UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2019


APPROVAL OF AGENDA

18.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of the Senate to the last meeting of the Senate for the calendar year. He thanked members of the Senate for accommodating the change of date for the meeting and stated his gratitude to everyone in the University community for the very constructive and collegiate relationships that were maintained during the eight days of strike action. He noted he was especially grateful to the local UCU leadership for allowing for the statement that was written and issued to the community. He further stated that he hoped that the national discussions become equally constructive and collegiate. Members of the Senate were reminded the meeting would be audio recorded and were asked that they introduce themselves and ensure their microphone was switched on before contributing to discussion to allow for an accurate minute.

18.2 The Principal invited members to approve the agenda. He noted that no items for routine approval or information had been brought forward for discussion. Members of the Senate approved the agenda and the meeting proceeded.
19.1 The Principal invited members of the Senate to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2019.

19.2 Tom Rist, representing the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, raised an inaccuracy with regards to minute point 7.6. He noted that while his proposed addition of the word heritage was correctly minuted, the Principal’s agreement with the suggestion was not. Tom asked that the minute be amended to appropriately reflect this. The Principal stated that he would return to this point under the discussion on Aberdeen 2040 (minute point 21 below refers).

19.3 Helen Martin, representing the School of Education, raised concerns with regards to the course evaluation process, noting that the University’s digital tools, such as they are, do not allow for the adoption of the course evaluation form. Helen stated that colleagues had tried to change the course evaluation system to allow for better questions and the use of questions used in the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Student Survey. Helen stated that the question types were not amendable. Kath Shennan, Dean for Quality Enhancement and Assurance stated that it was possible to amend the questions asked. Helen confirmed that it was the question types which could not be amended. The Principal stated that this would be looked into and that Helen would receive an update prior to the next meeting of the Senate.

19.4 No further objections or comments were raised regarding the minutes and the meeting proceeded.

UPDATE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

20.1 The Principal, in providing an update to the Senate, began by noting that the major strategic issues on which he wished to provide an update, Aberdeen 2040, the Estate investment, student recruitment and improvements in the University’s revenue position, were included on the agenda. The Principal reminded members of the Senate that the revenue position in academic year 2017/18 was that £223 million was raised. In the current year, he noted, this has risen to £238 million. The Principal stated that good progress was being made in the generation of extra revenue in the context of cash or real terms cuts from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). He further noted that this needed to be maintained to ensure the University was in a position to meet rising costs. Members of the Senate were informed that the projection for this year was that there was likely to be a small deficit, approved by the Court, to allow for investment in advance of REF. He stated that his preference was to get as close as possible to a break-even position. The Principal stated that, as a community, the University had done a superb job in raising extra revenue, much of which had been from international student recruitment. He thanked the University as a whole for their efforts in achieving this. Lastly, the Principal welcomed new members to the University and Senior Management Team (SMT). He welcomed Rob Donaldson, Director of Advancement and Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education). The Principal also welcomed Steve Cannon, interim University Secretary, back to the University. He informed the Senate that he would soon engage in discussions with Steve and the Esther Roberton, Senior Governor, regarding the process for the appointment of a substantive University Secretary. He noted that, as with other recent senior appointments, there would be Senate involvement in the appointment process.

20.2 Scott Styles, representing the School of Law, welcomed the update on the University’s financial sustainability and improved revenue position. He noted the importance of transparent accountability of where the money is spent as well as where it is raised.
He sought assurances that this would happen. The Principal asked Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, to respond on this matter. Karl informed Scott and members of the Senate that planning meetings with academic schools were drawing to a close and in January/February, a series of meetings with each of the Directorates would be held to look at how they are responding to the School plans in order to be able to deliver what is required. He noted that the financial paper within the agenda also comprehensively covers where money is spent.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

21.1 On behalf of the Senate Assessors, Lindsay Tibbetts provided an update to the Senate of the Court meeting held on 2 October 2019. Lindsay noted that there was a detailed paper provided for members of the Senate. She drew the attention of the Senate to the following key points:

- Lindsay stated that this had been her first meeting of the Court and that she had been struck by how positive and robust debate had been. She noted this as important for members of the Senate to be aware of.
- It was noted that the Court had discussed the issue of the confidentiality of items/papers and that the Senate Assessors had sought that as much as possible be shared, as broadly as possible. It was noted that this approach was agreed, subject to matters of financial or individual confidentiality.
- With regards to point 5.1 of the Court report, the Report from the Principal, the attention of members of the Senate was drawn to the staffing gaps which had contributed to the improved financial position. The Senate noted that this was a double-edged sword, which while positive in financial terms could also be negative in terms of the gaps associated with it. The Senate was informed that Heads of School had been asked to put forward requests for staff, where required.

