

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

Minute of the meeting held on 15 March 2022 (2.00pm – 3.10pm).

**Present:** Professor S Olivier (Chair), R Adedokun, D Adesanya, Dr C Air, A Ayub, L Binnie, Dr A Butler-Warke, J Clifford, Dr D Cockburn, Professor S Dawkes, W Deegan, Dr N Emmison, Dr E Ezeani, I Fairley, Professor N Fyfe, Professor E Gammie, Dr S Henderson, Dr E Ibeke, B Jackson, P Johnston, Professor L Kilbride, T Kouider, Professor A Lamb, D McCaughley, Professor D McClean, Dr C McCulloch, L Mifsud, P Moran, A Rasheed, Dr J Royle, Professor J Steel, V Strachan, Professor S Vertigans, Professor S Walsh and Dr M Zarb.

**Apologies:** C Campbell, H Christie, L Curtis, Dr J Isaacs, A Murray, Dr A Oke and T Pirie.

**In Attendance:** F Antoniazzi, S Cameron (item 3.3 only), F McLean Whyte (Secretary) and J Strachan.

**Welcome:** Professor Walsh was welcomed to their first meeting of Academic Council, and William Hardie was welcomed as an observer.

**1. MINUTE**

Academic Council **approved** the *Minute of the meeting held on 16 December 2021, reference AC/22/1*, and noted a *Matters Arising Report*.

**Action**

F McLean Whyte

**1.1 Business Plan and Risk Register [AC/22/1/4.2]**

The Annexes to the *Business Plan 2021/22*, omitted from the papers at the last meeting, were attached as an appendix to the *Matters Arising Report*.

**2. CHAIR'S REPORT**

Academic Council noted the customary report from the Principal and Vice-Chancellor.

The Chair also wished members to forward suggestions for the future operation of Academic Council to the Secretary, in order to avoid a purely transactional agenda. For example, whether a workshop format involving a presentation on a strategic topic followed by discussion would be helpful.

Academic Council  
Members to  
F McLean Whyte**3. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION****3.1 University Strategy**

The *University Strategy*, as approved by the Board of Governors on 22 February 2022, was considered, and the following was raised in discussion:

- Over 50 pages of feedback had been received as a result of the extensive consultation process, and every comment had been considered. The Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning was thanked for his efforts in leading a transparent and engaging

Dr D Cockburn

consultation. The final document would shortly be available at [www.rgu.ac.uk/about/our-strategy/strategy-map](http://www.rgu.ac.uk/about/our-strategy/strategy-map).

- The *University Strategy* would be highlighted at the University's Stakeholder Event being held on 17 March 2022, in particular, the three themes: Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience; Research and Knowledge Exchange; and Economic, Social and Cultural Development. Work had commenced to more closely align the Annual Appraisal Process with the Planning Process in order to assist with delivery of the *Strategy*.

### 3.2 Research Strategy 2022-2028

Council considered the *Research Strategy 2022-2028*, as approved by the Board of Governors on 22 February 2022. The *Research Strategy* had also been subject to extensive consultation, with very positive engagement from the research community, Schools, the Executive, and the Board.

Consistent with the *University Strategy*, the *Research Strategy* focused on three themes: increasing our research capability and capacity and invest in our research leadership and infrastructure; improving our research quality, culture and communications; and enhancing interdisciplinarity and our contribution to the 'place agenda'. The purpose was to enhance the research culture, research and teaching linkages, and research career progression, with activity focused on interdisciplinary research themes:

#### Interdisciplinary Research Themes



The inclusive collaborative culture promoted in the *Research Strategy* was particularly welcomed by Council members.

### 3.3 Dignity at Robert Gordon University

Council considered the *Dignity at Robert Gordon University Policy*, as approved by the Board of Governors on 14 December 2021.

The previous version of the *Policy* had been approved in 2018 and, at an early stage, it had been agreed it should not cover only work and study but incorporate obligations for the social environment and community engagement. Both staff and students had engaged in the consultation process, and the intention was to make it a living document. It was values-

based and so had to reflect new realities, it incorporated more definitions of unacceptable behaviour, and included information on potentially conflicting equality rights.

