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UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2024

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In Person: Raja Muhammad Abu Bakar, Rasha Abu Eid, Waheed Afzal, Scott Allan, Euan Bain, Simon Bains, George Boyne, Alex Brasier, Alessandra Cecolin, Brett Cochrane, Matthew Collinson, Hannah Cowie, Leone Craig, Sergio Dall'Angelo, Pete Edwards, Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, Nick Forsyth, Catherine Francis, Toni Gibson, Greg Gordon, Nathaniel Greene, Fiona Gröning, Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, Astley Hastings, Richard Hepworth-Young, Jonathan Hicks, Muhammad Azizul Islam, Aana Khandelwal, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Anne Kiltie, Nadia Kiwan, Seungho Lee, Michelle Macleod, Catriona Macdonald, Joanne McEvoy, David McGloin, David McLernon, Alan MacPherson, Mauro Manassi, Doug Martin, Sam Martin, Abigail Meissner, Oleksandr Menshykov, Jessica More, Heather Morgan, JP Mynott, Patricia Norwood, Nir Oren, Graeme Paton, Michelle Pinard, Amudha Poobalan, Daniel Powell, Ann Rajnicek, Miles Rothoerl, Agathe Rouaix, Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar, Joachim Schaper, Patience Schell, Karen Scott, Samuel Seymour, Diane Skåtun, John Skåtun, Tracey Slaven, Srinivas Sriramula, Trevor Stack, Scott Styles, Fiona Stoddard, Ben Tatler, Mansi Vasant Utikar, Neil Vargesson, Ash Venkatesh, Nikolaos Vlassis, Gordon Waiter, Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Walklate, Ilia Xypolia, Roland Young, Alexandros Zangelidis

Online: David Anderson, John Barrow, David Blackbourn, Jason Bohan, Isla Callander, Beatriz Goulao, Constanze Hesse, Thomas Muinzer, Sam Newington, Charlaine Simpson, Steve Tucker

Apologies: Siladitya Bhattacharya, Chris Collins, Karin Friedrich, Peter Henderson, Karolin Hijazi, Karl Leydecker, Beth Lord, Amy McFarlane, David Muirhead, Stuart Piertney

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APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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1.1 The Principal welcomed members to the first meeting of Senate of the new Academic Year. He welcomed new members, in particular the students and newly elected staff members, noting that some members were attending for the first time while others had been re-elected or were returning after taking a break from Senate membership. He thanked members for their continuing support for working to ensure the excellence of the teaching and research experience at the University, which lay at the heart of Senate's remit within the governance structure of the University. He reminded members to state who they were and their role before contributing to discussions.

1.2 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary, also welcomed everyone and reminded members of procedures: the meeting would be recorded to enable production of the minutes; there were no planned fire alarms; members were asked to state their name before contributing to discussion and those attending on Teams were asked to use the chat function to state when they wished to ask a question. Members were reminded that the chat itself does not form part of the formal minute, and to remain muted when not speaking. Staff were reminded that, while all staff and students are welcome to attend Senate, only members are permitted to contribute to debate. Noting that no votes were anticipated, she reminded members that any voting would take place using the auditorium functionality for those in the room and Forms within the chat for those on Teams. She noted that slides from the induction session were available online (within the resources area of Decision Time) and that the video would be added shortly. Tracey reminded members that contributions should relate to the approved agenda and that a range of views would be sought during discussions. There would be a short break after agenda item six.

1.3   The Principal highlighted that the meeting was Tracey's last and, on behalf of Senate, thanked her for all the advice and guidance she had given to Senate about governance, the role of Senate and complying with due process.

1.4   Senate approved the agenda, and the meeting proceeded.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF 5 JUNE

2.1   Senate approved the minutes from 5 June 2024.

ORAL REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL AND
UPDATE ON HE SECTOR/UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS

3.1   Noting Senate had received his written report, the Principal highlighted that the format of his report had changed and that the ordering of items within his report had swapped round to lead with research and education achievements rather than sector news. This had been done to ensure that everyone received appropriate recognition for their achievements in education and research. He commended the entire community for maintaining the quality of education and research, for the quality of support provided, for the magnificent 30% increase in the value of research awards over the previous year and the way that has been reflected in league tables – putting the University second in Scotland and either 12th or 15th in the UK, dependant on the table being viewed. Noting that it was part of Senate's role to support these achievements and oversee the continuation of this success. He noted that these achievements were even more admirable when viewed in the context of the challenges to the sector as a whole. He noted as positive, the newly elected UK Government's recognition of the value of Higher Education: it said positive things about what higher education can contribute to the economy, society, the UK's international and global profile but thus far this had not resulted in any policy changes or funding changes. He noted that the same was true of the Scottish Government which had, for years, been very positive about Scottish Higher Education in its rhetoric although not in its funding decisions. He highlighted the challenging context that the University continued to operate within but noted that University finances were stable. The University had yet to achieve financial recovery but had achieved financial stability with strong education and research.

3.2   Scott Styles, School of Law, asked if the Principal anticipated that the threatened National Insurance rise would affect the University?

3.3   The Principal noted that there was a rumour suggesting that there would be a rise in National Insurance for employers, possibly for all types of organisations, noting that there had been speculation today that it may not affect the public sector, or by extension charities. He noted that it would be more expensive to recruit and retain staff if it were to happen which would impact on the University. The most likely rise of 1% on the pay bill, which was not expected before next April, would give a bit of time to adjust. He highlighted he had made representations to the UK Treasury, along with Universities UK, explaining the difficult burden that would be placed on universities if this were to go ahead. He had noted the already challenging context universities were operating in. He commented that perhaps this Government was more receptive to messages from the sector than the previous one, however that did not indicate that anything would change and so there was no option but await the Budget and adapt to it if required.

3.4   Asha Venkatesh, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (MMSN) noted, in connection with educational achievements, that Medicine had been ranked first, for the second time in a row, and Anatomy and Physiology had been ranked second in the whole of the UK.