21.2 Helen Martin noted that she welcomed point 10.1 of the Court report regarding an update on REF preparations. She specifically noted that discussion had been undertaken regarding ‘the extent to which the University should focus future investment in early career academic staff over more senior academic staff’ and asked for further clarification on this point. The Principal informed the Senate that the point made at Court was that the overwhelming majority of current recruitment is for early career academics. The Principal stated that he did not have the exact figure but that this could be circulated post-Senate.

21.3 No further questions were asked of Lindsay by members of the Senate and the meeting proceeded.

21.4 Scott Styles was invited to ask his question of the Principal. Scott noted that, in recent years, almost everything considered by the Court has been marked as confidential. He welcomed the fact that the University appeared to be entering a new era of transparency and that the most recent Court agenda and minutes had been declassified. He asked the Principal, however, to comment on why things had been classified for so long, when this causes people to think that there is something to hide. He further sought a response from the Principal regarding what steps were being taken to ensure this situation didn’t arise again, with a blanket and unnecessary requirement for confidentiality.

21.5 Responding, the Principal thanked Scott for raising these issues. He stated that he couldn’t fully comment on the position prior to his arrival at the University, but that there
had been a presumption in favour of papers being confidential. He stated that this had now been flipped and that there should be a presumption in favour of transparency and that unless there is a compelling reason for a paper remaining confidential, then all papers would be non-confidential. He noted that compelling reasons could be if a paper concerned a commercial or competitive matter or if a paper named an individual on the basis that he was reluctant papers be issued with sections redacted. He reiterated the commitment of the University to a presumption in favour of transparency. He noted that prior to each meeting of the Court, the SMT, University Secretary and Senior Governor would review the position to ensure that nothing was being held back that could reasonably be released.

21.6 Scott Styles welcomed the Principal’s response. He stated that transparency matters in anticipation of a meeting as well as afterwards, to ensure the University community is aware of what the Court will discuss and therefore, where appropriate, has the opportunity to lobby or contact the Principal.

ABERDEEN 2040

22.1 The Principal moved to the item on Aberdeen 2040 and issued his thanks to the many people who had contributed to the document. He noted that work on the strategy had been ongoing for almost a year. The Principal reminded the Senate of the nature of the strategy document, noting that it was not a conventional University strategy document, primarily because of the fact it looks forward 20 years. He noted that it does not contain lots of target and performance indicators but focuses on what the University wants to achieve and be over the next 20 years, rather than, at this stage, how it will be measured. He stated that the strategy starts with the foundational purpose and that the whole document builds on this purpose and seeks to continue to achieve it over the coming 20 years. The Principal stated that the University wants to continue to (i) be inclusive, reflecting the original commitment to be open to all, (ii) pursue truth, not only disciplinary truth but interdisciplinary truth and (iii) serve others, not only other in Aberdeen and the North East of Scotland, but others globally who could potentially benefit from our expertise. He stated that the University would continue to serve the foundational purpose by being inclusive, interdisciplinary, international and sustainable, both in terms of the University’s sustainability and the sustainability of the world. The Principal informed the Senate that this would be partly achieved through the problems in the modern world that the University would help to solve, including (i) data and artificial intelligence, (ii) social and cultural inclusion, (iii) health, nutrition and wellbeing, (iv) environmental sustainability, speaking directly to the global issue of the age, climate change and (v) energy transition. Collectively, he stated, the University would continue to serve others by seeking to help to solve these and the other problems of the modern world.

22.2 The Principal invited Jenny Fernandes, Acting Director of External Relations, to provide a presentation to Senate on the developing visuals for the strategy and the associated branding and events for 525, a copy of which is filed with the principal copy of the minute.

