

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minute of the meeting held on 4 December 2017 (2.00pm – 4.00pm).

Present: Professor F von Prondzynski (Chair), Mr F Antoniazzi, Dr I Arana, Professor D Ashall, Mrs M Buchan, Professor D Cairns, Dr N Connon, Ms L Curtis, Mr J Dunphy, Ms J Guest, Professor P Hagan, Mrs E Hancock, Professor J Harper, Ms K Harrison, Dr A Lamb, Ms J Leith, Mr M Lewis, Professor K Mackinnon, Professor J McCall, Mr B McCann, Professor D McClean, Dr J McConnachie, Professor I Murray, Ms J Royle, Ms L Sharp, Mr M Shepherd, Ms J Steed, Professor J Steel, Mrs V Strachan, Professor S Vertigans and Dr A Weidmann.

Apologies: Mrs K Close, Professor E Gammie, Mr M Ife, Mrs A Lawani, Dr M Leon and Mr M Sollis.

In Attendance: Dr D Cockburn, Ms H Douglas (Secretary) and Mrs F McLean Whyte (Clerk).

Welcome: Dr Arana, Dr Connon, Ms Curtis, Professor McCall, Ms Sharp and Mr Shepherd were welcomed to their first meeting.

1. MINUTE	Action
<p>Academic Council approved the <i>Minute of the meeting held on 21 June 2017 [AC/17/3]</i>, and noted a <i>Matters Arising Report</i>.</p>	
<p>1.1 Academic Calendar and Semester Dates [AC/17/3/1.1]</p> <p>The Convener of the Graduation Working Group had provided the following update:</p> <p>The feasibility of moving the summer Graduation Ceremonies forward by two weeks, from the Summer of 2019 onwards, was currently being explored. As a first step, a detailed analysis of the Student Records specific business process was undertaken. This identified a number of ways in which the change in dates could be facilitated, but it was recognised that these changes would have an impact on other university processes. For that reason, a short life “Graduation Working Group” was convened with representation from Governance and Academic Quality, Academic Administration, and the Schools of Engineering, Applied Social Studies, and Pharmacy and Life Sciences. The purpose of the Group was to consider what adjustments to ‘normal’ university processes/schedules would be required to facilitate an earlier graduation. Considerations included timetabling of examinations, assessment administration timescales, the timing of Assessment Boards and venue availability. Associated risks to the university were also considered.</p> <p>The Working Group agreed that the Award Assessment Boards would need to be given priority and be brought forward to the first week of the two-week Assessment Board period and, similarly, examinations contributing to the Award Boards plus large exams would need to be timetabled earlier in the exam diet to allow sufficient time for the marking to take place. Confirmation was received from the Assistant Chief Academic Officer that the potential changes to the examination timetable could be accommodated; however, the Working Group agreed that further substantive work regarding an analysis of the required changes to the Assessment Board schedule was required and that this should be delayed until the availability of a suitable venue had been confirmed.</p>	<p>Ms C Brooker</p>

The Theatre was the preferred venue for the Summer Graduation, both in terms of student experience and the ease of running the event; but liaison with the Theatre subsequently clarified that they could not accommodate a booking from the university during June as it was a peak month for income from touring opera/ballet /theatre companies. The Group would continue to pursue a response from the Theatre about the possibility of moving the ceremonies forward by just one week to the first week in July in summer 2019. Should the Theatre be unable to accommodate a one-week change in dates, then the next step would be to assess the Music Hall and the Beach Ballroom as potential alternative venues. The latter option would require a re-profiling of the number and size of ceremonies held during the week due to seating restrictions. Once the venue had been settled the impact on the Assessment Board schedule would be examined.

Ms C Brooker

The Chair advised Council that he had been informed the university's Graduation Ceremonies in December 2018 would be the first public events to be held in the newly re-furnished Music Hall, and this could give the university an opportunity for additional publicity.

Mr M Sollis &
Ms A Duthie

A member advised Council of concerns he had recently become aware of from staff and students in his School relating to the potential impact of the revised Academic Calendar on 'semester three'/summer teaching activities. In particular, the time available over the summer period to schedule teaching and marking of assessments prior to the start of the new session, especially for accelerated Masters courses and given, in the revised Calendar, semester 2 would end at the same point but that the new session would commence one week earlier. Council was reminded that the decision not to move semester 2 forward had been taken in order to minimise disruption to international student recruitment. It was **agreed** a small group would meet to discuss the concerns as soon as possible, in order that the marketing and recruitment teams could be informed as a matter of urgency.

