

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

MINUTES OF THE ADDITIONAL MEETING HELD ON 8 MAY 2024

In Person: Scott Allan, Joanne Anderson, Euan Bain, Simon Bains, Martin Barker, William Barras, Harminder Battu, Daniel Berg, Siladitya Bhattacharya, Thomas Bodey, George Boyne, Alex Brasier, Ainhoa Burgos Aguilera, Andre Justin Carpio, Sandie Cleland, Chris Collins, David Cornwell, Rebecca Crozier, Chantal den Daas, Nick Forsyth, Karin Friedrich, Greg Gordon, Aravinda Meera Guntupalli, Malcolm Harvey, Jonathan Hicks, Niels Imrie, Dragan Jovicic, Rhiannon Ledwell, Karl Leydecker, Beth Lord, Catriona Macdonald, David Mcgloin, Andrew Mckinnon, David McLernon, Alan Macpherson, Doug Martin, Samantha Miller, Martin Mills, David Muirhead, Jo-Anne Murray, Shane Painter, Graeme Paton, Stuart Piertney, Amudha Poobalan, Ann Rajnicek, Brice Rea, Tom Rist, Joost Rommers, Miles Rothoerl, Joachim Schaper, Diane Skåtun, John Skåtun, Anne-Michelle Slater, Alan Speight, Valerie Speirs, Srinivas Sriramula, Fiona Stoddard, Ben Tatler, Louise Thomson, Bert Timmermans, Neil Vargesson, Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Walklate, Ilia Xypolia, Zeray Yihdego

Online: Finn Abou El Magd, Rasha Abu Eid, Sanaa Al-Azawi, Sumeet Aphale, Jason Bohan, Fred Byrne, Delma Childers, Ian Greener, Peter Henderson, Gareth Jones, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Lesley Lancaster, Laura McCann, Michelle Macleod, Justin Rochford, Charlene Simpson, Lorna Stewart, Steve Tucker

Apologies: Waheed Afzal, Lesley Anderson, Irene Couzigou, Pete Edwards, Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, Toni Gibson, Beatriz Goulao, Kevhvan Graham, Constanze Hesse, Kate Kostick, Mark Kurz, Alasdair Mackenzie, Mintu Nath, Sam Newington, Adelaja Israel Osofero, Bettina Platt, Karen Scott, Tracey Slaven, Mary Stephen

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- 49.1 The Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members to the additional meeting called to discuss how the University is adapting to the altered financial circumstances of the sector and how Senate should undertake its primary responsibilities to protect and enhance the quality of education and research in the circumstances. He noted that the rest of the University community would rightly be looking to Senate for ideas, creativity, innovation and plans for the protection of education and research, when it was known that the whole sector was under pressure. He noted that as it was an extra meeting there were not the usual minutes, or his usual written report, these would be included in the next meeting. He noted that in the Secretary's absence, Louise Thomson from the Governance Team would be deputising.
- 49.2 Louise reminded members of procedures: there were no planned fire alarms; the meeting would be recorded; members were asked to state their name before contributing to discussion and those attending on Teams were asked to use the chat function to state when they wished to ask a question. Members were reminded that the chat itself does not form part of the formal minute, and to remain muted when not speaking. She reported that a request had been received for the chat to be shown on screen in the auditorium, but it had been decided not to do this to prevent members in the room from being distracted. Members were reminded that, while all staff and students are welcome to attend Senate, only members are permitted to contribute to debate. They were also reminded that, as laid out in the Standing Orders, any motions for discussion must be related to items already on the agenda. Any voting would take place using the auditorium functionality for those in the room and Forms within the chat for those on Teams.

- 49.3 The Principal thanked the elected members who had suggested the meeting and had helped draw up the agenda which had been formalised by the Senate Business Committee. Senate confirmed that it was content to approve the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE

- 50.1 Reiterating that he had not circulated a written update for the meeting, the Principal noted that most of what he would have had to say would be covered in the presentations on the agenda. The Principal noted that while he was grateful to some colleagues who had made the choice to leave the University at the current time as it helped the University's financial sustainability and helped protect the jobs of those who had opted to remain, he noted, however, it was sad to see people leaving. He added his personal reflection on one task he undertook as Principal which was to write to staff who were retiring to thank them for their contribution to the University. He observed that sometimes that contribution spanned forty or fifty years and when staff retired after those lengths of time he invited them for a cup of tea and a chat to reflect on how the University had changed over time. He noted that in the past he would probably have written a couple of letters each month at most for colleagues retiring. He observed that on the preceding Sunday he had signed off 10 letters in a single day. Most of these staff were people he knew, having worked with them, and met them many times over the preceding six years. In reporting this, he noted that he understood how everyone must be feeling seeing valued colleagues and friends who would no longer be at the University. He added that he always said in his letters that he hoped staff retiring would remain in contact and noted that he hoped this would be true for everyone and that staff would remain in contact with those leaving for the greater good in the circumstances being faced currently. The Principal noted that, since the previous meeting of Senate, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) had cut the University's funding by £1M more than had been expected creating a further financial challenge, and the news on international student recruitment, particularly postgraduate taught students (PGT), continued to be negative with the news that the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) was reviewing the post-study work visa. He highlighted that regardless of the outcome of that review he was not expecting the UK Government to respond to it in a positive way and that it might further suppress international student recruitment for the autumn. He noted that the University had already adjusted expectations from a 15% year on year reduction to 25% and he hoped that this turned out to be correct. He further noted that, based on current offers and acceptances confidence was high that this projection was as bad as it might get, but if the UK Government were to react very negatively to the outcome of the MAC review it was possible that the market would go down even further. He stressed that this was national party politics well beyond the University's control. He highlighted that although the University and the sector tried hard to influence policy in this area there were ideological tides within the system that were difficult to counteract or resist. He noted that this made it even more important that the University adjusted its way of working to accommodate effectively this different set of circumstances. There needed to be a change in the way education and research were undertaken in order to protect quality while doing the best possible to mitigate the impact on workload. He noted that workloads were already high and less burdensome ways of working needed to be found.
- 50.2 Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science asked, from reading all the material connected with the current situation and from what had been said in the update, whether the Principal felt any sense of personal responsibility for the situation?
- 50.3 Responding the Principal confirmed that, as far as any of member of the University should, he did have a feeling of personal responsibility. He indicated that he felt that there were things which were known now that, had they been known before, might have resulted in things being done differently. He noted that there were things going back decades that the University might have done differently, but the current challenge was to ensure the University was not left behind and remained at the cutting edge of the sector and engaged with contemporary developments to ensure the University did not fall out of step with what was required to be successful.
- 50.4 Jo Anne Anderson, School of Divinity, History, Philosophy & Art History (DHPA) noted that the current situation required a lot of short-term decisions to be taken immediately and asked how

