

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minute of the meeting held on 15 December 2022 (2.00pm – 3.30pm).

Present: Professor S Olivier (Chair), Dr C Air, A Ayub, L Binnie, C Campbell, H Christie, J Clifford, Dr D Cockburn, L Curtis, Professor S Dawkes, W Deegan, Dr E Ezeani, Professor N Fyfe, Dr S Henderson, Dr J Isaacs, Dr N Johnson, P Johnston, Professor L Kilbride, Professor A Lamb, Dr C McCulloch, P Moran, A Murray, T Pirie, V Strachan, Dr C Thompson, Professor S Vertigans, Dr M Victoria and Professor S Walsh.

Apologies: O Akinoso, Dr B Bjeirmi, M Bryce, Dr A Butler-Warke, M Coull, Professor E Gammie, Dr E Ibeke, T Kouider, T Lampkin, S Macpherson, L Mifsud, Dr J Royle, R Westwater, M Wilschnack and Dr M Zarb.

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

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

1. MINUTE

Academic Council **approved** the *Minute of the Academic Council meeting held on 14 June 2022*, subject to item 1.2 being amended to read: "Since Council's last meeting, the decision had been taken to replace the term 'face-to-face learning' with 'digitally-enhanced in-person learning'".

Action

F McLean Whyte

1.1 Chair's Report: Academic Staff Workload [AC/22/3/2]

An email had been issued to academic staff on 13 December 2022, from Professor Nick Fyfe, Vice-Principal for Research and Community Engagement and Professor Lynn Kilbride, Vice-Principal for Student Experience and Academic Development, highlighting actions taken to support workload challenges.

1.2 Strategic Discussion: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy [AC/22/3/3]

Further work on the *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy* would be progressed from January 2023 onwards.

2. ACADEMIC COUNCIL: REMIT AND COMPOSITION

An extract from *Organisational Regulation O3* relating to the remit and composition of Academic Council was noted.

3. 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.

4. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION [STANDING ITEM]

The Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience gave a presentation on *RGU+*. The initiative was aimed at building on the University's excellence in teaching and learning by enhancing the ability of students to clearly articulate their global citizenship, employability skills, innovatory spirit, and personal values for the future, and to help the University explicitly demonstrate alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The initiative would incorporate:

- recognising and widening existing activity such as volunteering, community engagement, and studying abroad; ensuring that every student at RGU had a credit-bearing opportunity to benefit from this type of development;
- threading the cross-cutting themes of Sustainable Development and Entrepreneurship and Innovation throughout the courses delivered at RGU.

The intention was to collate information about existing credit-rated and non-credit-rated provision across the Schools, although it was acknowledged that, in some instances, this would be tailored to specific courses. Roll-out of the *RGU+* framework would be phased across several sessions and students would be included in its development.

The aim would be to seek formal accreditation of the *RGU+* framework in the future.

In discussion, the following was considered:

- The internationalisation of the curriculum was an integral element of the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment project. It also featured throughout the sub-strategies currently under development by the Executive and that would be presented to the Board of Governors on 9 March 2023. It was anticipated a new Internationalisation Committee would be established to oversee the work.
- Given the University's commitment to offering study abroad opportunities, the termination of the Erasmus Programme and associated funding in 2023 was of real concern. The University, like the rest of the sector, was not in a position to offer replacement funding, but it would focus on developing cash neutral, credit-bearing reciprocal arrangements with partner institutions. The Head of Employability and Community Engagement was currently investigating fundraising opportunities to support student mobility. It was expected some limited funding would also be available.
- Although 'whole person education' was integral to the University's Learning and Teaching Framework, the *RGU+* framework provided students with opportunities to express what they had learned.
- Work was progressing to develop a parallel initiative, with a working title of "RGU Local", that would help coordinate the University's community engagement activities in the local area and building on existing activities. A presentation on *RGU Local* would be made at Council's next meeting.

5. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

5.1 Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council

Academic Council noted the *Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council: 2022-23 – Institution-Led Review of Quality*, endorsed by the Board of Governors on 27 September 2022.

5.2 Enhancement-Led Institutional Review

The *Enhancement-Led Institutional Review Follow-Up Report*, submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) on 16 August 2022, was noted. The full *Technical Report* was available at www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/The-Robert-Gordon-University.