3.5   The Principal echoed that the achievements in Guardian league tables were excellent achievements for the whole University and for Medicine.

COURT REPORT

4.1 Neil Vargesson, School of MMSN updated Senate on the September meetings of Court and the recent strategy day where the university's finances, financial recovery and plans for the future had been discussed. He highlighted that the Court had been introduced to the new independent members who contributed new skill sets to Court. He noted that Court had also discussed the pay award which the University would receive in two parts, the first in October and the second in March. He also recorded his thanks to Tracey for all her help on Court as well as with Senate, noting she would be missed.

4.2 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science noted how positive it was to see, given the meetings prior to the summer, the links to Court, particularly those highlighted in section 1.1 of the written report.

RESEARCH UPDATE

5.1 Nick Forsyth, Vice-Principal (Research) noted that there were three main components to the update: where the University landed in the last full year in terms of research performance; an update on Institutional Research Leave in relation to the round which had taken applicants in January; and finally, Senate would be updated on the current position regarding the Technician Commitment Concordat.

5.2 He asked Senate to note the progress made in research grant income which had remained in steady state. He highlighted the increase in the number of research grant applications made and the monetary value of the incoming grants from external funding bodies over the past year.

5.3 Nick highlighted that over the last five years overall there had been a general increase in awards. As anticipated, there tended to be a bimodal distribution with applications being written and submitted before being received and work starting. He noted that collectively the aim was for everyone not to be working to the same cycle so that there was a smoother pattern to income. Over the last five years the University has gone from £38M in 2019/20 while in 2023/24 the University achieved £69M in awards which had been remarkable. He noted that this had not been an overnight change but rather a gradual change which had plateaued out before showing further change. He highlighted that the ask against the £69M had been £266M which provided an indication of success rates and the degree to which we need to be seeking funding to deliver income.

5.4 He noted that some of the awards seen during 2023/24 were amongst the highest seen over the previous ten years which reflected the concerted efforts of staff to secure funding across a range of sources. This was not just a result of teaching and research staff (T&R), but that teaching and scholarship staff (T&S) had a role to play in supporting and enabling colleagues. He noted that just as research supported education so too did education support research. It was a symbiotic relationship. He highlighted that, as noted at Senate previously, there had been a change in emphasis toward submitting for larger grants as well as smaller ones. He noted that this was evidenced in 4.1.3 of the written report, which illustrated a shift in academic behaviour.

5.5 He highlighted that research income had been largely static during the previous year but was still moving in the right direction when viewed across a five-year period.

5.6 He drew Senate's attention to Figure 5 in the report which showed resilience in the research funding portfolio. There were six main blocks within the portfolio giving the capacity to weather storms should they arise with one of these.

5.7 He asked Senate to note the part played by the School Directors of Research in helping to drive forward the research agenda and the individual colleagues who had made this increase happen.

5.8 He suggested that the increase in funding acknowledged the external standing of the University's research had been improved.

5.9 Trevor Stack, School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture (LLMVC) noted that there had been significant inflation during the five-year period and asked whether this had been factored into the figures and whether the increase was real? He suggested that the figure could be compared with total UKRI grants available as these would have been increased with inflation to determine whether there really had been an increase.

5.10 In response Nick agreed that this had been of concern but noted that the 30% increase in the number of awards received sat well in advance of where inflation had been, and this should take care of the inflationary pressures.

5.11 The Principal agreed that it was a valid point but noted that the 30% figure was well above inflation. He noted that another way to look at the figures was in terms of the level of funding achieved per T&R staff member in order to get a degree of standardisation over time and noted that this was something he was sure the team were looking at.

5.12 Diane Skåtun, School of MMSN noted that when everyone was under such stress with workloads increasing, any indicator that research applications were going up suggested that all staff were putting in a huge amount of effort which were potentially not within working hours and whist it was correct to celebrate this it should also be recognised the potential impact this was having on staff's workload.

5.13 Nick agreed and noted that working outside of hours was not encouraged.

5.14 Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science asked if demographic data were available breaking down the figures to show who was applying for the awards and within which contexts, for example staff:student ratios and individual school research policies etc and if the data were being looked at whether this could be made available to Senate? She also asked about the role of research teams in applying for funding and not just individuals.

5.15 Nick confirmed that the team were continually looking at data and new ways to look at it and noted that what had come from the current discussion was a useful addition to that which would be taken forward.

5.16 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences highlighted that it was good that large grants were being secured but noted that in order to secure large grants, it was necessary to have pilot data, for which small grants were required. He asked if the University was sure that the number of applications was increasing and that it wasn't just the size of the grants being applied for was increasing.

5.17 Nick confirmed that the number of applications made during the last year had increased and, that across T&R and R staff, more than 50% had been either PI or co-PI on applications. He noted that it would be interesting to see whether, during the coming year, there was any overlap with the names seen during the last year.

5.18 The Principal sought confirmation of his recollection that 300 hundred academics had contributed to the awards.

5.19 Nick confirmed that the figure was in the region of 340.

5.20 Sam Martin, School of Biological Sciences (SBS) noted the time lag that existed between numbers being published and when funding is spent. He also commented that UKRI, in particular BBSRC and NERC, were particularly slow. He highlighted the concern that it used to take around six months from application to funding confirmation, but now this could take up to eighteen months and noted that timelines seemed to be getting longer.

5.21 Nick noted that this was a good observation and observed that this was in part due to the migration from JES to the Funding Platform and partly due to the universal workload problems in academia. He noted that the research councils were experiencing real difficulties obtaining peer reviews. He highlighted that in some instances the delay could be up to two years and noted that one school was awaiting outcomes of applications submitted two years ago. He acknowledged that due to the delay the numbers for the current year might still be subject to change.

5.22 Astley Hastings, SBS noted that he had submitted several large bids with other Universities as part of a consortium and that it was common elsewhere for a bid manager to be appointed to coordinate the process. However, his experience of putting in a bid for £5.5M at the University had not been so good and academics did not receive the same level of support as he perceived was available at other institutions.

