

## THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

## ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minute of the meeting held on 20 June 2018 (2.00pm – 4.35pm).

**Present:** Professor F von Prondzynski (Chair), Mr F Antoniazzi, Dr I Arana, Professor D Ashall, Professor D Cairns, Ms L Curtis, Professor E Gammie, Professor P Hagan, Mrs E Hancock, Professor J Harper, Ms K Harrison, Mr M Ife, Dr A Lamb, Ms J Leith, Dr M Leon, Professor K Mackinnon, Mr B McCann, Professor D McClean, Dr J McConnachie, Professor I Murray, Ms L Sharp, Mr M Shepherd, Professor J Steel and Mrs V Strachan.

**Apologies:** Mrs M Buchan, Mrs K Close, Dr N Connon, Mr J Dunphy, Ms J Guest, Dr A Lawani, Professor J McCall, Professor G McConnell, Ms J Royle, Mr M Sollis, Ms J Steed, Professor S Vertigans and Dr A Weidmann.

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

## 1. MINUTE

## Action

Academic Council **approved** the *Minute of the meeting held on 14 March 2018 [AC/18/2]*, and noted a *Matters Arising Report*.

## 2. CHAIR'S REPORT

In his routine report, the Chair highlighted:

- *Spending Review:* the Scottish Government was about to embark upon its regular spending review that would be informed by the UK Government's autumn budget. Universities Scotland was making a submission to the review, seeking a real terms increase of 2 per cent for the higher education sector for 2019-20. Higher education was now designated by the Scottish Government as a 'protected' category (alongside health and schools), demonstrating recognition by the Government of its importance to the Scottish economy. Consequently, while there were still uncertainties, particularly in respect of Brexit, the immediate future of higher education funding might cautiously be considered more positive than it had over recent years;
- *Knowledge Exchange Framework:* the UK Government intended to establish a *Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)* that would assess institutions in terms of their success in generating knowledge exchange. It was not yet clear how this would be measured or, because it was an initiative of the Office for Students, whether it would apply to Scotland, although early indications suggested most higher education institutions in Scotland were keen to engage;
- *Outcome Agreements:* the Scottish Funding Council was obliged by the Scottish Government's 'intensification' priorities to ensure all institutions were committed to making all reasonable efforts to meet key targets. In a change of emphasis, outcome agreements were increasingly being used to ensure delivery on key public policy priorities, in particular widening access, by requiring very challenging (possibly unachievable) targets to be included in agreements. Whether these targets could or would be met was not always certain;

- *North East Scotland College (NESCol)*: the university and NESCol would be launching a new partnership, to be branded as TWO PLUS (with 'TWO' standing both for the number and 'together widening opportunities'). With a strategic objective of creating a new framework of tertiary education access in the region, it was being presented as a key innovation to both the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government. A formal ministerial launch was planned for later in the year;
- *gender-based violence*: as advised at the last meeting, the Scottish Government had set up an HE/FE sector-wide working group as part of its *Equally Safe 2016 - A National Strategic Approach to Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls* initiative on gender-based violence in higher and further education. This consisted of Government officials, agency members (including the Scottish Funding Council), representatives of some key groups (such as rape crisis centres), and representatives of the two sectors. The Chair represented university Principals on the group, and Ms Susannah Lane of Universities Scotland was also a member. The University of Strathclyde's *Equally Safe in Higher Education Toolkit* had now been launched and would inform the university's own work in this area (see item 4.2 below). The university had also purchased a dedicated support system, *Silver Cloud*, used by other universities, and this was currently undergoing testing and development prior to implementation. Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis Centre had been appointed as consultants to the university. A programme of training had been devised for frontline staff, including for a select group that would be able to risk assess and take forward necessary actions, thereafter a train the trainer methodology would be adopted;
- *University of Aberdeen*: Professor George Boyne would be taking up office as the new Principal of University of Aberdeen on 1 August 2018, and had recently visited RGU.

### 3. STRATEGIC PLANNING

#### 3.1 Business Plan and Risk Register 2017-18

Council noted third quarter updates for the *Business Plan and Risk Register 2017-18*.