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

- The Principal returned to the question raised by Tom Rist (minute point 19.2 above refers) and the proposal that the word heritage be added to the document. The Principal noted that while the history of the University is referred to within the document, the word heritage is not used. He invited Tom to
suggest where use of the word would be appropriate. Tom Rist, responding, noted that the addition of the word had been intended in relation to where we come from and what we study. Responding, Karl Leydecker, confirmed that one of the aims would be that the web presence conveys the heritage, using images and the way in which the strategy is framed. Karl noted that it would be designed to give a sense of place and history. He noted that the document had been cut down with regards to the narrative around the history of the University, with the intention that this be addressed by way of the framing and representation of it to a variety of audiences. Jenny Fernandes added that one of the tasks being undertaken is the development of a timeline video, beginning in 1495, which takes the viewer through the University’s rich history.

- David Watts, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, sought to test a perception amongst members of the Senate. He stated that on reading the strategy document, it came across as more instrumental than he expected. He noted that he didn’t see strong defences of scholarship and research that aren’t necessary applicable to the crises the University is involved in facing. Responding, the Principal stated that he felt the sections on education and research spoke directly to these issues. He noted these sections as the appropriate places to represent the intrinsic value of academic endeavour. Karl noted that the emphasis on these matters as central planks of the University had been incorporated into the document. He stated the importance of both education and research and the relationship between them.

- A member of the Senate sought clarity around reference to academic freedom in the document and suggested that the University’s commitment to it be made more obvious. They also proposed further reference to the University’s commitment to servicing a wide range of disciplines and the inclusion of the term ‘curiosity driven’. Responding, the Principal noted that the references to breadth within the strategy speak directly to the point raised regarding a wide range of disciplines. He further noted the statement within the document regarding freedom of thought and supported the inclusion of ‘curiosity driven’ within the text.

- Jeff Oliver, representing the School of Geosciences, also supported the use of the term ‘curiosity driven’. Jeff proposed the removal of the word excellence from the document. He stated his feeling that the word had been hollowed out amongst academics. He noted that the word, for academics, represented a culture of corporate jargon and doesn’t mean anything anymore. He suggested that the use of another word would help make the University more distinctive. Responding, Jenny noted that steps to test the wording used in the strategy had been undertaken and that the term ‘Research Excellence’ was one that resonated very well. She stated the importance of placing appropriate stories and context behind the wording in order to ensure meaning. Karl added that there had been debate around the use of the word excellence and noted that it features exactly four times within the document, fewer than it used to. He stated that following debate at the Strategy Development Steering Group (SDSG) it was felt that a commitment around excellence was one that had to be made. He informed the Senate that the word was not there by chance and that it was how it is measured and what that means that will become important. Karl noted the importance of giving a commitment to the quality of what the University does and not just its activity. The Principal stated the importance of defining
the meaning, to ensure resonance both internally and externally and noted that the University Court was particularly keen to see the word excellence used.

- Scott Styles, with reference to the point raised regarding freedom of belief and thought, stated that he could not see any reference to this within the document. He noted that such a commitment should be right up at the front, under the foundational purpose. Responding, Karl noted that it was on page 1, within the second last paragraph and read, ‘we welcome others with respect and work with them in trust. We value freedom of thought and integrity of action…’

- Ben Marsden, representing the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, questioned the choice of the phrase ‘energy transition’ and not ‘climate change’ throughout the document and particularly at the beginning of the document. Given the outward facing nature of the document, Ben asked whether it would be appropriate to use the phrase ‘climate change’ or ‘climate emergency’. The Principal thanked Ben for his question. Responding, he stated that the document spoke directly to the need for the University to be distinctive and to make a contribution to the world that perhaps others are not as well placed to make. He noted that the document refers to sustainability, environment and bio-diversity and also places an emphasis on energy transition. He clarified to the Senate that the issue of energy transition will be the signature issue for the North East of Scotland for the next 20 years and the University wishes to be seen to make a specific contribution to it. He acknowledged that every University around the world would be seeking to make a contribution to the alleviation of climate change and stated that the University’s distinct and special contribution was best placed in the support of energy transition academically, through research, teaching and through supporting the change that will need to take place in the North East of Scotland.

- Jennie Macdiarmid, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, stated that the risk of this approach could be seen to bury the wider work of the University around climate change. The Principal noted that this was a helpful point. He further stated that another opportunity the University had, was to not only tackle the five global problems identified but to show the connection between them. He noted that other institutions would be dealing with some of the issues, but probably not all. The Principal stated the distinctive opportunity for the University to demonstrate how nutrition, energy transition, data and artificial intelligence, social and cultural inclusion etc., are all connected to each other.