5.23 Nick noted that Research & Innovation were trying to offer more support for strategic grant papers in order that a bid manager was able to oversee the process from start to finish.

5.24 Moving on to Institutional Research Leave, Nick reminded members that following REF2021, SMT and Court had instigated the post-REF action plan which had included the establishment of an Institutional Research Leave programme. He highlighted that the first round of the programme had been undertaken in 2022/23 with the second round being made available for 2024/25. Within the programme c.£225K had been made available. It had been launched in October 2023 with applications due by mid-January. 54 applications had been received and 15 awards had been made to the value of £223K for 2024/25 with one award being pushed into 2025/26 highlighting that applications were taken for periods which were downstream from the current financial year. He highlighted that of the awards made 74% had been for staff costs i.e. buy-out of activities to enable staff to undertake the research work, for example impact or output generation. Of the 54 applications received, 28 focused on writing outputs; six that looked at early-stage impact; and 17 that were looking at mature impact case studies. One application had been received that focussed on Research Culture as part of the institutional submission for REF2029. The approach taken, for schools with a significant number of applications, discussed recommendations with Heads of School to ensure that proposed periods of leave could be accommodated within the anticipated timeframes. Where applicants were unsuccessful, feedback had been supplied and colleagues were invited to reapply to future rounds. The schemes' main aim was to improve the institutions submission to REF2029 and to strengthen all elements as part of that process. From the successful applications in the current round the anticipated outputs had included 17 journal articles, 21 books or monographs, 17 Impact Case Studies for REF2029 plus the possibility of subsequent case studies thereafter; 10 grant applications and three potential spinouts. Applications had been received from 10 out of 12 schools. Feedback received from the two schools not submitting applications, indicated that this had been the first opportunity for applications to receive funding internally, as these schools had not previously had a research leave scheme while other schools were using it to complement their own schemes. Nick noted this was an important observation and noted the opportunity to align the two schemes and where schools were unable to provide their own research leave resource it was particularly important for those staff to have the opportunity to apply for institutional resource.

5.25 Nick noted that, following on from the first round of funding, the second round had particularly encouraged applications from underrepresented cohorts, namely mid-career part-time female researchers and researchers from black and other ethnic minorities. The number of applications means it is not possible to undertake a more rigorous and thorough analysis, but as subsequent rounds were completed, it should be possible to complete more detailed analysis of equality and diversity of the applicants. It can however be noted that 23 applications had been received from mid-term researchers of which seven were awarded; the gender split was roughly aligned with the academic population with a strong bias in awards being made towards female academics – 73% of awards.

5.26 Plans for the next schemes include encouraging applications that would strengthen impact and research environment submissions in equal measures. Nick noted that it was important that

there was also a focus on research culture as this was a key pillar of REF2029 and Ben Tatler would detail, in his forthcoming presentation, work being done both nationally and internationally to strengthen these areas. The next round of funding would be looking for impact and research environment submissions that could be brought to fruition within the assessment period for REF2029. Schools were encouraged strongly to invite colleagues to participate in the next round in order to improve rates of submission.

5.27   Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History (DHPA) asked whether individuals specifically impacted by Covid, regardless of gender, were encouraged to participate in the scheme as the University had committed to support staff that had been affected by Covid and whether there was any such data available.

5.28   Noting this was a good point, Nick indicated that he did not have these data to hand, but it was a good point that he would take away and investigate.

5.29   The Principal recalled that the first round had offered the opportunity to outline the circumstances which had prevented the research from progressing in the way that had originally been intended, but that he was happy for Nick to check how Covid had been taken into account.

5.30   Nadia Kiwan, School of LLMVC, noted that LLMVC had had the highest number of applications (11) but had only received one award and noted that individuals would receive feedback but asked whether any general guidance would be provided through school research committees in order that the success rate might be improved. She also asked whether there would be an institutional review of the different schemes in operation due to the lack of parity between schools.

5.31   Nick confirmed he had undertaken an initial review of school research leave policies and institutional leave policies not long after his arrival in Aberdeen and had taken a paper to SMT outlining the position in October last year since when the University had moved to the second stage of the process and Ben Tatler has taken the body of work, on and a refresh of institutional research leave policy would be undertaken, framed within what exists within schools. He did not expect that schools would be instructed what they must do but rather the range of approaches in existence and available to them would be highlighted. Nick noted that one of the difficulties with providing feedback had arisen from the fact that impact for REF2029 had been prioritised had led to a direction being identified but he undertook to work with the School Director to provide feedback on optimising applications.

5.32   Thereza De Aguiar, Business School asked if there was any mechanism in place to monitor whether the resources supplied for research were actually spent on what they were intended for.

5.33   Nick confirmed that a review of the first round of research leave was currently being undertaken to determine whether the investment had led to a return for REF2029. However, he confirmed he was not aware of any procedure to monitor in the way described but where money was awarded to provide cover, for example for teaching, it would be relatively easy to monitor whether the request for drawn down had been accompanied by a request through HR.

5.34   Thereza commented that it would be very dangerous if other people were becoming overloaded because of the system for research leave.

5.35   Kirsty Kiezebrink, Dean for Educational Innovation noted that it was important that the University was not drawn into a 'one for one' type system as sometimes school resources were juggled to enable the best cover possible to be provided.

5.36   The Principal emphasised the importance of ensuring that the person given the resource for research leave was given the time to undertake the research.

5.37   Diane Skåtun, School of MMSN noted she had wished to ask a similar question highlighting the importance of schools not just absorbing the money and not providing research time.

5.38   Jen Walklate, School of Social Science commented that she had not seen any data or metrics relating to disability or health and also highlighted the comment that unsuccessful applications were more likely to come from earlier career stage researchers which was a concern for staff at various levels within Social Science and asked if any specific supports would be put in place to support these staff in their research to ensure they do not get stuck in a teaching cycle and that institutional research leave was not always awarded to research active professors.

