

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022

Present: Akua Agyeman, David Anderson, Joanne Anderson, Mervyn Bain, Simon Bains, Murilo da Silva Baptista, William Barras, John Barrow, Siladitya Bhattacharya, Jason Bohan, George Boyne, Alex Brasier, Abbe Brown, Marion Campbell, Alessandra Cecolin, Delma Childers, Chris Collins, Matthew Collinson, Chantal den Daas, Andrew Dilley, Pete Edwards, Marie-Luise Ehrenscheidtner, Karin Friedrich, Aravinda Guntupalli, Paul Hallett, Malcolm Harvey, Richard Hepworth, Contanze Hesse, Amelia Hunt, Dragan Jovicic, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Lesley Lancaster, Amanda Lee, Karly Leydecker, Beth Lord, Alasdair MacKenzie, Pietro Marini, Ben Marsden, Kathryn Martin, Laura McCann, Samantha Miller, Mintu Nath, Gareth Norton, Nir Oren, Graeme Paton, Ekaterina Pavlovskaja, Tavis Potts, Brice Rea, Justin Rochford, Arash Sahraie, Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar, Joachim Schaper, Diane Skåtun, Ann-Michelle Slater, Matteo Spagnolo, Scott Styles, Ruth Taylor, Neil Vargesson, Sai Viswanathan, Sara Woodin, Ilia Xypolia, Zeray Yidhego and Alexandros Zangelidis.

Apologies: Flora Alapy, Irene Couzigou, Cheryl Dowie, Gareth Jones, David McGloin, Colin North, Michelle Pinard, Tom Rist, Mary Stephen.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- 1.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of the Senate to the new academic year.
- 1.2 The Secretary reminded members of procedures. Members were reminded that the meeting would be recorded. Members were asked to state their name before contributing to discussion and advised 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. A break had been scheduled at around 2.20pm. Senate was also reminded that debate should be respectful and inclusive, and a wide engagement with subjects was encouraged. No fire alarms were planned during the meeting.
- 1.3 David Anderson, School of Social Sciences, suggested that there was an item missing from the Routine Business section of the agenda as there was no reference to elections for Senate representation on the University Education Committee (UEC). The Secretary highlighted that the additional meeting of Senate on 28 September would be approving the composition of the Senate sub-committees. Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education) confirmed that no meeting of UEC was scheduled before the Senate meeting on 28 September and that pending the formal decision of Senate on composition, the pre-existing membership of UEC was being used which included Senate representation.
- 1.4 Members of the Senate approved the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 2.1 Members of the Senate approved the minutes 11 May 2022 subject to minor amendments to the attendance.

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

- 3.1 The Principal highlighted specifically two items in the news: the ongoing cost of living crisis, and the Government announcement earlier in the day that the University energy bill, which

was already 60% higher than previous years, would not be rising further until at least the spring. He further noted news was expected later in the week that National Insurance contributions may change to further lighten the burden, but also the expectation that the economy would move into recession. Since the last meeting of Senate, the publication of the National Student Survey (NSS) results had taken place and the Principal thanked Senate members for their contribution to the University's impressive performance, moving from fifth place to fourth place overall, signalling that students recognise the quality of the education and support provided by the University. Also related to the NSS results, the University had retained its top twenty position in the Times and Sunday Times rankings, where the University had risen from 20th to 19th. and that the Guardian league table results would be published on Saturday.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

- 4.1 Neil Vargesson, on behalf of the Senate Assessors, noted that the two major topics for discussion at the meeting of Court on 28 June, had been the REF outcome and the planned way forward from that and the restructuring of the Court subcommittees, with both these items scheduled for Senate discussion either at the current meeting or the additional meeting on 28 September.
- 4.2 David Anderson, School of Social Science, requested clarification regarding the intersection of the Court Governance Review and the Senate Effectiveness Review, and how the recommendations of the Effectiveness Review would be taken forward. The Secretary confirmed that the two reviews were not being taken forward separately but it had been useful from a management perspective to look at the initial outcomes of the reviews separately before reflecting on areas of overlap. The position of the Digital Strategy Committee, which was previously a subcommittee of the Policy and Resources Committee and would now be moving to become an Executive Group, was highlighted specifically and the fact that mechanisms for academic representation on the Group would receive further consideration. It was further highlighted that consideration was ongoing in terms of opportunities for a joint meeting of Court with Senate, and the reintroduction of a wider stakeholder meeting which would provide an opportunity for staff, students, and regional representatives to meet with Court.