the University could avoid short-termism to ensure it remained best-placed to cope with hopefully better times ahead, including, as she had read, an increase in the number of 18-year olds coming with changing demographics. She noted the need not to be in a place where the University was unable to service future markets.

- 50.5 The Principal agreed that this was an important topic that he hoped would come up in discussion during the meeting. He noted the need to be thinking medium and long-term to ensure the ability to take advantage of the opportunities available; the need to ensure that the right resources were in place within the right parts of the University to take advantage of the opportunities presented. This might require some reallocation of resources to the areas where the opportunities were strongest. However, he noted that there were some things which must be done in the short-term that there was no choice about. The University must become financially sustainable, in accounting terms the University must be a 'going concern' to ensure partners were able to work with the University confident that it would be able to fulfil its part of any bargain, pay its suppliers and wages. In addressing these short-term pressures an eye needed to be kept on the medium term and the quality of education and research needed to be maintained because if this was not being done the University would be forgetting what it was there for.
- 50.6 Fred Byrne, School Convener, DHPA, noted that a student journalist from The Gaudie had had an information request refused as it was classed as vexatious and asked to what extent the Principal was committed to transparency for staff and students going forwards.
- 50.7 The Principal confirmed the commitment to transparency, taking all legal considerations into account, and noted there was no obligation to respond to vexatious requests.

FINANCIAL RECOVERY PLAN – OVERVIEW AND PROGRESS

- 51.1 Senate received a [presentation](#) from Mark White, Chief Financial Officer highlighting the key elements in the plan approved by Court in December and February and updating them on the current financial position and projections. Following the presentation there was the opportunity for questions and discussion.
- 51.2 Lesley Lancaster, School of Biological Sciences asked how the difference in fee income was split between home and international students.
- 51.3 The Principal confirmed that the reduction in fee income was almost entirely due to the reduction in international student numbers which continue to become smaller. This was so important to the University as the international students contribute, per student, a much greater part of the University's income than home students.
- 51.4 Lesley noted that she had misunderstood the slide as she had thought that fees were being reduced.
- 51.5 The Principal indicated that it was the total income from international fees that had reduced not the fee per student but there had been some adjustments to the scholarships available to ensure that the University remained attractive.
- 51.6 Martin Mills, School of Social Science asked that given the situation, what was the University's fundraising strategy?
- 51.7 The Principal confirmed that fundraising would continue to focus on the topics already attracting funding. He noted these included the five interdisciplinary challenges and separate school topics that continued to attract around £5M per year. He highlighted that Court in June would receive plans for a phased campaign which would be shared with the community after Court had met.
- 51.8 Martin noted that previous Principal, Professor Sir Duncan Rice, had raised £150M for the University during his tenure and prior to that at New York City he had raised just short of \$1billion. He noted that a lot of this was raised personally, the University Principal was the embodiment of the prestige, status and public benefit of the institution and the leverage of that

was a massive multiplier. Martin recalled, when he had first joined the University, Sir Duncan was hosting hospitality events in the Chanonry every week. He noted that at the current time the University did not have any similar activity and the planned campaign would need to be very ambitious.

- 51.9 The Principal agreed that this was correct.
- 51.10 Martin referenced comments made by the Principal in local press (P&J) about the possibility of selling the Principal's house which had been the main leverage facility for the previous hospitality cycle.
- 51.11 The Principal noted that many other universities managed to generate significant philanthropic contributions without having a residence for their Principal or Vice-Chancellor and he was not convinced that it was an asset to the extent Martin had indicated. He clarified that, in the P&J interview, he had not suggested selling the Chanonry but had said that all options had to be considered and when he had been asked if that was one of the options, he had confirmed it was.
- 51.12 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science asked if Senate would receive business cases for enhancing online learning and TNE. She suggested that these were things Senate would be keen to support but would wish to have sight of projected profits expected from investments in order to be able to do so.
- 51.13 The Principal confirmed that Senate would see the plans in terms of substance however, as was usual, the business cases were matters for the Senior Team.
- 51.14 Karin Friedrich, School of DHPA asked if there was a plan outlined for fundraising whether ideas coming forward from other members of the University would be accepted by the alumni team or other fundraising organisations. She noted she had experience of suggested fundraising activities being rejected because there weren't sufficient staff or resources. She asked whether the Senior Team recognised that in some instances there was a need to invest money in order to generate income. She noted her concern that a negative spiral of disinvestment was a real possibility.
- 51.15 The Principal expressed his hope that income generating ideas were not being pushed aside. He noted that the fundraising team, in common with the rest of the University, had had to adjust, and that their capacity too was limited and needed to be prioritised for the benefit of the whole University. The Team needed to prioritise the projects which were likely to generate the biggest returns financially and academically for the whole University rather than an individual discipline. He noted that all ideas would be considered but that it was not possible to back all ideas equally.
- 51.16 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences noted that everything in the presentation thus far had been about cost savings. There were regular updates about the Financial Recovery Plan (FRP) but noted that his constituents were keen to see the plan. He noted that if it was passed to Court without Senate having seen it, then Senate would not have had the opportunity to contribute to it and perhaps enhance or redirect things. He asked when Senate would see the plan.
- 51.17 The Principal replied to say that he thought it would be good to be able to keep Senate up to date as things progressed and update on new developments and examples of things which were working. As leading on the weekly updates, he asked the Senior Vice-Principal whether it would be possible to include more detail on initiatives on TNE and online activities which were proving productive.
- 51.18 Karl confirmed that the plan did include a rolling series of updates and those leading on initiatives, such as Jo-Anne who was leading on online, would be sharing what was being looked at and this would be the same for other areas such as TNE and fundraising. There would be an update on fundraising shortly. He had just met with the fundraising team and agreed that there were things which could be done to improve the communication and understanding of fundraising and the challenges faced by the team. He agreed that there was a lot that could be done to improve communication both with individual Directorates driving