5.39   Nick highlighted the role of the school Directors of Research in supporting colleagues within their areas to ensure that what is sent onwards and upwards is of the best quality. Nick acknowledged that the applications for first round of research leave, which had focussed on outputs, had almost by definition shown the characteristics described which had led to the second round being aimed more squarely at mid-career research staff. He noted that where early career research staff were not producing outputs which were capable of making it through the peer review process, responsibility for this lay with the institution. If this was not occurring at a school level, then this needed to be addressed institutionally. Nick confirmed that, in terms of the data on disabilities, it had been difficult to perform a rigorous EDI assessment due to the numbers involved but he anticipated that as time went on it should be possible to undertake some analysis.

5.40   Euan Bain, School of Engineering noted that there had been an application from the library which had been funded. He highlighted that the Institutional Research Leave scheme documentation made reference to the scheme being governed by the Institutional Research Leave Policy. The Policy, however, described itself as being for academic staff before going on to describe being open to all 'staff who undertake or support research'. He asked if it might be made clear how non-academic staff might be included.

5.41   Nick confirmed that the documentation should make it clear that it applied to all staff that undertake, support or enable research as this was what REF2029 was indicating had to be the position. It stipulated that research should be inclusive of all staff groups within organisations including those that enable activity. This would be looked at and made clearer.

5.42   The Principal noted that this was a good link to the next topic of the Technicians' Commitment.

5.43   Nick noted that the University had been disappointed that the last update to REF2029 had not been more inclusive to all 'individuals who undertook, facilitated or enabled research' and the University had hoped that staff within Research and Innovation, or technicians, for example, would be included but that this had been changed. The eligibility was now for staff on a T&R or an R contract only.

5.44   Nick explained that the Technicians Commitment was an agreement that the University had become a signatory to in 2018 which had committed the University to provide support to the technician community. The University had drawn together and submitted an action plan which had included 30 points with subpoints. Following this, changes to sector priorities, had led to the Technicians' Commitment (TC) not being given the direction and steer it warranted. In order to remain signatories to the TC, the University was required to report on actions taken and was due to submit a report in January on progress made against the previous 30-point action plan together with an action plan going forward. He reported that back in May he had begun work with the technical resource staff across the organisation to pull together a response on where the Institution was against the action plan. He noted that, pleasingly, the University had achieved the bulk of the actions identified. The actions not yet met were being taken forward and formed the basis of a new 10-point action plan and included actions such as a review of technical resources across the Institution, noting that there had been a number of organisational changes which had taken place, including the science teaching hub, which had led to substantial changes in the landscape. This was being brought to the meeting of Senate today to ensure that Senate were aware that this activity was being undertaken. He noted that although this was not an academic activity this was a key enabler for research activities. This would also be considered

by the Partnership, Negotiation & Consultation Committee (PNCC) before going to the Senior Management Team (SMT) before the Report was ultimately submitted.

5.45   The Principal highlighted that in most areas the work of the technicians was an absolutely vital component of teaching and research activities, and the results being sought could not be achieved without them.

5.46   Karen Scott, School of MMSN thanked Nick for bringing this important initiative to the attention of Senate. She noted that one concern was related to skilled technicians progressing through the career path available to them and reaching a ceiling leading to the only route for further progression being to move sideways. This resulted in the loss of very skilled technicians, and this loss of experienced technicians, was something that was experienced frequently. She noted that many of the TROs would have previously been skilled technicians and asked if there were plans included to keep the very skilled technicians in the role.

5.47   Nick confirmed this as exactly the type of issue which the action plan was picking up on.

5.48   Jen Walklate, School of Social Science noted that it was excellent for Senate to see this and important that the TC was part of the University's practise, particularly as a predecessor of the Institution had employed what, may have been, the first university technician: John King in 1783 was employed by Marschial College as a watchmaker.

RESEARCH DEANS: INTRODUCTIONS AND PORTFOLIOS

6.1   Nick noted that it was important that Senate was introduced to the three new Research Deans, noting that they were appointed towards the end of the previous academic year and portfolios were now at a stage where they might usefully be introduced. He highlighted that the appointment of the deans had been closely aligned with the REF2029 pillars ensuring the University had a clear focus against each one. He noted that Nir Oren, Michelle McLeod and Ben Tatler were present and that Stuart Piertney, the fourth Dean, had had the opportunity to introduce himself at a meeting of Senate before the summer.

6.2   Nir Oren, Dean for Knowledge and Understanding noted that there was a common misconception that the Deans were Ref Deans which they were not. Although they had a role in supporting REF2029 there were several other things for which they were responsible. He highlighted that in his case this included ensuring that research outputs reached their intended audiences: that the intended people read papers produced and that the University's research was sustainable. This would ensure that research income was maximised. Maximising quality and reach of research and grant income, all fell within his role.

6.3   Nir highlighted that the Knowledge & Understanding pert of REF will count for 50% of the Institution's GPA and essentially 50% of the submission. 90% of the Knowledge & Understanding component will be determined by the external assessment of the University's research outputs. He noted that REF2029 would decouple individuals from outputs and that the University was lucky in this regard as it was a broad-spectrum university including individuals and outputs which may fit in multiple different areas. Thia led to there being scope to determine which areas certain work was included within leading to the University having the ability to influence its REF GPA and subsequently an ability to influence its research income from REF. This might be somewhere between 2 and 10%. He confirmed that he was responsible for the REF Assessment (stocktake as it was termed for 2023) noting that this was necessary to determine the current position within the University in terms of research outputs in order to optimise the eventual submission. He noted that the team were aware that this type of 'big bang' assessment of research outputs was seen by many as onerous; consequently it was his intention was to roll out a form of rolling assessment during 2025. As individuals have a new output that they feel is high quality it will be submitted at that point and it will be assessed, giving a 'real-time' view of the Institutional position. He also indicated that he would be responsible for modelling GPA and understanding what the REF submission will look like and the impact that will have on the and research income. He also indicated that he was thinking about the REF

narrative, but that these rules had not yet been announced. There would be 10% of the knowledge and understanding metric derived from the REF narrative.

