

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

Minute of the meeting held on 14 March 2023 (2.00pm – 3.30pm).

**Present:** Professor L Kilbride (Presiding), O Akinoso, A Ayub, L Binnie, Dr B Bjeirmi, M Bryce, Professor A Chan, H Christie, J Clifford, Dr D Cockburn, M Coull, L Curtis, W Deegan, Professor E Gammie, Dr S Henderson, Dr J Isaacs, Dr N Johnson, Dr P Johnston, Professor A Lamb, S Macpherson, Dr C McCulloch, P Moran, A Murray, Dr J Royle, V Strachan, Dr M Victoria, Professor S Walsh and Dr M Zarb.

**Apologies:** Dr C Air, Dr A Butler-Warke, C Campbell, Professor S Dawkes, Professor N Fyfe, Dr E Ibeke, T Kouider, T Lampkin, L Mifsud, Professor S Olivier, T Pirie, Dr C Thompson, Professor S Vertigans, R Westwater and M Wilschnack.

**In Attendance:** F Antoniazzi, F McLean Whyte (Secretary) and J Nicol.

**Welcome:** New members were welcomed to their first meeting of Academic Council.

**1. MINUTE**

Action

Academic Council **approved** the *Minute of the Academic Council meeting held on 15 December 2022*.

F McLean Whyte

**1.1 Strategic Discussion [Standing Item]: RGU+ [AC/23/1/4 referred]**

A presentation on “RGU Local” would be made by the Vice-Principal for Research and Community Engagement at Council’s next meeting.

Prof N Fyfe  
Holding File  
[13.06.23]**1.2 Academic Progression [AC/23/1/6.3 referred]**

Work was progressing on implementing the planned changes.

**2. CHAIR’S REPORT**

Academic Council noted the customary report from the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, which was based on a similar report provided to the recent meeting of the Board of Governors.

**3. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION [STANDING ITEM]: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)**

Council received an informative presentation on the *Potential Impact of AI in Student Learning and Assessment* from Dr John Isaacs.

Generative AIs were specifically designed to generate new content, to learn patterns and relationships in existing data, and use that knowledge to create new content that was similar in style to what they had been trained on.

Examples of AIs included:

- ChatGTP: a chatbot built around open-ai Davinci engine, <https://chat.openai.com/chat> and <https://platform.openai.com>
- Dall-E / MidJourney / Stable Diffusion: Image Generation, <https://labs.openai.com>
- HuggingFace: free access to multiple AI models, <https://huggingface.co>
- Jenni.ai: Text Completion, <https://app.jenni.ai/>
- Synthesia: AI Presenter, <https://www.synthesia.io/free-ai-video-demo> and <https://share.synthesia.io/61b5ea63-90e0-4334-8fc3-c42593c9781d>

Currently there was a dichotomy of views in academia whether AIs were a concern and a threat to academic integrity, or provided opportunities that should be embraced. Some higher education institutions were banning their use completely, whilst others were providing training on their use, diversifying assessment types to integrate their use.

Opportunities:

- generative AIs were very effective summarisers and analysers for large amounts of data;
- they could produce examples for a range of subject areas based on their training set. For ChatGPT, this was a large portion of the web prior to 2021;
- they could help with practice for conversational type assessments (e.g. vivas) or debate/discussion generation;
- they could provide feedback on written work, including helping with grammar, spelling, vocabulary and sentence structure.

Drawbacks:

- they were not always correct;
- they were limited by their own training set;
- they could be unpredictable;
- they could be used to produce work that was not the student's own.

It was important, however, to be aware of the myths that circulated, largely arising from poor understanding of AI.

In discussion, the following was considered:

- *Turnitin* would shortly release updates to improve detection.
- The larger the training set used, the lesser the risk of discriminatory or threatening material being generated.
- A detailed email had been issued to all staff on 14 February 2023 advising of the actions being taken by the University to consider the impact of AIs on teaching, learning and assessment. A meeting was also being held on 6 April 2023 to further

plan the University's approach, including the swift development of guidance for staff, policy and procedure.

