

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minute of the meeting held on 14 June 2022 (2.00pm – 3.30pm).

Present: Professor L Kilbride (Presiding), R Adedokun, D Adesanya, A Ayub, L Binnie, Dr A Butler-Warke, C Campbell, H Christie, J Clifford, Dr D Cockburn, L Curtis, W Deegan, Dr E Ezeani, Professor N Fyfe, Dr S Henderson, Dr E Ibeke, Dr J Isaacs, B Jackson, P Johnston, T Kouider, Dr C McCullagh, L Mifsud, P Moran, A Murray, Dr A Oke, Professor J Steel, V Strachan, Professor S Vertigans, Professor S Walsh and Dr M Zarb.

Apologies: Dr C Air, Professor S Dawkes, Dr N Emmison, I Fairley, Professor E Gammie, Professor A Lamb, D McCaughley, Professor D McClean, Professor S Olivier, T Pirie, A Rasheed and Dr J Royle.

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

1. MINUTE

Academic Council **approved** the *Minute of the meeting held on 1 March 2022, reference AC/22-2*, and noted a *Matters Arising Report*.

Action

F McLean Whyte

1.1 Chair's Report [AC/23/2-2]

No suggestions from Council members had been received by the Secretary regarding the future operation of Academic Council, that might avoid a purely transactional agenda.

1.2 Items for Noting: Terminology [AC/23/2/4.7]

Since Council's last meeting, the decision had been taken to replace the term 'face-to-face learning' with 'digitally-enhanced in-person learning'.

2. CHAIR'S REPORT

Academic Council noted the customary report from the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, and the following was discussed:

- senior representatives of University Alliance would be visiting the University on 29 June 2022;
- the most recent Staff Townhall meeting had been held on 9 June 2022 and Council members were encouraged to forward suggestions for ways of enhancing these meetings to Carol Ross, the Principal's Personal Assistant;
- the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience and the Vice-Principal for Research and Community Engagement were leading a working group exploring academic staff workload;
- all members of Academic Council were encouraged to attend the forthcoming Graduation Ceremonies.

Academic Council
Members

Academic Council
Members

3. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION [STANDING ITEM]

The Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience presented a diagram depicting a draft *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy* (see [Appendix](#)), based on the *University Strategy (February 2022)*, and in which its aims had become pillars of the draft *Strategy*.

The University had not, in recent years, had a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy but it did operate with the *Learning and Teaching Framework*. It was questioned whether the latter should be superseded by a new strategy. It was suggested in discussion that the *Learning and Teaching Framework* provided a good foundation for discussion at, for example, Institution-Led Subject Review events. Other comments received included: where the professional focus of the courses would fit; and the focus on 'students as global citizens' was welcomed.

A view was expressed that the FTLA Standards, that required a single summative assessment per module, inhibited the discrete assessment of skills and theory in some Schools, and it was **agreed** this would be followed-up after the meeting.

Council members were encouraged to forward further comments to the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience over the summer period. Although this was just the start of the process, and its relationship with the *Learning and Teaching Framework* was not yet confirmed, it would be fully developed only if staff found it had a useful purpose.

4. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

4.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meeting held on 26 May 2022.

4.1.1 Regulation A3 - Section 2: Student Conduct Procedure – Sanctions

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022-23, that *Academic Regulation A3, Section 2: Student Conduct Procedure, paragraph 10* be amended as follows [new text underlined]. The revisions were designed to more effectively accommodate mitigation and to clarify the sanction of 'Absolute Discharge' in relation to any subsequent misconducts:

10. Sanctions

10.1 Criteria

10.1.1 When determining a proportionate sanction, the following criteria will be used, taking due cognisance of whether the sanction relates to academic or non-academic misconduct as described in [paragraph 6](#) of this Regulation:

(vii) any mitigating circumstances (also refer paragraph 10.1.2 of this Regulation);

Prof L Kilbride
J Strachan &
P Johnston

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10.1.2 In accordance with Regulation 10.1.1, a number of criteria are considered when determining a proportionate sanction. Where a student has extenuating circumstances and the Dean is satisfied that the severity of the circumstances may have impacted the student's decision making and behaviour at the time of the misconduct then the Dean may determine that the assessment opportunity be deferred.

