

## THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

## ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minute of the meeting held on 18 June 2019 (2.00pm – 4.10pm).

**Present:** Professor J Harper (Chair), Mr M Abibo, Dr H Ahriz, Dr I Arana, Dr P Bremner, Professor D Cairns, Dr D Cockburn, Dr S Cunningham, Ms L Curtis, Dr G Droubi, Mr E Eke, Professor P Hagan, Professor E Hancock, Dr D Hill, Dr A Lamb, Ms J Leith, Professor D McClean, Professor G McConnell, Mrs D Mitchell, Professor I Murray, Dr E Rey-Marmonier, Mr M Shepherd, Professor J Steel, Mrs V Strachan, Ms J Tait and Dr A Weidmann.

**Apologies:** Dr I Agouris, Ms P Andia, Ms J Bisset, Mr J Buckley, Dr N Connon, Mr T Dounas, Professor E Gammie, Mr A Johnston, Dr M Leon, Professor K Mackinnon, Professor J McCall, Ms J Royle, Mrs L Sharp and Professor S Vertigans.

**In Attendance:** Mr J Dunphy and Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary).

1. MINUTE	Action
Academic Council <b>approved</b> the <i>Minute of the meeting held on 12 March 2019 [AC/19/2]</i> , and noted a <i>Matters Arising Report</i> .	
1.1 <b>Student Partnership and Engagement [AC/19/2/3]</b>	
Council was advised there had been greater promotion of those students who had received <i>Engagement and Partnership Awards</i> in 2019.	
1.2 <b>Outcome Agreement [AC/19/2/4.2]</b>	
The Director of Planning and Policy confirmed a commentary regarding the intake targets for the controlled subject of Pre-registration Nursing and Midwifery had been incorporated into the <i>Outcome Agreement</i> .	
1.4 <b>Academic Calendar [AC/19/2/7]</b>	
Since Council's last meeting, when it had considered feedback that suggested the long interval between the end of the formal teaching and assessment period in semester 1 (17 December 2018) and the start of semester 2 (28 January 2019) may have led, in some areas, to problems with student re-engagement, further feedback had been sought from the Schools. It was evident from this feedback there was no clear consensus to bring the start of semester 2 forward by a week. Council <b>agreed</b> , therefore, to seek further feedback from staff and students following another cycle, i.e. in semester 2 of Session 2019-20.	Mrs V Strachan Academic Council Holding File [11.03.20]
2. <b>CHAIR'S REPORT</b>	
In a change of approach, the Chair had taken the opportunity to revise the purpose of his routine "Chair's Report" to Council to provide a brief update on key in-session activities and performance indicators, primarily considered by the Board, and on a few quality-related items. Although Board Minutes were published once approved, it was felt this would be a more immediate means of communicating items of shared interest. This included advising on the main items that had been approved or considered by the Board at its meeting on 28 March 2019, and highlighting some of the significant items for consideration or approval at this forthcoming Board meeting.	

Council was also reminded that the University's preparations for its Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR 4), being held in Spring 2021, would commence imminently.

### 3. BUSINESS PLAN

Council noted the third quarter report on progress with the delivery of actions in the *Business Plan 2018-19*, prior to its submission to the Board of Governors, and was advised a full year report would be circulated to Academic Council members in October 2019. Council also noted a draft *Business Plan 2019-20 – 2021-22*, and was informed a slightly updated version was being submitted to the Board on 27 June 2019. The next step in the planning process was for Schools and Departments to prepare plans that were aligned to the strategic aims.

Dr D Cockburn

The University's focus would be on securing core funding in the most efficient way, and placing greater emphasis on the raising commercial income through the upskilling agenda. This would require the University to be adaptable, professional, and operate with simple but effective processes.

It was anticipated the [Augar Post-18 Review of Education and Funding](#) would have a detrimental impact on Scottish universities: it had recommended that the maximum fees for students should be reduced to £7,500 a year and whilst the Westminster Government would cover the difference in fee income for English institutions, no such clarity was currently available for rUK students studying in Scotland.

The development of master's level apprenticeships was uncertain due to funding uncertainties. It was noted that the funding for graduate apprenticeships that was distributed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) currently originates from the European Union, and therefore future funding beyond any Brexit remained unclear at this time.