income as with fundraising, and also with academic leadership of things like online and TNE and student recruitment. He also indicated that there would be an update on research activities.

- 51.19 The Principal sought clarification from Brice whether he was hoping to see examples of new initiatives so that they could be learnt from?
- 51.20 Brice indicated that updates indicated that 'things were progressing ok' but that staff did not know what those 'things' were other than the headline figures that had been provided. People did not know what was happening and he had not been able to tell them anything in addition to what they knew.
- 51.21 The Principal confirmed that there were lots of new developments that were promising, for example in TNE, but it was difficult to say a lot more about these as some of it was commercially confidential. The University had been approached by potential partners in other countries and those approaches had to be considered to decide whether or not they would work. However, if the stage were reached that something was to be taken forward then Senate would know about it.
- 51.22 Dragen Jovicic, School of Engineering noted that the presentation indicated that PGT income was projected to be reducing by 25% and yet one of the main strategies for income growth was to increase PGT income by growing the portfolio to increase student numbers. He noted that some schools already had significant PG numbers and a significant PGT portfolio and there was still management pressure to grow this further. He noted there were disadvantages to this strategy most obviously that resources were diverted from other activities such as research and undergraduate teaching. He asked whether there was a target ratio of PGT to undergraduate students or whether it was to increase PGT as much as possible.
- 51.23 The Principal clarified that the aim at the current time was to increase revenue as much as possible from the sources available. He indicated that target ratios, as described, did not exist and at the current stage of the finances of the sector he would not wish to be constrained by target ratios. He noted that it was now being suggested that the on-campus student numbers should be grown but rather the University was seeking to maintain the numbers it had or to maintain the current market share of international PGT students coming to the UK. He indicated that it was the total volume which was collapsing as a result of UK Government immigration policy and therefore the University must do its best to maintain or even improve its market share but that would still mean that the numbers had reduced.
- 51.24 Alan Macpherson, School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture (LLMVC) noted that one of the things which had been highlighted by the Principal as impacting on the financial position was interest rates and inflation. He noted recent indications that the Bank of England interest rates were expected to fall to the target 2% possibly within a month and that the Office for National Statistics had the current inflation rate in the UK a 3.4% which had been at least as high as 11% within the previous year. He asked to what extent the reduction in these rates impacted on the savings being sought within the University.
- 51.25 Responding Mark indicated that the high interest rates over the previous 12 to 18 months had actually been of great benefit to the University due to the borrowing taken out as private placements to fund the two projects of the Business School and the King's project and the healthy cash situation meant that the University was generating more income from this money than it was costing. Clearly, part of the Financial Recovery Plan had been to repay a large chunk of this so the net effect of this had been negligible. The final position of the debt renegotiation was still being worked through, so the outcome was not yet known, however, while there had been benefits from the high interest rates, the University would not suffer as a result of these coming down. Mark agreed that the double-digit inflation had had a significant impact particularly during 2023/24 at the start of the financial year resulting in significant increases in all areas of spending, including insurance which had nearly doubled, professional fees such as audit and all the areas on which the University spent; wage inflation had been another significant pressure during the last financial year and would continue to be so. The fall

in inflation had been reflected in the current financial projection however when approximately 75% of total spend was on salary costs, wage inflation was key. Some had been built-in, but this was an assessment and would clearly be impacted by the current negotiations. He noted that the falling interest rates were likely to be of benefit in terms of overall spend.

- 51.26 The Principal added that the debt which had been restructured had included a £40m loan from Barclays for the Duncan Rice Library which was a reminder that the £150m figure quoted by Martin and the previous campaign had included £40m that was borrowed to complete the library. He was not suggesting that he thought this was a good time to enter into another £40m of debt for a similar project, however if over the next ten years over £100m was raised by the philanthropic campaign that would be fantastic and then the University might be in a position to borrow money to complete projects underway at that time.
- 51.27 Chantal Den Daas, MMSN noted that a projected figure of £12M had been given as needing to be made through staff reductions and further noted that the promotions scheme for the current year had not been announced. She asked whether the promotions round was being skipped for the current year? If not, she further asked whether the criteria would remain the same and would there be a bias check as the decision makers were focused on making cost savings?
- 51.28 Responding, Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that the decision regarding proceeding with the promotions round would be taken as part of the budget position. He noted that there would be a 'lessons learned' exercise undertaken as part of the operation of the revised promotions processes but noted that he did not anticipate that there would be significant changes to the criteria following the recent major changes to the process. He noted that the promotions exercise had never been driven by the financial position of the University, unlike other institutions which operated a quota system for promotions.
- 51.29 Thomas Bodey, School of Biological Sciences noted that if PGT fees were dropped from £20,000 to £15,000 then three PGT students would generate more income than two. He reported significant frustration within the School that most neighbours and competitors charged significantly less for PGT programmes than the University whose fees have been described as 'unjustifiably high'. He asked why the University persisted with this approach when a reduction to the level of, for example St Andrews, would give the opportunity to maintain, or even grow, market share.
- 51.30 The Principal confirmed that the headline price of programmes had been under review as part of a review of scholarships offered.
- 51.31 Alan Speight, Vice-Principal (Global Engagement) noted that a fee benchmarking exercise was underway currently, including scholarships, to ensure net fees were in line with comparator institutions. He reported that this was a very thorough exercise which looked at comparisons at a programme and discipline level and then grouped the resulting fees and scholarships into bands. He noted that this bottom-up process was quite granular in its early stages and was expected to report in the near future.
- 51.32 Thomas queried which intake would benefit from any changes made.
- 51.33 Alan confirmed that, subject to the appropriate approvals, the changes would be implemented as soon as practicable. He noted that there was a lead time to take account of in marketing terms and hence would likely be too soon for September 2024 although scholarships could be changed more quickly than the advertised fees.
- 51.34 Miles Rothoerl, student Vice Chair for undergraduate education noted that any decisions on the University's financial recovery would likely have far-reaching implications for learning and the wider student experience. He asked whether senior management recognised the need for effective student engagement in the process and, if so, asked how this would be facilitated moving forward.
- 51.35 Jo-Anne Murray, Vice Principal (Education) confirmed that student representation was something she was working on, working with the Students' Association to determine where there was already student representation and identify where this should be increased. She

