

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2024

In person: Raja Muhammad Abu Bakar, Waheed Afzal, Scott Allan, David Anderson, Euan Bain, John Barrow, Nigel Beacham, Siladitya Bhattacharya, David Blackburn (to 3pm), Jason Bohan, George Boyne, Alex Brasier, Isla Callander, Marcus Campbell Bannerman, Ignacio Canales, Andre Justin Carpio, Alessandra Cecolin, Brett Cochrane, Chris Collins, Matthew Collinson, David Cornwell, Hannah Cowie, Leone Craig, Chantal Den Daas, Nick Forsyth, Fatima Garcia Bernal, Jean-Baptiste Gramain, Nathaniel Greene, Fiona Gröning, Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, Astley Hastings, Peter Henderson, Richard Hepworth-Young, Constanze Hesse, Karolin Hijazi, Karim Hurtig, Mohammad Aziz Islam, Babu John, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Anne Kiltie, Nadia Kiwan, Seungho Lee, Karl Leydecker, Beth Lord, Joanne McEvoy, Amy McFarlane, David McGloin, Michelle Macleod, David McLernon, Alan MacPherson, Mauro Manassi, Doug Martin, Sam Martin, Javier Martin-Torres, Jessica More, David Muirhead, Jo-Anne Murray, JP Mynott, Patricia Norwood, Nir Oren, Ekaterina Pavlovskaja, Stuart Piertney, Amudha Poobalan, Daniel Powell, Ann Rajnicek, Miles Rothoerl, Agathe Rouaix, Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar, Patience Schell, Nicholas Schofield, Karen Scott, Samuel Seymour, Diane Skåtun, Trevor Stack, Fiona Stoddard, Ben Tatler, Steve Tucker, Neil Vargesson, Ash Venkatesh, Nikolaos Vlassis, Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Walklate, Samantha Waters, Ursula Witte, Roland Young, Alexandros Zangelidis, Phil Ziegler

Fraser Lovie and Rose Lyne for Item 10

Online: Thomas Bodey, Selma Carson, Sergio Dall'Angelo, Toni Gibson, Beatriz Goulao, Heather Morgan, Sam Newington, Joachim Schaper, Charlaire Simpson, Lorna Stewart, Scott Styles, Bert Timmermans, Mansi Vasant Utikar, Ilia Xypolia

Apologies: Simon Bains, Catherine Francis, Ines Graca, Faye Hendry, Louise Thomson

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- 14.1 The Principal welcomed members to the final meeting of the calendar year and particularly new members who had been elected since the previous meeting and asked them to introduce themselves. He also introduced the new interim University Secretary, Samantha Waters.
- 14.2 Samantha reminded members of procedures: the meeting would be recorded to enable production of the minutes; 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 did not form part of the formal minute, and to remain muted when not speaking. 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. There would be a short break after agenda item seven.
- 14.3 Patience Schell, School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture (LLMVC) noted that she had asked a question on Monday: 'Can the Principal please advise the date when the "Lessons learned report" compiled by Prof Greg Gordon would be released to MLTI and LLMVC staff and to the wider university community'. She noted the response received that the Principal would be meeting with staff to go through recommendations with MLTI staff next week whilst welcome news, had not answered the question fully, which had been about the report's full release, and she asked whether the question about the report's full release was worthy of Senate's attention today.
- 14.4 Responding the Principal confirmed that the first stage in the process was to have a meeting with MLTI staff which would take place in the next week. This would be an initial meeting, and it might be decided that more than one meeting would be required before constructive conclusions were reached. He would provide an update after the meeting had been held. He noted his view

that it was correct that MLTI staff were given the first view of the report and to contribute to the shaping of the next steps.

- 14.5 Patience asked whether MLTI staff would be given sight of the full report before the meeting next week?
- 14.6 The Principal confirmed that due diligence on the report was currently underway, and that once that was complete a decision would be made.
- 14.7 Patience noted that it would be hard to hold discussion without having had sight of the object being discussed.
- 14.8 The Principal indicated that those decisions would follow once due process had been completed.
- 14.9 Patience confirmed that her question had related to the Senate agenda, and she had been asking if the matter could be added to the agenda as she understood that the report would be coming to Senate in the future.
- 14.10 The Principal confirmed that this was correct and there was already a commitment to bring the recommendations to Senate and that this would happen as agreed previously.
- 14.11 Trevor Stack, School of LLMVC asked whether the commitment was to bring the recommendations or the report itself to Senate.
- 14.12 The Principal confirmed that this was something he expected to be discussed at the meeting next week.
- 14.13 Senate approved the agenda, and the meeting proceeded.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF 23 OCTOBER

- 15.1 Senate approved the minutes from 23 October 2024.

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

- 16.1 Noting Senate had received his usual written report detailing education and research achievements, the Principal highlighted that the wider sector context continued to be challenging. He noted that since Senate had met last, the external auditors had confirmed that the University was financially stable for the current and next academic years and that the steps taken had stabilised the financial situation. He again noted that University had not recovered financially and noted his pleasure in seeing the effort that was being put into the development of new educational programmes and applying for research awards and noted the differences to the financial position that were already being seen as a result of these efforts, together with new initiatives in online and transnational education; the amalgamation of existing on campus courses into new degree programmes which was a rapid and relatively low effort way of ensuring the offering to students remained attractive to students. He noted that the news on research awards continued to be positive. He highlighted that the value of new awards in the first quarter of the year was almost twice as high as the last year which, in itself, was 30% up on the previous year. This was tribute to Senate's primary responsibility for overseeing the quality of education and research and noted that it was this quality that would drive revenue and support the financial recovery. All things being equal, he noted that high quality education would attract students, and high-quality research would attract research grants which made Senate's primary responsibilities crucial to the University's financial sustainability and recovery. He added that the level of funding received from government had not been held equal and that the funding from the Scottish Government had been declining. During the afternoon the Scottish Government would make its budget announcement. The sector had been warned previously to expect a reduction in higher education funding and that if this did not happen it would be a step in the right direction.
- 16.2 Euan Bain, School of Engineering, asked on behalf of constituents what the process was for inclusion in the update? Constituents had noted that they did not know how an individual was included and, therefore, the report might not give a balanced picture of activity.

- 16.3 The Principal confirmed that he relied heavily on professional services colleagues and Vice-Principals for the information but if he had missed something to let him know and it would be included next time.

HONORARY DEGREE NOMINATIONS

- 17.1 Senate voted by consensus to approve the candidates proposed by the Honorary Degrees Committee. Candidate details were circulated confidentially by a separate process.

ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS POLICY

- 18.1 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal introduced the policy which had been updated following discussion at the previous meeting of Senate. The amended policy was being presented to Senate for endorsement ahead of being taken to the Partnership and Negotiating Consultative Committee (PNCC) which was responsible for its final approval. He noted that the predominant feedback from Senate at the last meeting had been around the level two criteria in education and the possibility of having a 'by exception' consideration of outstanding research performance. Following that discussion at Senate, as can be seen from the paper, the Review Group decided that the exception should not continue, instead some small, but important, changes had been proposed to the criteria for level two education which, in the Group's view, addresses the feedback received on the process. He highlighted that the changes made since the last meeting were summarised in section 4.3, paragraphs i) and ii). While the most significant feedback from Senate was the level two education issue, the table also set out the other changes made in response to the Senate feedback. All other changes made since the last meeting were shown in a different colour so Senate might see the changes easily. In addition, the Group had received a proposal that something should be said about 'open research' in the criteria as part of the cultural journey around that. The Group had agreed, and this had been incorporated.
- 18.2 Richard Hepworth-Young, School of Natural and Computing Sciences (NCS) asked about the criteria under level three for education and noted the welcome addition of the word 'discipline' in connection with 'international disciplinary norms of excellence' which now appeared in level three under the heading 'Reader' but noted that the same word did not appear under 'Professor'. He noted that he did not know whether this had been a conscious choice, but he would welcome its inclusion.
- 18.3 Karl agreed that he thought this was an uncontentious change.
- 18.4 Alexandros Zangelidis, Business School noted that there had been discussion at the last Senate around how exceptional research could compensate where someone fell short of the education criteria, and it had been discussed as also being appropriate the other way around. He noted that colleagues had raised concern that this was not included in the revised draft and asked whether this flexibility had been withdrawn.
- 18.5 Karl confirmed it had.
- 18.6 Alexandros reiterated that this was not his school's recollection of what had been discussed at the previous meeting.
- 18.7 Karl confirmed that if the Group had continued with the idea of Panels having flexibility, they would have made this the same across the different pillars, but this had not been the decision. The Group had moved away from the idea of using flexibility, because of the feedback from Senate which had indicated this was problematic as it gave the appearance of the Institution valuing research more than education which had not been the intention. The Group had therefore moved away entirely from the idea of flexibility which was, in his view, much neater and simpler. Instead, the Group had made some small changes to the criteria which was intended to address the issue of those who were finding it difficult to reach level two across the education and research pillars. It was the Group's view that this was a clear, fair, equitable approach and was easier to interpret than any system of discretion. Any system for discretion would need to be very tightly defined. The idea of discretion had been discarded in favour of the process now in front of Senate.

- 18.8 Alexandros admitted that maybe it had been his misinterpretation, but his understanding leaving the last meeting was that the revised policy document would include flexibility in both education and research in both directions, not that it would be taken out of the document.
- 18.9 The Principal asked for the minute to be checked.
- 18.10 Karl commented that he had not been at the previous meeting, but the group had taken the feedback, reflected on it as a group and proposed revised procedures.
- 18.11 Discussion resumed while the minute of the previous meeting was checked.
- 18.12 Patience Schell, School of LLMVC noted she had asked at the last meeting about the Social Bias Observer role and highlighted that in the paper which had been brought back, the role had been clarified as observer only and that part of the longer-term review would determine the nature of the role along with that of the Trades Union representative. She commented that the value of the role came from being able to participate, and potentially intervene in discussion if needed, and expressed hope that the consideration of the purpose of the role would be prioritised.
- 18.13 Karl confirmed that the role's purposed had always been to observe not to intervene, so that there was no change in this regard. He noted, however, that this was something the Group should reflect on in terms of this feedback.
- 18.14 Patience clarified that, in terms of the discussion at the previous Senate, there had been the suggestion that they should be invited to participate and that was what had prompted her point.
- 18.15 Astley Hastings, School of Biological Sciences (SBS) confirmed that his understanding from the discussion of candidates who were exceeding expectations in research would still be considered and that the reciprocal relationship for education would also be considered. He observed that the way postdocs were hired and became research fellows, they were hired on projects, they produce papers and enhance the standing of the University by producing papers and get put on other projects if they were good and they excel in that, but during this time they are not paid to do any teaching which becomes an extra-curricular job for them. It makes it very difficult for them to make the criteria for teaching. In this regard he suggested that the promotions criteria did not reflect the actuality of the way people were employed and hired.
- 18.16 Karl confirmed that postdocs would be applying under the research track where there wouldn't be the same requirement for education at level two.
- 18.17 The Principal confirmed that the minute was ambiguous as the conversation had maybe been ambiguous at that last meeting. There was a commitment to an equal approach to education and research. The minute does not say that discretion should be applied in both cases, nor did it say that discretion should be removed in both cases. The Principal suggested that this might be something for further reflection before this progressed to the next stage.
- 18.18 Karl confirmed that the next stage of the process would be PNCC. He asked Senate to determine whether the exercise should include discretion and noted the recommendation from the Review Group was that it was not included as it would require further determination of in what circumstances it was appropriate to be used and this would result in a significant delay in the criteria being available to use as it would require a further meeting of the Review Group, further consideration at Senate before going to PNCC which would delay the ability to move to a new promotions round in the new year. The Group had designed the revisions to address certain feedback around a very small number of candidates who were struggling to be promoted based on exceptionally strong research but not quite meeting level two criteria in education. What the Group had done was to make it a little bit easier for them and all others a little bit easier to meet the level two criteria in education. The Review Group were of the view that this change addressed the presenting issue adequately, without overcomplicating the system by introducing discretion that was designed for one particular thing but would require to be incorporated across the board at all levels. The Group did not feel that this was the way to go, and that they had addressed the problem which had presented itself.
- 18.19 The Principal confirmed that the policy changes did address the point made in the Senate minute.