Mrs V Strachan

1.2 **Athena SWAN [AC/17/3/5.2.1]**

The university submitted its application for the *Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze Award* on 30 November 2017. Council was informed that if the application was successful, there was potential for two Schools to make individual bids in the following year, and two more in the year after. This was in recognition of the considerable effort that was required to prepare an application.

Council extended its thanks to the Vice-Principal for Research and those staff instrumental in compiling the application, for their efforts.

Prof P Hagan

1.3 **Gender Action Plan [AC/17/3/7]**

The *Gender Action Plan* could be accessed at www.rgu.ac.uk/about/planning-and-policy/strategy/outcome-agreement/.

2. **COMPOSITION AND REMIT**

Council noted an extract from *Organisational Regulation O3* relating to its composition and remit.

3. CHAIR'S REPORT

In his routine report, the Chair highlighted:

- *Ministerial Letter of Guidance*: the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Ms Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, had issued her letter of guidance to the Scottish Funding Council on 18 October 2017. This highlighted the Scottish Government priorities, including a desire for an 'intensification' of the Outcome Agreement framework in order to drive institutions to achieve increasingly ambitious targets;
- *Ministerial Visit*: Ms Somerville had visited the university on 28 November 2017 to learn more about RGU's articulation and access provision, and the establishment of a Joint Strategic Board between the university and North-East Scotland College (NESCol). In a private meeting during the visit the Principal, accompanied by the Principal of North East Scotland College (NESCol), had presented an argument for metrics not necessarily based on SIMD to be used for the region, due to the region's distinctive demographics, a view also shared by the University of Aberdeen;
- Council was advised that Ms Somerville was to chair the Delivery Group, tasked with coordinating and monitoring progress with the implementation of the Commission on Widening Access' *Blueprint for Fairness*, in recognition of the importance the Scottish Government placed on the Group's role;
- *Public funding*: Universities Scotland's efforts to obtain a 2% funding increase for the sector in the forthcoming Scottish budget for 2018-19, due to be announced on 14 December 2017, and the likelihood this would be a flat cash settlement;
- *Industrial Strategy*: this had been announced on 27 November 2017 by the UK Government to support research, and research and development. A central part of this was the establishment of a *Strategic Priorities Fund* that would be managed by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and that would fund interdisciplinary research in government priority areas;
- *Oil and Gas Technology Centre*: following discussions with the University of Aberdeen it had been decided to establish two discrete centres of excellence, one in decommissioning and one in subsea, and discussions were ongoing on this basis;
- *Accolades for RGU*: the university had appeared fifth in the UK in a league table published by The Economist for its track record in boosting graduates' salaries;
- *Trade Board*: this had been established by the Scottish Government to oversee and improve Scotland's export performance, and the Principal had been invited to be a member of the Board;
- *Aberdeen Football Club*: the Principal had given evidence at a pre-determination hearing held by Aberdeen City Council on the Kingsford stadium and training centre and expressed strong support for the plans both in terms of the potential positive impact on the university and the city;
- *Nippon Foundation*: the university had held the prestigious Nippon Foundation Summer School for the second year running; and
- *Council leader visits*: leaders from both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils had visited the university and, during this visit, it had been confirmed that the plans for a new Dee Bridge had been shelved.

4. STRATEGIC PLANNING

4.1 University Strategy, Business Plan (including KPIs) and Risk Register

Council noted a first quarter update on the *Business Plan 2017-18*, in addition to the *Strategic Framework 2017-21*, the *Business Plan 2017-18* (including the key performance indicators, and the *Risk Register 2017-18*, all of the latter having been approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 5 October 2017.

Members of Council were encouraged to read the *Business Plan* in detail, as it provided a succinct summary of the university's key priorities, and demonstrated the university's commitment to addressing the Scottish Government's priorities for higher education. The *Business Plan* would also be the focus of the Principal's visits to Schools and Departments after Christmas.