### 4. UNIVERSITY RESPONSES TO NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Council considered the implications of a number of national initiatives that had been raised through Universities Scotland. These included:

- the sector-wide adoption of a *Fair Admissions Statement* and a *Qualifications-Related Statement*, in addition to a number of specific actions for institutions related to applicants' personal statements;
- the sector-wide adoption of the following definition of "Care Experienced Learners", as well as recommended actions for institutions, as part of an increasing range of widening access categories that also included veterans/recent service leavers, and estranged students:

*The term 'Care experienced' refers to anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life, no matter how short, including adopted children who were previously looked after. Care may have been provided in one of many different settings, such as in residential care, foster care, kinship care, or looked after at home with a supervision requirement.*

Verification of the status of people within the access categories had to be prudent, proportionate and in line with the University's values;

- institutions were being encouraged to consider signing the *Stand Alone Pledge* to develop support for estranged students at their institution. Council **agreed** the University should commit to the *Stand Alone Pledge*, and undertake an immediate review of the *Pledge's* requirements; and
- recent developments within the sector regarding gender-based violence, including work to revise the Universities UK/Pinsent Masons *Guidelines on how to handle Student Misconduct which may also constitute a criminal offence (2016)*. The Assistant Chief Academic Officer would liaise with the Director of Student Life in respect of ensuring a continuous high profile of the University's activities in relation to GBV.

Prof E Hancock

## 5. ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Council noted a number of items of strategic and developmental business considered by the Academic Development Committee at its meeting held on 16 May 2019:

- *business development:*
  - two new Graduate Apprenticeships had been validated without conditions in May 2019, and Graduate Apprenticeship recruitment was going to plan;
  - there were opportunities for engineering courses in Senegal;
  - significant funding had become available creating opportunities to increase the number of knowledge transfer partnerships (KTPs);
  - work was continuing in Mexico and representatives from Business and Economic Development had visited in May 2019 to meet with a range of partners;
- *demand for Scottish higher education:* using data from Scottish Government forecasts, the Department for Strategy, Planning and Policy was analysing the number of 17/18 year olds who potentially could apply for university in each academic year to 2028. This would assist with the strategy and medium term student number planning;
- *CPD/short courses/micro-credentialing:* there would be a corporate RGU approach to micro-credentialing to ensure: that products were cost effective and marketed efficiently; they embedded quality and effective pedagogy; and delivered a positive learning experience which encouraged repeat purchase. Development work was underway and further reports would be made to the Senior Management Group;
- *applications and enrolments:* a range of marketing activity was discussed in relation to meeting targets for recruitment of SFC undergraduate on-campus students. With regard to international on-campus and online students and UK/EU online students, there had been some modest growth in recruitment, which could be attributed to increased effectiveness in marketing activity. A new dashboard to visualise ratios of offers to acceptances ("conversion") was demonstrated. There were a range of filters to define applications and enrolments, including: geography; year to date; individual courses, and stages. More filters would be added during further development work. The dashboard was available in *RGU: Insight* to all relevant staff;

- *Marketing/Recruitment strategy updates:* Marketing strategy for online provision and postgraduate full-time on-campus recruitment had been approved in March 2019. The new applications to enrolments dashboard had allowed the Marketing team to see the impact of marketing activity and to adjust this if necessary. Updates were also provided on recruitment activity in China, India and Nigeria. Work was also progressing in Mexico.

## 6. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

### 6.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Council considered a report of the meeting held on 29 May 2019.

#### 6.1.1 Quality Events

Academic Council **approved** the *Validation, Review, Approval and Professional Body Event Outcomes* for onward submission to the Board of Governors.

Board of  
Governors  
[27.06.19]

#### 6.1.2 Academic Regulations

Academic Council **approved** the following amendments, endorsed by the Committee (and as recorded in QAEC/19/4/6.1), with effect from September 2019:

Governance and  
Academic Quality  
(Ms L Jack)

(i) *Disclosure of Criminal Convictions: Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment, paragraph 1.*

(ii) *Appeals Procedure for Applicants: Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment, Schedule 2.1.*

(iii) *Transfer of Enrolment to Another Course: Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment<sup>1</sup>.*

(iv) *Regulation A3 – Section 2: Student Misconduct Procedure: Regulation A3 - Section 2* be amended to reflect that all misconducts would be investigated by the relevant Head of School.

Council **agreed** it would be appropriate for the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee to oversee a project reviewing the Academic Regulations and their relevance/application to graduate apprenticeships. Furthermore, it was **agreed** that the GA Course Leaders' group, convened by the Head of Learning Teaching Development, should discuss and make recommendations to the Sub-Committee in the first instance.

Academic  
Regulations  
Sub-Committee  
Mrs V Strachan &  
Ms L Jack

Ms J Strachan

#### 6.1.3 Compositions and Memberships

Academic Council **approved** amendments to the composition of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, and **agreed** *Organisational Regulation O4* be revised accordingly.

Mrs F McLean  
Whyte

<sup>1</sup> Regulation A2: Admission retitled *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment* from Session 2019-20 and the Regulation relating to course transfer would be relocated from *Regulation A1: Courses* to *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment*.