- 18.20 Diane Skåtun, School of MMSN indicated that her recollection of the previous discussion at Senate of discretion, in particular the distortion that is caused around education with the double impact on education with the lowering of the criteria. She asked whether there would be a similar review of this amended policy in the future. She noted the review was based on those who had put themselves forward for promotion and whether or not they were successful, but the review had not addressed those who had not put themselves forward for promotion and whether the females had waited to put themselves forward until such time they were absolutely sure to be successful and that this was the gender difference that was being exhibited and asked whether work would be done to look at the distribution across grades irrespective of whether they put themselves forward.
- 18.21 Karl confirmed that there was always a review of promotions whenever it was run to ensure that it might be amended to account for experiences. Obviously if no changes were proposed, it would not return to Senate. Data were gathered as part of this and Karl noted that Diane's point was helpful. He also indicated that there would be briefings, as part of the launch of any future promotion rounds, with any potential staff who wished to put themselves forward. The views of Heads of School were sought as they were in dialogue with Academic Line Managers and potential candidates, and there was the opportunity for this to be fed in. He also highlighted that Ben Tatler, Dean for People, Culture and Environment, was also leading a review of the system for Annual Review and it was anticipated that this would begin to be aligned with the promotions exercise resulting in there being no surprises as staff would be aligning themselves with the criteria and encouraged to assess themselves against them on an annual basis so that line managers can encourage those who may not put themselves forward and need encouragement to put themselves forward. Modernising the promotions exercise was the first stage in the process and this would be followed by modernising of the annual review process. Karl agreed that the data showed there were still equality issues, particularly racialised groups and gender, that the Group were very aware of and the first stage in the process for addressing this was to make the data very visible as had been done in this process, and for there to be consideration by the Race Equality Strategy Group and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee
- 18.22 Scott Allan, Business School noted that in his view the issue on the education side had been addressed by the extra wording on the education side but highlighted he was not seeing similar for level two research which suggested to him that there had been a softening on the education side but not the research side and hence there may still be a disparity between the two.
- 18.23 Karl noted that the Group had not received any feedback to indicate that the research criteria at level two needed to be amended.
- 18.24 Scott noted that his understanding had been the opposite and that if there was a need to soften the criteria for someone who might be deficient on education but exceeding on research that the equivalent the other way around should be possible, and he was not able to see how that might be achieved by softening just the education side.
- 18.25 Karl confirmed that he was not aware of any discussion or feedback that a reduction in the criteria for research was something that should be pursued.
- 18.26 The Principal noted that a further check against the Senate minute might be beneficial just to confirm that the changes made, aligned with the discussion at Senate and suggested that should be completed before the criteria moved to the next level of approvals.
- 18.27 Sam Martin, School of Biological Sciences, noted that there had been feedback from the School around the removal of discretion and this had further highlighted that if the Head of School was going to support an application their comments would be taken into account therefore taking away the need for discretion at the Panel stage. He had not realised that discretion had been completely removed and a member of the School had queried whether this had been reallocated to the Head of School in their letter of support.
- 18.28 Karl confirmed that this was not his understanding, and that the Head of School role was to provide objective evaluation and to explain disciplinary norms and context. That was why the Head of School was at the committee to help clarify anything the committee needed in relation to discipline context. He noted that it would not be correct to state that the Head of School was

responsible for exercising discretion; they were exercising judgement in relation to the case that had been made by the staff member to help guide the Committee in respect of the discipline context. Part of the feedback received was that the Head of School should not be permitted to dominate or lead the discussion of the candidate. This approach had been taken in the last round to ensure the Head of School voice was not overdominant in discussion and they were able to feed back the discussion to the candidate. The Committee felt it was important that they made the decision, taking into account the Head of School evaluation. The Committee members had felt it important that they were seen as the decision-making body guided by the application and the Head of School.

- 18.29 Sam noted that he expected there to be opposition to this change within his school.
- 18.30 Aravinda Guntupalli, School of MMSN asked, in the context of the Social Bias Observer, about the implementation process. She noted that everyone would receive the applications from different candidates and while reading the applications might have already formed a biased view and asked how the Social Bias Observer might understand this inherent bias. In an interview situation she noted that an observer would be observing the candidate perform and the bias of other people but in instances of written format how would this operate? She noted all the different strategies the University had, for example within the Athena Swan process, and asked how the observer might operate to support the process discussed at the table?
- 18.31 Karl noted that this was a good question and noted that one way this was addressed was the requirement that all committee members had completed appropriate training. He noted that it was not possible to observe how each individual member of the committee was approaching the task however he noted that it was possible to check that every member, as far as possible, made the process fair and unbiased and the observers could help with that by drawing people's attention to issues that they might not have been aware of. They may spot unconscious bias and then feed that back to the panels and panel chairs. There was also a requirement to look at the data associated with the outcomes to determine what that was telling the University. The paperwork had asked if there was anything about the process itself, as far as anyone in the room could tell, which gave the impression of there being a bias. He observed that so far no one had identified this, which suggested that there was a need to focus on the career development of people prior to the submission of applications; the report suggested that there needed to be more mentoring of, for example, people from racialised groups. He noted that a whole system approach was required. The issue would not be fixed by the social observer within the room or by the policy itself which did not itself contain biases as far as the Group were aware, but by engagement with the Race Equality Strategy Group to look at what the community might do to bring about different outcomes in terms of people coming forward and some of the outcomes themselves.
- 18.32 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science, noted that wires may have become crossed in terms of the education/research. Her recollection was the discussion was less about discretion and more about balance between education and research and the favouring of them within the promotions process. She noted that this was also an EDI issue where, at least within Social Sciences, women undertook the bulk of the teaching. She highlighted that the key point was not being discretion, but more that there was an imbalance which favoured those who had been able to engage with more exceptional research as opposed to teaching. She suggested that this might be where wires had become crossed.
- 18.33 The Principal conformed that the minute also indicated that the two activities should be treated equally, and that Karl had confirmed that this was also what the proposal did.
- 18.34 Patience Schell, School of LLMVC noted her agreement with the recollections of Jen and Scott about what had been said at the previous meeting about the balance between education and research and Scott's point about loosening the education criteria while there had been no change to the research criteria. She also highlighted that 100% of women had been successful compared to 50% of men and noted the concern had been that the criteria themselves were skewed towards a particular constituency and noted the balance and equal value were key.

- 18.35 The Principal restated that the equal value between education and research was the key to successful promotions criteria.

EDUCATION STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

- 19.1 Steve Tucker, Dean for Quality Assurance and Enhancement introduced the timetable proposed for education policy and regulation reviews, planned across the next two academic years. He noted that the plan had already been approved by QAC, APRG and UEC. He noted the intention to build on the activity of the 2023/24 academic year and to build on the policies which had been updated during the time-period. He noted that it was important that Senate noted that this was set against the backdrop of implementing the new Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework which was Scotland's new quality arrangements covering both further and higher education. He highlighted that the process of looking at the framework was underway alongside the review schedule. He also noted that the University's first external review under the updated system, which had replaced ELIR and more recently QESR, would take place in February 2026. He noted that the review would focus on updating policy, procedures and regulations internally but also would reflect the pressures facing the external sector environment and ensure that policy and procedures also matched what was occurring in practice. He highlighted the areas due for review in the current academic year were assessment and feedback, undergraduate student progress and student academic discipline. In the next academic year, the focus would be on postgraduate student progress, non-academic student discipline, fitness to practise and degree regulations. Further reports and updates would follow to Senate as progress was being made. He also highlighted that the plans and schedule remained fluid in case of there being emergent pressures from external sources requiring attention along the way.
- 19.2 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science noted her particular pleasure around the discussion around placements and stressed the need for practical support and funding for placements and to ensure that there is equity of access for those disciplines which are not necessarily within the commercial sector. She noted that, for example, within museum studies there was not typically funding within the museum sector to support placements as within, for example the chemical industry. She suggested that this was probably also true within music and theatre and NHS placements as well. She would like there to be a conversation about parity of access for students who, for example, just needed some funding to be able to travel.
- 19.3 The Principal noted that Jen's question might relate to item 7 on the agenda not item 6 and confirmed the meeting would return to this point in due course.
- 19.4 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences, commented on the Policy & Procedures on Student Appeals and the panel that judges whether appeals can proceed and noted that he had dealt with a case which had come through as an appeal and complaint where a student had mentioned good cause for late submission of work after completion of the course and an adviser from the Students' Union had advised that such matters used to be dealt with routinely through the appeals process and that schools would routinely give a late GC. Now there is a panel that judges appeals before they go to schools not all of those cases were being heard and this case had only been sent to the school as it was both an appeal and a complaint. If the appeal part had been rejected then the school would not have found out about it and he wanted to make sure the panel was aware of this. He asked that even where appeals were judged not to be competent that they were sent to the school, so they were aware.
- 19.5 Steve thanked Alex for his point and suggested a conversation outside of Senate to ensure procedures were being followed. As far as he was aware when appeals were being rejected there was normally a discussion with the school.
- 19.6 Jo-Anne Murray, Vice-Principal (Education) introduced the high-level summary of the plan for the education strategy update which included an update on progress on matters from 2023/24 and a forward plan for 2024/25 noting that meeting with key stakeholders would be taking place early in the new year. She highlighted that the report showed the current status of the various reviews, and noted that some areas included a plan to bring items back on track where traction had been lacking to date.