- The Digital Learning Lead in DELTA had recently attended a conference which had encouraged the sector to take advantage of the opportunities, and also highlighted the sector's duty to teach its students how to use and understand AI in order to prepare them for the workplace of the future.
- It was considered likely that AI would be integrated into Bloom's Taxonomy at some point in the near future. It was also suggested this would facilitate students in the creative industries convey ideas and concepts.
- Although academic integrity was a genuine concern, there were opportunities to develop smarter and more authentic assessments. The University would, however, need to be mindful of the views of the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and, where possible, avoid reverting back to closed-book exams.

Academic Council **agreed** the University should embrace the opportunities provided by AI, and not ban its use for staff or students. This would be the position that would be used as a basis for the University's guidance as it was developed.

Prof L Kilbride

## 4. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

### 4.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meetings held on 28 February 2023.

#### 4.1.1 *Academic Regulations Sub-Committee: Regulation A3 – Section 1: Student Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure – Grounds for Appeal*

The revisions to *Regulation A3 – Section 1: Student Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure – Grounds for Appeal [paragraph 6.5]* were designed to simplify the language of the Grounds for Appeal. It was observed students frequently ticked both boxes ((i)(a) and (b)) declaring either physical or mental incapacity which would indicate a lack of understanding of the grounds. The use of the word 'computational' was confusing and often a student related it to IT difficulties as opposed to an error on the part for the University.

Academic Council **approved** *Regulation A3 – Section 1: Student Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure – Grounds for Appeal [paragraph 6.5]* be amended, from Session 2023/24, to read:

Governance and  
Academic Quality

- 6.5 (i) that there is exceptional and compelling justification, which can be evidenced, that the student was experiencing such physical or mental incapacity as to prevent the student from notifying the School by submitting a *Coursework Extension Request* or a *Deferral Request*, and/or undertaking the assessment;
- (ii) that there had been a material procedural or administrative error;

- (iii) that the assessment was not conducted in accordance with the current regulations governing the course.

#### 4.1.2 Quality Events

Academic Council **endorsed** the *Quality Event Outcomes* report for onward submission to the Board of Governors.

#### 4.1.3 Items for Noting

The following additional items were noted:

- *Enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Assessment*: the Committee received an update on the Enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Action Plans for 2020/21 and 2021/22;
- Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Review: the Committee approved interim responses from the following Schools:
  - The School of Applied Social Studies, in respect of the *Psychology, Social Work and Sociology* Review: November 2019;
  - The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice in respect of the *Midwifery, Nursing, and Paramedic Practice* Review: October 2019; and
  - The Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment in respect of the *Architectural Technology, Architecture, Business and Management, Land, Construction, Real Estate and Surveying* Review: November 2019.
- *Institution-Led Subject Review: Executive Summary*: the Committee approved the *ILSR Executive Summary Report* from Gray's School of Art in respect of the *Art and Design* Review which was held on 26 and 27 October 2022;
- *Impact Assessment Project*: the Committee received updates on the Impact Assessment Project and the roll out of the Inclusive Curriculum Tool as a pilot;
- *Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee*: the Committee had considered updates from the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee.
- *Student Experience Sub-Committee*: the Committee had also considered updates from the Student Experience Sub-Committee.

## 4.2 External Examiner Appointments

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

- **approved** nine appointments, 16 extensions of duties, two re-allocations of duties; and
- **ratified** three appointments and two re-allocations of duties.

## 5. RESEARCH

### 5.1. Research Committee

Council noted the following items from the report of the meeting held on 1 November 2022:

- Convener’s Report: the Committee received updates on the following areas: Interdisciplinary Research Theme Champions; University Alliance Co-Funding of PhD Studentships; Launch of National Subsea Centre; Additional Research Funding; Academic Titles; and the Research Office;
- Subsequent to the Committee’s meeting, and following a series of ‘elevator pitches’ by all applicants to a panel of academics and Research Office staff, the following Interdisciplinary Research Theme Champion appointments had been confirmed:

Environment, Energy and Sustainability:	Dr Jen Clark
Health and Wellbeing:	Dr Paul Swinton
Inclusive and Creative Societies:	Professor Sarah Pedersen
Living in a Digital World:	Dr Yang Jiang