6.4 Nir indicated that he was working closely with Research & Innovation (R&I) to improve the University's submission volume and the quality of research funding applications. He acknowledged that the University had had some good successes, but he felt that it was possible to do better. He highlighted activities had already begun, for example, there had been a week-long grant writing retreat where there had been 10-20 individuals spending time writing and polishing grant submissions which had been very successful, and this would be repeated. Other activities included working with R&I to determine how best to support large grant applications, strategic grant applications and applications from early career researchers (ECR) to maximise their success rate and the ability of the Institution to ask these deep research questions which ultimately was what the institution needed funding for.

6.5 Michelle McLeod, Dean for Impact and Engagement introduced herself detailing her experience and her view that the co-creation of research with public bodies enables the research to be used for policy decisions. She highlighted that one of her priorities was to develop an impact and engagement culture and indicated she believed in the normalisation impact and engagement and that this does not only have to occur in the context of REF. She noted that part of impact and engagement was about co-creation of research working with stakeholders and she was hoping to work with colleagues across the University to increase the opportunities for working with partners. She noted she works closely with the impact and engagement team within R&I and with the impact leads across the Institution. She noted the existence of an Impact Leads Network which met several times each year which provided an opportunity to discuss the facilitation and assessment of impact and engagement. She noted that she would soon be able to give more detail of the REF Impact and Engagement Plan she was working on currently and would bring that through its committee stages; she had been working with others to develop school mechanisms for the supporting development of impact statements at that level.

6.6 In a REF context, she noted changes from the last REF: it had changed from being 'impact' to 'engagement and impact' which would be assessed through case studies and a discipline-level statement which will illustrate how researchers have been engaging in addition to the case studies. She noted that this was one element of REF for which all the details were still unknown, but they were anticipating this would be known by the end of the year. However, it was known that impact case studies were no longer required to be related to 2-star outputs and would account for between 50% and 80% of a unit of assessment's submission and the discipline level statement around engagement could count for between 20% and 50%, depending on the size of the units that were submitted to, together with the number of case studies submitted.

6.7 While more information on REF 2029 was awaited, the University was continuing to run training around impact skills; calibration of impact case studies; colleagues within the impact team are taking a 'case work' approach to supporting case study authors which was found to be working well and highlighted again the impact leads group.

6.8 Michelle highlighted the ongoing work to develop an engagement framework for the University which would be brought to committees in the near future.

6.9 Michelle also highlighted a couple of other duties which were part of her brief: the strategic research partnerships work with Calgary and Curtin, Universities of the Arctic and work with the University of Bergen; she also noted that she sat as an Executive Committee Member on the Scottish Graduate School for the Arts and Humanities together with being a member of the steering committee for the Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance.

6.10 Ben Tatler, Dean for Research Culture introduced his remit to Senate as being responsible for the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to enhance research culture of the Umiversity. The broad domain of research culture required a team approach, and he highlighted some of the key individuals with whom he was working across the University.

6.11 He highlighted the approach to research culture being taken by the University as being one which recognised the strong cultures that already existed while looking for opportunities to bring together different groups of individuals in order to share best practise and learn from each other to create and develop initiatives to further enhance research culture.

6.12 He noted that for this to work well there needed to be a shared understanding of what excellence in research looked like. He cited the examples of having open and transparent processes; shared standards of excellence in assessing the range of research outputs responsibly together with shared standards of excellence in behaviour by plaing trust at the centre of interactions with each other.

6.13 Ben highlighted the importance of taking an evidence informed approach to building research culture within the Institution. He also noted the importance of recognising the wide range of ways that existed for people to contribute to this which needed to be recognised and rewarded. He also highlighted that this needed to be underpinned with a robust framework for career development. He argued that the University was seeking to develop a strong community of practise around research culture.

6.14 He noted that one of the important stands his work was developing was to address the Research People, Culture and Environment (PCE) element of REF2029, noting that this new element of REF replaced the former 'Environment' strand. He highlighted that this strand now counted for a larger proportion, increasing from 15% to 25%, of the overall REF score.

6.15 He highlighted the timeline which was being worked to, which included internal and external elements. He noted that although the new element of REF was known, it was as yet unknown how it would be assessed. He reported that the University had taken a key role in the development of the processes for assessment of this element which provided key insights into the national framework being developed allowed the possibility to work with schools to develop their approaches.

6.16 Thereza de Aguair, Business School asked how the School consultation had taken place.

6.17 Ben responded detailing that consultation was shortly to recommence, however there had been an offer to all Schools to hold an open session on research culture with anyone interested. He noted that this had happened with five schools so far and would happen with another in December. He noted that there had also been meetings with the leadership of all schools to discuss research culture, and Ben confirmed that both of these activities had taken place within the Business School already.

6.18 Thereza queried whether this had taken place at the School forum.

6.19 Ben confirmed that it had been and that the sessions had been aimed at developing a better understanding of what research culture looked like in different parts of the University.

6.20 Thereza asked if it was possible for staff to give their perspectives more generally as there had not been sufficient time for some concerns to be expressed at the meeting and suggested that an anonymous survey might be a good idea.

6.21 Responding Ben confirmed that he did want to hear from people and that the aim was to keep the padlets, which had been running during meetings, open for contributions, and noted that work had to be based on what was actually occurring in schools.

6.22 Aravinda Guntupalli, School of MMSN noted that the list of institutions associated with the PCE pilot exercise did not include the University and asked if this would nor be an advantage and asked if there were plans to join the next round.

6.23 Ben reported that the University had applied to be part of the pilot exercise but hadn't been selected. He noted his relief at not being selected as it had pushed the University to become

very involved with the process leading up to the pilot including involvement in the development of the templates to be used during the pilot which had included being at six of the ten workshops deciding how this part of the REF would be assessed, and he had sight of the templates which would be being recommended to REF. He noted that University had had the benefit of seeing all the process for this part of the Ref without needing to complete the forms.