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It was acknowledged that RGU's competitors were catching the university in some areas in which it had previously excelled. It was suggested disruptive innovation or innovation-driven growth might be an approach the university could adopt to be responsive and regain its competitive edge. It was confirmed that this area would be a key consideration for Professor Gordon McConnell, Vice-Principal for Commercial and Regional Innovation following his arrival on 8 January 2018, and that Council members would be involved in such discussions.

Mr G McConnell

The university had established a strong relationship with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and this was assisting the university deliver the Scottish Government's *skills alignment* priority, defined in the Ministerial Letter of Guidance (see item 3 above) as helping to "create a workforce which can compete effectively in an increasingly competitive global economy" and "improve the alignment of education and training provision to the needs of industry and the economy". The award of £4.2m for phase 2 of the Graduate Level Apprenticeships had reinforced the university as an innovator in the development of these Apprenticeships, and the largest provider in Scotland. Plans were underway to prepare for phase 3. (See also item 4.4 below).

The *Strategic Framework* would be launched across the university after Christmas.

Ms M Sollis

The Chair **agreed** to give consideration to a suggestion that the *Risk Register* might benefit from the inclusion of an additional risk relating to the significant strategic and structural changes within the university.

Prof F von
Prondzynski,
Mr M Sollis &
Dr D Cockburn

Council also noted the *Annual Report on Key Performance Indicators 2016-17* and *Business Plan and Risk Register 2016-17 – End of Year Report*, considered by the Board of Governors at its last meeting.

4.2 SFC Outcome Agreement 2018-21

Council was updated on progress with developing the draft *Outcome Agreement 2018-21*.

The Director of Planning and Policy Development confirmed that further information on the additional nursing and midwifery numbers announced in part 1 of the *National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan*, published by the Scottish Government on 28 June 2017, had not yet materialised and he would pursue this in the new year.

Dr D Cockburn

4.3 Strategic Partnerships

The Chair updated Council on current developments with forming new, and extending existing, strategic partnerships. This included the intended launch of a new strategic framework with North East Scotland College (NESCol) in February/March 2018, that covered four separate workstreams.

The Board of Governors had approved Bénédict Schools in Switzerland as an Associate College of the university.

The Chair reiterated that there were no active discussions or any desire to discuss merger with the University of Aberdeen, which had recently been suggested in the media following the announcement of the forthcoming retirement of the University of Aberdeen's Principal.

4.4 Academic Development Committee

Council noted a report of the meetings held on 28 September and 9 November 2017 and, in particular, the following, which highlighted the university's pedagogical approach to course development:

- *Course Portfolio Analysis*: the Committee had taken a high level overview of the whole portfolio, highlighting key issues and challenges that would influence the future shape of course provision. This included efforts by colleagues to ensure a dynamic and responsive portfolio, and the development of interdisciplinary provision where possible. Subsequently, the Committee considered an analysis of courses falling short of intake criteria for viability, as well as courses with strong recruitment and potential for further growth. Heads of School, who are all members of the Committee, were tasked with further reflection on the *Course Portfolio Analysis* considering the numbers and financial implications of their provision.

The Chair advised Council that the Board had taken an interest in the effect of pedagogy on estate planning, as well as the broader teaching and learning agenda.

- *Course Portfolio Developments*: Council noted the following portfolio proposals and developments considered by the Committee:
 - a sector-leading professional suite of *integrated Masters courses (undergraduate) in Health Sciences* was approved. This development would increase the university's competitiveness in the rUK market for these subjects by differentiating the offering and producing graduates who were even more professionally capable. The integrated Masters courses would be developed from a suite of existing undergraduate courses, and the new award titles would be: Master of Dietetics (MDiet); Master of Diagnostic Radiotherapy (MDRad); Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT); and Master of Physiotherapy (MPhys);
 - a number of new *interdisciplinary course developments* were approved that combined delivery from two or more Schools: MSc Strategic Health and Social Care Service Planning and Delivery Management; MSc Biomedical Technology; MEng Electronic and Biomedical Technology; MEng Mechanical and Biomedical Technology; and MSc Business Analytics;