10.2 Sanctions

10.2.1 One or more of the following sanctions may be applied for a first incidence of misconduct. (Refer also to [Regulation A6: Research Degrees, Schedule 6.3](#) for outcomes relating to research degrees and paragraph 10.1.2 of this Regulation).

The following list is not exhaustive. ...

Absolute Discharge: Exceptionally, although it is established that an incidence of misconduct has occurred, no blame is attached to the student's actions and no sanction imposed (although a record of the *Misconduct Hearing* and decision is retained in the student's file). This outcome **will not** be taken into account when considering any subsequent incidences of misconduct.

4.1.2 Regulation A3 - Section 2: Student Conduct Procedure – Initial Evidence-Gathering

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022-23, that *Regulation A3 – Section 2, paragraph 7* be revised as follows [~~deleted text struck through~~ and new text underlined] to permit the introduction of a discretionary preliminary evidence-gathering process to inform Deans' decision on whether to proceed to a Misconduct Hearing:

7. Student Conduct Procedure: Misconduct Hearing

7.1 Initial Intimation

7.1.1 Where there are reasonable grounds to believe that misconduct has occurred then the Head of School shall be informed in the first instance, Where an allegation of misconduct is made, then the Dean shall be informed in the first instance, including where it relates to the University's student accommodation. The Dean shall determine whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that misconduct has occurred. The Dean may, at their discretion, appoint an Officer of the University to undertake preliminary evidence gathering to inform their decision as to whether there are such reasonable grounds. In such circumstances, the Dean should be mindful of the normal timescales as specified in Regulation 7.2(i).

In doing so, Council welcomed this addition to the *Student Conduct Procedure*, and noted the Committee agreed further consideration would be given to the provision of skills training for conducting such evidence-gathering and investigations. Furthermore, it was confirmed not every case would require the preliminary evidence-gathering, and it was more likely to be used for cases of non-academic misconduct, although not exclusively. Existing prescribed timescales would still have to be adhered to. It would be important to ensure students were not prematurely alerted to a potential allegation until such evidence-

gathering had concluded, and a decision whether to proceed to a Misconduct Hearing had been made.

4.1.3 *Fit to Sit Policy and Extenuating Circumstances*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022-23, that the *Coursework Extension Form: Self-Certification* be revised as follows [new text underlined]. In doing so, Council amended the proposed text on the form from "I am a disabled student and am currently being supported by the University's Inclusion Centre" to read "I am currently being supported by the University's Inclusion Centre". This would allow students to indicate whether they were supported by the Inclusion Centre, remove the need for the *Reasonable Adjustment Extension Request* form, and streamline the current process:

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Extract from COURSEWORK EXTENSION FORM: SELF-CERTIFICATION

SECTION 3: Supported by the Inclusion Centre

If you are currently supported by the Inclusion Centre then please tick the box. By doing so you are granting permission for the School to contact the Inclusion Centre should they need to.

<u>I am currently being supported by the University's Inclusion Centre</u>	
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SECTION 34: Declaration

By submitting this form through your RGU email address you are declaring:

- the above information to be accurate to the best of your knowledge; and
- that you understand the information provided in support of your claim will be treated in confidence unless disclosure is necessary to progress the claim.

Please be aware the University's *Student Conduct Procedure*, as contained in *Academic Regulation A3: Section 2*, may be applied should there be any doubts about the authenticity of the claim or documents submitted to support the claim.

Student Name	Date

4.1.4 *Release of Information to Students*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022-23, the following *Schedule of Release of Information to Students*:

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Schedule of Release of Information to Students

The following decisions will not normally be released to students*:

- after 4.00 pm Monday, Tuesday and Thursday;
- after 11.00 am Wednesday;
- after 12 noon Friday;
- immediately prior to University closures, e.g. for public holidays.

Decision
Rejection of Academic Appeal (Award and Progression) following reconvened Assessment Board
Rejection of Academic Appeal (Award and Progression) Stage 2
Rejection of Academic Appeal (Award and Progression) following a Student Appeals Committee
Outcome of established Misconduct following a Misconduct Hearing and where the sanction is particularly impactful, e.g. termination of enrolment.
Rejection of a Misconduct Appeal.
Rejection of Misconduct Appeal following a Student Appeals Committee
Complaint Outcome
Notes: 1. Schools/Departments should exercise discretion in relation to the release of information to a student studying overseas to take account of the relevant time zones. 2. Schools/Departments may exercise discretion depending on the particular decision.