ITEMS FROM EDUCATION COMMITTEE – PASTORAL SUPPORT REVIEW

- 5.1 Abbe Brown, Dean for Student Support, provided Senate with a brief overview of the recommendations contained in the report and the initial proposals for implementation. Abbe noted specifically that resource, both human and IT, would be significant factors in any implementation of the recommendations in the report, and noted that this is a future looking plan at this stage. Senate's input was sought specifically on the proposals at 4.5 and 4.7.
- 5.2 Alexandros Zangelidis, Business School, highlighted that in the Business School with over 2,600 students (UG and PG) the proposals have tremendous workload implications for staff, both academic and administrative. Academic staff would be required, with administrative support, to schedule over 5,000 one to one meetings on top of the existing workload. In addition, significant training for staff would be required for staff new to systems. He also noted that with research needing to be reprioritised following REF 2021 the workload implications of the proposals must be understood.
- 5.3 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences, queried whether the proposal for Personal Tutors to support students in curriculum choice signalled a return to the previous system of Advisers of Study. If this were the intention, staff who had not previously undertaken advising duties would have significant work to do to become familiar with degree pathways and regulations. Brice also queried whether the development of a new workload allocation model would be completed

ahead of any implementation of a revised Personal Tutor system noting that if this did not happen first the result would be academic staff becoming overloaded. The development of supporting materials also requires staff to have time to engage with the material. In addition, he highlighted that the proposals implied that both staff and students would have their engagement in the system monitored digitally and queried whether staff were to be somehow penalised for their allotted students failing to engage with the system. He further noted that there was confusion within the document around whether meetings should be with individual students or with groups. Brice also highlighted the relatively small number of respondents to the survey (209) and queried the validity of changes being proposed based on such a low number of respondents.

- 5.4 Ekaterina Pavlovskia, School of Engineering noted that in terms of the proposed inclusion of PGT students in the system it was difficult to see how this could be achieved without the addition of significant numbers of extra staff. She also raised concerns about the proposal to include online/on demand students as many of these students might only be taking very low numbers of courses and therefore she queried whether we would be allocating Personal Tutors to these students.
- 5.5 Colleagues in the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition were reported to have expressed similar concerns around workload implications as well as the undergraduate pastoral support model, which can result in staff in the school being allocated students from academically very different branches of the school, and this not really working. It was suggested that staff should be allocated tutees from areas close to their own disciplines. It was, however, noted that programme coordinators already provide significant support to students and that a proposal to share this burden would be welcomed especially if the academic guidance and pastoral roles could be decoupled.
- 5.6 Amanda Lee, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition highlighted feedback from within the school seeking a definition of what the pastoral support role should include and where the boundary is between what is expected of Personal Tutors and where signposting should begin.
- 5.7 Joanne Anderson, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History noted that one of the most valuable things a Tutor can do is to schedule their own appointments as being seen to reach out to tutees directly is important in terms of creating a sense of community. With increased numbers of tutees this ability inevitably becomes diminished, and the value to the student of being seen to be an individual, is lost. Joanne also noted that the balance of power within small programmes is another area of potential conflict of interest between the Tutor role and the programme coordinator.
- 5.8 Diane Skåtun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition commented that the workload issues created by the inclusion of PGT students had generated a lot of concern in the school. She noted that the move by the University of Edinburgh to a model of support not being provided by academic staff, and which was acknowledged in the paper to be very costly, and that keeping the role with academic staff does not recognise that this is costly in terms of academic time and therefore potentially more 'expensive' in terms of opportunity costs.
- 5.9 Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History asked whether the proposed system was intended to be pastoral or disciplinary. There is a tension inherent in any system which seeks to do both things. Attendance recording should be separated from pastoral support; she questioned whether monitoring high-level academic events and invoking disciplinary action really supports student mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.10 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, raised three issues: colleagues are not sure of the benefit of seeking consistency across schools for students at levels one and two and this might lead to repeated appeals; the assertion that there are major

educational events across the term which are more important than lectures and tutorials seems odd and surely raises the potential for selective attendance at different events; and asked how are these events to be identified.

- 5.11 Scott Styles, School of Law, suggested that the first meeting for first year students with the Tutor should be made compulsory. Under the previous system of advising, students could not access their timetables until they had seen their advisor and been registered for courses. If the first meeting were made compulsory, staff and students would inevitably get to know each other right from the start.
- 5.12 Justin Rochford, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition noted three points: that to advise students appropriately on academic matters in a programme, staff really need to be teaching on the programme and this would likely cause students to be uncomfortable approaching the same staff for pastoral advice. Colleagues felt the two roles needed to be separate; proportionately there are many more PGT students than staff teaching on PGT programmes and student numbers can vary dramatically between years making workload planning particularly difficult; that under increased workload pressure, the activity likely to suffer would be research.
- 5.13 In response, Abbe noted that the points raised had not come as a surprise and that the Group recognised the concerns, particularly regarding workload and hence this was why the Report suggested that this may be an area which the University should be looking to invest in technology to support the Tutor role. In connection with the proposals around PGT support, Senate were reminded that PGT support was identified in the ELIR report as an area the University should be seeking to implement consistently. In the area of academic advice, the Group is not recommending a return to Advising rather is seeking to build on the work to date with MyCurriculum but acknowledges the role of training in this area. Abbe highlighted the difficulty in reconciling a desire to make meetings compulsory with any penalty to be imposed where students fail to keep the meeting. She noted that any move to penalise a student through some method of academic exclusion would not be something the Group could recommend. The aim of any IT solution would be to help support staff and students, and not to use it for disciplinary purposes. In terms of support for PGT students it is about formalising what is often occurring informally so staff and students may benefit consistently and in a way that is reflected in workload modelling.
- 5.14 In summary, the Principal highlighted three points from the paper and the discussion:
- That support needs to be available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students and that this is especially important as the institution shifts its focus from being primarily focused on undergraduate provision to a more balanced undergraduate/postgraduate population
 - The need to minimise any workload pressures associated with any change, with the point from the Business School being required to schedule 5,000 extra hours of work being particularly powerful in this regard.
 - The results of the NSS indicate that our students are the fourth most satisfied in the UK with the education and support they receive. This does raise the question of what problem are we trying to address.