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- The *BSc (Hons) Sports Coaching* was approved and was aimed at enhancing articulation;
- *Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA)*: the university had been successful with seven out of the nine tenders submitted to Skills Development Scotland. This would make the university the largest Graduate Level Apprenticeship provider in Scotland, and attract considerable income and student numbers. Two Graduate Level Apprenticeship courses from an earlier tender had commenced delivery in September 2017, in the School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with all 30 student places filled. The university was already preparing for the third tender process;
- *Student recruitment*: the Committee discussed student recruitment at both of its meetings. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects would be the strategic focus for Scottish Funding Council (SFC) funded numbers. It was recognised also that strong, attractive, course provision was needed for non-SFC provision. A number of innovative and commercially attractive Masters courses had been approved recently (refer below). It was recognised that distance learning provision had grown and that a better understanding of the reasons for the growth would be advantageous in developing the provision and increasing numbers. The Committee agreed that a recruitment and marketing plan for recruitment for session 2018-19 should be produced and this would be presented to the Senior Management Group on 13 December 2017;
- *RGU Online Learning Baseline*: the Committee endorsed the RGU Online Learning Baseline for adoption across the university. The Baseline was a specification developed by DELTA which established benchmark standards/expectations for online distance learning provision. This was used to undertake an audit of existing provision which involved 56 distance learning courses (and over 500 modules). From this, a prioritised enhancement plan for distance learning provision was developed. In addition, adoption of the Baseline would provide greater assurance of quality and consistency in this strategically important and increasingly competitive area;
- *Approval process for Trans-National Education (TNE)*: the Committee agreed a new approval process for TNE proposals, that would support more agile decision-making based on consideration of a business case.

5. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

5.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Consideration was given to reports of the meetings held on 11 October 2017 and 22 November 2017.

5.1.1 *Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2016-17: Annual Report*

Academic Council considered and **endorsed** the *Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2016-17: Annual Report*, for onward reporting to the Board of Governors. Council was reassured the *Annual Appraisal Process* provided a sound evidence base for the Board of Governors to have confidence in, and be satisfied with, the quality and standards of award-bearing courses. Council noted the view of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee that this had been a highly commendable performance given the recent period of significant institutional change.

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In respect of the completeness of the quality assurance processes of the 11 Schools, the following was highlighted:

- all required *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports* had been submitted to the satisfaction of the Committee;
- all *External Examiner Annual Reports* had been received and responded to, with the exception of those noted in the respective Academic Quality Officer Reports, and the Committee was satisfied appropriate action was being taken to obtain these outstanding reports.

In a change to former practice, following the consideration of annual appraisal data at course and School levels the Chief Academic Officer, Assistant Chief Academic Officer and relevant Academic Quality Officer had met with each Head of School to discuss the respective *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports*. Summary outcomes from each of these meetings were provided to the Committee. The thoroughness of the Heads of School engagement in the process had been commended as this had led to demonstrable evidence of extensive improvement actions that were either already complete or well advanced. Furthermore, the Committee was satisfied the *Annual Appraisal Process* had confirmed these actions were adequate and appropriate. Significant pockets of excellent and innovative practice across the Schools were also acknowledged and would be disseminated.

Key observations made by the Committee included:

- Performance in *overall satisfaction* in the *National Student Survey* had recovered to 86%, having declined in 2015-16, with seven of the 11 Schools above the university average.
- *Overall satisfaction* in the *Student Experience Questionnaires* had fallen by 1% to 80% (52% response rate), reflecting a 2% fall for undergraduate provision to 79%, and no change for postgraduate provision at 82%.
- Analysis of the first diet *student achievement rates* had shown:
 - Undergraduate:
 - 90% of full-time students passing at the first diet; and
 - 60% of part-time students;
 - Postgraduate:
 - 90% of full-time students passing at the first diet; and
 - 83% of part-time students.
- *External Examiner Annual Reports* were generally very positive.
- Whilst 97% of undergraduates achieved employment within six months, 80% entered full-time graduate-level employment and/or studying at a higher education or professional level six months after graduation, and the areas with low levels were being targeted by the current *Employability Project*.
- It was commendable that, despite the significant changes within the university over the past year, this had not had a detrimental impact on the *overall satisfaction* score in the *National Student Survey*, which had risen 1% to 86%. Furthermore, this had been achieved with an increased response rate of 80%, up 6% from 2016. This was above both the Scottish and UK sector-wide scores of 85% and 84% respectively. The university was placed 6th in Scotland in 2017 (from 11th place in 2016), and it had surpassed its HEFCE institutional benchmark of 84%. The University of Edinburgh was the only other Scottish institution to improve its performance in this NSS score.