- 19.7 Returning to Jen's earlier point about placements Jo-Anne noted the importance of the placements question both for the education review, and also to the employability agenda, and further noted the importance of parity of access to placements.
- 19.8 Nadia Kiwan, School of LLMVC noted, in the context of employability, that it was good to see reference being made to the UUK Blueprint for Change Report and noted that the Report made a number of points which were relevant to the University's employability strategy and noted the falling numbers of international experiences available for UK students which inevitably impacted employability. She also referenced the need to maintain sufficient capacity in languages and interdisciplinary area studies in order to meet long-term national interest of the UK. She asked for details of the University's plan for implementation of the UUK Blueprint for Change in relation to the employability agenda and the University's ambitions under Aberdeen 2040.
- 19.9 The Principal noted his disappointment when looking at figures for progress against Aberdeen 2040 targets, that the number of students getting an international experience was actually falling after the removal of the ERASMUS programme and noted the support for rebuilding this.
- 19.10 Jo-Anne noted that, in terms of the employability agenda, addressing some of the challenges noted was on the agenda and also that part of looking at the portfolio of programmes across the University to determine how to establish more interdisciplinary programmes and programmes combining the different areas highlighted, and incorporating languages into different disciplinary areas also to embed the skillsets across the portfolio.
- 19.11 The Principal asked Nadia if she had any thoughts on the subject?
- 19.12 Nadia suggested that this should be a consultation with a number of stakeholders rather than just her. She noted, however, her support for Jo-Anne's suggestion that embedding should take place across a number of disciplines and increasing the interdisciplinarity of a number of programmes was a first step.
- 19.13 Patience Schell, School of LLMVC noted that Appendix B mentioned the new course proposal form and amending it to collect the attributes and skills but asked if there were plans for a more general review of the form as it was a form that could be incredibly time consuming to complete and frustrating for staff to work with. It increased workload and stress perhaps unnecessarily and that by putting heads together and using collective creativity it would be possible to find a better way. She noted her worry that a form which was 30 plus pages long was acting as a barrier to innovation and nimbleness.
- 19.14 The Principal noted that he had learned something new in discovering the form was 30 pages long.
- 19.15 Jo-Anne agreed that this was an important point and noted work had already started on this. It was being led by Debbie Dyker, Steve Tucker and JP Mynott and was looking at the process around new courses and programmes as well as changes. She noted that some stakeholder meetings had already taken place and that further meetings would be scheduled. She noted the intention to strip the process right back and suggested Senate's input would be useful as part of this.
- 19.16 The Principal asked if there was an objective to make the process shorter and easier and quicker?
- 19.17 Jo-Anne confirmed there was.
- 19.18 Patience asked if the change could be implemented ahead of next year's planning so that the current year would be the last, working with the forms and that this would be very much appreciated.
- 19.19 Jo-Anne confirmed that this was the intention.
- 19.20 Miles Rothoerl, Vice President (Education) noted that it was good to see reflection moving to specific skills rather than roles. He noted that the students would be keen to continue to contribute to the consultation begun by John to ensure that the work being undertaken on the enhanced transcript and MySkills continued to align. From an inclusivity perspective he noted that not all students had the same ability to engage with co-curricular activities, something which

had been exacerbated by the ongoing cost of living crisis and further noted that many students had multiple part-time jobs together with caring responsibilities which limited their involvement in these types of activities. He stressed the importance of creating as many opportunities as possible for such students to participate in these types of activities and to maximise their potential employability and to reflect on the skills they are gaining through work and caring. This would ensure the framework was for everyone and not just for those able to engage with the co-curriculum.

- 19.21 Jo-Anne noted how important this was, and also the importance of ensuring this was embedded within the framework. The Institution needed to encourage students to reflect on skills developed in those contexts.
- 19.22 Karin Friedrich, School of DHPA noted that within all the text there was no mention of knowledge and suggested that, if the intention was to develop critical skills, surely some knowledge was required as part of that. She asked if the notion of knowledge could be added somewhere.
- 19.23 The Principal noted that the debate about whether knowledge was a skill, was one that had been had at Senate previously but noted that intellectual curiosity, creativity and intellectual innovation were certainly skills which were encouraged and if this was not there, then the University needed to ensure it was.
- 19.24 Diane Skåtun, School of MMSN asked for clarification around the agenda and the slides and papers. She noted that a slide presentation had been planned for the employability item and she felt it was important that this be included in discussions.
- 19.25 Jo-Anne noted that the agenda had become a little confused as John Barrow, who had been scheduled to give the employability presentation had been unexpectedly called away and suggested that maybe John be given the opportunity at a future meeting to speak to the slides.
- 19.26 The Principal noted that everyone had had the opportunity to see the slides as part of the papers and a discussion had been possible.
- 19.27 Diane suggested that this was not the same as hearing a presentation.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE CHANGES

- 20.1 Jo-Anne Murray, Vice-Principal (Education) introduced JP Mynott who had recently been appointed as the Dean for Portfolio Development. She updated Senate on recent changes made to the Programme Management Committee (PMC). She began by clarifying the governance structure for PMC. She highlighted that the PMC reported into the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee (SRAC) and that in turn reported into the Senior Management Team (SMT). She noted that what had changed in the structure was that the Dean for Portfolio Management, who had previously reported to the Vice-Principal (Global) had changed to Education due to the strong link between programmes and education. She noted that the location of the Dean was the only one to have changed at this current time although JP would go on to detail some issues he was looking at with PMC.
- 20.2 Jo-Anne highlighted that the remit of PMC included responsibility for consideration of business cases for new programmes. This was really to look at proposals for new programmes coming forward from schools to see whether, in the view of the Committee, there was sufficient demand for the programme i.e. does the market intelligence support the case being made in the business case and does the programme look financially viable. PMC made recommendations around withdrawing programmes i.e. programmes which schools felt were not recruiting or were being withdrawn for various other reasons; it also made decisions around pausing recruitment to enable time for a close look at the programme and making changes before returning it to the market. PMC also looked at the different entry and exit points for programmes and the different variants offered e.g. on campus or online. She noted that the intention was to focus on a consistent process across all schools and programmes for considering the programmes offered.
- 20.3 JP Mynott, Dean for Portfolio Development highlighted that the current process for considering programmes was not particularly agile and noted that one of the first things he was seeking to achieve was to streamline the process in terms of the information required for all processes so

that it became a one point entry process and reduced the workload associated with new courses and programmes by giving one option for inputting the data.