ITEMS FROM EDUCATION COMMITTEE – MONITORING, ABSENCE AND ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

- 6.1 Abbe Brown, Dean for Student Support, presented a draft report from the Monitoring, Absence and Engagement Task and Finish Group (TFG) which included some draft recommendations on which the Group were seeking feedback from Senate.
- 6.2 Abbe outlined the recommendations which fell under four broad aims:

- The Group concluded that it is very important that the university can identify when a student is experiencing difficulties, either academic or pastoral, and that the monitoring system is an important part of delivering this
 - That it is important that the University is able to provide support to staff who are supporting students.
 - That any system must have the ability to function in a school specific way, but that consistency for students is important and hence there must be a community of practice located centrally in support of any system.
 - Any system must be both agile and effective.
- 6.3 The work falls into three areas: enhancing what we do already; a suggested approach for the medium term; and a suggested approach for the future which would require significant investment and change.
- 6.4 The proposed work seeks to ensure that: students feel part of a community; that students feel supported to take responsibility for their own learning; that students always feel supported even if there are external constraints on the options which are available; that the system is informed and fair, and clearly communicated in order that it is streamlined and effective.
- 6.5 The TFG has been able to identify some immediate actions in support of these aims and has streamlined the webpages, shared guidance and set up a community of practise through which the Group learned a lot about the various ways schools are delivering the current system. This has enabled the Group to intervene and offer guidance on ways to make the system less burdensome for academic and professional services staff.
- 6.6 A dialogue has begun around the growing requirements of the visa system and how we can best work within its constraints, together with working to provide the current disability provisions and informing work on academic appeals, specifically in the context of frontline appeals.
- 6.7 The Group has made requests for some IT changes which have been scheduled for consideration through the Digital Strategy Committee, as well as looking to change internal names to remove 'C6, C7 etc'.
- 6.8 The Group have identified some schools which operate a system utilising a Student Support Coordinator which has been found to be extremely valuable. Whilst the Group appreciate that to roll this out more widely has cost implications, their view is that this could be of significant value in supporting delivery of the current system.
- 6.9 The Group felt that the option of live dashboard communications should be explored, recognising the potential constraints in terms of privacy law etc., but that this could be a very effective method of providing support.
- 6.10 Looking forward, the Group is suggesting a new system, recognising that this would not be possible for a considerable period of time. Any new system should be delivered as a package rather than in a phased approach and the introduction of a new student management system might be an appropriate time for this to be considered. The Group were of the view that early identification of any student problems would be the key to offering effective help. It was felt that first identifying that a student is having difficulties in week six of a course is too late. By this stage the amount of work required to support a student in difficulty can be enormous. Training and support for colleagues to deliver any system was identified by the Group as crucial.
- 6.11 Abbe clarified that the aim of the system is not to remove students from courses, and that any perception that when students have been through the system and reinstated to the course, the system has been a waste of time is entirely wrong. The aim of the system is to

identify students in need of support and to provide it in order to bring the student back on track.

- 6.12 Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, welcomed any changes to the system which reduced the associated workload as, particularly for large courses, there can be a lot of work associated with C6 and C7. Also, that there needs to be more consistency between schools in terms of C6 being supportive rather than a punishment. She also proposed the inclusion of PGR students in a revised system.
- 6.13 Scott Styles, School of Law welcomed the report. He raised the question of whether the creation of a 'community' referred to in the paper is intended to be for staff or students or both and how this should be created as it wasn't clear from the report how this was to be done. He welcomed the move to rename C6/C7 and also stressed the importance of the language used in communications. He noted the tone of current communications can cause unnecessary alarm for some students who think they are about to be removed from their courses. He also noted that the most sensitive cases are often the students who are least likely to respond. It is these students who pose the biggest challenge to any system seeking to support students.
- 6.14 Alessandra Cecolin, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History noted that the current system of providing extra support for students joining the University through widening access routes goes against the idea of inclusion. Some students have reported that they feel this system of extra support is not really helping and is possibly creating issues rather than solving them.
- 6.15 David Anderson, School of Social Science, welcomed the report but noted he was unclear how the paper moves us towards the idea of creating a supportive community. He noted that interaction with the system is often carried out through professional services staff rather than by academics directly, Student Support are often involved, and that the system proposed in the paper seemed to be very similar to the existing system in terms of the involvement of very many different staff.
- 6.16 Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar, Business School, noted that any implementation would be particularly challenging for the Business School, given the high numbers of international students in the school, and would require significant resource input. She commented that the majority of C6/C7 seen in the School relate to personal issues rather than academic, requiring students to be signposted on to support services rather than being dealt with by academics in the school. If academics are meant to be providing the support Thereza queried what training was going to be available to facilitate this.
- 6.17 Sarah Woodin, School of Biological Sciences, noted that a new integrated system would be key to the success of any changes.
- 6.18 In response to the points raised Abbe noted the continuing importance of keeping messaging under review in order to ensure it isn't seen as a system for punishment, and that it is a difficult balance to be struck between punishment and being too flexible. She noted that these proposals only apply to any taught elements for PGR students, but the group is in dialogue with the PGR School. Abbe noted that some hold the view that provided assessments are passed there should not be any requirement to come to class. However, there is an argument against this in terms of achieving the learning outcomes and the sense of community; there is also evidence to suggest that students who do not attend class are more likely to disengage. She also noted that the new system proposed would generate some notifications automatically as it is no help to students if some academics opt not to engage, but the automatic interventions need to occur alongside human ones. The system for support is complex and involves many different parties who all have different supportive roles to play.