Academic Council congratulated the Interdisciplinary Research Theme Champions on their appointment;

- *Research Away Day – Action Plan*: the Committee received detailed updates in respect of the following:
  - People and Culture, from the Research Fellow Working Group (RFGW) and the Research Culture Working Group (RCWG);
  - Impact, from the Impact Working Group (IWG);
  - Grow and Diversify the PGR Community, from the Professional Doctorate Steering Group (PDSG);
  - Annual Peer Review of Research Process: the introduction of this process would allow the transparent modelling of the University’s REF submission over the course of the REF cycle.

The Dean of Graduate School also updated Council on the status of the Chancellor’s Fellowships, which were intended to align the University’s activities for the REF 2027/28 units of assessment. Funded by the University’s Strategic Research Investment Fund, 127 applications had been received for the Fellowships from the UK, Europe and globally. There had been an even spread of applications across disciplines and the four Research Themes were well represented. Shortlisting had commenced and this would be followed by interviews involved the University’s Research Leads and some members of the Research Committee.

Council was advised of the current changes affecting the Research Hub in the Sir Ian Wood Building that involved moving the current occupants of level 5 of the Hub into level 4, to enable all of the Research Office and Graduate School to move into level 5. Although there

had been email communications issued, some difficulties had been experienced and it was agreed these would be discussed after the meeting.

The first impressions of the new Head Research Strategy, Culture and Performance, reported to the Research Committee, had been very positive and were particularly welcome.

## 5.2 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the Research Degrees Committee meeting held on 24 January 2023.

### 5.2.1 *Conferral of Awards*

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

- (i) The degree of DBA be conferred on Ms Laura Morgan, Aberdeen Business School with effect from 16 October 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Industry 4.0: the impact of strategic leadership behaviour on organisational response to the adoption of technological innovation".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Muhammad Shadi Hajar, School of Computing with effect from 13 December 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A Reliable Trust-Aware Reinforcement Learning Based Routing Protocol for Wireless Medical Sensor Networks".
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Idris Zakariyya, School of Computing with effect from 19 December 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Towards a Robust, Effective and Resource Efficient Machine Learning Technique for IoT Security Monitoring".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Paul Okpozo, School of Engineering, with effect from 11 January 2023, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Magnetic Field Directed Self-Assembly of Gold Pickering Emulsion for Preparing Patterned Film".
- (v) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Opeyemi Awolope, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 13 January 2023, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Genome-guided Bioprospecting for Novel Antibiotic Lead Compounds".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Akinola Ogunsemi, School of Computing, with effect from 20 February 2023, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Holistic, Data Driven, Service and Supply Chain Optimisation. Linked Optimisation".
- (vii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Haval Kukha Hawez, School of Engineering, with effect from 23 February 2023, in recognition of a programme of work entitled:

“Coupled Geomechanics and Transient Multiphase Flow at Fracture-Matrix Interface in Tight Reservoirs”.

### 5.2.2 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- Advance HE Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2023: preparations were underway to allow the PGR student community to participate in the above national survey for 2023;
- Graduate School Professional Doctorate Steering Group: the ongoing actions in support of preparing pre-validation documents.

## 6. STRATEGIC PLANNING

### 6.1 Sub-Strategies

Academic Council considered an *Overview of Draft Sub-Strategies*, as presented to the Board of Governors on 9 March 2023 and previously considered by the University Management Group. These would inform targeted investment requests to the Board, with delivery coordinated by the Executive. The Research Strategy had previously been approved by the Board in February 2022, with the Strategic Research Investment Fund approved by the Board in November 2022.

### 6.2 Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators 2022/23

Council noted a report from the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning, considered by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 9 March 2023, and providing an overview at the mid-year point of the session on the achievement of the outcomes set out in the 2022/23 Business Plan. This was the first time that a progress update had been provided in line with the University's refreshed Strategy.

Whilst student recruitment and associated revenues had remained buoyant there were significant external funding uncertainties requiring the University to continue to be prudent.