A recent national report had indicated that 13% of UK employees were subject to bullying and harassment but the majority of incidents went unreported. Although the University's caseload was significantly lower it was important not be complacent. Of note was the new reference to microaggressions, which were frequently unconscious but might develop into more serious issues.

All RGU employees had a responsibility to be aware of and share the *Dignity at RGU Policy*, and representatives from Human Resources and Student Life would provide briefing sessions to all Schools in the coming months. Heads of School had also been briefed on methods to de-escalate challenging situations.

A concern was expressed by one Council member that by providing a list of unacceptable behaviours, this might actually encourage those behaviours or increase anxieties. It was believed, however, that most people understood what was and was not acceptable. Of paramount importance was the need to be explicit about what was unacceptable and to ensure the negative examples were not normalised and positive behaviour promoted. It was also suggested the *Policy* would assist with opening up conversations about uncomfortable issues.

## 4. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

### 4.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meeting held on 1 March 2022.

#### 4.1.1 *Academic Regulation A3: Student Conduct and Appeals*

Academic Council **approved, for implementation with immediate effect**, that *Regulation A3 – Section 1: Academic Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure, Section 2: Student Conduct Procedure* and *Section 3: Fitness to Practise* be amended to reflect that the Assistant Chief Academic Officer's role in the consideration of Stage 2 academic appeals, misconduct appeals and fitness to practise appeals would now be undertaken by the Deputy Academic Registrar, acting with delegated authority on behalf of the Principal, and in liaison with an Academic Quality Officer.

Governance and  
Academic Quality

Academic Council **approved, for implementation with immediate effect**, that *Regulation A3 – Section 1: Academic Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure, paragraph 7*, be amended to provide Heads of School with increased autonomy and discretion to accept late appeals submitted no later than six months following publication of results from Assessment Boards. Any appeal submitted later than six months but still within the 12 month window for late appeals would be considered through the existing process.

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#### 4.1.2 *Proceed Carrying (Regulation A4, paragraph 5.2(i))*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022/23, a revision to *Regulation A4, paragraph 5.2(i)* to remove reference to 'exceptional' within the Regulation, with a view to encouraging greater use of 'proceed carrying' to support and facilitate the progression of students, and to replace the term 'discretion' with more transparent wording [deleted text ~~struck through~~ and new text underlined]:

- 5.2 A student shall normally pass all modules central to the objectives of the course at each progression and award point as specified by Academic Council and defined in the Course Specification at each stage of their course before being permitted to receive the appropriate award or to proceed to the subsequent stage of the course, except that:
- (i) the Assessment Board ~~shall have discretion to exceptionally~~ may allow a student to proceed to the subsequent stage of their course carrying modules, normally amounting to no more than 15 credits and not designated as prerequisites for the subsequent stage of study;

#### 4.1.3 *Condonement (Regulation A4, paragraph 11.1)*

Whilst the current wording of *Regulation A4, paragraph 11.1* remained appropriate, Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022/23, that *Regulation A4, Schedule 4.1: University Grading Scheme* be amended to address some ambiguity regarding which grades were open to condonement, i.e. both Grades E and F [deleted text ~~struck through~~]:

##### **Grade E**

*Definition of Grade: Borderline Fail – ~~Failure Open to Condonement~~*

#### 4.1.4 *Recording of Condonement (Regulation A4, paragraph 11.2)*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in 2022/23, that *Regulation A4, paragraph 11.2* be amended to revise the terminology to record condoned passes within relevant documentation, including student transcripts, as "Credits Awarded", with the aim of providing a more supportive and transparent approach for all parties [deleted text ~~struck through~~ and new text underlined]:

- 11.2 Where a fail is condoned this shall be recorded as "~~condoned~~ Credit Awarded" on the student's transcript, and the module's SCQF credit points awarded.

#### 4.1.5 *Fit to Sit Policy*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2022/23, that the *Fit to Sit Policy* be amended to make clear that a student might apply for either an extension or a deferral for a particular assessment. The revised wording was designed to support staff in their decision-making and manage student expectations [new text underlined]:

## 8. WHAT WILL BE THE OUTCOME OF MY REQUEST?

8.4 It is your responsibility to determine whether your circumstances warrant applying for **either** a *Coursework Extension Request* or a *Deferral Request*. You may find it helpful to consult with your Course Leader or Personal Tutor for further guidance. Where a student has received an extension to their submission date then no further extension shall be permitted for that particular submission and the student would either be expected to submit on the agreed deadline or use the [Academic Appeals \(Awards and Progression\) Procedure](#) after the Assessment Board. Only in very exceptional circumstances would a *Deferral Request* be accepted on an extended submission date.