- 6.19 In summary the Principal noted that there was significant support for the proposals in the report from Senate. In particular, Senate appeared supportive of a change to the terminology in use. Concerns had been expressed around the concept of student community and whether more work was needed in this area, as well as recognising the workload implications which would require work to resolve.

**ITEMS FROM EDUCATION COMMITTEE –
ACADEMIC YEAR ARRANGEMENTS 2023/24**

- 7.1 Alan Speight, Vice-Principal, Global Engagement provided an outline of the rationale for seeking to continue the arrangements in place for 2022/23 into 2023/24. He noted this was being proposed to allow sufficient time for the Aberdeen 2040 Curriculum Group to complete its work on the structure of the academic year and to bring forward proposals for implementation from 2024/25. In general, the year structure adopted since the start of the pandemic had permitted a later start date for teaching and reduced half-session lengths. Decisions around the structure of 2024/25 are required now to permit clarity for applicants and to enable offers to include start dates.
- 7.2 Alan noted that while pandemic conditions in the UK have eased considerably, the same is not true across the world. The pandemic continues to be highly disruptive in some parts of the world in some of our key student recruitment markets, for example China, but logistical constraints continue to operate on a number of other fronts including visa processing delays, restrictions on travel etc. He also noted that international students are increasingly applying and making decisions later in the recruitment cycle, reflecting a global change in practise. The University's increasing diversification of its markets means that more students come from markets where results are issued later. Students also need adequate time to complete the visa application process and to book their travel. Moving to an earlier start date would make the University less attractive to international students which would in turn impact on our cultural diversity and our financial sustainability. Moving to an earlier start date would also lead to increased numbers of students arriving on campus after the start of teaching. He highlighted that there are, therefore, strong reasons to recommend continuing with the arrangements we have had. In addition, it was also noted that domestic students are also applying later, with many applying for the first time through clearing. This has permitted us to substitute some of the EU students who we have lost, with Scottish domiciled students through clearing. The move to later applications makes it beneficial to continue with the current arrangements.
- 7.3 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education) highlighted educational factors for continuing with the current arrangements. The key issue in this context was identified as the several ongoing workstreams associated with the educational side of Aberdeen 2040 and the need to make progress on these ahead of making more permanent changes to the structure of the academic year. Initial work on the structure of 2024/25 would be making its way through committee structures and would come to Senate in the future. Continuing with the interim arrangements would permit the Aberdeen 2040 work to feed into the work that is being undertaken on the academic year in a coherent way. Ruth noted that the institution needs to be able to continue to deliver on both the educational side and the recruitment side while discussions continued, and continuation of the interim structure would permit that. Ruth reiterated that the academic view of Senate was being sought at this time and revised formal proposals would return to a future Senate.
- 7.4 Kathryn Martin, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, drew to Senate's attention the imbalance within the proposed structure for January start PGT students. The typical two 13-week sessions with 12 weeks over the summer for projects and three weeks for the spring break for September start students, means that spring break falls into first half-session of teaching for the January start students. Overall, the distribution of teaching and holiday is very mismatched between September and January start models. The School have

noted that the January start students are being adversely affected by the imbalance with students feeling unable to take any holidays and consequently becoming exhausted. Kathryn highlighted that with the success of recruitment to the January start programmes means that consideration needs to be given to how the structure aligns with the traditional September model.