- 20.4 Another feature of the new process was to demystify the PMC stage by giving clear feedback about the evidence base and the decisions and recommendations that PMC were. He highlighted the key features PMC would be looking at: the evidence base that would support the introduction of the programme; is the financial case there to support the programme; does the University have the resources (people, IT etc) to support the programme; also consideration of where the programme would sit within the portfolio and whether it was actually something the University already did or was it something that would impact on students that were already recruited; and finally the Committee needed to look at how programmes performed over time. He noted that the portfolio was an ongoing, living thing and not something static that stayed the same: there might be programmes which were very successful over time but there would come a point where they needed to be reviewed and updated. Criteria needed to be set around what makes a successful programme and this varies between programmes.
- 20.5 Nadia Kiwan, School of LLMVC, asked whether there was discussion at PMC, in addition to the evidence base, about how well a programme aligns with Aberdeen 2040 themes and grand challenges?
- 20.6 JP noted that the evidence base was determined by what individual schools wished to provide to support the reasoning around the introduction of a new programme. It might come from just one school. The evidence might come from a school's own population, for example where their graduates go on to in terms of PGT and what students indicate they would like to continue doing. This would be a very interesting evidence base for looking at a new programme.
- 20.7 Karin Friedrich, School of DHPA noted that there used to be many papers which defined the purpose of the committee previously, but they no longer appeared. When these old remits were looked at there was quite a lot of overlap but one that still persisted was the so-called recommendations for suspension. She noted that the remit of Senate as the body 'responsible for the overall planning, co-ordination, development and supervision of the academic work of the institution' according to the governance act of 2016. She asked if she could propose a motion in light of this, that 'no degree programme or subject be introduced or withdrawn without the express consent of Senate' and that in light of this she requested that the Principal presented a draft policy on the procedure for proposing and withdrawing degree programmes which should include the submitting of any such proposals to Senate before they could take effect.
- 20.8 The Principal noted that he had been informed that Senate's powers in this regard were delegated to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and suggested the process was clarified before any motion was considered.
- 20.9 Karen agreed this would be helpful.
- 20.10 Jo-Anne noted that the terms of reference for the group included at the link in the slides, was the old one. The new remit had been to PMC but hadn't gone further yet and this would be making its way through the appropriate governance process. She noted that she was aware that Senate was the body for approving the introduction and withdrawal of courses and programmes and was not suggesting any change to that.
- 20.11 Matthew Collinson, School Natural & Computing Sciences noted that PMC played an important role in the introduction of programmes but that in terms of sustainability quality was key. He noted that QAC played a key role in looking at the quality of courses but ensuring the quality of programmes needed to look end to end to ensure the cohesion. He noted that he had been responsible for the introduction of a number of programmes over the years, and noted he had found the interaction of QAC and PMC rather opaque and asked for a brief description of that.
- 20.12 JP replied to say that this was a key area for work. He noted there was a lot of overlap between QAC and PMC, and conversations between them, but acknowledged this was very opaque. He noted that at the current time the process was very long and that the aim was to reduce this to a one stop shop for academics. He highlighted that there were many stages to the process and

suggested that the aim would be to enter the process and then leave knowing that everything was done without needing to undertake additional steps along the way

- 20.13 The Principal summarised the desire of Senate as being for shorter forms and for fewer stages in the process.
- 20.14 Scott Allan, Business School noted that the strong feedback he had received was that the process was too complicated with too many bodies and could they not be combined together under QAC? At each point lots of questions were asked before you are sent in a new direction. The view from the Business School was not that these points did not need to be taken into account but why weren't they taken account of in one place rather than in many.
- 20.15 JP acknowledged that this was a fair point and that everything was being brought into one place but that it had to be acknowledged that PMC and QAC were interested in different things, with the former looking at viability and the latter being concerned with quality. Understanding the need to simplify the process was key but noted lots of complicating factors such as TNE and online and all the different variants which all have an impact on process and how things work but acknowledged these things appeared complicated as they have been added on rather than being part of the original process. He highlighted the aim of bringing stakeholders together as part of the review was to make it a single process which would be very agile in the programme management space.
- 20.16 Patience Schell, School of LLMVC noted that as a new member of Senate she was still, finding her way around governance structures and asked why QAC did not appear on the governance slide if it had delegated powers from Senate. She noted that this reinforced Karin's point about why it was important that PMC's remit be brought to Senate, so Senate may have a real understanding of where it sits in the governance structures and within Senate's responsibilities for education and research.
- 20.17 Jo-Anne confirmed that what was happening was essentially a business process review to tackle the workload issue as well as being about agility. The process had started with what was in existence now and when this process was complete the team would be happy to share things with Senate.
- 20.18 The Principal noted that it would be good to see the map of the very complicated system that had been inherited and what the system that had been moved to looked like in comparison.
- 20.19 Patience added that it would also be helpful for Senate to see some of the process, in addition to the end-product. This would help with seeing how Senate fitted into the process, and it would be important to see the workings before decisions were made. She noted that it seemed to her that PMC needed to be brought under Senate somehow as it dealt with education which was one of Senate's responsibilities as far as she could see there was currently no line between PMC and Senate.
- 20.20 Jo-Anne noted that PMC was on the agenda as a result of a request being made. This was not a problem, but it explained why they were not as far along with the process as they would have liked to be at the point of sharing work, they would have wished to be further on with the thinking. Jo-Anne assured Senate that multiple conversations were going on between multiple people across the Institution to ensure that the process was correct from a governance perspective.
- 20.21 Diane confirmed her understanding that previously PMC had consulted with QAC for new programmes but there had been no reference to QAC for withdrawal of programmes and suggested that this should be looked at to make sure that Senate had oversight. She also reminded the meeting that although Senate had delegated its powers to QAC, it could still pull those back or decide to take a look at that. She suggested that it would be good to have more information about how the governance process fitted together.
- 20.22 Astley Hastings, SBS, noted he was also a new member of Senate asked what QAC was? He noted that there was no Senate representation of the composition of PMC given on the website and it was mainly composed of management and the administration and asked if this could be updated and where Senate fitted into things could be explained.