- Due to the volume of students, the relatively poor *overall satisfaction* score in the School of Nursing and Midwifery had a significant impact on the university's overall score. If the 70% score was disregarded, the university would have achieved its KPI target for 2016-17 of 88%. Disappointingly, the School's score had not improved from the previous session. It was agreed at the meeting that it would be important to establish if the School's plans were effective at the earliest point possible, and the Chief Academic Officer had met with the School's senior management team to discuss the plans. It was important to note, however, that whilst the School of Nursing and Midwifery had performed badly in the *National Student Survey*, encouragingly its performance in earlier stages of courses demonstrated positive indicators.
- The university's lowest scoring question in the *National Student Survey* was for the *student voice*, however, the university performed well against other Scottish institutions in this area. The *Student Partnership Agreement's* objectives for 2017-18 were to develop the *student voice* at School level, as well as enhance student wellbeing and resilience.
- It was also observed that whilst some ODL provision had demonstrated high first *student achievement rates*, a number of areas had performed quite poorly. The Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access (DELTA) had already completed a review of the content of ODL provision, and the findings had been reported to the Heads of School. The Academic Development Committee would also review the portfolio of ODL provision.
- The Committee had taken the opportunity to look ahead to future reporting by considering data relating to *Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO)* and *Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)*. The university's performance in *Services and Facilities Spend* and *Staff: Student Ratios* was also noted.

5.1.2 Quality Events

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

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5.1.3 Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

At its meeting on 7 December 2011, Academic Council had approved the 'principles for inclusion', and the 'items for inclusion' in *Section 6.1: Additional Information* of the *HEAR*. Following a request from the Student Union for the inclusion of additional items, a small group had convened to review the content and categories more thoroughly.

Academic Council **approved**:

Ms J Guest

(i) The following items would be included within Section 6.1 of the *HEAR*:

Category	Item
Academic Prizes	Academic and/or equivalent meritorious prizes including scholarships
Clubs, Societies and Groups	Society Posts and Sports Captains Participation in student groups, e.g. Nightline/Student Media
Personal and Professional Learning	Leadership Programme Duke of Edinburgh Award
Student Representation	Student Engagement and Partnership Awards Equality Champions

	Student Officers e.g. Governors, Vice-Presidents, School Student Officers Student Partners Membership of University Committees ResLife Assistants
Work-Related Experience	Student Placements - description Internships
Volunteering	Scarlet Awards Verified Volunteering Activity Saltire Award Student Ambassador Student Buddy BP Student Tutors
Sporting Achievements	Blues Awards
Study Abroad	ERASMUS Scheme and/or equivalent recognised exchange programmes

(ii) Student Union Sabbaticals would not be included within Section 6.1 of the *HEAR*.

(iii) The list of 'academic and/or equivalent meritorious prizes, including scholarships', and the proposed content and mechanisms introduced for Section 6.1 of the *HEAR* be reviewed on a biennial basis.

5.1.4 *Items for Noting*

The following items, in particular, were noted:

- *Graduate Attributes and Course Documentation*: the Committee noted the development work on graduate attributes and course documentation would be integrated into development work currently being undertaken as part of the establishment of the *Employability Hub*;
- *Higher Education Sector Developments: Teaching Excellence Framework*: the Committee's discussion of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF);
- *Staff Development*: the Committee's consideration of a report from the Director of Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access and the Academic Support Lead, DELTA, on recent staff development initiatives;
- *Student Partnership Agreement*: the Committee's consideration of a report on the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*, and its endorsement of the following areas of focus for Session 2017-18:
 - *Student Voice*: to support students and staff to identify areas for 'partnership in action', and to improve the communication of enhancements which are 'achieved in partnership';
 - *Well-being and resilience*: to explore perceptions of well-being and resilience across the RGU community, and identify opportunities to develop a self-reflective and proactive approach which supports students to achieve.

5.2 External Examiner Appointments

In respect of nominations received from the School Academic Boards, Council **approved** three new appointments, and **ratified** 20 appointments, six extensions of duties and three re-allocations of duties.