noted that although this work was underway this was something that it was intended to move quickly on. To ensure the student voice was present at every level.

- 51.36 Joachim Schaper, DHPA noted that he was aware that there was commercially sensitive material in everything that went to Court in terms of papers but noted that, in order to address the fact that colleagues felt underinformed regarding the financial plan, the actual shape of the financial plan and the papers which went to Court should be made available in redacted form to members of Senate. He suggested that this would address the issue under discussion.
- 51.37 The Principal noted that this would be a decision for Court and suggested that as a member of Court, Joachim could make the proposal to Court. [*Clerk's note: non-commercially sensitive papers are made available routinely to staff and students on the website following meetings of Court. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/court-information.php#faq1>*]
- 51.38 Malcolm Harvey, School of Social Science indicated that he wished to raise a motion proposing that two elected Senate members were elected as members of the Financial Recovery Group (FRG) as Senate had a key role in oversight of Education and Research which were not represented in the FRG and that members of academic staff directly involved in these functions should have input into the plans.
- 51.39 The proposal was seconded by Martin Mills, School of Social Science.
- 51.40 When the online and in-person votes were combined Senate voted to elect two elected members to be part of the Financial Recovery Implementation Group:

In favour	56
Not in favour	13
Abstain	2

- 51.41 Martin Barker, School of Biological Sciences commented that it was usual for there to be discussion of the motion before a vote is conducted.
- 51.42 The Principal concurred but noted that when he had asked for comments the only comment made had been to second the motion.
- 51.43 Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science asked who would be responsible for ensuring that this took place.
- 51.44 The Principal confirmed that he would initiate a process to look at the practicalities of implementing the motion.
- 51.45 Diane Skatun, School of MMSN asked for an indication of the likely timescale for the implementation of this.
- 51.46 The Principal indicated that he would raise this with the University Secretary and Senate would be informed of the likely timescale.
- 51.47 Ainhoa Burgos Aguilera, AUSA Vice-President for Communities noted that the Students' Association had been reassured in several meetings with the Senior Management Team (SMT) that Professional Services staff would not be hit disproportionately by staff reductions. She noted that from the figures included presented Professional Services would once again be hit hardest and she asked if there were plans to protect student-facing services and ensure fairness in the process.
- 51.48 The Principal confirmed that it was important to protect the quality of the services provided and that this did not necessarily require the same quantity of staff, but it was important to ensure that quality of the student experience was preserved. This had been made clear in communications about the reshaping of Professional Services.
- 51.49 Aravinda Guntupalli, School of MMSN asked, in the context of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) asked about how many applications had been accepted or rejected and whether any equality analysis had been undertaken. She noted that members of the Equality Strategy

Group had received reports that some staff had been subject to microaggressions during the process and the Group had determined that it would be good to undertake some analysis to ensure the process had operated appropriately. She detailed a further question relating to the data presented as part of the financial recovery plan detailing that the figures presented at the start had predicted a fall of 50% in PGT numbers and income until 2025 and asked if modelling had been undertaken for income for different levels of reduction.

- 51.50 Debbie Dyker, Director of People confirmed that EDI data had been collected throughout the process and that it would be analysed once the final figures were known.
- 51.51 Mark White, Chief Financial Officer noted that the 50% reduction referred to, was the projected year on year figure from the end of 2023 until 2025 while the 15-25% drop was the actual drop from 2023-2024 expected into 2024-2025.
- 51.52 Aravinda queried if the modelling was still ongoing as the exact situation was not known. She asked if different types of predictive modelling were being undertaken to plan for best- and worst-case scenarios.
- 51.53 Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal confirmed the process for setting expected student numbers began with detailed discussions with schools to look across two or three years. Current discussions had focused on two years due to the level of uncertainty. Figures were built up from what schools believed the likely position to be and built into the projection continuing students based on students who have yet to complete their programmes. He indicated that this was done for all categories of student UG, TNE, online, PGT and PGR. He noted PGT numbers were the most difficult to predict as the only continuing students were the January intake who would continue in September. Projected figures were produced drawing on the expertise of the Student Recruitment team who undertook a lot of modelling based on conversion factors, including geographical markets etc. Current predictions for 2025-2026 were at best expected to be flat and he noted that it would be very risky to predict any growth at the present time. He further noted that the predictions were kept under review and would be adjusted based on experience of what actually occurred in September but again stressed that predicting numbers of overseas students was always difficult and was particularly so for the next year.
- 51.54 Niels Imrie, School Convener, School of Biological Sciences indicated he wished to raise a motion to ensure that students were represented in any group considering restructuring at the University.
- 51.55 The Principal commented that the motion was too broad and suggested that a refined, specific motion was brought forward for consideration at the next meeting of the Senate Business Committee.