In respect of disseminating this message more widely across the University community, it was confirmed that Academic Council and University Management Group members were expected to ensure key messages were routinely shared. Rather than prepare discrete papers for this purpose, it was **agreed** that future papers would indicate the communication requirements, and this would be discussed by the Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary at the time of agenda setting.

### 6.3 Academic Development Committee

Academic Council noted the report of the meeting held on 6 February 2023 and, in particular, the following:

- *Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment – Part C – Portfolio Review* [ADC/23/3/2.1]: The portfolio review project had progressed with focus groups to test shortlisted subject areas, which informed a wider qualitative and quantitative analysis of the areas. Further discussions with Schools were required to explore how to implement any new or revised courses within the portfolio, which would also consider opportunities for interdisciplinarity. This would lead to a three year curriculum development programme for the University.
- *Student Recruitment – Semester 2 Enrolments* [ADC/23/3/3.3]: The latest Session 2022-23 Semester 2 enrolment figures were considered, and it was noted that whilst some Semester 2 targets were not reached, these were compensated by the significant recruitment in Semester 1, predominantly in international on-campus. The issue of capacity was raised, and this also fed into discussions on Session 2023-24 targets whereby Deans were urged to contact Professor Kilbride and Professor Fyfe if any resourcing and estate issues restricted Schools taking in more students. The online market segment remained a challenge for student recruitment as it was a competitive marketplace, however, there had been some signs of growth.
- *Course Changes*: three course change proposals were approved at the meetings or by Convener's Action.
- *Course Cessations*: one course cessation proposal was approved at the meeting.

### 6.4 Annual Report on Engagements with North-East of Scotland College

The Annual Report, from the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning and previously considered by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 9 March 2023, provided and update on engagements with North-East of Scotland College (NESCol).

There were currently four pilots to explore different models of collaboration under the auspices of the Scottish Funding Council's Regional Pathfinder initiative.

Biannual meetings were now being organised between the University's Deans and the College's Head of Sector to maximise existing articulation agreements areas for curriculum development, informed by portfolio reviews undertaken by both institutions. the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning wanted to thank the Deans for their assistance in this area.

A data sharing agreement enabled a greater understanding of the demand for tertiary education within the region. This had been in decline, reflecting ongoing general declines in the population



## 7. RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

Academic Council **approved** an updated *Recruitment and Admissions to Higher Education Policy*. The *Policy* intended to outline the University objectives in relation to the recruitment and admission of candidates and how the University would achieve these through transparent, fair, and accessible processes. The *Policy* was compliant with relevant legislation including the Equality Act 2010, and also ensured the University's compliance with Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*.

The majority of changes in this version were general housekeeping and more significant changes to the *Policy* would be submitted to Council in June 2023. Academic Council members were encouraged to forward any feedback on the *Policy* to the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning.

Holding File  
[13.06.23]

Academic Council  
Members to  
Dr D Cockburn

## 8. HONORARY DEGREES [STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL]

The following would receive honorary awards at the summer 2023 graduation ceremonies **[strictly embargoed]**:

Linda Bauld	DSc ( <i>honoris causa</i> )
Douglas Blackstock	DBA ( <i>honoris causa</i> )
Karen Darke	DEd ( <i>honoris causa</i> )
Jeanette Forbes	DBA ( <i>honoris causa</i> )
Deborah O'Neil	DSc ( <i>honoris causa</i> )
Lynne Smith	DBA ( <i>honoris causa</i> )
Gregor Townsend	DBA ( <i>honoris causa</i> )

## 9. ACADEMIC APPEALS, MISCONDUCT AND COMPLAINTS

Academic Council noted:

- the *Annual Report of Complaints: August 2021 – July 2022*; and
- the *Annual Report on Academic Appeals and Misconduct: Session 2021/22*.

## 10. CALENDAR OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The *Calendar of Committee Meetings* for Session 2023/24 was noted.

## 11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – SESSION 2022-23

The next meeting of Academic Council would be held on Tuesday 13 June 2023 at 2.00pm in H230, Ishbel Gordon Building.