Department for
Governance and
Academic Quality

6. RESEARCH

6.1 Research Committee

The Vice-Principal for Research reminded Council members of the need to increase the levels of research income by reinforcing an ethos and culture that valued research. He acknowledged the efforts of Heads of School, particularly in a challenging environment that required them to carefully balance priorities. He advised he would, however, be meeting with the professoriate to reiterate the university's expectations for research and encourage them to lead the transformational change required. The university would be taking firm action in areas with poor performance. In addition, it was evident the internal peer review process was not working as intended, and the university needed to get smarter and better at how it conducted its research activities. This would be particularly important if the Board of Governors approved a significant investment package for research which would, in part, be used for the recruitment of experienced researchers.

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In terms of the *Research Excellence Framework (REF)*, the UK funding bodies had published the [Decisions on staff and outputs](#) on 21 November 2017. This confirmed the adoption of the hybrid model involving the inclusion of all staff with significant responsibility for research, provided they were independent researchers, combined with institutions deciding other staff that meet core eligibility criteria and categorised as either 'Category A eligible' and 'Category A submitted'.

The Vice-Principal for Research also updated Council on a number of innovative interdisciplinary research projects which involved the university collaborating with, amongst others, the University of Aberdeen, Grampian Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Orkney Council, Opportunity North East (ONE) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The Chair wished to acknowledge the considerable efforts of the Vice-Principal for Research in providing leadership of these notable developments.

Prof P Hagan

The Committee had received an informative presentation on the *SciVal research performance software* from Ms Victoria Farmer, Resource Services Librarian, and it was **agreed** this should be repeated at a future Senior Management Group meeting.

Prof P Hagan,
Mr C MacLean &
Ms V Farmer

A report of the meeting held on 1 November 2017 was also noted and, in particular, the following:

- *Doctoral supervision*: the Committee had agreed consideration should be given to developing a university policy for the support for supervisors and supervision duties in order to introduce some uniformity;
- *Peer Review*: the Committee's discussion of the requirement for internal peer review of funding applications and publications;
- *School Research Plans*: the Committee's discussion of the Research Plans, and the implications for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021;
- *Recent developments*: the updates provided to the Committee on a number of recent developments, including the university's Athena SWAN submission, priorities for the Graduate School, developing research projects, and the Research Asset Management Project.

6.2 Research Degrees Committee

Council considered a report of the meetings held on 4 October and 15 November 2017.

6.2.1 Conferment of Research Degrees by the Robert Gordon University

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

Mr M Simpson

- (i) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Hyder Abbas, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 20 October 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Dublin Library Society and its Founding Members: Associational Activity and Cultural Patriotism in Late-Eighteenth-Century Dublin".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Bernadette Adeyileka-Tracz, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 28 September 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The effect of single nucleotide polymorphisms and metabolic substrates on the cellular distribution of mammalian BK channels".
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Hussain Arab, School of Engineering, with effect from 7 September 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Application of Chitosan for Produced Water Management".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Sylvie Braat, Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment, with effect from 28 August 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "On Sensory Experience of Historic Architecture".
- (v) The degree of MPhil be conferred on Mr Bruce Chalmers, School of Engineering, with effect from 4 September 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Accurate AVO modelling and reservoir characterisation of the Upper Cretaceous deepwater reservoirs in the Vøring Basin".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Shonagh Douglas, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 13 July 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Does an accounting degree add up? An investigation into the professional exam performance and non-technical skill development of accounting degree graduates".
- (vii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Diana Hogan-Murphy, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 10 October 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Exploring the facilitators and barriers towards implementation of electronic prescribing, dispensing and administration of medicines in hospitals in Ireland".
- (viii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Ibiyekariwaripiribo Iyalla, School of Engineering, with effect from 26 October 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Computational fluid dynamics modelling of pipeline on-bottom stability".