6.24   Nick confirmed that the process of selection for the pilot had been by random draw and that the University had not been unsuccessful in this non-competitive process.

6.25   Trevor Stack, School of LLMVC asked Ben if he could give some examples from Schools of PCE activities considered to be outstanding together with Institutional initiatives.

6.26   Ben declined to pick specific examples from schools as there were so many examples and highlighted that this was part of the reasoning behind the coming together for sharing of approaches between schools. He noted that the desire for preserving the strong individuals school research cultures, had been something that had emerged from discussions with schools and tis was part of the idea behand the idea of building a community of practise in this area. He noted that a network had been established of all the culture leads across the university which would meet regularly to share experiences and practises. He highlighted that the Portal would shortly be launched which would provide access to all the development and training opportunities in research within the University providing access to everything available within the University from one easy to navigate space.

6.27   The Principal asked if there were plans to highlight elements of good practise and Ben confirmed that there were.

6.28   Karen Scott, School of MMSN asked Nir for clarification about the rolling REF stocktake planned from the next year and details on what this would mean and whether this would mean a continual effort from the REF assessors would be required to support this?

6.29   Nir confirmed that the intention behind it was to reduce workload and suggested that things should only be submitted for assessment if they were considered better than the worst items already submitted. He noted that the University was already almost at the level of output needed and that going forward the focus was on quality rather than quantity. It was about determining which outputs would increase the quality; rather than requiring individual staff to submit a number of outputs within a defined period it was about staff submitting when they considered they might have something which would improve Institutional quality which should have the effect of reducing the review load.

6.30   Ilia Xpolia, School of Social Science asked what the anticipated relationship of Senate was to research and REF and asked how Senate might help the Deans?

6.31   In response, Nick replied that Senate's help was sought to promote institutional engagement in the upcoming REF exercise. He highlighted that this was something that everyone was part of and that everyone worked together on. He confirmed that Senate would be kept informed of developments and it was support which was being sought.

6.32   David Blackbourn, School of MMSN asked whether there was yet any clarity on inclusion in the REF exercise. He noted that previously a staff member on a 0.2 contract could be returned.

6.33   Nick confirmed that a precise answer was not yet available. This would form part of module four which had been promised during autumn/winter 2024/25, however, the indicative language being used was that individuals would be required to demonstrate at least six months association with an institution which would translate to exactly to number just mentioned remembering that it was taken across a two-year rolling average, but the details were still not known.

6.34   Neil Vargesson, School of MMSN asked how the units of assessment would be determined and whether schools would be able to submit to multiple units?

6.35 Nick confirmed that, not only were the rules not yet published but that the University had to understand where it sat in terms of the quality of its outputs and impact, in order to be able to take those decisions. Meetings were underway to determine how this might look and what the best shape and fit might be. He noted that there were workload considerations to be considered as part of this, highlighting that last time the University had submitted to 22 units, and it had to be determined whether this was the best approach this time and that the descriptors for individual units would be the key information for determining this. The University's main mission had to be to improve its outcome and improving the ranking and returning to where it should be. Nick confirmed that discussions were ongoing while initial thoughts existed these were not confirmed and the RSG would make recommendations to SMT once the position became clearer and that this would be brought to Senate in due course for discussion and comment. Nick confirmed that the descriptors for the Units of Assessment were not yet known but that they did not traditionally change substantially.

6.36 The Principal noted that research was fundamental to the University's existence being one of its two primary purposes. REF was both strategically and financially important and Senate would return to it as things became clearer.

ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS: PROPOSED UPDATES TO POLICY AND PROCEDURE, AND FRAMEWORK OF CRITERIA

7.1 Pete Edwards, Vice-Principal (Regional Engagement) provided Senate with an update on the changes proposed to the Academic Promotions Policy and Procedures Framework of Criteria and the work being done in the Promotions Review Group and summarised the recommended changes being made to the Framework Criteria. He noted that having done this he was going to listen to the views of Senate as this was part of a listening exercise seeking the academic view of Senate which could be taken back to the Review Group to inform the finalised proposals which would return to Senate for approval in December.

7.2 Following the presentation Joachim Schaper, School of DHPA noted that formerly for promotion to professorships the University had asked for 12 references, which he believed to be the practise in many good universities, and queried how this could possibly be reduced so dramatically to three.

7.3 Replying that he was aware that this had been reduced dramatically, although noting he was unsure whether it had been from as many as 12, he noted that the reality was that the University was part of a very different world. Benchmarking against other similar institutions had revealed that others were no longer seeking that number of references and the University had to recognise the workload associated with obtaining external evaluations which was increasingly becoming very challenging to obtain.

7.4 Patience Schell, School of LLMVC asked about the principles in 3.1 which were alluded to in the presentation and welcomed the consideration of applications in the round and the new criteria for promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer for T&R staff, however she noted concern for why this was written into the criteria for T&R staff as the change might be interpreted as valuing research over education. In addition, she asked about the social bias observer noted in the EDI section and queried whether this individual was able to speak and contribute?

7.5 Pete confirmed that the criteria for the move from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer still carried the expectation that both research and education were at level 2, but the intention was to give the Committee discretion in the very rare cases where an individual was just short in education but was truly exceptional in research, as if discretion were not exercised that might generate other issues for the Institution. He noted that he was unable to speak on behalf of both Committees, but for the one he had convened he had encouraged all members of the Committee to call out anything they had observed in the Committee which they had been uncomfortable with and there had been examples of occasions where this had happened.

7.6   Patience responded to confirm that she had not intended to query the concept of discretion as this was clearly important, but she was questioning why it was only permitted in one direction and not for cases the other way around, i.e. excellent in education but just short on research?

7.7   The Principal noted that this was a good point and summarised that Senate was asking the Group to consider a more equal balance between education and research.