- 20.23 JP confirmed that this was one thing that was in the process of being updated and the membership of PMC was under consideration, and this would be fed into that.
- 20.24 Steve confirmed that the membership of QAC was given on the University website. He also confirmed that a lot of work was ongoing determining what fell under QAC and PMC's remits with the aim of streamlining processes and maximising the turnaround between the two committees and also avoid duplication while maintaining standards.
- 20.25 Astley asked for details of the mechanism for Senate delegating powers to QAC.
- 20.26 Steve confirmed that Senate had delegated powers for quality assurance and entry requirements to QAC and that enabled QAC to discuss those elements and ultimately present them to Senate in its routine report.
- 20.27 Jen commented that it would be very helpful for Senate's confidence to have a closer relationship with PMC, whatever form it took, whether this was a regular report along the lines of QAC as ultimately Senate has a legal responsibility for planning and coordination as defined by the Higher Education Governance Act so Senate is responsible for decisions made at least in part by PMC. As there was currently no communication along those lines for individual Senators, or as a body, this was really important in governance terms and any way this could be improved, would be appreciated.
- 20.28 Jo-Anne clarified that PMC feeds into QAC for recommendations to withdraw programmes or approval of new programmes. All or any withdrawals or proposals come to Senate via a clear line already, but she agreed that mapping it all out on a slide and bringing it to Senate would be a valuable exercise. The business process review is the starting point for that and would allow mapping on of the various parts and memberships and all of this was a work in progress. She reassured Senate that PMC was not adding or withdrawing programmes without following due process. It is looking at the viability of programmes only and making recommendations.
- 20.29 Jen noted that there had been the situation in the previous year of the suspension and the semi de facto withdrawal of programmes in modern languages and that was one of the situations that was of great concern to Senate and this was why there was a need to be very clear about what it means to suspend or pause a programme. She noted that she was sure that any full withdrawals would come through Senate but what was the process to suspend a programme and did that need to come through Senate. She suggested that this was maybe a question to answer at a later point, but this should be part of the review of governance of PMC.
- 20.30 Euan Bain, School of Engineering summarised his understanding of discussions of the materials on the website as having the PMC under the Directorate of Planning and nowhere near the committees shown on the slides. His understanding was that this was wrong, and this was being revised as it was inappropriate. In addition, the current remit and composition of PMC on the website on the Planning website, may be considered not fit for purpose. It was in the process of being revised from first principles and that all stakeholders will be involved in the discussion in particularly within schools Directors of Education and School Administration Managers.
- 20.31 Jo-Anne noted that what PMC does is to consider requests from schools. It did not make recommendations in its own right, recommendations are not pushed down from PMC they all came up from schools.
- 20.32 Jen noted that the suspension of programmes in LLMVC had not happened in this way.
- 20.33 Aravinda Guntupalli, School of MMSN noted that everyone was keen to know the details of the new system and highlighted that within MMSN, there was another School committee before QAC and that the streamlining needed to consider this as staff who were busy with research want to reduce the number of forms and committees so increasing the number might prevent innovation. She also suggested that there could be streamlining of research with the Vice Principal (Global) also. She noted she was often overseas for recruitment and being asked for programmes so it would be good to have an awareness of work unfolding with partner institutions etc.
- 20.34 The Principal summarised discussion as being around an ongoing process which was greatly needed, particularly with the lack of clarity that some are experiencing around it. It was important that it was known which part of the governance structure was responsible for which

decisions. By the end of the process, and along the way, Senate needed to see how things were developing. There was a need to delay and not to have as many clearance points as that slowed everything up, and there was a need to de-bureaucratise and no longer have 30 page forms imposing an excessive burden on staff at a times when the aim was to reduce workload. The intention was also to be agile and to respond quickly to a very turbulent and dynamic context where there was a need to ensure the most attractive courses and programmes that could be developed were on offer and that these were developed quickly enough so that students came to Aberdeen rather than elsewhere. He noted that this was the aim and that a further update would be provided when work had moved on.

- 20.35 Jo-Anne confirmed that this was likely to be in the new year and JP indicated that there would be something in February.

REF OUTPUTS EXERCISE AND ANALYSIS

- 21.1 Nick Forsyth, Vice Principal (Research) noted that, as he had committed to at a previous Senate, he was going to provide an update on REF progress and give details of the output review that was ongoing, having begun in May and culminating currently. He reiterated previous comments that the exercise was live, and figures would continue to evolve. The paper provided an update on the current position. He highlighted the continued monitoring and review exercise detailed in the paper and noted that this was undertaken to understand the preparedness for the contribution to knowledge and understanding element of the of the REF2029 exercise. He noted that this element remained the largest contributing element to the overall GPA. The report also detailed the next steps to be taken in the exercise: further analysis and modelling of the output scores would be undertaken from the 2023 and 2024 exercises and noted that these would allow data driven analysis to be undertaken for units of assessment. He further noted that feedback gathering, and evaluation was happening at school and Institutional levels; technology and processes were being reviewed to improve and streamline the process and the intention was, drawing on feedback from the exercise, to move to a process of continuous assessment rather than gating and bunching up outputs at single points in the year. As things came through, they could be reviewed and moved forward. Moving on to background and context, he highlighted that work had built on that undertaken in 2023. In 2023 there had been an average response rate of 92% across the University, with about 8% of staff indicating that they had no REF eligible work or no work in progress at that time. The 2024 assessment was launched in May 2024 with the aim to have everything nominated and assessed by late June, with reviews completed by late August then with further calibration of scores completed by late September. He noted that there had been slippage due to operational issues that had been encountered across the piece and these had been absorbed and completion was close, although later than had been intended. For the 2024 research assessment there had been 1,029 outputs collated between May 2024 and November 2024. Excluding duplicate items and items identified for future review there were 928 outputs reviewed, with 28 of these identified for double weighting. 939 outputs were nominated by current eligible staff with 19 outputs associated with former or ineligible staff. Nick highlighted that outputs associated with former staff were eligible for inclusion and could still be put forward by the University.
- 21.2 Based on the current staff eligibility data of 699.48 FTE, and a requirement of 2.5 outputs per submitted FTE, the University would require 1,749 outputs to complete a REF output submission including a little flexibility dependant on what the units looked like. With 704 outputs identified and 223, and 967 unique outputs, including those double weighted, the University currently had reviewed 1,690 outputs leaving us 59 outputs short of the overall submission requirement. He noted that this was very much a step in the right direction, bearing in mind one output was requested for the first round and a minimum of one for the second. He noted the University was now well placed to start gathering and pulling forward extra outputs of additionality as we move forward in the process.
- 21.3 Moving to table 2.1 within the paper, he drew colleagues' attention to the column which detailed the number of REF eligible staff (T&R and R) and outputs proposed in 2024 and noted from that a strong contribution from staff members. He acknowledged that there was a range within this, with some schools having more than others but this was expected, and work could be directed

towards where help was needed working together with schools to increase numbers to 100% of staff as the University moved into the next cycle of monitoring. The numbers were looking good with many schools sitting above 90% and a lot of schools in the high eighties. The average across all school of 84.95% of eligible staff putting forward outputs in the last round was a very positive number.