In doing so, Council noted that, whilst welcoming the proposal, the Committee wanted to ensure the release of results to students were not unduly delayed. It was confirmed there was still an element of discretion available and so these were guidelines, rather than mandatory requirements. The Committee had agreed the *Schedule* was for staff use only and would be available on CampusMoodle. It was also agreed the guidance should refer to not releasing information immediately prior to University closures for public holidays and Friday afternoons.

4.1.5 *Regulation A6: Research Degrees – PhD by Public Output*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022-23, that Regulation A6: Research Degrees be amended as detailed in the Annex provided.

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4.1.6 *Quality Events*

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

Board of Governors
[23.06.22]

4.1.7 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- *Academic Regulations Sub-Committee*: the extensive work by the Sub-Committee that included: the Equality and Diversity Working Group; development of a Fit to Study Regulation; the Sub-Committee’s Evaluation; and developments with Report and Support.
- *Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee*: the updates from the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee in relation to: *Calendar of Events*; Equality Champions; Equality and Diversity Strategy and Policies; Enhancement Theme Project - Male students; Staff Survey; Trigger and Content Warnings; and the *Family Support Policy*.

- *Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee*: the updates from the Sub-Committee concerning: the *Welcome Update*; *Estates Strategy*; Review of Student-Facing Support Services; Appraisal and Enhancement of the Student Experience; and the Operation and Effectiveness of the Sub-Committee 2021-22.
- *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee*: the updates from the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee covering: the future of the Sub-Committee; QAA Enhancement Theme: Resilient Learning Communities; *QAA Enhancement Theme: Emerging Stronger Enhancement Award*; and the TEF Project: Developing Independent Learning Skills.
- *Student Experience Sub-Committee (SESC)*: the Committee had approved the establishment of the *Student Experience Sub-Committee (SESC)* from Session 2022-23, to replace the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee. In taking the decision, the Committee had been mindful of ensuring the remits of the two Sub-Committees were appropriately covered by the new Sub-Committee.
- *School Academic Board Reports to the Committee*: the Committee considered, in detail, School Academic Board Reports that provided commentaries on actions taken by School Academic Boards in relation to the following key University priorities for Session 2021-22:
 - student satisfaction;
 - retention and progression;
 - graduate outcomes;
 - reviewing the course portfolio, to identify potential alternatives, e.g. short courses and microcredentials;
 - equality, diversity and inclusion;
 - ensuring enhancement activities were done collectively and consistently to ensure effective and appropriate impact.
- *Annual Appraisal Process 2020-21: Action Plan*: the Committee considered and welcomed the updated *QAEC Appraisal Action Plan 2020-21*, that incorporated RGU enhancement priorities, and demonstrated the huge array of enhancement initiatives in progress. Committee members were encouraged to share the document within their respective Schools.
- *Enhancement-Led Institutional Review 2021*: The Committee noted a preliminary draft of the *Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR): Follow-Up Report* due for submission by 19 August 2022.

4.2 External Examiner Appointments

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

- **approved** 12 appointments, seven extensions of duties and four re-allocations of duties; and
- **ratified** three appointments, one extension of duties and one re-allocation of duties.

5. RESEARCH

5.1 Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021

Council considered the outcome of the recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise, and was advised the information had also recently been shared at the Research Committee, the University Management Group and the recent Town Hall meeting. The Vice-Principal for Research and Community Engagement wished to thank all members of staff who had supported and contributed to the significant undertaking, including the collation of data and preparation of the 15 impact case studies.

Whilst, overall, the outcome had been very disappointing, the University's outputs had performed better than other elements of the submission, and were ranked 87th out of 129 institutions, with 69% of outputs graded 3* or 4* (i.e. internationally excellent or world leading).

Preparations for the next REF exercise had commenced, and were underpinned by the implementation of the new *Research Strategy*, approved by the Board of Governors in February 2022, and that would focus on: impact, people and culture, communications, interdisciplinarity, postgraduate research student growth and diversity, and would introduce an Annual Research Review process. Working groups and forums had been established to drive these areas forward. A business case for investment in research, to support implementation of and delivery on the *Research Strategy*, was being prepared for submission to the Board of Governors.