- Iain McEwan, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, noted that the document was much improved on the initial draft and was much more engaging, punchy and dynamic and captured a number of the points raised at the open meeting at Foresterhill. He stated that the were a couple of issues which he still found distracting, including some of the imagery used and the numbering of the document. The principal confirmed that the imagery was still being worked upon. Regarding the numbering, Karl stated that this had been done deliberately and made it easier to track the strategy in the future.

- Cecilia Wallback, Student President, asked why the commitment to educate all students to be leaders in protecting the environment had not been extended to include staff. Karl stated that this was covered under point 16. He informed the Senate that this statement was intended to reflect a specific commitment around education.
• Dubravka Pokrajac, representing the School of Engineering, expressed concern that, within the research section that reference was made to Sciences, understood to be Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences but not to Engineering. The Principal acknowledged that Sciences could refer to Physical Sciences or be broader. He noted that care had been taken to ensure disciplines were not listed individually. Karl further noted that he didn’t have a strong feeling on whether Engineering was added separately.

• Martin Barker acknowledged the phrase ‘open to’ used within the presentation. He suggested that the phrase might be slightly passive, particularly in instances of opportunities where the University might be very interested. He asked what the University was doing to set the agenda, rather than being only ‘open to’. Responding, Jenny stated that ‘open to’ which can be tied to the foundational purpose, felt like an appropriate framework, the next steps of which would be stipulating what the University is open to and, in so doing, build content around the mindset and optimism brought about by the phrase. The Principal confirmed that all three elements of the foundational purpose (open to all, dedicated to the pursuit of truth and service of others) would be represented in the final strategy.

• Tom Rist expressed concern at references within the interdisciplinary changes to social and cultural inclusion. He stated that the use of the word inclusion was perhaps limiting and curiously precise. He proposed the removal of the word from this section. The Principal noted that the interdisciplinary changes represent problem of the modern world which the University feels can be addressed by combining the expertise of disciplines. He stated that society and culture doesn’t quite cover this. He informed the Senate that social and cultural inclusion was a theme which came through strongly in feedback received on the strategy and that it could be argues that it represents a major problem of the modern age. Tom accepted the points raised by the Principal but expressed further concern that the use of inclusion in this section loses the focus on the specific interdisciplinary activities of the University.

• Tom Rist also made a point regarding the use of the phrase ‘at our campus in Doha, Qatar’. He noted that he was worried about this wording and the larger implications of it. He stated that by using the terminology ‘our’ campus in Qatar, it directly links it to Aberdeen. He specifically noted the position of the Qatari government with regards to Unionisation and modern slavery. The Principal, responding, stated that the Senate had specifically asked that Qatar be referred to within the document. The Principal informed the Senate that he was comfortable with its addition and with providing education in that part of the world not in partnership with the Qatari government but with a private individual who seeks, as the University does, to extend education to wider groups than would otherwise have access to it. The Principal committed to further discussion, outwith Senate, on the specific wording around Qatar.

• Gareth Jones, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, asked that some imagery of the Foresterhill campus be used. Regarding content, he queried target 19, within the sustainability section, which sought to achieve an existing target. He suggested the wording be amended. The Principal thanked Gareth for this feedback and committed to look at the wording more closely.

• Nick Schofield, representing the School of Geosciences, in following up on points raised regarding climate change and energy transition, shared the story
of a former graduate who is now the youngest exploration manager within Shell and who visited the University recently to speak with an MSc class, before flying out to visit a rig, one of the first designed to sequester CO2 rather than pump it into an oilfield. Nick emphasised the relationship between the University and individuals such as these and suggested that Jenny may wish to contact him.

- Arnar Arnason, representing the School of Social Science, asked whether, given the University’s commitment to freedom of thought, the University will not accept students funded by governments which represent an oppressive regime. The Principal confirmed the University’s purpose of enlightenment and confirmed that no student would be discriminated against in such a scenario.

- Alison Jenkinson, Dean for Widening Access, Articulation and Outreach asked if there was a plan to be communicated as to how staff and students could contribute stories etc. as well as to receive advice on what the appropriate type of stories sought would be. Responding, Jenny confirmed that the toolkit would help in this regard and that contact could be made to her directly but also through the existing channels of communication and marketing teams.