- 7.5 Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition agreed with everything highlighted by Kathryn and noted that the January start students having ten weeks of teaching followed by three weeks of holiday, are not able to take advantage of the holiday as they have assessments coming up. She further highlighted that looking at the numbers of students required to undertake resits, the majority were January-start students and so the other two-week break was also not a break, as many students were preparing for resits. There were January-start students on the school's programmes who became unwell, some serious enough to require hospital admission, as a result of the stress associated with the structure of teaching.
- 7.6 Richard Hepworth, School of Natural and Computing Sciences noted that the current academic year is the first time in three years where we have been permitted to have examinations. He further noted, however, that it is not a full exam diet as there is no revision week which limits the proportion of material that students can be examined on. Richard stated that within his discipline there is a strong desire to return to a full exam diet and that he did not see any reason to delay this for another year by prolonging the interim arrangements for a further year.
- 7.7 Ekaterina Pavlovskia, School of Engineering noted there is a strong view within Engineering that 13 weeks of teaching and assessment is insufficient to hold examinations. The School are bringing back examinations and are now able to timetable approximately 25% of the pre-pandemic exams on campus. Going back to fourteen-week terms would be beneficial to their students as it would permit more time for students to learn, revise and then have assessments. In addition, she commented that the time available for marking seems to have been shortened with time available for marking and processing now only two weeks. With examinations not being possible, the time available is insufficient to deal with the processing required for alternative assessments.
- 7.8 Ruth indicated that the points raised would be taken away for consideration but wanted to stress that the structure identified was an eleven plus two weeks to permit exams to take place and so this would be the model which would be taken forward. She further stressed that there are insufficient weeks in a year to permit three 14-week terms, however as work is taken forward in considering the new academic year the comments, and the sentiments behind them, will be very helpful in framing thinking. Ruth also reminded Senate that the 13-week teaching structure does include a 'floating' week that can be used as appropriate by courses as reading week or similar. It is this component which is not included in the summer teaching period. Ruth reiterated that this is the interim position but that comments would be taken away both in this current context and also for the next piece of work.
- 7.9 Alan reiterated that this was an interim arrangement and also made the point that it would not be helpful for us to have a sequence of changes to the structure over the coming years, as this could be destabilising to our markets.
- 7.10 The Principal noted that it was been our success in student recruitment which has permitted us to recruit additional teaching and research staff (up from c600 to 700, over the last three years) and it is this funding which also enables us to address our escalating costs. In order to sustain our position, the Principal highlighted the ongoing requirement to ensure that the institution remains at least as attractive to students as our competitors.

ROUTINE REPORT

- 8.1 Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education) highlighted items from the report for information:
- Institutional action planning is ongoing around assessment and feedback, in the context of the NSS where, despite overall improvement in the survey rankings, there is still work for the University to undertake in this area.
 - In the work around the Enhancement Theme, led by Steve Tucker, the University has just submitted its third annual plan for work. Ruth recorded her thanks to Steve and colleagues for their hard work on taking this work forward

ITEMS FROM RESEARCH COMMITTEE – RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (REF) RESULTS

- 9.1 Marion Campbell, Vice-Principal (Research) presented the results from the most recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) which covered research output between 2014 and 2020. A copy of the full presentation is available with the principle copy of the minutes.
- 9.2 Following the presentation Marion sought input from members of Senate in terms of their wider reflections on the process and thoughts on moving forward.
- 9.3 Matteo Spagnolo, School of Geosciences noted that he had become aware of a number of colleagues who were not particularly engaged with REF, some of whom were not aware of the criteria for categorising output for REF. In order to address this, he suggested including REF within PURE so that individuals see the income associated with research output. This, he suggested, would make everyone become more aware of the REF process and of the income individuals bring to the University.
- 9.4 Murilo da Silva Baptista, School of Natural and Computing Science highlighted issues on behalf of David Anderson from the School of Social Science. David's view that the REF process placed too much responsibility on individual members of staff, and he noted the increased workloads on individuals not arising from research related activity. In particular, teaching activities over the last two years, have impacted negatively on research activity. He further noted that the REF process was informed by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and while meetings had taken place at different levels within the organisation there was not good communication between the various groups. This had been, in part, responsible for the low outputs in some areas.
- 9.5 Murilo also stated that he felt the emphasis should not be on a light touch process requiring everyone to produce an assessment of a single paper for next year, rather that the focus should be on the whole process of evaluating outputs. In his view, the process had not been agile enough to incorporate changes from the Ethics Committees about what should be considered good quality. Within interdisciplinary units it was not possible to incorporate all the many changes without an agile process as recommended by DORA. Also, staff were required to identify selections for submission without having seen the agreed marks. The process was not transparent.
- 9.6 Zeray Yideho, School of Law, noted that the focus of the last two years had been on monitoring and external review rather than trying to support colleagues to produce outputs. In his view it would be better to focus on supporting colleagues to produce high quality outputs rather than on monitoring and review. The implementation of some sort of mentoring system would help colleagues to plan the production of output, rather than waiting for output to be judged. Support to produce high quality outputs and impact studies is what is required.
- 9.7 Joachim Schaper, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History observed that in his time as a College Director of Research he had introduced a system of research leave for

colleagues. This meant that colleagues were able to take one in every six half-sessions solely to focus on research. He noted that the system began to be eroded as soon as it had been introduced and as a result the extent to which it still exists in the schools within the former College, is very mixed. He noted, however, that a system for research leave is a good thing. He further noted that the University should be encouraging all staff to be striving to submit a piece of four-star research and not to be aiming for a lower level as this is not sufficient. Joachim also highlighted the need for an improved system of communication and engagement between institutional-level planners and the staff within the individual units of assessment. In addition, he highlighted the importance creating the right research culture which is both an institutional responsibility, and the responsibility of schools and departments.