7.8   An elected member asked whether any allowances were made for disabilities or racial groups.

7.9   In response, Pete confirmed that the way the criteria were framed did not refer explicitly to these but that there was an opportunity now for every individual applying for promotion to spell out individual circumstances and that this was one area where the Group had received a lot of positive feedback.

7.10   Miles Rothoerl, Vice-President for Education asked for more clarification on what falling 'just short' of criteria might look like and noted that the presentation had referred to falling just short but that the policy read falling short.

7.11   The Principal reminded Senate that these points were being referred back to the Group in order that they might be clarified before the final version comes to Senate in December and that Pete was not asked to respond to individual points but rather that they were provided for reflection.

7.12   Greg Gordon, School of Law welcomed the paper and, in particular the changes proposed to the promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer. He also welcomed the more targeted use of external evaluation being proposed.

7.13   Nadia Kiwan, School of LLMVC noted that Appendix Four on the impact of gender and ethnicity on the process gave the impression that data were gathered either by gender or ethnicity and suggested an intersectional approach to data gathering might be more insightful and capture a more nuanced picture.

7.14   Pete confirmed his recognition of why this would be a useful exercise.

7.15   Alexandros Zangelidis, Business School observed that in terms of promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer that the expectation of individuals going forward for promotion it was clear that the indictors were indicative examples and that the observation from individuals applying for promotion and members of the Committees was that some of these were actually necessary criteria not indicative. He was referring in particular to the research funding element; the feedback from his school was that if an individual did not have research grants there was no point in going forwards for promotion. There seemed to be a discrepancy between the Policy and its execution.

7.16   Pete noted that this was helpful feedback, and highlighted Committees were looking at applicants in the round and were looking for a range of activities and that the criteria were not specific, but if that was the feedback he would take that back to the Group.

7.17   Neil Vargesson, School of MMSN noted some concerns from members of the School that the document lowered the status of teaching and highlighted that it was important to maintain the status of teaching as the desire was for staff to do both to an excellent standard. He highlighted feedback that indicated that staff volunteer for teaching as it is a part of the promotion process. He asked if the changes to level one were being made why were the changes required at level two also?

7.18   Pete highlighted that the point about the exceptionality of research and not education was one that had already been made and would be taken back to the Group. The changes that had been suggested reflected the reality of what had been seen at Committee, that it hadn't been

recognised that sustained meeting of level one criteria was acceptable and that it wasn't simply a requirement that all criteria had to be at level two.

7.19   Doug Martin, School of Psychology, highlighted that from an Education perspective the increased number of T&S staff perhaps meant that there were fewer opportunities for T&R staff to achieve level two in Education than there had been in the past and that from a Head of School perspective this was a real problem. He noted the desire to retain staff but highlighted that staff would be employed elsewhere for having level two research regardless of they might sit in education and also that the University would recruit similarly so there was a need to look in the round.

7.20   Rasha Abu Eid, School of MMSN asked how the racialised groups were defined in data terms? The data appeared to show that there were no applications from racialised group,s but it was known that there were applications from these groups.

7.21   The Principal noted that when the paper returned, and was considered by PNCC, it was important that the data were accompanied by the data definitions.

7.22   John Skåtun, Business School noted that it was a good report and was an improvement on the process. He had had concerns expressed to him about how it would impact the Business School but with so few applicants he suggested that it was too early to identify trends. He noted that the promotion scheme was a sort of deferred incentive scheme and therefore he was not surprised that research grants had increased with the new scheme, for example in the Business School there had been a 50% rise in applications for research grants and a 90% rise in awards. However, he noted that in the past colleagues in the Business School had perhaps perceived they had had a different sort of contract. There had been a lot of grant application activity which would produce a different form of promotion applications in the future.

7.23   The Principal noted that this sounded fine, so long as the other valued aspects were not being neglected as a result of this being included in the criteria.

7.24   Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science asked where the Academic Promotions Committee sat in governance terms? And if it was not a Senate sub-committee, she would recommend that it should be and that most universities had a link to Senate. She asked, if it was a Senate sub-committee, why there were no members of Senate on the Promotions Committees? She suggested this was an opportune point to update the committees with senior academics. She also highlighted that other universities also often included a member elected from their EDI committees and suggested that this was something to reflect on.

7.25   Tracey Slaven, University Secretary confirmed that, while the academic promotions committees sat under the auspices of Senate, they were also connected to the University's employer responsibilities and therefore approvals for change were required through the Partnership and Negotiation Consultative Committee (PNCC). She confirmed the Committees sat within the Senate ecosystem but did not report directly to Senate. She highlighted that they effectively had two lines of responsibility.

7.26   The Principal suggested that consideration could be given to some of the extra membership being alluded to being drawn from Senate members.

7.27   Scott Allen, Business School reiterated the welcome of the paper, but noted that colleagues had highlighted the disparity between the processes for achieving a promoted post from within the University and being appointed to one from outside. He suggested that this might be acting as an incentive for staff to leave.

7.28   The Principal noted this was an interesting point which had been a feature of the sector for a long time and was a good point for the Review Group to reflect upon.

7.29   Alan MacPherson, School of LLMVC, asked on behalf of a constituent, noting that there was anticipation that these changes would be approved in December, he asked what impact this was expected to have on the timing of the next promotions round?

7.30   The Principal confirmed that there would be a promotions round but asked Debbie Dyker, Director People to comment on the timing.

7.31   Debbie confirmed that the normal December launch of the exercise would likely be pushed back until January or February. The cycle would have to be approved by PNCC formally which needed to be factored in so there would be a slight delay on the normal timings.

7.32   Alan responded and asked whether consideration would be given to the fact that there had not been a promotions round in 2024 and any associated backdating of promotions? 3.1 in the Policy states that there would be a promotions round annually and the questioned whether the missing round would be factored in to a delayed promotions round?