It was acknowledged the University had to proactively nurture good researchers and this was being addressed in ongoing discussions with Human Resources and the Deans of School, and which included consideration of the Employee Performance Review (EPR) process and the Workload Allocation Model.

5.2. Research Committee

Council noted the following items from the report of the meeting held on 17 May 2022:

- *Research Excellence Framework (REF) Results*: the Committee's extensive discussion of the University's REF results, the implications, and lessons learned for future exercises;

- *Research Strategy*: a detailed budgetary plan for a strategic research investment fund would be considered by the Executive on 7 June 2022 before being presented to the Board at its meeting on 27 September 2022;
- *Research integrity and Ethics Sub-Committee*: the Sub-Committee had been re-constituted and had, to date, met on two occasions;
- *Committee Annual Report: Session 2021/22*: the Committee had no items it wished to bring to the attention of Academic Council arising from its *Annual Report: Session 2021/22*, which contained an analysis of responses from the Committee Evaluation Questionnaire and of members' attendance.

5.3 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the Research Degrees Committee meeting held on 21 April 2022.

5.3.1 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 MRes be conferred on Mr David Kidd, School of Health Sciences with effect from 14 February 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Physical Literacy – Impact and Cost Effectiveness in Primary School Settings".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Miss Mhairi Paul, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 30 March 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Exploring the role of Wnt signalling in Heart Failure with preserved Ejection Fraction".
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Obinna Iheukwumere, Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment, with effect from 31 March 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Analysis of the Performance Challenges Affecting State-Owned Refineries in Nigeria: A Systems Thinking Approach".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mrs Oyefunke Adetoba, Law School, with effect from 5 April 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Importance of the Protection of Micro Enterprises in B2B International Commercial Contracts".
- (v) The degree of MRes be conferred on Miss Shauna Narine, School of Applied Social Studies, with effect from 5 April 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An exploration of the contribution of the Arts to local economies in terms of human and social capital".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Richard Afolabi, School of Engineering, with effect from 21 April 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A New Approach to Predictive Modelling of Flow of Hydrophobically Associating Polyacrylamide Polymers in Porous Media".

- (vii) The degree of PhD by Public Output be conferred on Mr Christopher Fremantle, Gray's School of Art, with effect from 21 April 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Working together on Ecological Thinking: Relationality and Difference".
- (viii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Waleed Alshaer, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 13 May 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Analysis of Stock Returns in The London Stock Exchange in the Context of the Cyclical Adjusted Price to Earnings Ratio Signals".
- (ix) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Abodunrin Aminu, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice, with effect from 13 May 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Putting ageism in context: Examining the relationship between age discrimination and frailty among older individuals aged 65 years and over".
- (x) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Andrew Jones, Law School, with effect from 16 May 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The relationship between the social licence and law in the context of the Scottish fracking debate: a textual, thematic, and comparative analysis of environmental and planning law governing onshore oil and gas authorisations in Scotland".
- (xi) The degree of MRes be conferred on Mr Paul Fwangchi, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 17 May 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Entrepreneurial Enactment as Social Value Creation: An Exploration of the Aberdeen Entrepreneurial Ecosystem".
- (xii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mrs Hend Talkhan, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 28 May 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A mixed-methods study to identify, quantify and explore determinants of antimicrobial prescribing behaviours among clinicians in Qatar".
- (xiii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Peter Egbe, School of Engineering, with effect from 6 June 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Stuck Pipe Prediction in Deviated Wellbores: A Numerical and Statistical Analysis".

5.3.2 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- *100projects@RGU Initiative*: Dr Gillibrand and Mr Simpson were meeting with the University web team, as the project development concluded, with the intention of launching a University web page for postgraduate research (PGR) applicants in mid-June 2022;
- *Professional Doctorates*: the Committee acknowledged the broader need to increase PGR numbers across a number of academic Schools. As part of this strategy, the development of new professional doctorate options would be explored in collaboration with the Academic Development Committee. It was **agreed** the Dean of the Graduate School would be asked if it was possible to expedite the discussions of the Professional Doctorate Working Group;

- *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2022*: the University's participation in this survey ended on 16 May 2022. The results would be tabulated over the summer, along with a sector comparison report prepared by Advance HE. This information would be made available to staff and PGR students at the end of summer.

