holidays was considered and that the reasoning for the proposed dates was to avoid disruption to those who had made plans based around the currently in place dates and in relation to retaining students who may not return after the Spring holidays. Feedback could not be delayed any further as this would impact on student course selection, however, the additional preparation time would put less pressure on the marking period. Ekaterina noted that the change in session dates meant that a period normally dedicated to revision and assessment would now contain teaching impacting those who must simultaneously take care of children who are on school holidays. It was requested that Senate consider this more detail. The Principal acknowledged that the term dates had been sent far in advance and that school holidays vary between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

- Scott Styles noted that the Law School supported the one-week delay and the delay to the beginning of the next academic year. It was requested that attempts be made in future years to align with School holidays on the grounds of equal opportunity and diversity that would fit with the University’s missions. It was requested that an extension on marking deadlines also be considered, particularly in the summer as this would be very helpful to staff after what may be a stressful term. The Principal noted the point about aligning with school holidays and suggested that this could be looked at for future years. In response to the query about marking deadlines, Ruth explained that the aim of the proposals had been to normalise the summer period as much as
possible as there would still be postgraduate teaching taking place, in addition to preparations for the new session.

- Cecilia Wallback, President of the Students’ Association, asked how the extension of term dates would affect thesis and dissertation deadlines as two weeks were lost due to the delay in the start of the first half-session. Ruth confirmed that she would need to seek further information to allow for a full response, however, noted that it was planned that students would have the usual amount of time for assessment, overseen by Schools. Ruth requested the opportunity to seek a more detailed response. Ondrej Kucerak, Vice President for Education, added that many dissertations had already been pushed back and that work was underway to identify any that needed further delays. Schools had been hesitant to change dates prior to a final decision on term dates. Ruth committed to seek complete clarity on this matter and to ensure the outcome is communicated.

- Eva Lindberg, a student representative, sought clarity on why it was believed students would not return after the spring holidays. Ruth explained that this view was based on experience from earlier years that indicated that students returned due to there being in-person exams. It was hoped to continue with a blended learning model and observed that students may not return with online only learning available. The spring holidays were agreed far in advance and must be adhered to for the time-being, but this could be considered further going forward.

- Neil Vargesson, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, commented that there was support for the one-week delay in his School assuming that there was also a delay to the start of the academic year. Neil noted that discussion of the alignment of University and school holidays was a recurring topic and an important issue, particularly where staff cannot secure childcare. Neil requested that if consideration of school holidays takes place, local and national holidays are also considered, and staff are given time off with no meetings arranged. The Principal agreed that this could be looked at.

- Colin North, School of Geosciences, offered a different view on the alignment of holidays, as the School of Geosciences have some courses that hold fieldtrips during the vacation period. It was feared that shifting the holiday dates may mean students could potentially miss teaching in other courses. If both the start date was moved later and the holiday one week earlier, there would not be sufficient time to cover the necessary material prior to the fieldtrips. Colin suggested that the paper is adhered to as proposed to avoid the emergence of problems in this area.

- Amanda Lee, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, explained that postgraduate programme co-ordinators had met and discussed the various models of how, for example, teaching term projects could become lab-based projects. The consensus was that the one-week delay in January and the two-week delay in September was appropriate. It was noted that some programmes had never utilised the spring holidays and found the opportunity to use them a benefit, especially in light of staff workloads. The flexible week was also viewed positively. Amanda noted that Schools had proposed new postgraduate programmes for a January start and the delay would allow for preparation for these.

- Igor Guz, School of Engineering, suggested that Schools who wished to align the school holidays with the spring holidays could possibly use the flexible week for this purpose, pending the alignment of the holidays in the future. Ruth explained that the only proviso around the flexible week is that it must not be used within the first two weeks of the half-session, meaning there were no barriers to this suggestion. The Principal noted that there had been a lot of discussion regarding aligning school and University holidays and that this should be considered by Senate in due course.
• Lindsey Tibbetts, representing the Business School, commented that the extra week was very welcome. It was requested that the deadline return of grades for postgraduate students could be further delayed as these students do not have course selection options. It was noted that this would help with the onboarding of new January starts and the degree classification calculation of concluding students. Kath Shennan, Dean of Quality Assurance, agreed that this course of action was appropriate.

8.12 The Principal moved to undertake a vote on the proposals set out in the paper, as follows:

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<th>In favour of approving the changes to the start date and structure of the second half session of 2020/21 and the first-half session of 2021/22:</th>
<th>80</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abstaining from the vote:</td>
<td>5</td>
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The Principal confirmed that this gave Senate authorisation to proceed with these arrangements.