MANAGING IMPACT OF FINANCIAL PRESSURES ON EDUCATION

- 52.1 Senate received a [presentation](#) from Jo-Anne Murray, Vice Principal (Education) outlining some of the ways of working to minimise the impact of the financial pressures on educational provision.
- 52.2 Neil Vargesson, MMSN asked for an indication of how long the proposed processes for rationalising courses and programmes would take as the workload issues were current and how, having identified courses and programmes that might be withdrawn, could this be achieved quickly as University processes took so long to make this type of change.
- 52.3 Jo-Anne indicated that this could be achieved quickly if desired and she was willing to work with staff to see if things could be speeded up. She also indicated that better forward planning was desirable to enable the identification of new programmes coming on stream and to plan workloads effectively to free up time for the development of new TNE and Online opportunities.
- 52.4 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences noted that many staff had experience of remote teaching but not online teaching. He noted that there were online programmes starting in October and

existing staff would have left which would cause workloads to increase. He asked that training be provided on how to deliver online courses effectively without adding significantly to workloads.

- 52.5 Jo-Anne confirmed that this staff development would be available. She cited an example of an approach she had taken in the past: she had built an online course to teach staff how to deliver an online course. She had found that being an online student herself had been a good experience to learn what did or didn't work from a student perspective.
- 52.6 Alex also asked that MyAberdeen courses for the next year be set up as soon as possible to help with workload management.
- 52.7 Jo-Anne undertook to try to make this happen.
- 52.8 Euan Bain, School of Engineering commented that the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used currently was not fit for purpose for marking some types of work. It was designed with essays in mind and certainly not with any numerate assessments in mind. He further noted that any of the sciences which were not marked in a linear fashion were problematic as the VLE was not set up to deal with this. He suggested he was not aware of any suggestion that this was about to change. He noted that colleagues in the School of Engineering had come up with ways of dealing with this efficiently using technology for example the 'remarkable surface' but staff were now being prevented from using these by IT. The University was not permitting colleagues to use these devices which save a lot of time. In addition, colleagues were having to use their own budgets to buy these devices if they were able to use them. He asked that the policy be reviewed, and thought be given to the hardware staff were being provided with to execute their duties. Currently staff in some schools were not being provided with hardware that enabled them to do their jobs effectively which was a massive waste of resource. He asked whether it was possible for staff in professional services, particularly in this instance in IT, to try to help academics rather than hinder them.
- 52.9 Jo-Anne noted that Euan's example was a good one for showing how it might be possible for her to take the problem away and look at how the user experience of a service might be improved, and workloads reduced as a result.
- 52.10 Andrew McKinnon, School of Social Science asked at what point would a department or programme be considered business critical in terms of hiring staff. He noted his discipline, Sociology, had been doing everything in terms of making efficiencies and drafting in colleagues to help with workloads. He noted that on the basis of snapshot three, the current staff student ratio was 30. He suggested that on the basis of the best estimate available in terms of staff leaving after taking voluntary severance and students continuing into level four of the criminality programme, the ratio would likely be 37 which would be off the scale in terms of comparable Sociology departments. He suggested the department was managing to hold together with sticking plaster and bits of string, but this couldn't continue indefinitely. He asked at what level would it be acknowledged that what was needed was more staff.
- 52.11 Jo-Anne agreed it was a good question that should be discussed in terms of the current situation and also for determining how staff student ratios were managed for the future within the sector. There was a lot to do in terms at looking at ways of working to make that more manageable. She suggested that she should meet with Andrew to talk this through.
- 52.12 Karl Leydecker commented that this aspect was considered all the time by Heads of School when staff depart and Heads of School could come forward to identify that a particular post was required. He noted that there was not a complete and utter ban on recruitment. Cases were considered carefully where a need had been identified and a strong case made. He noted that there had been a number of discussions with Heads of School around this including which cases for voluntary severance could be accepted and which it had not been possible to accept. He noted that this was the usual route for this sort of discussion and further noted that it was good to involve Jo-Anne in those discussions, in terms of areas identified for expansion. He acknowledged that he was aware, through the Head of School, of the specific challenges within Andrew's discipline and that discussion would be continued.

- 52.13 Zeray Yihdego, School of Law noted that, in reviewing effectiveness and productivity Jo-Anne had highlighted recruitment and demand for undertaking such assessment and asked whether it would also be appropriate to consider research and expertise, noting that successful programmes are not created quickly, they take time. He queried whether there was a risk in focussing too much just on recruitment.
- 52.14 Jo-Anne clarified that the question was related to the development of programmes aligned with areas of research expertise. She confirmed that she worked closely with the Vice-Principal (Research) in this area and with the Interdisciplinary Deans to identify areas where there were opportunities and capacity. She noted that everything was interrelated and needed to be monitored to ensure that the 'pipeline' of new programmes operated effectively to enable prediction of resource requirements.
- 52.15 Sandie Cleland, School of Psychology asked about online courses and programmes in the context of the loss of the upskilling fund. She noted that this loss had the potential to impact severely on some courses which had benefitted from the 'free' recruitment provided by the fund: students who had initially undertaken a course covered by upskilling funding might have opted to stay and complete a further qualification. She asked to what extent this was being looked at and factored in when impacts on courses were being considered.
- 52.16 Jo-Anne agreed that the provision of this funding had been an attraction as well as the demand for the courses and programmes. She suggested that this needed to be factored in when planning was taking place for these courses, with the possibility of rethinking recruitment to these courses now that the upskilling money had been withdrawn. She indicated that a new strategy was needed for these courses.
- 52.17 Sandie agreed and suggested that potentially there would be nothing to prevent the University offering its own version of upskilling.
- 52.18 The Principal noted that there had been a lot of surprising and unfathomable aspects to the recent Scottish Funding Council (SFC) cuts. He further noted that the appointment of a new First Minister who had identified the economy and workforce development as his priorities at the same time as SFC was removing funding for upskilling for the sector was difficult to make sense of and expressed the hope that the upskilling funding might return in the future.
- 52.19 Xavier Martin Torres, School of Geosciences asked whether there would be a point where there were too many students undertaking online courses and who never came to campus? He asked what the impact would be if all the students became online students?
- 52.20 Jo-Anne expressed the view that she did not think there would come a time when there were no students wishing to study on campus. She noted that the on-campus students were a very different demographic from those who studied online and that those willing and able, in terms of other commitments, would likely continue to do so. She acknowledged the problems with on-campus recruitment needed to be addressed, but suggested that, from her experience, an online programme did not take away students from an identical on-campus version. She reassured Senate that, from her experience, providing online programmes would not take students away from campus provision.
- 52.21 Alan MacPherson, LLMVC noted that it was encouraging to hear Jo-Anne's ideas and plans for involving the community to work together. He noted that, in the context of what had taken place within Modern Languages, there had been a direct relationship between cutting programmes and cutting staff. He went on to ask about the requirement for 15 students on a course, and the impact this had on the viability of some programmes. He asked whether, in this context, there was recognition that one size did not fit all. He noted that he ran an MLitt programme currently with 13 students and that this programme would not meet this requirement and that there were courses within that programme which had smaller numbers. He noted that these individual courses were amongst those that attracted students to the programme which, within the School, was considered successful.
- 52.22 Jo-Anne noted that Alan had made a good point. She suggested that in normal circumstances numbers on programmes would be reviewed to determine whether resources were being