5.3 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meetings held on 13 October and 24 November 2022.

5.3.1 Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2021/22

Academic Council **approved** the *Annual Report on the Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2021/22* for onward reporting to the Board of Governors.

The Annual Appraisal Process had operated in a slightly different format, with the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience attending all of the School Academic Board meetings and the appraisal meeting convened for the Student-Facing Support Services.

The Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience was also delighted to have read all of the External Examiner Annual Reports, the majority of which had commended staff for their considerable efforts in supporting students during challenging times. Some of the comments would be reflected in the Student Welcome.

5.3.2 Academic Regulations Sub-Committee: Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment

The revisions to *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment, Schedule 2.1: Appeals Procedure for Applicants* incorporated and adjusted timescales relating to elements of the appeal procedure, and included provision for the submission of a late appeal. These changes would both manage applicant expectations but also more closely align the procedure with other appeals procedures within the *Academic Regulations*.

Academic Council **approved** *Regulation A2, Schedule 2.1* be revised as follows [new text underlined, deleted text struck through] for implementation in Session 2023/24:

4. APPEAL PROCEDURE

4.1 Stage One: Appeal

4.1.1 Any applicant seeking to appeal the outcome of an application should submit an *Admissions Appeal Form*. The form, with any accompanying evidence, should be submitted to the *Head of Student Admissions Service*, normally no later than ten working days¹ following receipt of the feedback (paragraph 1.2 of this Schedule). Only exceptionally would an appeal be accepted beyond that period and only where the *Head of Student Admissions Service* is satisfied that there are verifiable, evidenced circumstances which were outwith the control of the applicant.

Where the *Head of Student Admissions Service* determines that there are no such circumstances then the *Admissions Appeal Form – Continuation of Appeal* will not be considered and the *Head of Student Admissions Service* shall advise the applicant accordingly.

4.1.2 Receipt of the *Admission Appeal Form* will be acknowledged, by email. If no email address is available then a letter acknowledging receipt will be sent to the applicant by first class mail.

4.1.3 The *Head of Student Admissions Service* and a representative from the School relevant to the application will consider the *Admission Appeal Form* and will provide the applicant with a response to the appeal normally no later than ~~five~~ ten working days following receipt of the *Admission Appeal Form*.

4.2 Stage Two: Continuation of Appeal

4.2.1 If an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage One Appeal then they may choose to continue with the Appeal by submitting the *Admissions Appeal Form – Continuation of Appeal* to the *Head of Student Admissions Service* normally no later than 10 working days following receipt of the outcome of the Stage One Appeal.

4.2.2 Receipt of the *Admission Appeal Form* will be acknowledged, by email. If no email address is available then a letter acknowledging receipt will be sent to the applicant by first class mail.

5.3.3 *Academic Regulations Sub-Committee (Fitness to Study)*

Regulation A3 – Section 4: Student Fitness to Study Procedure was a new section to *Regulation A3* and specifically related to an enrolled student's fitness to undertake their course of study.

Academic Council **approved** *Regulation A3 – Section 4: Student Fitness to Study Procedure*, as presented, for immediate implementation.

5.3.4 Quality Events

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

Board of
Governors Report
[09.03.23]

5.3.5 Items for Noting

The following additional items were noted:

- *Reflection on the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Project*: the Committee had received an update on, and extensively discussed, the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (FTLA) work which summarised the activity that had taken place ahead of Session 2022/23 across all Schools and Support Departments.
- *Equality and Diversity Sub Committee*: the Committee had received an update on business from the Equality and Diversity Forum held on the 28 September 2022.
- *Assessment Policy and Guidance*: the Committee approved, in principle, updates to the draft Assessment Policy and Guidance for immediate implementation, subject to amendments in relation to Marking and Moderation.
- *Attendance and Engagement*: the Committee considered feedback regarding attendance and engagement from the first Student Experience Sub-Committee Seminar which was held online on 5 September 2022.

5.4 External Examiner Appointments

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

- **approved** 1 appointment; and
- **ratified** 19 appointments, five extension of duties and four re-allocations of duties.

