UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2019


APPROVAL OF AGENDA

1.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of the Senate to the first meeting of the Senate of the 2019/20 academic year. He reminded members that the meeting would be audio recorded and asked that they introduce themselves before contributing to discussion to allow for an accurate minute. He reminded members that this was particularly important in recognition of new members of the Senate being present.

1.2 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.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF 15 MAY 2019

2.1 The Principal invited members of the Senate to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2019. No objections or comments were raised regarding the minutes and the meeting proceeded.

2.2 Amy Bryzgel was invited to raise a matter related to the minute of 15 May 2019. Amy, representing the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, noted the
approval of the revised Course Evaluation Process. In recognition of the approval of the Evidence Based Motion in Senate, she acknowledged the extensive research undertaken regarding unconscious bias in the completion of course evaluation forms. She noted that the research shows the unconscious biases of those completing evaluation forms and proposed that steps be taken to mitigate this. She proposed the addition of a couple sentences at the top of each evaluation form that alerts students to this fact. The Principal acknowledged the research on the topic and invited Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal to respond. Karl welcomed the suggestion on behalf of Peter McGeorge, Vice-Principal (Education). Karl confirmed that he would pass the suggestion to Peter and ensure it was actioned.

**UPDATE FROM THE PRINCIPAL**

3.1 The Principal, in providing an update to the Senate, began by discussing the University’s financial position. He informed members of the Senate that the University was on a very strong path towards financial sustainability and noted that the University had finished last year with a small surplus, representing the first time the University had been in that happy position for some time. He stated that the University was on track to achieve the financial target for the year as set by the Court. The Principal expressed his thanks to all those in the University for the huge amount of hard work undertaken to restore the University to financial sustainability and encouraged this to continue. Regarding Student Recruitment, the Principal began by updating the Senate on IMD20 recruitment, the recruitment of students from the most deprived postcodes in Scotland. He noted that in academic year 2018/19, 4.9% of the University’s Scottish domiciled undergraduate intake was from IMD20 postcodes. He informed the Senate that the figure for academic year 2019/20 remained provisional but was estimated to be 9%, representing almost a doubling in IMD20 recruitment. The Principal expressed his thanks to the Widening Access, Student Recruitment and Admissions teams for enabling the University’s progress with this aspect of recruitment. The Principal expressed that another aspect of recruitment of importance was the recruitment of international students in ensuring the University’s global reach and diversity. He informed the Senate that international recruitment expanded significantly in academic year 2018/19, with an extra 500 international students joining the University. He noted that the University was on track to at least match this figure in academic year 2019/20. He acknowledged this positive expansion in international recruitment, helpful across several fronts, not least in connection to financial sustainability. Regarding Education, the Principal acknowledged rankings and while noting that they were not everything, he stated that they are something. He stated that he was pleased to see improvements in the University’s National Student Survey (NSS) scores. He stated his gratitude to everyone who put effort in, both staff and students, to improve the student experience and to improve teaching quality. He stated that the result was of enormous credit to all those in the University who had helped contribute to it. Finally, regarding Research Quality, the Principal informed members of the Senate that the Research Grants awarded to the University rose by approximately 50% in academic year 2018/19. He noted that a lot of this could be credited to the large grant awarded to the National Decommissioning Centre, however, he also acknowledged improvements across the range. He stated his delight to see this, as for many disciplines, high quality work depends on the availability of research funding. He stated his congratulations to all those involved.

3.2 John Lamb, representing the Business School, noted that he had submitted three questions to the clerk, however, only one had received a response. He asked:
(i) Can Schools choose not to follow the policies and procedures on academic probation and, if so, what other policies and procedures can they choose not to follow? The Principal stated his hope that Schools couldn’t choose not to follow the policies and procedures laid down by the University. He noted, however, that if it was felt improvements could be made to the processes, the University would be happy to look at these. The Principal asked John to send the question to Karl Leydecker for a further and more detailed response.

(ii) Can we thank the University for the new Campus map and ask that this be used more? John stated that a new, very helpful map, showing all the University’s buildings, had been used at the open day in August. Regretfully, however, he stated that it had not been used since. The Principal asked Angus Donaldson, Director of Estates, to respond. Angus confirmed that he would investigate the request further.

UPDATE ON ESTATES GROUPS

4.1 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, gave a presentation to Senate providing an update on Estates Groups, a copy of which is filed with the principal copy of the minute.