- (ix) The degree of MPhil be conferred on Ms Jesintha Jesudoss, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 19 September 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The design, synthesis and evaluation of selective, non-invasive imaging agents for atherosclerotic plaque".
- (x) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Andrew Martin, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 10 October 2017, in recognition of a programme entitled: "An investigation into contemporary Hotel General Managers behaviour and activity in the context of private, franchise and chain ownership/business models".
- (xi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Trudi McIntosh, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 10 August 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Social and cognitive influences on prescribing decisions among non-medical prescribers".
- (xii) The degree of EngD be conferred on Mr Peter Moyes, School of Engineering, with effect from 28 September 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Development of a novel metal/polymer hybrid downhole expandable seal".
- (xiii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Udechukwu Oguagha, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 16 October 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A Critical Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Local Content Policy (LCP) and Transparency Practices in LCP Implementation in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry".
- (xiv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Andrea Peach, Gray's School of Art, with effect from 23 August 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Making of Modern Scottish Craft: Revival and Invention in 1970s Scotland".
- (xv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Elliot Pirie, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 16 October 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "I've got a feeling: The effect of haptic information on Musical Instrument purchase location intention".
- (xvi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Ndibarafinia Tobin, Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment, with effect from 25 October 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Developing a Framework for Knowledge Capture and Recovery in Whole Life Costing Practice".
- (xvii) The degree of MRes be conferred on Mr Stoyan Veleshki, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 10 October 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Simulation and Optimisation of the Separation Process in Offshore Oil and Gas Platforms".
- (xviii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Wei Zhang, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 23 August 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The cultural consumption of fashion clothes by Chinese Newly Rich Professionals (CNRP)".

6.2.2 *Research Degree Appraisal*

The Committee had considered the *Research Degree Appraisal*. This was the second such consideration following the formation of the single Graduate School in the summer of 2016. Council welcomed the evident and positive impact the Graduate School was having on the research student experience, and was reassured with the rigor of the process. Identified actions would be overseen by the Committee.

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[14.12.17]

6.2.3 *Items for Noting*

The following items, in particular, were noted:

- *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017*: the Committee considered the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 which showed a notable improvement in the “overall satisfaction” rating since the last survey in 2015. In comparison with sector benchmarks, the university scored 77% (up 6%), post-92 - 77% (no change) and Scottish universities - 79% (down 3%). The survey also highlighted a high level of satisfaction with supervisory support. During 2017-18 the Graduate School, in collaboration with host academic Schools, would consider ways to enhance research culture and ambience;
- *Supervisory training*: the Committee considered further development of a Mentoring Moodle Area to assist colleagues share good practice. This work would be done in conjunction with the Human Resources Department and DELTA;
- *Postgraduate Loan Scheme for Research Students*: the Committee had noted the development of the scheme by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in Session 2018-19, offered only to English-domiciled students to study all types of doctorates at universities across the UK. However, an equivalent initiative was not yet under consideration by the Scottish Funding Council, which might prove detrimental for Scottish-domiciled applicants;
- *Student expectations of supervisors*: the Graduate School was currently reviewing the benefits of producing an explicit policy on students’ expectations of supervisors in terms of frequency of meetings and quality of feedback. This work would be benchmarked against sector practice;
- *Appointment of supervisors for part-time staff undertaking a research degree*: following a review of completion rates for part-time research degree study by members of staff, the current policy for offering staff members a part-time degree would be revisited;
- *Maximum periods of registration*: the Committee considered an interim report prepared by the Graduate School listing current research students by host academic School, who had gone beyond their maximum period of registration. The number of students requiring consideration had reduced since the last report produced in May 2017, primarily due to successful completions.

Over the past 20 years, 50% of staff registered internally for a doctoral degree had failed to complete. The long lead in time did not assist the university grow the university’s supervisory capacity, and approximately 50% of staff left the university’s employment after three years following graduation. This demonstrated that unless an exceptional business case could be made for an individual member of staff to undertake a doctoral degree with the university, internal applications should be discouraged.

The Graduate School was continuing its efforts to improve completion rates within the students' registration periods, from the current 30-40% to a target of 70-80%.

7. ACADEMIC APPEALS, MISCONDUCT AND COMPLAINTS

7.1 Academic Appeals and Misconduct: Annual Report 2016-17

Council received its routine annual report summarising the number of academic appeals, research degree appeals, cases of academic and non-academic misconduct, and misconduct appeals processed in Session 2016-17.