- Andrew Simpson, representing the School of Law, proposed the use of ‘social inclusion and cultural interaction’ as an alternative to social and cultural inclusion. The Principal proposed the use of ‘social inclusion and cultural diversity’. Responding, Karl suggested careful thought in ensuring what was conveyed is what is intended. He supported the use of diversity, however, proposed greater thought before committing to this.

- Ralph O’Connor, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, with regards to the issues discussed in relation to climate change, acknowledged the importance of emphasising energy transition but proposed that climate emergency also be included to demonstrate a clear awareness of the emergency being faced. Responding, Karl stated that he was open to the addition of climate emergency to the existing text regarding climate change on page 1.

- Cecilia Wallback suggested that images could be used to better represent campus or to be more representative. Jenny acknowledged this point and that images were being commissioned to support the plan. She further noted that suggestions would be welcomed.

- Rachel Shanks, School of Education, asked whether the document would be in place for 20 years or whether it would reviewed and, if so, whether this should be stated. The Principal confirmed that the document would be reviewed every five years, but that the intention would be to maintain the commitments and to be true to the foundational purpose and therefore we shouldn’t give any counter indication that the University isn’t committed to the plan as it stands. It may, however, be adjusted accordingly.

- Alexander Acheampong, Student Welfare Officer, asked if the strategy sought to address the strategic relationship between Africa and the far east of Asia. The Principal commented that there were no plans to seek to change political landscape, nor would it be appropriate to do so. He stated that the University would do all it could to support peaceful relationships across the world but that, beyond that, it would not be appropriate for a University to seek to alter global politics. It was further noted that specific areas of the world were not mentioned, but that the international strategy is dedicated to making a difference wherever the University’s expertise will be of relevance, in education or research.

- Dragan Jovcic, on behalf of the School of Engineering, queried point 9 of the strategy as follows: ‘ensure all our students can have an international
experience, by studying abroad or working collaboratively with international partners’. Dragan expressed concern that this was not realistic and that, at the moment, only a small number of students have this opportunity. The Principal agreed that the objective was ambitious but stated that it appropriate that students have this opportunity. He noted the requirement for appropriate setup, organisationally, culturally and with the correct resourcing in order to achieve it.

- Ekaterina Pavlovskaya, on behalf of the School of Engineering, reiterated an earlier point, regarding the need to include Engineering in the list of research areas, as it is not covered by Sciences or Social Science.
- Finally, Tom Rist agreed with the Principal’s suggestion of the use of social and cultural diversity, as an alternative to social and cultural inclusion.

22.4 The Principal thanked members of the Senate for their contribution. He sought the approval of the Senate to take the document, with the amendments as agreed, to Court.

22.5 Scott Styles further emphasised the need to move the statement on freedom of thought to the start of the document, as part of the foundational purpose. He stated that it was worthy of a separate heading. Responding, the Principal confirmed that it wouldn’t be given a separate heading, but that he was comfortable with it being moved further up the page.

KING’S COLLEGE TRANSFORMATION UPDATE

23.1 The Principal invited Alan Speight, Vice-Principal (Student Recruitment), to provide a presentation to Senate on the current position with the King’s College Transformation Project, a copy of which is filed with the principal copy of the minute.

23.2 Following the presentation, the Principal noted that the Senate would recall that earlier in the year, the University had borrowed £50 million and that the presentation provided detailed what £50 million expenditure on the estate delivers. The Principal noted that anyone who has visited other universities who have embarked on redevelopment in recent years, will be impressed that the University is able to do as much with £50 million. He stated that it was remarkable value for money and that similar change was costing other institutions considerably more.

23.3 A discussion then ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Nick Schofield asked how the University had been able to achieve such value for money. Responding, the Principal informed the Senate that planning had started from the assumption that a sustainable approach should be taken and instead of building from scratch, existing spaces were looked at for upgrade. He noted that it could be said that the University was fortunate to have space which could be reconfigured to allow for better value for money, rather than constructing brand new buildings.
- Ilia Xypolia, representing the School of Social Science, asked about the energy efficiency of the buildings. Responding, Alan Speight stated that energy efficiency would be a key component of the next phase and the design of the internal configuration of the spaces. He informed the Senate that even at this stage there was very good thought towards light exchange and heat exchange etc. in the buildings. He noted that the buildings do lend themselves towards that form of improvement and asked Angus Donaldson, Director of Estates, to
provide further comment. Angus informed the Senate that the project was in concept at the moment, going into detailed design. He stated that the benchmark would be the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) for the new buildings and that the repurposing of existing building would score well in terms of sustainability. He further noted that the campus is served by a district heating network, a positive in terms of sustainability. Angus further noted that there was greater opportunity for the new buildings but that there was a challenge for the design team across the project as a whole.