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

- Frauke Jurgensen, representing the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, asked where within the categories as listed in the presentation would the consideration of performance space fit? Responding, Karl stated that this was potentially across multiple areas, and certainly within social interaction and learning and teaching and potentially within research. He further noted that perhaps predominantly under learning and teaching. Frauke stated that performance did constitute research and it was agreed the topic would be covered in the terms of reference to ensure its discussion.

- Iain McEwan, on behalf of the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition expressed his thanks for the presentation. He suggested that Senate membership of the Estate Groups be comprised of a member representing the Old Aberdeen campus and a member representing the Foresterhill campus. It was confirmed that this was the intention.

- Scott Styles, School of Law, welcomed the update and stated that it took on board the spirit of the initial motion raised at Senate. He asked whether the Committee would be formally recognised as a Committee of Court or Senate. He stated the importance of giving the Committee an appropriate existence by being a sub-committee of Court and/or Senate. Scott further stated the importance of transparency and communication and asked whether proceedings would be minuted and reported online and to the Senate by way of presentations. Responding, Karl stated his hope that transparency would increase by way of the memberships of the Committees. He stated the importance of clarifying the role of those on the Committees in representing their Schools. He stated his commitment to enhancing communication and while steps had already been taken to improve this, this would continue. Regarding whether the Committee would be a sub-committee of the Senate, Karl noted that he was not convinced of the appropriateness of this and was comfortable it remain as set out in his presentation for now.

- Richard Hepworth, representing the School of Natural and Computing Sciences, welcomed the proposals. He stated the feeling within his School of need for quick change, including to allow for the proper accommodation of growing numbers of overseas postgraduate students. The needs for delivery
and planning were acknowledged and it was stated that planning was underway with immediate issues intended to be addressed in as timely a manner as possible.

- Tom Rist, on behalf of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, raised interdisciplinarity as a key factor to be considered in the development of plans for the Estate. Responding, Karl stated that there was a huge amount to think about in relation to how the strategy could be implemented once agreed. He noted that all the groups, and in particular, the Education and Research groups, would need to think carefully about how best to incorporate interdisciplinarity. He stated the importance of considering it regarding space management.

**REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT**

5.1 On behalf of the Senate Assessors, Mirela Delibegovic provided an update to the Senate of the Court meeting held on 2 July 2019. Mirela introduced the paper and drew the attention of the Senate to the following key points:

- The Court had welcomed Esther Roberton to her first meeting as Senior Governor.
- The Court approved the operational budgets which provided for a £3m deficit in 2019/20 but moving to a break-even position by 2020/21.
- The Court had received a report from the Remuneration Committee and the great progress towards the reduction of the gender pay gap of experienced staff at professorial level. It was noted that the initial Mean and Median gap of 6.18% had been significantly reduced – the mean to 2.77% and the Median to 0.06%.

No questions were asked of Mirela by the members of the Senate and the meeting proceeded.

**COMMUNITY PLANNING ABERDEEN**

6.1 The Principal stated that members of the Senate would be aware that in recent months the University had been working hard to connect more strongly and more consistently and more productively with the organisations around the University within the North East, such as the City and Shire Councils. He noted that the University’s Senior Management Team (SMT) had met several times with the senior teams at the City Council and NHS Grampian and that positive steps were being taken. He stated that a positive aspect of this work was Community Planning. Karl Leydecker stated that he was delighted to be able to welcome Michelle Cochlan, the Corporate Strategy and Community Planning Manager for Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA), to the Senate. He noted that the University had received the invitation to join CPA and that the SMT had felt it was an important thing for the University to be involved in. He informed the Senate that he sits on the Board for CPA and Mervyn Bain, Head of the School of Social Science, sits on the Management Group. It was further noted that several other University staff are engaged in the project. Following a presentation to the University Management Group by Michelle, it was felt it would be appropriate and useful for members of the Senate to receive further information.

6.2 Michelle Cochlan proceeded to deliver a presentation to the Senate providing an update on Community Planning, a copy of which is filed with the principal copy of the minute.

6.3 Following the presentation, the following question was asked of the speaker:
Dariya Koleva, Education Officer for the Students’ Association (SA), expressed her thanks for the presentation, and asked whether there were further opportunities for student groups to engage with CPA and whether the SA could assist in further promoting CPA. Responding, Michelle stated the need to improve communications with groups such as the student body.