	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Academic Appeals and Research Degree Appeals	268*	215	209	241	266
Academic Misconduct	173	177	208	248	169
Non-Academic Misconduct	88	66	146	53	96
Misconduct Appeals	13	20	19	31	19

Some trends were highlighted:

- the number of stage 1 academic appeals considered by Assessment Boards had increased by just over 10% to 268* in Session 2016-17, from 215 in 2015-16, with 65% upheld by Assessment Boards;
- of 57 stage 2 academic appeals and five research degree appeals, 64.5% were dismissed by the Principal, 30.6% were returned to the Assessment Board or Research Degrees Committee for re-consideration, and 3.2% were upheld by the Student Appeals Committee;
- for the third session running cases of academic misconduct had decreased to 173 (–2.25%) from 177 in 2015-16, 208 in 2014-15, and 248 in 2013-14), of which 85% were established and 15% dismissed; two appeals were considered and dismissed by the Student Appeals Committee;
- cases of non-academic misconduct investigated in Misconduct Hearings by the Accommodation Service had increased by 36% to 64 from 47 in 2015-16 (123 in 2014-15, 38 in 2013-14 and 62 in 2012-13); and 24 cases of non-academic misconduct were investigated by Schools, an increase of five on the 19 investigated in 2015-16; one appeal was considered and upheld by the Student Appeals Committee.

The *Academic Regulations Seminar* held on 10 November 2017 had been successful and well-received, with 48 attendees representing all academic Schools.

Some common themes had emerged from academic and research degree appeals over the session, including the supervision of students (honours, masters and research), and students' expectations of the class/grade of their final award.

* Data on the number of stage 1 academic appeals in 2016-17 is not considered reliable due to a one-off amendment made mid-session to the SITS student records system. This lack of reliability will not re-occur in subsequent sessions.

7.2 Complaints Handling Procedure: Annual Report 2016-17

Council considered the fourth *Annual Report* prepared following the implementation of the *Complaints Handling Procedure* on 1 September 2013. The most significant aspect was the decline in the numbers of frontline complaints recorded through Schools and Departments, continuing a trend from 2015-16:

Complaints dealt with by Frontline Resolution				
<i>Source</i>	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
Student	36	70	81	150
Public	8	21	51	7
Anonymous	0	0	3	7
Unknown	0	0	0	36
TOTAL	44	91	135	200

It was apparent from the complaints that were received at stage 2 that frontline complaints were generally resolved in accordance with the *Complaints Handling Procedure* and within the designated five working days for doing so, and yet some of them were not being recorded as such. As a result, Heads of School and Department had been emailed to ask them to remind staff to record all frontline complaints and who to contact within their School or Department. At the same time, mindful of the significant changes to structures and roles that had taken place over the last year, the offer of a briefing to staff on the procedure had also been made.

It was proving gradually more challenging to complete Stage 2 investigations within the prescribed 20 working days due to their increasing complexity.

In summary:

- of the 44 complaints, 12 (40%) were upheld, 10 (33%) were not upheld, with the remainder having no recorded outcome;
- complaints related to the following seven categories:
 - *Quality and standard of service* – 11 complaints
 - *Treatment by or attitude of staff, student or contractor* – 9 complaints
 - *Quality of facilities/learning resources* – 6 complaints
 - *Dissatisfaction with the university's policy* – 4 complaints
 - *Failure to provide a service* – 4 complaints
 - *Inappropriate behaviour by staff, student or contractor* – 3 complaints
 - *Failure of the university to follow a proper administrative process* – 2 complaints;
- 14 (31%) were considered at the *investigation stage*; of these none were upheld, six were partially upheld and eight were not upheld;
- as a result of investigations a number of recommendations had been made by complaints investigators and communicated to the complainants. These were logged separately and monitored to ensure implementation.

8. **VICE-CONVENERS: STANDING COMMITTEES 2017-18**

Academic Development Committee	Mrs Veronica Strachan
Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee	Mrs Veronica Strachan
Research Committee	Dr Emma Gillibrand
Research Degrees Committee	Professor Paul Hagan

9. **ACADEMIC REGULATIONS – CHAIR’S ACTION**

A paper detailing approval of exceptions to *Academic Regulations* was noted.

10. **HONORARY DEGREES**

An honorary degree, *Hon DLitt (honoris causa)*, would be conferred on Mr Stuart McBride at the graduation ceremony to be held on Wednesday 6 December 2017.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Academic Council would next meet on Wednesday 14 March 2018 at 2.00pm.

Secretary’s Note: Subsequent to the meeting, the venue for the meeting on 14 March 2018 was changed to N204, Sir Ian Wood Building.

Academic
Council Members

Professor F von Prondzynski, C
13 December 2017

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