7.33   Debbie confirmed that this was a helpful point that would be given consideration.

7.34   Waheed Afzal, School of Engineering noted that racialised groups were underrepresented at grade nine (with zero applications) and applications had dropped at all levels from past years which led him to wonder what the barriers were preventing individuals applying for promotion?

7.35   Pete thanked Afzal for making the point and noted this had been one of the points he had been trying to make by showing that table. He added that this was something which the Group would particularly welcome advice on from the University community and whether the guidance needed reworking to address this. Did colleagues require different support and guidance when submitting an application and/or to submit in the first place? The Review Group recognised this was a concern and would welcome input from the University community to address this.

7.36   Euan Bain, School of Engineering noted that the point pertaining to 3.1 (minute 8.32 refers) had been raised in Engineering also and Patience's point (minute 8.4) had been a good point. He also highlighted a subtly in the data shown in Table 1 of the paper: lines one and three in Table 1 effectively identify the same thing and then inset mitigations to address the same issue. He indicated that line one adds actions to take account of not enough applications 'reaching the bar' and then line three, in effect, 'lowers the bar' which, if applied as written would result in discretion being applied to a 'lower bar'.

7.37   Pete confirmed these points would be taken forward with the Review Group.

7.38   David Blackbourn, School of MMSN commented to welcome the suggested revisions and noted that was refreshing to see that the review process was working and welcomed the suggestions made, particularly the use of discretion. As the Editor in Chief of a major journal, he also commented on the difficulty in obtaining replies to requests for referees for their considered opinions on learned manuscripts, let alone on whether or not someone should be promoted and welcomed the proposed changes as appropriate and measured.

7.39   Diane Skåtun, School of MMSN highlighted a colleague's comment on the promotion to Senior Lecturer who had noted that all females had been promoted illustrating that they had evidence of education to level two which would lead to the conclusion that the application of discretion in these requirements was for the benefit of male colleagues who had not been promoted. The colleague had asked if this was evidence of how workloads were distributed and, in turn, how education was valued. She also asked about the requirement for two or three external reviews for applications above Senior Lecturer and the statement that two positive reviews being sufficient and asked what would happen in the event of two positive reviews and one negative review.

7.40   The Principal indicated that this was an instance where the Committee would exercise its judgement.

7.41 Diane argued that this was introducing an element of chance to the process.

7.42 The Principal noted that it would be unusual in such as instance not to take a majority verdict on the situation, provided that the reviews were of equivalent quality.

7.43 Richard Hepworth-Young, School of Natural & Computing Sciences (NCS) highlighted several issues raised by colleagues: strong support for the point made by Patience (minute 8.4); it was felt important for Committees to understand and take account of the differences between disciplines and one way this might be facilitated would be to include Heads of Schools on the Committee and there had been a small concern that the edit to the membership in 4.5.3 might reduce the opportunity for Heads of School to explain discipline differences; similarly the relaxation of the evidence requirements under the education pillar were welcome but queried whether the requirement for reaching 'norms' were discipline norms and if so could this be written into the criteria; he also asked under which pillar someone taking on the role of Academic Line Manager would be recognised as this was a major role for which Citizenship seemed too minor a pillar for recognition and might lead to the conclusion that taking line management responsibilities would be detrimental to prospects for promotion; finally he noted that the change to the wording in 3.1 was welcomed but wondered if the wording was strong enough to permit the Committee to exercise the discretion needed.

7.44 Pete thanked Richard for his points and noted, in the context of the point made about the Head of School, it was not the intention of the Review Group to limit the opportunities for Heads of School to be present and articulate important differences between disciplines as this was an important role, and the point about discipline norms was a good point also that he would take back. Regarding citizenship he noted that this was not a minor part of the process and the fact that it wasn't framed in a series of levels but a baseline he assured Richard that it had been actively considered by the Committee where an individual had been making contributions against this and he confirmed that staff should be assured that citizenship did matter.

7.45 Anne Kiltie, School of MMSN noted the 100% success rates of women and suggested that this was similar to the true/false system of negative marking with men taking more risky behaviour and that women only apply when they are absolutely sure they will be promoted and should we be encouraging women to apply before they are absolutely sure they will succeed?

7.46 The Principal replied yes to this and noted that encouragement should be given to all to apply who have a reasonable prospect of being successful. He noted the importance of the promotion process in general reflecting institutional values and that everyone had a fair opportunity to apply and to be considered, and for their work to be recognised.

7.47 Aravinda Guntupalli, School of MMSN noted similar points to others in terms of EDI but noted that the University already has a Bronze Medal for Race Equality which had required extensive analysis and Athena Swan recognition had required similar analysis and might one way to streamline the review process to be to have those groups look at the process. She noted that, for example, the role of 'Social Bias Observer' did not sound from its name as if it had an equal role as a Committee member and asked if those involved in Athena Swan etc might be able to assist with the implementation process.

7.48 Pete noted the final comment was a useful one. He thanked members for their contributions and noted the many helpful suggestions, and clear messages, that had been made during discussions that he would feed back to the Review Group. A revised paper would return to the December meeting of Senate.

7.49 The Principal thanked Senate for the useful debate and contributions and asked if there was any other business.

7.50 As nothing further was raised, the Principal closed the meeting.

SENATE ELECTIONS

8.1   Senate noted the timeline for Elections, approved by the Sente Business Committee, for filling outstanding vacancies on Senate.

RECTOR ELECTION RULES

9.1   Senate noted the Rules for the Election of the Rector approved by the Sente Business Committee.

END OF ACCREDITATION OF UHI RESEARCH DEGREES

10.1   Senate noted that, following the University of the Highlands and Islands receiving its own powers to award research degrees, the accreditation agreement with the University had ended and the final student had graduated.

UEC REPORT TO SENATE

11.1   Senate noted the routine report from the University Education Committee.

URC REPORT TO SENATE

12.1   Senate noted the routine report from the University Research Committee.

QAC REPORT TO SENATE

13.1   Senate noted the routine report from the Quality Assurance Committee.