- 9.8 The Principal noted his support for the development of a university-wide research-leave scheme, while acknowledging the challenges this presented within the budgetary framework, he was supportive of the sort of scheme described by Joachim.
- 9.9 Alexandros Zangelidis, Business School whilst being supportive of comments so far, noted that the crux of the issue lay with generating high quality research output and that there was no easy solution to do this. He welcomed the significant growth of academic staff numbers in recent years and noted the importance of retaining these staff for the future. In terms of how to approach a reduction in the administrative burden placed on academic staff, he highlighted that this was needed across the board and there was not a single task that could be reduced and have any significant positive impact. In his view it is substantial amounts of focused time which is missing for most staff.
- 9.10 Ilia Xpoloia, School of Social Science welcomed the Report and stressed the importance of addressing the workload issues to take forward actions to tackle the issues identified. She asked for details of how the misjudgement of output identified in the Report had occurred, and whether the discrepancy had occurred elsewhere in the sector?
- 9.11 Ralph O’Conner, School on Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, agreed with the points made by others in terms of the need to address the workload issues. He highlighted the need for the Institution to acknowledge its role in the underestimation of the impact that the disinvestment in staff and the workload pressures had had on the remaining staff and their research productivity. He noted that research had become the task undertaken when time permitted rather than being at the core of staff roles. The need for staff to be able to recognise a piece of research as being four-star rather than three-star was highlighted as particularly important and that the published definitions were not helpful in this context. Institutionally he was of the view that this was an area which needed to be addressed as a matter of the highest priority. Ralph acknowledged the ‘blindness’ of the process in terms of not knowing how output had been rated and how this was not helpful to working towards improvements for the future. It would be helpful for researchers to know how research had been rated in the past, in order to know what they were aiming for in the future.
- 9.12 Bettina Platt, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition added to the points already made that in her view staff, in her area, were not returned to the correct unit of assessment and this needs to be accounted for in any judgement of excellence. For example, in her area of medical sciences output was returned within the clinical medicine unit and this poor fit will have impacted on the scoring. It is critical that this is rectified for the future in order that output and impact studies can be evaluated within the appropriate framework.
- 9.13 The Principal noted that this is something which is being re-examined actively already.
- 9.14 Neil Vargesson, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition noted that four-star papers within his discipline take between four and five years to produce and so addressing the workload issues already identified is of paramount importance. Neil also highlighted issues around many staff not knowing what ‘impact’ really is. Writing good impact studies is very

difficult and so perhaps this an area where examples and assistance would be helpful for staff as this is an area which is likely to increase in importance in the future.

- 9.15 Mintu Nath, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition, stressed the importance of working in an interdisciplinary and multinational way for producing highly rated outcomes. It is important for the University to pool its resources in this regard to take best advantage of the opportunities in this area.
- 9.16 The Principal noted that it is known that multinational papers tend to be more highly cited- which can lead to work being more likely to be built on by others.
- 9.17 In response to the discussion, Marion thanked colleagues for their contributions and engagement. She noted that many of the points made were issues that are raised repeatedly, for example that of workload, which Karl is already working with the Workload Review Group to ensure that time is available for these important activities. Work is underway to align university systems to support the type of high-quality research being sought. The point made about moving support from assessment of output to come earlier in the process is already under discussion and it is acknowledged that putting support into production offers the chance to make changes that are not possible once research is published.
- 9.18 Marion further noted that colleagues across the sector have all reported a degree of discrepancy between internal assessments and the final external scoring. She suggested that for the future perhaps the approach should be to involve externals who have already had extensive involvement in the process so that we may benefit from their experience of recognising high quality requirements and understanding what the differentiators are between the categories of output. Regarding the selection of units of assessment Marion stressed that this is an area in which dialogue is encouraged to ensure that in future submissions best match the institution's profile at the time.
- 9.19 The Principal noted the importance of maintaining a balance between recruiting more staff and investing in time for existing colleagues to do more research and financially we are unable to do everything immediately.