Governance and
Academic Quality

6. RESEARCH

6.1. Research Committee

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

- *Strategic Research Investment Fund*: the Committee received an update on the development of the Strategic Research Investment Funding request, that was subsequently approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 29 November 2022;
- *Convener's Report*: the Committee received updates on the following areas: appointment of the Head of Research Strategy, Culture and Performance; RGU Orkney; Criteria for progression; Epigeum courses; Conferences; National Subsea Centre; University Alliance Research and Innovation Network; and processing of proposals.

- *Research Away Day – Action Plan*: the Committee received detailed updates in respect of the following, arising from the Research Away Day – Action Plan:
 - People and Culture
 - Research Fellow Working Group (RFGW)
 - Research Culture Working Group (RCWG)
 - Impact
 - Impact Working Group (IWG)
 - Grow and Diversify the PGR Community
 - Professional Doctorate Working Group (PDWG)
 - Communications, Interdisciplinarity, Annual Research Monitoring (ARM) and Key Performance Indicators

The activities were all aimed at delivering the *Research Strategy (2022)*, and all the Working Groups would, in future, report to each meeting of the Committee.

6.2 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the Research Degrees Committee meetings held on 7 July and 18 October 2022.

6.2.1 Conferral of Awards

The following awards were approved by Chair's Action to allow the students to graduate at the December 2022 ceremony which took place on 13 and 14 December 2022. Academic Council **endorsed** the awards to the undernoted students, and **agreed** the students and their supervisory teams be congratulated:

- (i) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Kwadwo Obiri, Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment with effect from 10 June 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A System Thinking Approach to Addressing Implementation Challenges of Local Content Policy in Resource-rich Countries".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Yi-Chen Huang, School of Applied Social Studies, with effect from 14 June 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "From government-led behaviour change to bottom-up understanding: the transition to low-carbon transport for motorcycles in Taipei, Taiwan"
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Ruissein Mahon, School of Engineering, with effect from 17 June 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Development of an Optimised Integrated Underbalanced Drilling Strategy for Cuttings Transport in Gas-Liquid Flow through Wellbore Annuli".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Tigan Daspan, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 26 August 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An investigation of Everyday Entrepreneurship in a Resource-Constrained Context".
- (v) The degree of PhD be conferred on Miss Laura Blaikie, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 29 August 2022, in recognition of a programme of work

- entitled: "Synthesis and evaluation of novel multi-target compounds for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Pamela Kirkpatrick, School of Health Sciences, with effect from 29 August 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An Exploration of Employment Factors in Working-age People with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease".
- (vii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Miss Benita Ize-Iyamu, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 5 September 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Investigating the Social, Economic and Environmental Feasibility of Extracting Onshore Oil and Gas in the United Kingdom".
- (viii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Martin Corsie, School of Health Sciences, with effect from 29 September 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Collective Behaviour Monitoring in Football using Spatial Temporal and Network Analysis: Application and Evaluations".
- (ix) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Voke Salubi, School of Engineering, with effect from 11 October 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Cuttings transport and hydraulics optimisation for underbalanced drilling UBD operations in concentric and eccentric, directional and extended reach wells".
- (x) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mrs Rana Moustafa Mahmoud Ezzat Ahmed Al-Adawy, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 19 October 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The incidence of metabolic syndrome amongst a group of migrants to Qatar employed in Hamad Medical Corporation 24 months post-migration: A prospective longitudinal observational cohort study".
- (xi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Russell Ainslie, School of Computing, with effect from 26 October 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Bi-Level Optimisation and Machine Learning in the Management of Large Service-Oriented Field Workforces".
- (xii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Geoffrey Eneyo, The Law School, with effect from 26 October 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Legal Framework for Utilisation and Emissions-Impact Mitigation from Natural Gas Production: The Case for Nigeria".
- (xiii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Jamilu Ibn Mohammed, The Law School, with effect from 14 November 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An Investigation into the Effectiveness of the Design and Enforcement of Nigeria's Anti-gas Flaring Law and Policy Regimes and the Considerations of Measures that Could Improve".

6.2.2 *Research Student Graduations*

Council **agreed** that, in future and in addition to receiving a scroll, all research students graduating from the University would receive a quach.