MOTION ON THE TIMING OF SENATE MEETINGS

9.1 Scott Styles, School of Law, proposed a motion on the timing and dates of Senate meetings. The motion put forth that the regular day and time of Senate was typically 1pm on a Wednesday in order to facilitate attendance by all members including those with teaching duties and childcare responsibilities. It was noted recent Senate meetings had been held at other times on other days of the week, negatively affecting the ability of Senators to attend. The motion proposed that Senate resolved to meet only at 1pm on Wednesdays, except where circumstances are so urgent that another time must be chosen and with the express authorisation of the Senate Business Committee. Scott explained that he understood that no time would suit everyone, however, a consistent time would allow for planning. The Senate were given the opportunity to discuss the motion. Chris Collins, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, observed that now teaching took place on Wednesdays, this could mean that Senators would not be able to attend any meetings. Scott explained that this point would be true of any day chosen. Chris agreed with this point but added that changing the days on which Senate is held would allow more flexibility for Senators to attend at least some meetings. Colin North, School of Geosciences, understood the position put forth but appreciated the flexibility to hold Senate meetings in the current context rather than delaying them until a Wednesday. Scott could see no examples of any instances where the business of Senate could not be considered on the subsequent Wednesday. The Principal noted that the proposal did make provisions for emergencies and exceptional circumstances. Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, observed that the only issue may be the availability of the Principal or himself to chair a meeting and explained this was why some meetings were held outside of the customary Wednesday slot.

9.2 The Principal moved to undertake a vote on the proposals set out in the motion, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In favour of approving the motion to hold Senate meetings on Wednesdays at 1pm:</th>
<th>55</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in favour of approving the motion to hold Senate meetings on Wednesdays at 1pm:</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstaining from the vote:</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Principal confirmed that this gave Senate authorisation to proceed with these arrangements.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SENATE MEMBERS TO RAISE ANY OTHER ITEMS
OF ACADEMIC INTEREST FOR DISCUSSION

10.1 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 noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning at its meetings on 7 October 2020.

1. Updated Risk Register for Learning and Teaching

11.1 The UCTL received an updated version of an excerpt of the University's Risk Register, listing risks specific to Learning and Teaching. The Committee considered each risk in turn. Members of the Committee acknowledged that both the Student Experience and the Staff Experience were categories covered elsewhere in the Register, relevant to Learning and Teaching. Members of the Committee agreed that these categories should be cross-referenced. The Committee further agreed the addition of self-isolating students as a risk to the Learning and Teaching section of the Register.

2. Update on the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group

11.2 The UCTL received and discussed a paper providing an update on the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group (BLITFG) (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

3. Second Half Session Update

11.3 Members of the Committee received the paper and an associated short presentation on the delivery of teaching in the second half session of 2020/21, in light of the impact of Covid-19. Members agreed the importance of approving a teaching model for both the second half session and summer teaching and of ensuring flexibility in approaches to teaching, whether future developments allowed for increased on campus provision, or the need to move entirely online should circumstances require. Overall, members of the Committee were content to approve the paper and its recommendations, making clear, however, that the proposal should apply to the remainder of the academic year in full and not the second half session alone. It was agreed that the paper would be forwarded to the Senate for further discussion and approval.

4. Monitoring Student Engagement

11.4 Members of the Committee received the paper on Monitoring Student Engagement in the context of the blended environment. Members noted that further discussions had remained ongoing as to whether, on receipt of C7, students should have their access to MyAberdeen maintained. Members noted that, currently, a link between the Student Record System (SRS) and MyAberdeen ensures access is automatically disabled and reinstated only at the point of an appeal against the C7 being lodged and/or a C7 being removed. Members of the UCTL agreed with recommendation 2 as outlined in the paper, allowing reinstatement to MyAberdeen at the point at which a student engages by any means with the School. Members
of the Committee agreed to investigate fuller policy changes in respect of monitoring over the course of the academic year.

5. Employability and Entrepreneurship Activity for Academic Year 2020/21 and Beyond

11.5 Members of the UCTL received the paper on employability and entrepreneurship activity for 2020/21, noting the identified action areas as (a) development of an employability and entrepreneurship vision and framework aligned to the Aberdeen 2040 strategic plan, (b) a targeted approach to planning employability and careers provision (c) a work placement and work-based learning strategy and (d) Careers and Employability Service development for blended 2020 delivery and beyond.

6. Update on the Enhanced Transcript

11.6 Members of the Committee considered the paper on the Enhanced Transcript and the request that AUSA awards, including Kings awards, Colours Awards and Blues awards, be recorded as ‘recognised activities’ on the Enhanced Transcript from 2020-21. Members of the Committee agreed the appropriateness of this course of action.

7. Sustained Study Proposal

11.7 Members of the Committee noted a new Sustained Study route in Counselling Skills, approved for introduction in 2020/21 by way of Chair’s action.


11.8 Members of the Committee noted the Annual Report on Institution-led Review of Quality for 2019/20, approved for submission to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) by way of Chair’s action.

SENATE ELECTION OUTCOME

12.1 Senate noted the outcome of the Senate elections conducted at the end of last academic year as detailed below:

The following have been elected to serve on the Senatus Academicus from 01 October 2020 until 30 September 2024 (except where indicated otherwise)

**Business School**
Cheryl Dowie
Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar

**School of Divinity, History and Philosophy**
Joachim Schaper

**School of Education**
Mary Stephen
Yvonne Bain

**School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture**
Amy Bryzgel
ADDITIONAL SENATE ELECTION

13.1 The Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved the timeline for election of elected members to the Senate as detailed (copy filed with principal copy of minute),
14.1 The Senate noted that Cheryl Dowie and Georgios Leontidis were confirmed to serve on the Senate Business Committee until September 2022.

REF UPDATE

15.1 Senate noted the attached REF update (copy filed with principal copy of minute).