ITEMS FROM RESEARCH COMMITTEE – OPEN ACCESS RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS POLICY

- 10.1 Simon Bains, University Librarian, noted that the paper provided is for input and discussion and is in connection with a well-established model begun by Harvard University in 2008. Simon highlighted that the Policy asks staff to retain their rights over publications in line with Intellectual Property (IP) policy rather than signing rights over to publishers as often happens when copyright transfer agreements are signed. Staff are asked to ensure papers acknowledge the University to guarantee any subsequent citations are associated with the University. The University will continue to deposit papers into PURE and make sure they are discoverable. Retaining individual rights ensures that everything remains entirely under the control of the University rather being dependant on a third-party organisation to allow us to comply with requirements of funding bodies who require open access publishing. This is particularly important where funding bodies require there to be immediate open access availability. Several funding bodies already require this and there is a view that this may become a requirement of being REF eligible in the future and so the drive to be open access research is likely to rise in the future. Simon noted that this affects publishing in journals and conference proceedings, which hold an ISSN, but is not yet a requirement of long format publishing although this is likely to become the case in the future. Consequently, the Policy would be kept under review and amended as necessary in the future. The University would provide wording for individuals to use to inform co-authors of the University's approach. He noted the Library is seeking to ensure that the administrative requirements on individual

academics is minimised. Simon highlighted that the option to opt out of these arrangements will exist where required by a third-party, although he did not anticipate that this would be a common occurrence.

- 10.2 The importance of the Policy was highlighted, and it was noted that the Policy would save money in terms of ensuring automatic compliance with funder mandates. Simon noted that for a University which is 'open to all', open research should be at the heart of activities. It was also noted to be one of the recommendations from the Research Culture Task and Finish Group. Research has shown that open access will increase citations and, in line with our theme of inclusion, will increase citation diversity.
- 10.3 Dragan Jovicic, School of Engineering, expressed concern that the policy does not consider sufficiently the interests of academics who as authors, will be put in a difficult position. He asserted that publishers would not be happy with the policy and would send copyright infringement notices to academics as the authors who transferred the copyright at the time of submission. Individuals transfer copyright, not the University, and this is something which academics wishing work to be published do not have a choice over. It is the authors who have a contract with publishers and so it will be the individuals who face legal action or will be banned by individual publishers. He also noted that open access is not yet a requirement of many funding bodies and only impacts on a small proportion of publications.
- 10.4 In response, Simon sought to reassure Senate around any issues arising from copyright: the University will put in place mechanisms for academics to engage with publishers to publish and retain copyright; where this isn't possible academics may opt out of the policy and transfer copyright to the publisher. He stated that there are a growing number of publishers who will not prevent authors retaining copyright; over 80 institutions in the world are already doing this and Simon was not aware of any instances of legal action. The greatest risk comes from not following the processes put in place and inadvertently ending up breaching copyright. Simon reiterated that he would be happy to engage with individuals to provide reassurance around the processes and stressed that there would be a reputational risk to any publisher seeking to take legal action against an academic or an institution.
- 10.5 Iliia Xypolia, School of Social Science expressed concern that in the future publication in books would become subject to this process and welcomed the opportunity for members of Social Science to be involved in future discussions.

ITEMS FROM RESEARCH COMMITTEE – ROUTINE REPORT

- 11.1 Marion Campbell, Vice-Principal (Research) invited members of Senate with comments and queries related to the routine report from the Research Committee to raise them with her directly outside the meeting.

UPDATE FROM ACADEMIC PROMOTION REVIEW WORKING GROUP

- 12.1 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal presented an update from the working group looking at academic promotions. He reminded Senate that the Group are seeking to align the promotions system with the Aberdeen 2040 strategy. The work includes several elements: procedural, criteria and the framework. He noted that the Group had not yet developed detailed criteria for academic promotion; the Vice-Principals are leading discussions across the University around their development currently. Karl asked for feedback from Senate on the appropriateness of the work undertaken to date.

- 12.2 Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science noted that, in terms of inclusivity, the update did not address entirely issues of anonymity. Whilst some documents were anonymised, others include applicants' surnames, and this had been raised as an issue within her constituency. She queried whether the Group have considered making the process completely 'blind' in terms of diversity characteristics. In addition, she sought further details around the role of the 'social observer'.
- 12.3 Richard Hepworth, School of Natural & Computing Sciences noted that the proposed policy for the research and teaching track seemed to favour research over teaching with levels not being aligned. He noted that while some of the imbalance is pre-existing in the current procedures, the proposals create additional imbalances. He hoped that the University values teaching and research equally and wished that this be reflected in the policy.
- 12.4 Scott Styles, School of Law, queried whether there were any plans to take the consultation to schools directly enabling all staff to contribute.
- 12.5 In response Karl noted that applications were already anonymised in the current process, and that there was no intention to move away from this. He highlighted that staff who did not feel comfortable declaring special circumstances to the whole panel would be able to do so in a much more controlled way to a small subset of the panel. In terms of the role of the Social Observer he noted that this was not a new introduction, and he would be happy to clarify details further if required. He noted that one of the biggest debates to date had centred around the framework and expectations of the community, particularly around the Reader and Chair levels. He stated that one of the important areas for feedback was to determine what being a professor at this University means – the Group had concluded that it should not require both research and teaching at the highest levels but that it was not appropriate to excel in research but not be above the lowest levels in terms of education. This would send the wrong message in terms of relative values of education and research. Karl noted that this was an area the Group were particularly keen to receive feedback on. Karl noted that through publication to members of Senate the document had also gone to all staff in the University and encouraged feedback to him directly from across the institution.
- 12.6 The Principal noted that it was entirely appropriate for the Institution to be seen to be giving equal weight to education and research, and whilst discussions are ongoing to find more time for research, this does not change the balance between the two. We value both equally as symbolised by there being an equal prospect for promotion on either the teaching or research tracks.