- 21.4 Section 5.6 of the report dealt with one of the greyer areas: with the proposed decoupling of staff from outputs and the wider inclusion of outputs proposed for REF2029, the volume of one REF eligible output per member of staff had been removed as a requirement. He noted that this had an impact on the plans for moving forward and the plans being made. He highlighted this particularly in the context of the figures in the report showing the proportion for staff who had not contributed an output at this stage or had no outputs. He noted that work would be done with schools and individual colleagues to determine what could be done to help in those areas.
- 21.5 For section 5.7 of the Report, when proposing outputs, authors were asked to consider the grade that the output may achieve. The self-assessment scores ranged from 2* thought to 4*; of all the submissions where a grade had been provided, 4% were in the 2* range, 43% were in the 3* range and 14% were in the 4* range. The process of self-reflection was thought to be an important part of the process as it was important to reflect on the quality of the work produced and how that fitted with the perception of others. This was a useful piece of academic training, and a useful skill set to have. Due to the range of self-assessment methods in use, self-assessments were not always included: 38% of submissions in PURE did not include a self-assessment grade. Although self-assessment was encouraged, not everyone chose to complete an assessment. Where a score was provided, self-assessed grades followed a similar pattern to reviewed grades from the 2023 exercise with between 40% and 50% at 3*, and 15% at 4*; broadly the same message was coming through.
- 21.6 Figure 4 showed the spread of outputs from the 2024 exercise and the reviewed grades. This exercise showed a bimodal distribution that peaked on 3 at 19.47%, with a long tail going down to grades 1 and 2, which would not be intended submissions, and further shallowing at 4- and 4+ which would be the intended submission level. He reflected that one output had been sought in each of 2023 and 2024 and it was known that there were more 4* output in existence but these would not start to be pulled into calculations until the move to continual assessments was made.
- 21.7 He highlighted that, as at 18 November, 89% of outputs had been issued for review, 7% had been reviewed by one or more reviewer, with 75% fully reviewed and graded. Table 2 showed the level of agreed scores by school and noted that the position withing Geosciences had changed markedly since the table was produced and now sat around 40% completed and highlighted that this was another 'live' exercise that changed on a weekly basis.
- 21.8 He noted that Nir Oren, Dean for Knowledge & Understanding, was working closely with the Directors of Research and completion of the outstanding reviews was expected imminently, with these to be incorporated into the data. He reassured Senate that progress was being made within the areas which, from the report, looked behind with data.
- 21.9 He noted that once all the reviews had been completed, a full analysis would be undertaken with the expectation that all schools would provide staff with constructive feedback. Feedback would also be provided to reviewers with consideration given to where there had been disparities between reviewers. The graded and reviewed outputs would be modelled against unit structures with the initial model anticipated before the Christmas break. The feedback on the 2024 exercise was scheduled for discussion at the forthcoming meeting of the University Research Committee (URC) scheduled for the following week, when issues encountered with process and technology would also be discussed and fed back to vendors. This included consideration of whether, or not, PURE provided the University with the desired solution and also the review template within PURE would be discussed together with the move to a continual process to fit in with workloads.
- 21.10 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences noted the low percentage of returns shown in Table 1 for Geosciences and reported that he had spoken with the Head of Geosciences ahead of Senate and reported that part of the explanation for this was due to staff having been away on fieldwork

at the time the initial call had been issued noting that there had also been issues with the location of the 'submission' button within the software. He suggested that the number might rise further if the instructions were reissued.

- 21.11 Karen Scott, School of MMSN noted her understanding of the move to continual assessment but asked where this would be managed, at a university, school or institute level? She highlighted staff within an institute would have different times when they were busy and asked for further clarification on this.
- 21.12 Nick confirmed that these sorts of details had yet to be confirmed.
- 21.13 Nir reported that the Directors of Research had been consulted on this and they had recommended that this be done at the school level to take account of differing deadlines. There would be oversight at the Institution level, but the detail would be delegated down to schools.
- 21.14 Dan Powell, School of MMSN asked about interdisciplinary papers and the issue of duplicates and how this was being handled? Had papers that crossed between schools been reviewed by both schools and if they had only been reviewed by one school would it be clear which school this had been?
- 21.15 Nick confirmed that papers had been reviewed by the school of the submitting individual, and where more than one school/unit was involved, the output might have been used twice but no conclusion had yet been reached about who the paper 'belonged' to yet in terms of the submission.
- 21.16 Trevor Stack, School of LLMVC asked how many outputs had been reviewed by staff from more than one unit of assessment? He noted that he had previously been instructed not to undertake reviews across schools.
- 21.17 Nick noted that he did not know where this instruction had originated as it bore no resemblance to the institutional instructions. He highlighted that there was no 'punishment' for submitting interdisciplinary outputs and noted that interdisciplinary outputs tended to bring in more general interest and generated more positive reviews within the multidisciplinary panels.
- 21.18 Dave Cornwell, School of Geosciences asked if there was any training or good practise being shared on how to turn 3s into 4s? He noted that it had been discussed at a school level and he and colleagues were currently writing papers that might be upgraded.
- 21.19 Nick responded that from a STEM perspective the general advice was to hold back and not feel pressured into submitting something ahead of time when holding back and adding might elevate it to the next level.
- 21.20 Nir noted that this did tend to be discipline specific and he had been meeting with the Directors of Research and had been urging the sharing of good practise in such areas. He highlighted his willingness to go to schools and have these discussions. Despite being very discipline specific support was available wherever possible.
- 21.21 Dave noted that some junior colleagues had expressed concerns about the process and suggested that those who had not submitted anything to the process yet were feeling vulnerable which did not align with the instruction to hold back and suggested that reassurance on the process and the instruction to hold back should be offered.
- 21.22 Nick stressed that REF was different this time and had moved past the individual and was about the Unit and everything contributing to that. This resulted to there being two aspects: the career development perspective of individuals and the research unit as part of the whole environment. If individuals were concerned, they should be encouraged to reach out to the Director, Head of School or Nir and himself.
- 21.23 Richard Hepworth-Young, School of Natural and Computing Sciences recalled that in the last REF round documents had come to Senate which had made clear that nothing to do with REF would feed into any human resource process and noted that he had not seen similar statements this time. He suggested it might be useful to incorporate a clear statement on what was being done with these data.

- 21.24 Nick responded, noting that until REF published its process it was difficult for individual institutions to publish their own codes of practise, meaning that the University was essentially operating on the basis of its 2021 code of practise even though the whole process had moved away from individuality. It would not be possible to seek approval of the final code until REF had published its final process. Nick confirmed updated guidance would be supplied once the final REF process had been published. He highlighted that REF included the whole of 2026 as the expected publication date for the finalised guidance, and that it would not be possible to hold off institutional publication until that time. The final institutional guidance was expected to be published at some point during 2026.
- 21.25 Neil Vargesson, School of MMSN asked whether it was known when the REF panels units of assessment would begin recruiting?
- 21.26 Nick confirmed that it had been indicated that information around the process would be published during December 2024. He noted that the main panel chairs had been published earlier in the week and institutions had been assured that the process would follow on with details for individual members. This would be communicated as soon as it was received together with encouragement for as many colleagues as possible to put themselves forward for membership.