directed appropriately, but because the exercise currently was being conducted during a period of financial challenge, she understood why there might be a perception that it related to making staff savings. She articulated the need to ensure that relevant market contexts were understood to ensure that all the information was viewed together to identify if there were better opportunities that resource should be directed towards or whether there were reasons why conversion rates were not as high as they might be to ensure staff workloads were not unreasonably high with extra teaching and marking.

- 52.23 Chris Collins, Head of School LLMVC added that another approach which had been undertaken within the School successfully was to identify courses which might be utilised across several programmes and therefore increased numbers on individual courses. He noted the need to look holistically at these opportunities across the Institution not just within schools and asked whether Jo-Anne had view on this.
- 52.24 Jo-Anne agreed that this was something which should be looked at given current demands for interdisciplinary approaches. This was an area which needed further exploration to fully understand where the markets were.
- 52.25 Kirsty Kiezebrink, Dean for Educational Innovation noted that there were already activities in existence such as the award winning 'DTC' course (Designing and Teaching Online Courses) which was available to staff wishing to move into online delivery. She also highlighted the Online Education Forum for staff to come together and share practise noting that staff were not coming forward for this and it was being considered for discontinuation. She suggested that further advertising of this might be beneficial and maybe Senate members would be able to spread this information. In addition, in the context of reviewing courses and programmes, she highlighted that the University was running the excellent TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment) programme which looked at assessments and feedback and their alignment. She noted that there was a significant body of work available already which would be continued.
- 52.26 The Principal summarised that there were a few consistent messages which had come through discussion. Firstly, he highlighted the need to look at what other universities were doing and identify practises which had been adopted successfully elsewhere which could be utilised. Secondly, he noted that there were clearly different practises and good ideas within different schools and there was a need to ensure these practises and ideas were shared so that those that were working could be translated to other areas and disciplines. He noted that Jo-Anne had shown a list of ideas at the beginning of her presentation but had stressed that these were not the only ideas to mitigate workload pressures and that these should be explored where ideas had not worked in a specific scenario.

MANAGING IMPACT OF FINANCIAL PRESSURES ON RESEARCH

- 53.1 Senate received a [presentation](#) from Nick Forsyth, Vice Principal (Research) outlining the financial pressures being faced within research and the REF.
- 53.2 Before moving to discussions the Principal noted the need to finish the meeting promptly at 4pm.
- 53.3 Jen Walklate, School of Social Science suggested that discussion moved on to MLTI at that stage and that REF and REF stocktakes were brought to a future meeting, given the importance of the MLTI discussion.
- 53.4 The Principal noted that the REF was of importance to more of the University community, and hence he would take some questions on that.
- 53.5 Alex Brasier, School of Geosciences noted one issue being faced immediately was a significant loss of technical staff running laboratories in the sciences and he suggested there was a need for a swift review of lost expertise and institutional knowledge and an effective plan for running laboratories going forward needed to be developed. He asked whether this was planned and how it would work?

- 53.6 Nick highlighted that he had recently taken over responsibility for running the Technicians' Commitment Programme and confirmed this would be taken forward. He expressed the hope that his own laboratory background provided reassurance in this context.
- 53.7 Zeray Yihdego, School of Law noted that Nick had set out clearly the financial pressures being faced within research but asked about the psychological pressures and the morale pressures being faced by researchers. He also asked about the stocktake exercise and why whenever the exercise was undertaken it was not possible to include assessment of work in draft or not yet published and provide support for this.
- 53.8 Nick noted that many areas were moving to the model suggested in Zeray's second point and suggested that, if this wasn't happening in his own area, this should be something taken up with the School's Director of Research and Head of School as others were working to improve quality during research rather than leaving it until the end. He noted that in the instructions for the current stocktake it had been detailed that if, for example a monograph was in preparation and where chapters existed that someone should have looked at the chapters to provide an overall impression of the quality at that time. Nick noted the question around morale was a good one but indicated he did not have the answer to this at that point in time. He suggested that everyone was responsible for creating a positive work culture and providing the right support for colleagues when things were not going well. He highlighted the need to celebrate failure: an unsuccessful grant application was still an application submitted which was worthy of celebration and consideration in terms of how it might be improved and moved forward.
- 53.9 Zeray clarified that his School did have support for ongoing research but that the stocktake had been based on submitted work only.
- 53.10 Ilia, Xypolia, School of Social Science expressed concern at the suggestion that the MLTI concern might not be a University-wide concern. She noted that in the original agenda had allowed 60 minutes for that discussion and she asked for those 60 minutes to be reinstated.
- 53.11 The Principal indicated that although this might be desired, he needed to leave at 4pm and noted that the quicker discussion moved on the more time would be available.
- 53.12 Chantal den Daas, MMSN asked whether the apparent distain for small grants was the way to proceed noting that small grants were still grants and would this approach not risk harming the Early Career Researchers (ECR) who were still building expertise and using a small grant to work towards a bigger grant. She asked whether it was appropriate to appreciate all grants regardless of size.
- 53.13 Nick apologised if his words had been taken to indicate distain for small grants. He acknowledged the importance of small grants. He noted the reference to ECRs and that there were ECR specific grants across all disciplines. He suggested that there was a need to move focus away from just making small grant applications and not following on to the larger grant. That model could be reversed with the big grant application being followed up with the smaller funders.
- 53.14 The Principal highlighted the importance of one of Nick's points which had detailed that the income from international student fees was no longer available to cross-subsidise research and that this must be compensated for by finding other sources of research grant income.