#### 6.1.4 Items for Noting

The following additional items were noted:

- *Institution-Led Subject Review*: the Committee's approval of the *Interim Review: Engineering (Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Oil and Gas Engineering)*;
- *Institution-Led Subject Review*: the Committee's approval of the *Interim Review: Art and Design*;
- *Student Engagement and Partnership: Session 2018-19*: the Committee's consideration of reports on *Student Engagement with Quality* and the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*;
- *Personal Tutor System*: the Committee's consideration of a report from the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee, which had subsequently led the Committee to decide that monitoring of the effectiveness of the personal tutor system would be incorporated into the *Annual Appraisal Process* undertaken by the School Academic Boards;
- *RGU Signature Pedagogy Working Group*: the update received by the Committee on progress with the development of the University's *Pedagogy Statement*;
- *Compositions and Memberships*: the Committee's approval of changes to the compositions of the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee and the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee.

#### 6.2 External Examiner Appointments

In respect of nominations received from the School Academic Boards, Council:

- **approved** 22 new appointments, 8 extensions to duties and 10 re-allocation of duties; and
- **ratified** 1 new appointment.

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Academic Quality

### 7. RESEARCH

#### 7.1 Research Committee

Council considered a report of the meeting held on 8 May 2019.

##### 7.1.1 Committee's Composition

Academic Council **approved** amendments to the composition of the Research Committee, and **agreed** *Organisational Regulation 04* be revised accordingly.

Mrs F McLean  
Whyte

##### 7.1.2 Items for Noting

Council noted the Committee's discussions of recent developments and issues, including:

- *Research Excellence Framework (REF)*: the Committee's discussion of the draft *RGU Code of Practice for Equality and Diversity*, and the status of preparations;
- *Research Strategy and Research Investment*: the Committee's discussion of recent developments;

- *Researcher Development*: the recent appointment of Ms Lesley Dickson as Research Training Coordinator, and recent developments for early- and mid-career researchers.

## 7.2 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meeting held on 15 May 2019.

### 7.2.1 Conferral of Awards

Academic Council **approved** the awards to the undernoted students, and **agreed** the students and their supervisory teams be congratulated:

Graduate School

- (i) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Yoke Yie Chen, School of Computing Science and Digital Media with effect from 20 May 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis for Social Recommender Systems".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Jérémie Clos, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 05 June 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Representation and Learning Schemes for Argument Stance Mining".
- (iii) The degree of MRes be conferred on Ms Malatl Hellandendu, School of Creative and Cultural Business with effect from 30 May 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Planning families in Zaria: an investigation into the information-seeking behaviours and favoured advice-givers of parents in northern Nigeria".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Tesnime Jebara, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 8 May 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A study of the development of frameworks of pharmacist prescribing in Qatar".
- (v) The degree of DPP be conferred on Ms Joan MacLeod, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 19 February 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An exploration of the medication related experiences of community dwelling adults with learning disabilities".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Ikechukwu Nkisi-Orji, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 9 January 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Ontology Driven Information Retrieval".
- (vii) The degree of MRes be conferred on Ms Charlotte Pace, School of Nursing and Midwifery, with effect from 12 March 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Co-creation of guiding principles and a practical framework for a Midwifery Continuity of Carer model: A Cooperative Inquiry with midwives".

This brought the total number of research degree awards conferred in Session 2018-19 to 30.

### 7.2.2 Items for Noting

The following items considered by the Committee were noted:

- *SITS Continuous Improvement Project (eVisioning the PgR journey) – Online Research Student Management System*: the Graduate School was continuing to work with the SITS Continuous Improvement Team on development of the above system, which was taking longer than previously anticipated. Individual research student events would be road tested with users when available;
- *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2019*: the Graduate School was liaising with DELTA in terms of developing an internal questionnaire, that utilised SITS, for 2019;
- *Graduate School Symposium 2019*: in conjunction with the University's Research Week, the above event would run on 19 June 2019.

## 8. COMMITTEE EVALUATION

This was the third and last Council meeting of the session, and the end of the first year of operation with its new and extended composition; the *Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016* prescribed that more than 50% of the membership had to be elected staff and students, and at least 10% had to be elected students. Council was advised that this was an opportune time to reflect on Council's remit and calendar of business, which had remained unchanged despite the extended composition, and also reflect on those of its main Standing Committees: Academic Development Committee, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, Research Committee, and Research Degrees Committee. This was in recognition of the fact that for many of the new members, particularly the student members, there had been a steep learning curve in understanding Council's business, and its interactions with its Standing Committees. The review of the remits and calendars of business would be undertaken over the summer period.

## 9. VALEDICTORY

Academic Council extended its thanks for the valuable contributions of the following members who were demitting at the end of their terms of office: Mr Abibo, Ms Andia, Mr Eke, Mr Johnston, Ms Leith and Dr Weidmann.

## 10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 19 November 2019 at 2.00pm in H230, The Ishbel Gordon Building.

Professor John Harper, C

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