Graduate School

It was also **agreed**:

Prof A Lamb &
C Thomson

- (i) consideration would be given to the research students' respective supervisors performing the capping of the research student at the graduation ceremony;
- (ii) a short script would be provided to the Principal on each graduating research student to extend the research students' presence on stage;
- (iii) the title of theses would be incorporated into Graduation Programmes;
- (iv) the opportunity would be taken at the graduation ceremony to highlight any awards conferred to research students by Schools.

6.2.3 *Research Degrees Annual Appraisal for Session 2021/22*

Academic Council **endorsed** the *Research Degrees Annual Appraisal for Session 2021/22*, for onward reporting to the Board of Governors

Board of
Governors Report
[09.03.23]

6.2.4 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- *Update on 100Projects@RGU*: the project, aimed at highlighting potential research projects linked into one of the four University research themes which could help enhance the quality of future PGR applications, went live on 6 July 2022;
- *Annual Report on Mandatory Teaching and Demonstrating Training for PGR students who undertook ad-hoc teaching/demonstrating activity in Session 2021/22*: the Committee endorsed the document as a very useful audit trail to address recommendations arising from the ELIR event in April 2021;
- *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2022*: the Committee considered the outcome to be the best set of results ever achieved by the University and evidence that RGU PGR students were very satisfied.

It was **agreed** consideration would be given to producing an article for WonkHE [<https://wonkhe.com>] regarding the University's success in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).

Prof A Lamb &
J Strachan

- *Short-Life Working Group for Professional Doctorates*: the Committee considered ongoing work in relation to development of the institutional Professional Doctorate Programme which was currently being developed.

6.3 Academic Progression

Academic Council received a presentation from Professor Lynn Kilbride, Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience and Professor Nick Fyfe, Vice-Principal for Research and Community Engagement relating to *Enhancements to Academic Promotion*.

The key changes, designed to enhance recruitment and retention, included:

- criteria for progression from Grade 7 to Grade 8 had been enhanced, with a more explicit research focus in both grades;
- change of title from Senior Lecturer A to Senior Lecturer;
- change of title from Senior Lecturer B to Principal Lecturer;
- change of title from Academic Strategic Lead to Associate Dean;
- changes in the process for reviewing Course Leader and Senior Lecturer roles;
- changes of title from Teaching Excellence Fellow and Reader to Associate Professor, in Research, Teaching and Learning, and Engagement, Impact and Enterprise;
- enhancements to criteria for Reader and Associate Professor; and
- enhancements to zoning criteria.

It was anticipated the transition would be complete in all areas by summer 2024. Work was also underway to simplify the Employee Performance Review (EPR) process and to ensure the setting of SMART objectives.

7. STRATEGIC PLANNING

7.1 Business Plan

Academic Council noted the *Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators – End of Year Report 2021/22* from the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning and approved by the Board of Governors on 27 September 2022; and the *Business Plan 2022/23*, from the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning, and approved by the Board of Governors on 29 November 2022.

The Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning would shortly be reviewing the entire planning cycle, including the interaction with budget-setting, the Annual Appraisal Process, and the Course Portfolio Review process.

7.2 Outcome Agreement

The *Outcome Agreement Self-Assessment Report 2021/22* and the *Outcome Agreement 2022/23*, both approved by the Board of Governors on 29 November 2022, were noted.

7.3 Academic Development Committee

Academic Council noted the report of the meetings held on 6 July, 22 September, and 21 November 2022 and, in particular, the following:

- *Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:* The RGU+ project was a collective term to describe the additionality that students at the University would experience whilst they study. Developmental changes to the Flexible Studies Framework (formerly Professional Studies Framework) had been proposed ahead of the re-validation event. Strategic theme projects on sustainability in the curriculum and entrepreneurship had started liaison with Schools on position statements of current progress and where further embedding of these themes could take place.

The portfolio review project aimed to create a clear strategy for the sustainable portfolio development of the University that capitalised on interdisciplinarity and research. Recent meetings with Schools had produced scorecards, which highlighted interdisciplinary opportunities within the undergraduate portfolio. These would be explored further with second schools and colleges focus groups and discussed in more depth with key project staff at future Committees meetings.