REVISIONS TO HONORARY DEGREE PROCEDURES

- 13.1 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary, presented the refreshed procedures approved by the Honorary Degrees Committee. She noted that the main issues the changes were seeking to address, were improving transparency and inclusivity within the process whilst remaining clear about the values placed on our honorary degrees and the expected number awarded each year. Tracey noted the recommendation that there be two active calls each year was intended to improve the accessibility and transparency of the process by encouraging all staff to nominate individuals; in addition, the introduction of a due diligence stage to be carried out on all nominations ahead of any recommendations being put before Senate.
- 13.2 The Principal noted that processes to date had not encouraged diversity in nominations, but the revised procedures did seek to improve this.
- 13.3 Neil Vargesson, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition noted that the forms for completion were lengthy and queried whether this might prove off-putting for some staff.

- 13.4 Tracey acknowledged that the forms were lengthy and indicated she would be content to revisit them, whilst noting that details were required in the forms to ensure that full due diligence can be undertaken.

SENATE NOMINATIONS TO THE DICK BEQUEST TRUST

- 14.1 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary outlined the background to the University's link to the Dick Bequest Trust highlighting that the terms of the Trust included two Trustees nominated by the University Senate. The University had been notified by the Trust that it wished to extend the University nominations when their current five-year terms end in June 2022 and 2023. She noted that if the University opted not to nominate Trustees, the power to do so would revert to the Trust. Tracey highlighted recent local press coverage around links between the Trust's founder, and the funds originally used to establish the Trust, having their origin in slavery and that both Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils have adopted positions on their continuing involvement with the Trust. Tracey noted the paper did not contain an explicit recommendation, but her personal recommendation was that Senate should not make any further nominations with power to appoint these two Trustees reverting to the Trust. Tracey highlighted the ongoing, active process within the University to look at the relationship between the area and historical links to the slave trade and noted that the nominations to the Trust proceeding to Senate ahead of the completion of the work due to the timings of the nomination process.
- 14.2 Ralph O'Connor, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, noted that research within the University had confirmed that James Dick's fortune was almost exclusively derived from trade in slave labour. Ralph noted that if the University were to cut all ties to the Trust, then it would lose any ability to influence any changes for the way the funds are used in the future. He noted it has been suggested in the press that one possibility would be for the Trustees to amend the terms of the Trust to benefit the people of Jamaica in ways similar to the ways in which people of the North-East had benefitted. He asserted that it might be ethically more appropriate to seek to exert influence from within the Trust rather than cutting ties completely.
- 14.3 The Principal noted that the two approaches could be combined and the University could cut ties with the Trust and write to the Trustees urging a change to the way the funds are used.
- 14.4 Ralph voiced the opinion that the University would stand a better chance of changing the way the Trust is used from a position within the Trust rather than as an outside body.
- 14.5 Diane Skatun, School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition noted that, whilst she understood the position expressed by Ralph, by appointing Trustees the University was not able to instruct them in how they should act as they would be appointed as individuals.
- 14.6 Scott Styles, School of Law spoke in favour of the view articulated by Ralph, that the University should not simply walk away but should be seeking change from within. Scott proposed that Tracey should become a Trustee and further noted that it is relatively straightforward in legal terms to amend the purpose of a Trust through the Court of Session. He suggested that the University should be seeking to establish scholarships to the University from Jamaica through the Trust.
- 14.7 Akua Agyeman, Vice-President for Education, noted the student view that the University should continue involvement with the Trust and should appoint new Trustees. Continued involvement would present the best opportunities to push for change and to permit international students to benefit from the Trust.

- 14.8 The Principal reminded Senate that it would not be lawful for the University to seek to influence the actions of a Trustee and that there could be no expectation that any change in the terms of the Trust would result in funds coming to the University.
- 14.9 In conclusion Tracey outlined the two options open to Senate: to decide actively not to appoint to the Trust (option A) or the suggestion that an alternate Trustee is appointed (option B).
- 14.10 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences, clarified that option A should also include an offer to the Trust to assist in exploring possible changes to the terms of the Trust.
- 14.11 Senate then voted 45 in favour of option A and 8 in favour of option B. Senate therefore decided not to appoint Trustees but to write o the Trust offering support to amend the terms of the Trust.

ANY OTHER ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- 15.1 The Principal reminded Senate of the additional meeting scheduled for 28 September and offered his apologies for missing the meeting due to attendance at the Scottish Parliament where he would be representing the sector in Higher Education budget discussions.

SENATE ELECTION RESULTS

- 16.1 Senate noted the results of the Senate Elections held in May.

SENATE ASSESSOR ELECTION

- 17.1 Senate noted the arrangements approved by the Senate Business Committee for the election of a Senate Assessor to court