NET ZERO STRATEGY UPDATE

- 22.1 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal introduced Fraser Lovie, Head of Sustainability and Rose Lyne, Net Zero & Emissions Manager. He noted that Fraser and Rose had worked with colleagues across the University to produce the Net Zero Strategy, which had recently been approved by Court. It had been felt that it was useful to share the Strategy with Senate due to its importance to the entire community, and its impact on everything undertaken by the University, and the engagement required from everyone. Fraser and Rose gave a presentation which detailed why the University needed a strategy; what organisational decarbonisation targets had been set under Aberdeen 2040; the various decarbonisation pathways; the financial impacts and what the next steps would be
<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/media/site/staffnet/governance/senate/agenda/documents/December-2024---Senate---Net-Zero-Strategy-FINAL.pdf>
- 22.2 Nir Oren, Dean for Knowledge & Understanding, noted that there was much made in the presentation of percentage reductions and asked what the baseline for these calculations was? He also noted that the Paris agreement often referenced 2030 for a 50% reduction in emissions but the University refers to 2040 and asked why there was this disconnect?
- 22.3 Rose confirmed that the University had taken 2015/16 as its reporting baseline as this was the furthest back the University was able to go and have confidence in the data with sufficient granularity. The target set by the University was originally five years ahead of the Scottish Government targets. The Scottish Government interim targets had been scaled back or scrapped. The University had five-year interim targets detailed within the strategy document.
- 22.4 Trevor Stack, School of LLMVC asked how the University's current financial challenges, some of which were shared by the sector, impacted on its ability to meet the Net Zero targets.
- 22.5 Karl confirmed that they had very significant impacts, as they did on the Scottish & UK Governments and governments worldwide in the post-pandemic era of high government debt and he noted the very considerable financial challenges. The recognition of this was driving the realisation that the University was unlikely to have the capital available to decarbonise on its own and would need to look at how this might work in partnership with others in industry etc. The University was in discussions with industry, the City Council about the need to operate regionally on this topic. He also noted that the UK electricity network was unlikely to be decarbonised at the rate originally anticipated and that would also impact organisations. He noted that there was a need to ensure that when capital was spent, it was done in line with sustainability. One of the criteria examined closely, as part of the Capital Plan, was sustainability. He also highlighted that part of the reimagining the campuses project had to focus on reducing the size of the physical estate so that there was less of it to decarbonise.

- 22.6 Waheed Afzal, School of Engineering asked, across the three scopes (1,2 & 3), what the University's footprint was and how it compared with other Scottish universities either based on total or number of students?
- 22.7 Responding Rose detailed that, across all three scopes combined the University's baseline emissions for 2015/16 was just over 32,000 tonnes and compared with other universities of similar size, this was about in line. The University's distinctive generation systems, the combined heat and power engine running off natural gas to generate electricity, the district heating schemes and also the purchase of steam from the NHS, make the split different from others but overall, very similar. In terms of the proportional split between scopes, she reported that the majority of the University's emissions came from energy, the scope three emissions (hotel stays, travel etc) were in comparison quite small currently but noted that this was based on current guidance of what must be included to reach net zero and if the Scottish Government altered what must be included in this figure, scope three would increase massively. Fraser highlighted that if the Strategy had been written six months previously when the guidance was different the baseline would have been considerably higher due to the volume of scope three emissions that would have to have been included. As the guidance was changing constantly the Strategy was very much a living document which must evolve as the guidance evolved.
- 22.8 Thereza De Aguiar, Business School asked how progress against targets would be reported. Whether there would be any engagement with stakeholders on actions taken to reduce emissions? And who would ensure progress in this area?
- 22.9 Karl confirmed that the process was hard wired into Aberdeen 2040 which included a commitment to reach Net Zero before 2040. Progress against the Aberdeen 2040 targets was reported as part of the Annual Review and Accounts and ultimately progress against Key Performance Indicators had to be accounted for to the University Court. Rose added that reports were also sent annually to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) through HESA. She noted that, due to the far-reaching nature of the project, staff training would be updated to include the pathways, which would help Directorates and Schools understand how they could contribute to the project, noting that not every section of the University would be able to help with everything. Karl also noted that two climate assemblies had been held: one on biodiversity, which had led to the development of the Biodiversity Policy; and one on 'green labs' which had led to a lot of thinking around how to decarbonise laboratories. This work was ongoing. Further assemblies were planned, and this was one way of engaging the community in the process. Work would also have to look at the curriculum and this was already underway with the University already a leader in many aspects of the energy transition and biodiversity.
- 22.10 For assurance purposes Karl confirmed the University was required to submit reports on progress towards Net Zero to the SFC, noting that the University was held to account both internally and externally. This formed part of the University's agreement with the SFC.
- 22.11 Thereza noted that the Government reports were very dry and difficult to follow and asked if there would be a more 'friendly' type of reporting so that the community could understand the position and become more engaged with the process.
- 22.12 Rose confirmed that there was already an emissions dashboard showcasing all the University's emissions which had recently won a highly commended award. She also reiterated the desire to extend the staff training module to cover what staff were able to contribute within teaching and research, as well as everyday life as well as extending it to students to enable all to have an understanding of what they might do to contribute.
- 22.13 Congratulating the team on their award and work to take the issue forward the Principal asked if there was any other business.
- 22.14 Karolin Hijazi asked what the procedure was for receiving an answer to her written question.
- 22.15 The Principal confirmed that the normal process was to publish both the written questions with their answers on the Senate website.

- 22.16 Dave Cornwall noted that a constituent had raised, on the way into the meeting, the BBC news story which had mentioned the University in the context of its use of agents for student recruitment and asked if there would be a University response.
- 22.17 Siladitya Bhattacharya, Vice Principal (Global Engagement) replied noting that he was not sure that a response was planned currently, but processes for recruitment through agents had been under review and the situation may have moved on from that contained in the report.
- 22.18 Closing the meeting the Principal noted that during the meeting an unconfirmed report had been received that the Scottish Government had announced as part of its budget, that there was to be a 3.5% uplift in funding to the Scottish Higher Education sector in 2025/26. He noted that, if confirmed, this effectively just reinstated the funding that had been lost as a result of the Westminster Government increasing employer National Insurance contributions, and that this meant the University was back where it had been anticipating. However, this would provide a little more room for investment than would otherwise have been the case. On the assumption that this turned out to be true, he recorded his thanks to the Scottish Government.

[Clerk's Note: Subsequent to the meeting it emerged that the actual amount awarded was approximately a 2.1% uplift]

SENATE ELECTION OUTCOMES

- 23.1 Senate noted the outcomes of the recent elections.

RECTOR ELECTION OUTCOME

- 24.1 Senate noted that, following student voting, Iona Fyfe had been elected to take up the role of Rector from 1 January 2025.

URC REPORT TO SENATE

- 25.1 Senate noted the routine report from the University Research Committee.