6.4 In concluding, Karl asked those interested in the project to contact him for further information. He urged members of the Senate to disseminate the information within the constituent Schools.

STRATEGY 2040

7.1 The Principal introduced the draft Strategy 2040 document. He stated that feedback to date had been very positive and that a very productive meeting had recently been held with elected members of the Senate, which had resulted in suggestions for modifications which were being taken on board. The Principal stated that the document was not a strategy document as conventionally conceived. Primarily, as it is intended for 20 and not 5 years and does not contain a list of targets and/or metrics. The Principal stated that, instead, it is a Statement of Purpose which brings the University’s Foundational Purpose into a contemporary context. He noted that it is hoped that, in this way, it will continue to have resonance across the next 20 years. He noted that the document may need to be further unpacked, as required by the Court, but that this is a higher vision about the University, what it is and what it hopes to become. In addition to the draft, the Principal informed the Senate that there would be further accessible versions for a variety of audiences. He stated that it was important to start with its understanding at an institutional level and, as such, sought the feedback of members of the Senate.

7.2 On behalf of the SA, Dariya Koleva, Education Officer, asked whether it would it be possible to arrange a feedback meeting with student senators. It was agreed that this would be possible and a positive step. Dariya stated that the language used might be difficult for some students to understand. Support for the publication of the document for users of British Sign Language (BSL) was given.

7.3 Graeme Nixon, Dean for Postgraduate Research, expressed the importance of reference to the training of researchers, an important part of the University’s mission. The Principal expressed his agreement with this point, that training was not sufficiently represented in the document as it currently stands.

7.4 Scott Styles, School of Law, echoed the point as made by Graeme Nixon. In addition, he expressed concern at the lack of a statement expressing freedom of thought and/or belief, a statutory duty in Scotland. He stated this, a core part of the University’s values, should be incorporated in a prominent manner. The Principal stated his agreement and contentment that this be incorporated. Scott further proposed the importance of stating that the University is committed to transparency and accountability both within the institution and to the wider community.

7.5 Ralph O’Connor, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, echoed the points as raised by Scott Styles. He also raised the importance of noting that with regards to Athena SWAN, women have achieved above average within the Arts and Humanities. He further noted that there was not a specific mention or reference of Languages within the International strand of the report and this had caused concern amongst members of his School.
7.6 The Principal noted a point raised by Tom Rist, and the inclusion of culture in the interdisciplinary pie chart, which has been adopted to give more prominence to the topic of culture. Tom Rist thanked the Principal for the inclusion of this. He sought clarification that the points raised at the meeting of elected Senate members would be incorporated into the final version. The Principal confirmed that while he could not guarantee the same wording would be used, the sentiments raised would be incorporated. Tom sought the addition of the word heritage to the document.

7.7 Jeff Oliver, on behalf of the School of Geosciences, noted references to online learning within the document and suggested that ‘online learning’ may not mean anything in 20 years’ time and suggested this be made more general. He further stated the importance of referring to the University’s commitment to the reduction if its carbon footprint as soon as possible. It was acknowledged that further work should be done to make change in this regard as soon as possible.

7.8 Alessandra Cecolin expressed concern that there was no mention of the Qatar campus within the document. The Principal agreed there could be more specific detail in this regard provided in the next draft.

7.9 Frauke Jurgensen stated feedback from her constituents that the wording used should be very precise. She noted that the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture has experts in the use of precise language who could be engaged in this. Karl added that emails received regarding the language used within the document were very helpful.

7.10 The Principal summarised that the Senate were, overall, content with the direction of the document and that it captures where the University is and seeks to move to. He thanked the Senate for their contribution and reminded members that the report was currently out for consultation across the University community.

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (REF) 2021

8.1 Gary McFarlane presented a paper providing an update on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021. He stated that the paper provided gave an update on current activities primarily in respect of (i) governance in relation to the REF Code of Practice and (ii) REF Equality and Diversity training. He informed members of the Senate that training was currently ongoing.

8.2 Otherwise, he noted that preparations continued to be made for the University’s submission. He noted that staff numbers continued to increase, outputs continued to be assessed and much of the current activity centred on case studies. He informed members of the Senate that in November, the University would undertake a full review of REF preparedness across all units of assessment.