LESSONS LEARNT: MODERN LANGUAGES CONSULTATION

- 54.1 Debbie Dyker, Director of People provided an update on the next steps in the 'Lessons Learnt Exercise' as part of the Change Management Process managed by the Joint Committee on Redundancy Avoidance (JCCRA) noting the Committee included both representatives from Management as well as from the Trade Unions. She confirmed that, in line with the Policy, the Modern Languages process had been managed by a sub-group of JCCRA, chaired by Greg Gordon from the School of Law. She noted there were five key steps to the Policy with the fifth and final step being centred on consolidation and learning. The purpose of this being centred around evaluating and understanding two key facts: whether the original objectives had been

met and any lessons which could be learned for the future. She indicated that stage five was currently being progressed. She reported that Greg Gordon had agreed to take forward the review and that terms of reference had been drafted and consulted on through JCCRA and revised in light of the feedback received. She noted that colleagues in Modern Languages had also provided feedback and extended her thanks to Nadia, Trevor and Patience in particular for their input into finalising the terms of reference. She noted that as part of the review it was anticipated that a wide range of stakeholders would be consulted including colleagues from Modern Languages and student representatives. She confirmed that external support would be available to Greg should that be appropriate and relevant for him. She noted that Senate had received a copy of a paper submitted by colleagues in Modern Languages and that this would also be included as part of the review. She highlighted that the original intention had been to have the review concluded by the end of June, however, following the consultation on the terms of reference for the review, which had resulted in these being extended, the time available had been extended until the end of August to allow time for due diligence within the review. She indicated that to rush the review would not permit sufficient time for appropriate consideration. Debbie indicated that the terms of reference would return to JCCRA on 14 May for final sign-off, following which Greg would commence the review. The report would inform JCCRA and SMT of any recommendations for policy change going forward, and these would also be provided to Court.

54.2 The Principal asked whether the recommendations would also be considered at Senate.

54.3 Debbie confirmed that this would be the case.

54.4 Tom Rist, LLMVC welcomed the opportunity to discuss matters which has been felt deeply within his School and across the University. He noted the concerns were developed in detail in the MLTI consultation document, that had been authored by colleagues within MLTI. He noted that these formed the substantive basis for the discussion at Senate. He highlighted the following key points to Senate:

- Communication – how effective and continuous had this been during the process?
- EDI – to what extent had this been neglected or enforced during the process?
- Stress – what consideration of the stress colleagues were placed under before, during and after the process and what might be done to improve things?
- Why MLTI? – of all the units in the School and the University why was this unit singled out?
- Financial assessment of disciplines – clarity was requested on University rules and procedures for this assessment.
- Strategy – especially for the Humanities and Social Sciences, what strategies for these disciplines were going to be employed going forward?

He thanked Senate in advance for their thoughts on these points and the MLTI Consultations document.

54.5 The Principal noted that Tom had made some good points for the review to consider and the wider points made regarding strategy for the whole range of disciplines, not just Humanities, which went further than the remit of the review but if they were relevant to the review he was happy to see them taken into account and this would be for the review team to consider.

54.6 Karin Friedrich, DHPA proposed a motion requesting:

That the membership of the lessons learned process in MLTI be expanded to include elected academic and student members of the Senate and at least one external member to chair the process.

She noted that there was a general feeling that individuals that were deeply involved with the processes in MLTI should not be chairing the lessons learnt process.

54.7 The Principal noted that as far as he was aware the review was not being led by someone involved directly in the MLTI process. He noted that there was an existing process to follow under the terms described by Debbie. He indicated that the rules could not be rewritten by

Senate as it did not hold that power. The Principal indicated that Senate might pass a motion but that would not change a process which had a set of rules associated with it.