- Dariya Koleva, Education President, sought clarification as to whether the plans would result in the Cromwell Tower becoming accessible to wheelchair users. Alan confirmed that this would be the case.

- Scott Styles stated that he felt the plans were excellent. He asked that they be circulated to the University as a whole in order that everyone can be aware of them. Regarding repurposing, Scott expressed surprise at the rebuilding of the central Johnston building, despite the existing building having rooms available for use. Finally, he asked whether there were any plans to build a new, larger lecture theatre. Responding, Alan confirmed that the Project Management groups had taken forward excellent consultation and good engagement through a range of open sessions, well attended by staff and students. Regarding Johnston, a reconfigured Johnston Central building was investigated, however, this proved not to be a viable option. Lastly, regarding lecture space, members of the Senate noted that a report had recently been commissioned and it was acknowledged that with greater efficiency, the existing space was found to be suitable. Alan stated that on the existing Johnston site there may be space to increase capacity in the future.

- Andrew Simpson asked whether books stored in stacks off campus, could be brought back to campus and made accessible. He further asked whether the site of the Snow Kirk could be tidied up as part of the development work. Responding regarding the Snow Kirk, Alan noted that while it doesn't form part of the development work directly, the proximity of it will force a view of the visual impression of the area and likely figure in the final plans. Regarding the storage of books, Karl confirmed that items not used in many decades would be moved offsite.

- Ivana Drdakova, School Convener (School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture), asked for clarity around what was intended for the Old Senate Room. Ivana noted that this room was currently used by several societies, including the debating society. Responding, Alan stated that in broad terms it was the intention that the ground and first floors would be learning and teaching spaces and the second floor more flexible in its use. He stated that there was awareness of current activities in these areas that would be reviewed by the project management groups.

23.4 The Principal thanked members of the Senate for their contribution to discussion. Alan stated that communication would soon follow to the wider university community.

DECLARATION ON RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

24.1 Marion Campbell, Vice-Principal (Research) introduced the Declaration on Research Assessment. Marion informed the Senate that the paper provided was largely self-explanatory and about the use of responsible metrics in the assessment of research. She stated that the principle behind responsible metrics promotes being able to review
the quality of academic research and output on its own merit rather than relying on metrics used as journal impact factors. She informed the Senate that the paper provided information on several voluntary instruments, which other UK universities and funders have signed up to. In particular, Marion noted the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and acknowledged that other universities, most recently including St Andrews, have signed up to the principles behind it. It was further noted that there was an awareness that a number of academics within the University have already signed up to it as individuals. The Senate was informed that a paper on DORA had been considered by the Research Policy Committee and therefore discussed with the School Directors of Research who agreed signing up would be an appropriate move for the University. Marion informed the Senate that SMT had also supported the proposal and acknowledged it as a reflection of current University practice. Marion sought feedback from the Senate as representing the wider academic view before its progression for adoption and implementation.

24.2 The Principal thanked Marion for the presentation of the paper. He noted that the paper reflected work undertaken by members of the Senate on responsible metrics, performance indicators etc. and that it was appropriate to focus on the quality of work. No further comments were received and Senate’s support for the policy was noted.

LATE SUBMISSION OF WORK POLICY

25.1 Ruth Taylor, Vice Principal (Education), introduced the paper, for an academic view, on the Late Submission of Work Policy. Ruth thanked Kath Shennan for the work undertaken in the presentation of the paper and noted that it was an early draft which had also been considered by members of the Quality Assurance, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught committees and the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL). It was noted that the paper before Senate had taken account of the feedback received at these committees. Members of the Senate were informed that the recommendation within the paper was, in part, driven by the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process, a recommendation of which was to look at parity of experience for all students at institutional and School level. Ruth stated that the late submission of work represented an area in which an issue in parity of experience had been identified. Before inviting comments from colleagues, Ruth drew their attention to the five bullet points on the cover paper, on which feedback was particularly sought.