6. STRATEGIC PLANNING

6.1 Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators

Academic Council noted the *Business Plan 2021-22: Third-Quarter Progress Report*, and the *Outline of Business Plan Actions for 2022-23*, from the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning.

6.2 Academic Development Committee

Academic Council noted the report of the meeting held on 4 April 2022 and, in particular, the following:

- *Portfolio Review*: the project would explore and provide direction to determine what the future shape and size of the portfolio would look like, and was underway;
- *Professional Doctorate courses*: the University was not maximising its potential in regards to professional doctorate recruitment and it was agreed this required further investigation in order to support the Research Strategy to support increasing the postgraduate research community by 33% over the next 5-6 years. A working group convened by the Dean of the Graduate School, with representatives from nine Schools and DELTA, met on 30 May 2022 to discuss the current provision and future developments, including creating efficiencies in institutional professional doctorate delivery;
- *Student recruitment*: whilst it was challenging to make predictions from the data presented at the meeting, a number of headlines were noted: SFC recruitment was a challenge following sector trends, applications were down by 8% although this was a better performance than the University's competitor list and international on-campus recruitment was very positive. Schools had raised concerns with the significant number of international on-campus students in regards to resourcing and the importance of being able to support these students appropriately was discussed;
- *Course Changes*: 15 course change proposals were approved at the meeting or by Convener's Action;
- *Course Cessations*: nine course cessation proposals were approved at the meeting.

7. ACADEMIC COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE: EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

A paper summarising the evaluation of the effectiveness of Academic Council and its Standing Committees for Session 2021-22 was considered.

It was felt that it often took a couple of meetings for new members to engage effectively, and it was suggested induction might be expanded to more committees.

8. VALEDICTORIES

The following Council members had reached the end of their term of office:

Ex officio: Deans of School

Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment	Professor David McClean
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Elected student members:

Postgraduate Student Representative	Amodu Abiola Rasheed, (1915278), Aberdeen Business School
Research Student Representative	Racheal Adedokun, (1807492), Aberdeen Business School
RGU Union Sabbatical Officer	Damilola Adesanya, President (Education & Welfare)
RGU Union Representative	Doireann McCaughley, (1906117), School of Health Sciences, Vice-President (Education)

Elected members of academic staff:

Aberdeen Business School	Dr Adekunle Oke
School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice	Isla Fairley
School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice	Billy Jackson
School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences	Dr Neil Emmison

Elections would be held in August 2022 to fill these vacancies and an outstanding vacancy from the Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment.

This was also the last meeting for Professor Iain Steel, Dean of the School of Engineering, prior to his imminent retirement. The opportunity was taken to thank Professor Steel for his valuable contributions to the School and the University, and to wish him well for the future.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – SESSION 2022-23

The next meeting of Academic Council would be held on Thursday 15 December 2022 at 2.00pm.

RGU – Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (draft 1 June 2022)

Our Purpose: To provide students with an excellent experience that will enable them to raise their aspirations and thrive in their professional careers as global citizens

Enablers

We will:

- Foster our sense of university community
- Play a role in a more sustainable way
- Develop our infrastructure
- Work collaboratively

Pillars

Create a vibrant and inclusive environment that provides an equitable and future-focused student experience

Design a broad and relevant and engaging curriculum with an international perspective that enhances personal development and employability

Provides Excellent academic and personal support; to include opportunities to participate in 'Beyond the Classroom' activities

Widen access and grow enrolments on our courses while further developing the range of work-based and upskilling courses

Outcomes

Students:
Transformative, co-created flexible and challenging learning experiences that allows them to achieve their full potential to contribute optimally to society as excellent global citizens

Staff:
Access to an excellent supportive learning environment that empowers them to deliver an outstanding curriculum an student experience

Stakeholders:
Collaboration with high quality engaged and innovative education partner that produces excellent graduates

Culture

Curiosity, Authenticity, Approachability, Collaboration, Enterprise, Ambition, Respectfulness, Equality