8.3 Members of the Senate referred to section 3.3 and the sentence ‘This remains a significant reduction in our eligible population since the REF2014 census date.’ The Senate sought clarity around the percentage reduction in population. The Principal confirmed that because of recruitment, this was a difficult question to answer, however, estimated it at approximately 20%. He indicated that this would improve as the University maintained a period of recruitment.
9.1 Karl Leydecker introduced the proposal made by the Senate Business Committee (SBC), that there be a change in practice regarding the format of Senate minutes. He informed the Senate that currently, Senate minutes can be between 15 and 25 pages in length and detail everything said. He noted that this was a huge task and that the SBC felt it would more effective for there to be a more conventional minute but for the oral recording to be retained for reference. A short discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Diane Skatun, representing the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, stated the usefulness of the lengthy written minute in providing members of staff with the ability to skim a written document of senate activity rather than having to listen to a recording.
- Scott Styles opposed the change and stated the minute used to be bland and to provide little clarity around what had been said. In terms of the transparency of communication, he spoke in favour of maintaining the full minute and retaining the status quo.
- Tom Rist also spoke in favour of maintain the full minute. He stated that it provided a good mechanism for the distribution of information.

9.2 The Principal moved to undertake a vote on the recommendation, as follows:

| In favour of maintaining the full minute: | 51 |
| Not in favour of maintaining a full minute | 23 |
| Abstaining from the vote: | 1 |

A vote having been taken, it was confirmed that the full minute would continue to be produced.

REPORT FORM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Senate approved and noted the actions taken by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning at its meetings on 12 June and 18 September 2019.

1. Omnibus Resolution

10.1 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forwarded to the University Court, the draft Resolution ‘Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees’ (copy filed with principal copy of minute).

The Senate further invited the University Court that, in accordance with the provisions of Section 6 (2) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, the draft Resolution be passed forthwith, so that the amended provisions may be applied with effect from the date on which they are passed by the University Court

2. Fitness to Practise (Medicine and Dentistry)

10.2 The Senate approved, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, and forward to the University Court, the draft changes (copy filed with principal copy of minute).
3. Term Dates for Academic Year 2020-21

10.3 The UCTL approved, the Term Dates for Academic Year 2020-21 (available on the University's webpages here).

4. Update on the Enhanced Transcript

10.4 The Committee received an update on the Enhanced Transcript. The Enhanced Transcript is more detailed than a degree certificate and functions as a supplement to it, providing details of courses, marks and approved extra-curricular activities. Undergraduate and taught Postgraduate students, receive the Enhanced Transcript on graduation. The Committee approved further roles as follows:

- Santander Mobility Awards
- The AberGreen Project
- The Shared Planet Society

SENATE ASSESSOR TERMS OF OFFICE ON COURT

11.1 Following a request from the Governance and Nominations Committee, and to ensure that the University complies with the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance, the Senate approved, on the recommendation of the Senate Business Committee, that Senate Assessor appointments to Court should be limited to two terms of four years.

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 2019 to 30 September 2022 (except where indicated otherwise):

School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition

Kate Gillies

School of Psychology

Amelia Hunt
Constanze Hesse
Katharina Schnitzspahn (until 2020)

School of Social Science

Árnar Arnason (until 2020)
Johan Rasanayagam (until 2020)

SENATE ASSESSORS

13.1 The Senate noted that following recent elections Neil Vargessson and Lindsay Tibbetts were elected as Senate Assessors from 1 October 2019.
SENATE MEMBERSHIP OF HONORARY DEGREES COMMITTEE

14.1 Senate noted that the Senate Business Committee approved Kate Gillies to be a member of the Honorary Degrees Committee for a period of four years.

SENATE MEMBERSHIP OF SENATE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

15.1 The Senate noted that following recent elections the following members were duly elected to serve on the Senate Business Committee until 30 September 2021:

Alfred Akisanya
Iain McEwan
Michelle Pinard
Amy Bryzgel
Allan Sim
Scott Styles

SENATE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

16.1 The Senate noted that following recent elections the following members were duly elected to participate in the Senate Effectiveness Review Group:

Donna MacCallum
Helen Martin
Rachel Shanks
David Anderson
Iain McEwan
Scott Styles

17.1 The Principal thanked members of the Senate for their contributions to discussion and closed the meeting.