25.2 Dariya Koleva, on behalf of the Students’ Association, expressed the support of the Education Committee for the proposal and the effort to ensure more consistency across the University. Dariya noted that students currently experience a lot of confusion given the different approaches taken by Schools. She expressed the support of the students for a 7-day approach and that 1 CGS deduction per day was reasonable and reflected practice elsewhere.

25.3 Tom Rist provided feedback from members of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture Teaching and Learning Committee. He noted that, overall, the committee was broadly supportive of the proposals. He further noted feedback received that it was not helpful to publish a list of what constitutes exceptional circumstances, which risks encouraging the tailoring of requests. Secondly, objections were also raised regarding the proposal that work received after marking had been completed would not be marked.

25.4 Peter Henderson, representing the School of Natural and Computing Sciences, agreed with the 1 CGS per day approach. He expressed concern, however, over the proposal that where work is marked in percentages that this is equivalent to a 5% reduction. Peter stated that some percentage conversions are non-linear and therefore this
approach was not appropriate. He proposed that however a piece of work is marked, it is converted to the CGS before marks are deducted as appropriate. Richard Hepworth, also representing the School of Natural and Computing Sciences disagreed with the proposed approach and welcomed the 5% per day model.

25.5 John Lamb, representing the Business School, stated that he was broadly happy with the paper. He noted that implicit within the proposals was the principle of being fair to students. He sought that this be made more explicit. He informed the Senate that he had discussed the paper with colleagues and reiterated concerns as noted by Tom Rist regarding a published list of exceptional circumstances. He further noted areas of concern in instances of a large piece of work, such as a dissertation, and asked whether there was scope to relax penalties in these instances.

25.6 Ben Marsden shared the points made by Tom Rist and, in addition, raised concern as to the things which could not be considered as exceptional circumstances. He noted that it is often the practice of student support to write to a Head of School or Undergraduate Programme Coordinator in supporting a student and asking for an extension on confidential grounds, and the academic staff member may never be made aware of the specific circumstances surrounding a case. He also suggested that there may be issues with provisions such as those for dyslexia, currently listed as not counting as appropriate exceptional circumstances.

25.7 Jeff Oliver raised the issue of extensions and who these are managed by. He noted that these are currently managed by individual lecturers, however, noted that this can allow for subjectivity and variability. Jeff suggested that it may be appropriate to discuss the possibility of a more centralised form of managing requests for extensions. Responding to this point, Colin North, representing the School of Geosciences, expressed concern that a centralised process taking away the responsibility from lecturers results in a more impersonal approach, where those handling the requests do not know the students or the material being assessed and therefore are not in a position to support early intervention for students. Donna Maccallum, on behalf of the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, confirmed that for postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes across the School, there is in place a centralised system for requesting extensions. It was noted that, in practice, a rota of academic staff considers all requests and that this works well.

25.8 Miguel de la Cal Moreno, School Convener (Divinity, History and Philosophy), expressed concern that without the publication of a list guiding students as to appropriate exceptional circumstances, students may be prevented from reaching out. He agreed the importance of face to face conversations for students and agreed that dissertations should be treated differently. He also sought clarification as to whether a day, or part thereof, equated to 24 hours.

25.9 Alison Jenkinson clarified that the paper was not intended to address authorised or approved extensions, but those which are unauthorised. Alison also agreed with the need for a careful approach around dissertations.

25.10 Helen Martin queried why, where students submit late and without approval, a no paper (NP) isn’t awarded. The need for consistency in instances of late submission was reiterated. Kath Shennan confirmed that penalties for late and unauthorised submission must be consistent across the University. While this could be a NP, if Senate agreed this, this may be a harsh penalty for students in circumstances such as being 12 hours late in submitting work.
STUDENT POPULATION AND BUDGETARY IMPACT 2019/20