- *Student Recruitment:* Session 2022-23, Semester 1 enrolments had been predicted to remain static and application to offer and acceptance to offer ratios had increased, however, as of the September meeting, numbers were lower than last year, but this has been mitigated by Graduate Apprenticeship students being counted in the return. There had been a rapid growth for international on-campus students, which had been slightly impacted by travel restrictions as some students were required to defer until Semester 2. Advanced preparation was underway for Semester 2 enrolments and targets were due to be met, and due to the recruitment success, the University had planned to have stricter enrolment rules for late arrivals.

Session 2023-24 recruitment had seen fluctuations with over- and under-recruitment in the Scottish undergraduate market, however, plans to increase applications, conversions and engagement through marketing activities would be discussed further with Deans of School following a Scotland-wide meeting to discuss SFC recruitment.

- *New Course Proposals:* nine new course proposals were approved at the meetings or by Convener's Action.
- *Course Changes:* ten course change proposals were approved at the meetings or by Convener's Action.
- *Course Cessations:* one course cessation proposal was approved by Convener's Action.

Chair's Action was taken on behalf of Academic Council to approve the following three new awards to *Academic Regulation A1: Courses, Schedule 1.1: Awards of the University*, following approval of a course change to the University's Flexible Studies Framework (formerly the Professional Studies Framework) by the Academic Development Committee:

BASc, Bachelor of Arts and Sciences

BASc (Hons), Bachelor of Arts and Sciences with Honours

MASc, Master of Art and Sciences

8. HONORARY DEGREES

Consideration was given by Council to proposals for amendments to the Honorary Degrees Committee's composition and remit, as contained in *Organisational Regulation O4: Standing Committees of Academic Council, Schedule 4.2: Honorary Degrees Committee*, and procedures as contained in *Academic Regulation A8: Honorary Awards*. Academic Council **approved** the following revised composition for immediate implementation:

Ex Officio

Principal (Convener)

Any two Vice-Principals (nominated by the Principal)

Ordinary Members

One Student President (nominated by RGU Union)

Two representatives nominated by Academic Council and drawn from its membership

In Attendance

Chair of the Board of Governors (or nominee advised by the Chair of the Board of Governors)

Head of Fundraising and Alumni Services (or nominee)

Clerk to the Committee

Academic Council **approved** the amendments to *Academic Regulation A8: Honorary Awards* as proposed.

It was **agreed** Academic Council members would advise the Secretary if they were interested in acting as an Academic Council representative on the Honorary Degrees Committee.

Academic Council
Members to
F McLean Whyte

It was suggested the University might benefit from adding a Doctor of Arts to the honorary degrees it might award. Academic Council members **agreed** to forward any further suggestions for new degrees to the Secretary, and these suggestions would be discussed at Council's next meeting.

Academic Council
Members to
F McLean Whyte

A more personalised process for communicating with potential recipients had been implemented, and amendments made to some forms.

Members were advised that item 11 below should remain strictly confidential.

Academic Council
Members

9. ACADEMIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Academic Council Membership List: 2022/23, updated following the recent nominations/ elections for School representatives, was noted.

10. ACADEMIC REGULATIONS – CHAIR’S ACTION

Council noted a paper detailing approval of exceptions to the *Academic Regulations*.

11. HONORARY DEGREES [STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL]

A paper listing honorary degree recipients was noted.

12. HONORARY AND VISITING PROFESSORS

No new Honorary and Visiting Professor appointments had been made since Council’s last meeting in June 2022.

13. APPOINTMENT OF PROFESSORS, READERS, AND TEACHING EXCELLENCE FELLOWS

A paper confirming the appointment of Professors, Readers and Teaching Excellence Fellows since December 2021 was noted.

14. ACADEMIC APPEALS, MISCONDUCT AND COMPLAINTS

The *Annual Report of Complaints: August 2021 – July 2022*, and *Annual Report on Academic Appeals and Misconduct: Session 2021/22* would be submitted to Council’s meeting on 14 March 2023.

Academic Council
Holding File
[14.03.23]

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – SESSION 2022-23

The next meeting of Academic Council would be held on Tuesday 14 March 2023 at 2.00pm.

16. AOB

It was **agreed** the following topics would be discussed by Academic Council at future meetings:

9 March 2023: the impact of artificial intelligence on academia, led by Dr John Isaacs;

13 June 2023: how to contribute to the debate on academic freedom, led by John Clifford.

Dr J Isaacs
Holding File
[09.03.23]
J Clifford
Holding File
[13.06.23]