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:

- *Interim Module Descriptors and Modes of Study: Terminology*: the Committee's discussion were noted and there was an intention that, in future and in light of strategic projects, the University would use only the following two terms:
  - Blended learning: referring to a combination of digitally-enhanced face to face learning and online learning; and
  - Online learning.
- *Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment*: updates on the current status of the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment project.
- *Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee*: updates from the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee.
- *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee*: updates from the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee.
- *Operation of Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee*: the Committee had considered a paper on the future operation of the two Sub-Committees, with the aim of merging them to streamline business and avoid unnecessary duplication. A draft remit and composition was being proposed for a new *Student Experience Sub-Committee*. The Committee was supportive, in principle, of the proposals but agreed further consideration was required of the size of the Sub-Committee, and to ensure core aspects of the respective Sub-Committees' remits were not lost, in particular, the Annual Appraisal Process and planning. The revised proposal would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting.

- *Annual Appraisal Process 2021/22: Action Plans:*
  - *Enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:* following Academic Council's approval of the *Action Plan* in December 2021, the *Plan* had been amended to incorporate: the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment projects; the Teaching Excellence Fellow projects; the Student School Officers' projects; DELTA projects; and the actions arising from the Annual Appraisal Process. It was believed this demonstrated the alignment with the strategic priorities and also how some projects had been subsumed within others. The Committee welcomed the *Action Plan*, regarding it as a very useful summary of the extensive number of projects and activities currently in progress. It was suggested the *Plan* might also include the activities arising from committees, such as the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee and the high level equality, diversity and inclusion actions reported through the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee, and consideration could also be given to including timelines for completion into the *Action Plan*. These changes were incorporated into the version circulated to Academic Council..
  - *Recruitment and Marketing:* the Committee also welcomed the *Recruitment and Marketing Acton Plan*, and the evident progress achieved since the Annual Appraisal Process for 2020/21 had been completed.

## 4.2 External Examiner Appointments

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

- **approved** 14 appointments, 12 extensions of duties and five re-allocations of duties; and
- **ratified** six appointments.

## 5. RESEARCH

### 5.1 Research Committee

Council noted a report of the meeting held on 8 February 2022 and, in particular, the following:

- *Updates:* on a number of areas, including the intention to hold a second annual Research Committee Away Day in June 2022.
- *Research Strategy:* the Committee's discussion of the revised draft *Research Strategy*, ahead of its submission to the Board of Governors on 22 February 2022.
- *Research Culture Survey:* the Committee had received a presentation on the outcomes of the *Research Culture Survey* as previously presented at a town hall meeting and a University Management Group meeting, both in January 2022, followed by a discussion of the issues raised.

- *Key Performance Indicators: new Research Activity Analysis* reports generated from the Tableau-based RGU:Insight system, had been developed by the Research Information Systems and Research Data Manager in liaison with the Strategy and Planning team. The Research KPIs/Data Working Group had met on 13 January 2022, and would meet again on 24 February and in April 2022, prior to submitting recommendations to the Committee's next meeting in May 2022.
- *RGU Orkney*: updates relating to RGU Orkney and the University of the Arctic.
- *Public Engagement Survey*: the discussions of the plans for collating Public Engagement data for 2021/22.
- *Research Excellence Framework (REF)*: the arrangements for publishing the REF 2021 results, including key dates.

## 5.2 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the Research Degrees Committee meeting held on 25 January 2022.

### 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 MRes be conferred on Jo Lironi, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice with effect from 02 November 2021, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Exploring acceptability and feasibility of a wearable device to facilitate home phototherapy treatment for newborn jaundice in rural Scotland: An Interpretive Description Study".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Kevin Forbes, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice, with effect from 15 December 2021, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An investigation of the mental health and psychological resilience of U.K. armed forces personnel following physical combat-related injury in Afghanistan (OP HERRICK) between 2009 and 2011".
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Chinedu Okoro, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 17 December 2021, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Dynamic Relationship Between Oil Price and Macroeconomic Variables: Evidence from Oil Exporting and Oil Importing Countries in Africa".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Maryam Heidarian, School of Engineering, with effect from 19 December 2021, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A Design Technique for Geometric Optimisation of Resonant Coil Sizes in Low to Mid Frequency Inductive Power Transmission Systems".