- 54.8 Debbie confirmed that this position was correct and that the process for managing the process was through JCCRA. She noted that concerns had been raised by colleagues in MLTI in relation to externality and she confirmed that there was a commitment for Greg to draw on external advice when required throughout the course of the review. She also confirmed that the points raised by Tom, were already included in the terms of reference as they had been drafted.
- 54.9 Tom thanked Debbie for the reassurance and noted he had hoped that his introductory comments would generate input from Senate colleagues from across the University and that this was something his School colleagues would welcome.
- 54.10 The Principal indicated that he was not seeking to prevent Karin from raising a motion but rather to highlight that it may not have any validity or impact to displace an established process without a motion going to JCCRA to replace the existing process.
- 54.11 Karin confirmed that she was not seeking to question the process but rather to add to the composition of the group undertaking the review.
- 54.12 The Principal indicated that this could be considered and whether this could fall within the terms of the process and would not introduce any conflicts of interest.
- 54.13 Jo Hicks, School of Education thanked the Principal for the opportunity for the meeting to have taken place. He noted his understanding that the terms of reference had still to be confirmed and suggested that JCCRA could take a view from Senate into consideration. He further noted his understanding from colleagues in MLTI that the question of an external member was something under discussion and it had not been ruled out. He highlighted that a number of colleagues had expressed concern around the leadership of the review, and that there might be a perception that an internal leader might feel constrained from making certain comments due to their own line manager. Countering this perception was why an external chair might be considered to be helpful.
- 54.14 André Justin Carpio, School of Medicine Convener commented from the perspective of an observer from another part of the University that the process had been an absolute shambles. He noted that communication and a hasty process had damaged public perception. He commented that many staff perceived that they had been betrayed by the communication and voluntary severances. He asked the Principal whether the Senior Management Team would agree that trust had been lost due to the way the MLTI consultation had been conducted.
- 54.15 Responding the Principal noted that in some parts, and in some respects, trust had been lost and that he expected that the review would help to rebuild it.
- 54.16 Rhiannon Ledwell, Vice-President (Education) noted that despite the review there had been a loss of trust amongst staff and students. She noted that one of the major issues had been the lack of transparency and lack of consequences after the fact. Students perceive that there were no consequences built in to the process for members of the steering group carrying out what may be perceived as very damaging processes. She noted the transparency and partnership issues were significant for the student body. She queried why the MLTI paper had been considered unsuitable initially for inclusion at Senate as it was one-sided when many papers considered at Senate might be regarded that way. She also asked why students had had to resort to going to Parliament to ensure their representation and noted that even with Government pressure this had been denied. She suggested that it had been refreshing to hear the Principal say at a recent meeting that some undermining of quality would be inevitable as a consequence of the staff cuts, as this was something already being experienced by some students where staff were leaving part way through the term following Voluntary Severance (VS). Students were tired of hearing that their education and quality would not be affected when it was already before anything had been implemented. She noted the view that the process was driven by numbers rather than academic quality. She reported on a focus group she had held with a variety of language students where it had emerged that students were very concerned about the impacts the cuts would have in the next academic year and she suggest

students would need a lot of reassurance. She noted that for category one languages it takes between 600 and 700 class hours to reach a high level of proficiency a level that the University was already below before the cuts. She acknowledged the University was in a difficult situation and suggested that one positive which might be drawn from the paper would be to vote to support a sustained, public marketing campaign for the MLTI programmes through the next three recruitment cycles to regain market share in languages and to repair reputational damage caused by the consultation.

- 54.17 The Principal thanked Rhiannon for her contribution and confirmed that a record of the meeting of Senate would be made available to the review group.
- 54.18 Fred Byrne, School Convener DHPA asked whether there would be a mechanism for students who were not members of Senate to feed into the lessons learned exercise.
- 54.19 Debbie confirmed it would need to be considered as there was no existing mechanism for this to be carried out. She noted it was clear that it was needed but as yet the mechanism had not been determined.
- 54.20 Dave Cornwell, School of Geosciences reported that from a different school his constituents were asking whether it would be different for their school? He was supportive of the lessons learned exercise but asked if they would be learnt before the next process required would be embarked upon.
- 54.21 The Principal confirmed that if this were to be required the lessons would definitely be learnt first. He noted that at the current point he hoped that this would not be required again.
- 54.22 Doug Martin, Head of School Psychology noted that colleagues had reacted with a huge amount of empathy for those affected and a huge amount of concern for their own disciplines. He noted the need for engagement with the review and to learn lessons. He suggested that this was required fundamentally because the University needed to change and that this would affect everyone. There was a need to be realistic and for the academic and student body to come together to make the best possible changes for the future. He noted that the lessons learnt would be hard for everyone, but they needed to be embraced as the financial situation did not appear to be getting better any time soon.
- 54.23 Diane, Skatun, MMSN noted from talking to constituents suggested that people had been concerned about the speed at which everything in languages had taken place. The concern within the School was that, despite reassurances from the Head of School that the School was alright that things might change suddenly, and this was the biggest concern she was hearing. She also noted from Senate's perspective the consultation exercise could have made more use of mechanisms already in existence such as the Education and Research Committees as part of normal agendas to think about some of the implications of closing some of the programmes across the University. She asked that for any future process use be made of existing mechanisms.
- 54.24 The Principal noted that he was not responding to Diane's point directly as this was for the review.
- 54.25 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences commented from the perspective of feeding into matters to be considered by the review and asked why, if there had been concern in the previous year, had this not been communicated to the School or the specific discipline involved. There had been a lack of transparency. They should have been made aware of the level of concern. Going forward, Schools and Disciplines needed to be made aware of concerns in a timely fashion. He recalled from his early years on Senate that data had been a massive problem. Important data provided centrally and used to make important decisions were repeatedly disputed by schools. He noted that this had occurred with MLTI before a reasonably agreed data set was confirmed. Staff in other schools were concerned that inaccurate data were being used to make decisions about their future. He further noted that this had been a problem within the University for a decade or more. He suggested that if a recommendation from Senate was to go to JCCRA that in term of perception he felt that an external chair would be useful. The process had to be seen to be honest. It was not good enough to say that there had been a mix

up with data when it was known that data was a long-term problem within the Institution. In view of this he suggested that staff would be more reassured if there were to be an external chair.

54.26 The Principal noted that Brice had made several references regarding the accuracy of the data and who had known what and when and confirmed that he expected that the review would get to the bottom of this.

54.27 Ilia Xypolia, School of Social Science asked that the meeting moved to a vote on Karin's motion.

54.28 It was confirmed that the motion wording was:

Senate requests that membership of the lessons learnt process in MLTI be expanded to include academic and student members of Senate and at least one external member to chair the process.

54.29 When the online and in-person votes were combined Senate voted on the motion to recommend to JCCRA that the lessons learnt group be expanded to include two elected members of Senate and an external member to chair:

In favour	49
Not in favour	12
Abstain	9

54.30 Closing the meeting, the Principal indicated that the view of Senate would be communicated to JCCRA and that the outcome of the review would be brought back to Senate