26.1 Alan Speight presented the paper on the Student Population and Budgetary Impact 2019/20. He noted that the paper sets out in detail fee income projections for 2019/20 for the total student population across all years and modes of study. The headline message was stated as very positive and, as at October 2019, stands at £67.9 million an increase of £7.2 million or 11.4% on the previous year. Alan informed the Senate of the current projection that this will grow further to £76.6 million, growth of £8.7 million or 12.8% as the University recruits in January 2020 and throughout the year for postgraduate research (PGR) students. Providing comment on the 2019/20 recruitment cycle, Alan noted that significant success had been experienced across a number of categories including rest of UK (RUK) undergraduate students, international undergraduate students, widening access students and international PGT students. Members of the Senate were informed that with regard to home undergraduates, new entrants were positively reduced as part of steps towards the intention to reduce the number in excess of the University’s funded place allocation. Alan noted that the paper provides an analysis of the overall student population, of which the 2019/20 entrants are only one part and information is also provided on continuing students. He stated that it should be noted that even for those groups where there has been growth in new entrants, small cohorts in later years of study do mean that the overall population may not demonstrate growth. With regards to overall population growth, the Senate were informed that this was 2.7% short of a stretching target, which translates into a currently projected budget shortfall of £1.6 million, however, the budget does have a contingency in place which covers this shortfall. In concluding, it was noted that the School planning process is well underway, and work is in hand to establish population targets and new entrant targets by fee region, level and School.

26.2 The Principal thanked Alan for the presentation of the paper. He stated that it was good to see growth in revenue from tuition fees, particularly as the University operates in a challenging context and expects flat cash at best from the Scottish government for the foreseeable future, the consequences of which are that the University must generate income itself. No questions were asked of Alan and the meeting proceeded.

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

27.1 Diane Skatun, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, posed the following question:

Is the University able to verify that there are adequate and effective heat protection measures that are actively followed at the construction site for the building of the new AFG-University of Aberdeen Doha campus in light of a recent article in the Guardian newspaper. Specifically:

1. what if any procedures do we have to verify the Qatari legislation has been followed and that the contractors are adhering to good heat protection measures?
2. what further practical measures should the University implement to ensure sufficient health, safety and wellbeing of workers who are building the University of Aberdeen Doha campus?

Diane noted the importance of this question, given the University’s history and the incident which occurred on the building of the Zoology Building approximately 50 years ago, when the building collapsed, resulting in the deaths of 5 workers. She noted that Angus Donaldson had contacted her regarding the issue but that she felt the issue should be raised in the forum of Senate.
27.2 Responding, Karl confirmed that the matters raised were of great importance. He stressed, however, that there was, at the moment, no construction going on for any buildings for the University in Qatar. He noted that the University remained in the early stages of the planning stages of phase two of development in Qatar and that no construction work was currently taking place. However, Karl emphasised that the University takes matters such as these very seriously and was working with AfG around the project management of phase two. He informed the Senate that the University is working with a very experienced company with which the University has worked extensively before. The company is based in the UK, with offices in Qatar. Karl reassured Senate that as AfG moves into the procurement of buildings for the new campus in partnership with the University that it will be ensured that within that project management there are extensive additional steps put in place to ensure that all the relevant legislation is adhered to. Karl further noted that it was envisaged that a construction supervision consultant, tasked with employing an HSE professional to monitor and report on health and safety standards, would be appointed. Karl confirmed the independent scrutiny of contractors. On behalf of the Principal and the SMT, he confirmed absolute commitment to the health and safety of everyone involved in the building of the Qatar campus.

27.3 The Principal thanked Diane for raising the question and noted that this was an issue of importance to him, as his father had been working on the Zoology Building the day it collapsed.

SENATE ASSESSOR ELECTION

28.1 The Senate approved the timeline for election of a Senate Assessor to the University Court (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

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 meeting on 12 November 2019.

1. Presentations from the Senate Task Forces

29.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Chair of the Retention Task Force providing an update on the work of the Task Force. A joint presentation, on the joint skills project, was also provided by the Chairs of the Assessment and Feedback and Positive Outcomes Task Forces.

2. Quality Assurance Committee Update and Update on the ELIR Recommendations

29.2 The Committee received an update from the Dean for Quality Enhancement and Assurance on the University’s progress with regards to the recommendations of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review panel. The Committee noted that a full update, in response to the recommendations, would be considered by the UCTL and the Senate in early 2020. The UCTL also received an update on the work of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

3. Late Submission Paper

29.3 The Committee received the first draft of the paper on Late Submission and agreed that it should be forwarded to the Senate for an academic view.
4. Library Management System (LMS) Update

29.4 The Committee received an update on new Library Management System (LMS) being introduced in January 2020.

REPORT FROM THE RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

30.1 The Senate noted the actions taken by the Research Policy Committee at its meeting on 26 September 2019.