Graduate School

- (v) The degree of MRes be conferred on Joshua Thakur, School of Engineering, with effect from 20 January 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Design and Analysis of Non-Threaded Drill Pipe Connector".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Louise Henderson, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice, with effect from 01 February 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An exploratory multi-case study of the health and wellbeing needs, relationships and experiences of Health and Social Care Service Users and the people who support them at home in a regional area of Scotland".
- (vii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Sosan Algahtani, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 07 February 2022, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Changing Society; Pioneering Women Entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia".

### 5.2.2 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- *100projects@RGU Initiative*: Dr Emma Gillibrand and Martin Simpson were meeting with the University web team to discuss where these projects could be uploaded on the RGU website, and made more widely visible both to potential applicants and the wider community.
- *Advance HE Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2022*: preparations were underway to allow the research student community to participate in the above national survey in 2022.
- *PhD by Public Output Working Group*: the working group was continuing to meet periodically to discuss important revisions to regulations and processes for implementation in Session 2022/23.
- *Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) – April 2021*: the Committee received an update from the Convener on the implementation of an effective oversight mechanism to ensure all research students received mandatory formal training prior to undertaking any teaching duties within their own academic School.

## 6. STRATEGIC PLANNING

### 6.1 Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators

Council noted the *Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators 2021/22 – Mid-Year Report* from the Vice-Principal for Strategy and Planning.



## 6.2 Academic Session 2021/22 Semester 2 Enrolments

Consideration was given to a paper on *Semester 2 Enrolments* from the Head of Planning and Insight. It reported on performance on enrolment versus target in semester 2 of 2021/22 for all relevant market segments, as at 7 March 2022, and provided contextual information.

It was confirmed that recruitment teams were extremely busy developing application pipelines and levels of international recruitment were expected to be maintained for September 2022, although the situation would be more certain by May 2022. The University's market share had also grown, and such sustained growth brought challenges.

The Postgraduate Student Representative on Council advised that they were frequently approached to support recruitment activities and it was suggested such student involvement could feed into the Student Welcome.

Prof L Kilbride

## 6.3 Academic Development Committee

Council noted a report of the meeting held on 2 February 2022 and, in particular, the following:

- *Portfolio Review*: the first part of the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Project; Part A – Portfolio Review had concluded. This part of the project audited the academic portfolio to check the currency of the University's provision, provide evidence for course enhancements, cessations and suspensions, which would be considered at the next meeting. The review findings would support the next stages of the project – curriculum content and portfolio shape, size and depth.
- *Student Recruitment*: a summary on Semester 2 enrolment versus target performance for all relevant market segments as at 24 January 2022 had been considered, which highlighted three key points: a very significant rise in international on-campus recruitment, the close of recruitment dates, and positive fee income predictions. Some risks were considered in relation to the significant increase in international recruitment and COVID-19 restrictions: impact on retention, late enrolments and resourcing arrangements for dealing with the significant increase in student numbers. The plan for marketing activities to mitigate the risk associated with increased targets for UK recruitment and it was noted significant focus would be on conversion activity.
- *Course Changes*: four course change proposals were approved at the meeting or by Convener's Action.

## 7. ACADEMIC CALENDAR

This item was withdrawn.

**8. COMMITTEE CALENDAR: 2022/23**

The draft *Committee Calendar for 2022/23* was currently being finalised and would be circulated to Council members once complete. It would contain dates for meetings of the Board of Governors, Academic Council (and their respective Standing Committees and Sub-Committees), the Executive, University Management Group, Validation and Institution-Led Subject Review Events, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion events, and agenda-setting meetings.

**9. HONORARY DEGREES**

The following will receive an honorary award at a Summer 2022 graduation ceremony:

Duncan Selbie *Hon DSc (honoris causa) – in absentia* (from July 2020).

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of Academic Council would be on Tuesday 14 June 2022 at 2.00pm.

Professor S Olivier, C