In respect of strategic collaborations, the Chair updated Council on the following:

- negotiations over significant partnerships and projects in Mexico were nearing completion. Although the details were not yet finalised they offered significant opportunities;
- the university was extending its existing links with Japanese partners, such as the Nippon Foundation, Kobe University and the city of Kobe;
- the university was fostering a new strategic partnership in Ireland, which would extend its reach in international student recruitment, and be a possible presence within the European Union after Brexit;
- as already reported at Council's previous meeting the Board of Governors had approved the status of the Bénédict Schools in Switzerland (Zürich and Lucerne) as an associate college of the university, and this would subject to a formal launch. Expansion of the collaboration was now being explored;

- discussions were ongoing with the University of Strathclyde in respect of the establishment of the *Subsea and Underwater Centre of Excellence*, and there was potential for this work to extend into other areas;
- initiatives were also being considered in China and Algeria.

It was confirmed the university had a long history of being fully engaged with the ERASMUS programme, and with student exchanges in many other countries. Exchanges were administered by the Employability and Professional Enrichment unit.

### 3.2 **Student Recruitment 2018-19**

Council considered a report from the Director of Marketing and the Dean of Student Recruitment. In summary, there was confidence that the university's recruitment targets for undergraduate and postgraduate provision would be achieved for Session 2018-19. This was due, in part, to offers being made earlier and promptly securing acceptances. Marketing campaigns were focusing on postgraduate (home/EU and international), clearing for specific undergraduate subjects, rUK and distance learning. Targeting specific areas avoided unnecessary expenditure in areas with little return.

### 3.3 **Athena SWAN Charter**

The university's second Bronze award application had regrettably been unsuccessful. Council was informed that while RGU accepted some of the feedback received from the *Advance HE* assessment team, there was disappointment that the application had been criticised for, for example: not addressing issues (when they had been included in the application); not reporting on progress with items that were in the forward-looking action plan and so not yet commenced; not holding enough interviews and focus groups (when extensive work had been done in this area); and not providing additional information (when the application word limit had been reached addressing the core items). *Advance HE* had offered support with the university's next application, although it was not yet certain whether the university would re-apply in November 2018 or delay until April or November 2019.

Alongside this, *Advance HE* announced on 15 May 2018 that it was going to undertake a major review of the *Athena SWAN Charter*, ensuring that it was fit for current and future needs of institutions, individuals and the sector as a whole. Professor Julia Buckingham, Vice-Chancellor and President of Brunel University London, would chair the steering group responsible for leading the independent review, with work completed in early 2019. *Advance HE* was assuring institutions that no changes would be made to the *Athena SWAN* process during the review. Consequently, it might be prudent for the university to delay its application until the outcomes of the review were known.

### 3.4 Strategic Discussion – Skills Agenda

Council was given the opportunity to discuss how the university might respond to the *skills agenda*, which was a key priority of the Scottish Government.

The Chair briefed Council on the dialogue between Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in respect of the necessary response by the higher education sector to the future skills needs of the Scottish economy. The potential issues were whether:

- higher education institutions should be left to define the future skills needs as being mainly ‘soft’ or transferable, as vocational or professional skills needs were difficult to predict; a position favoured by the SFC and many higher education institutions; or
- higher education institutions should be challenged on whether they were currently effectively addressing the current and future workforce management needs, as favoured by the SDS.

It was also noted that industry was often reticent, lacked confidence or found it difficult, to predict future skills needs in light of extant business conditions, as recently experienced within the oil and gas sector.

In discussion, there was consensus that the university was potentially in a unique position due to its established track record in establishing effective relationships, such as with North-East of Scotland College (NESCol), its leadership in developing graduate apprenticeships, and also its long-standing tradition of working closely with industry in curriculum development and research. The university's record on employability was also regarded as a key factor. There was agreement amongst Council members that the university was in a strong position to promote both professional and work-based skills for employment, and also transferable or ‘soft’ skills, over and above its extensive efforts to widen access through articulation with further education and expansion of short course provision.

Consequently, there was agreement amongst those present that the positions of SDS and the SFC were not mutually exclusive, and the university was well positioned to work with both approaches. Measures had already been taken, through the Academic Development Committee, to discuss potential options, including the expansion of short course/continuing professional development (CPD) provision, and consideration of the skills base in current entrants to higher education.

It was acknowledged in discussion that change should be regarded as the one constant, and no institution could remain in the status quo if it wished to address both political and practical implications of the Scottish Government's skills agenda. The university was also in a fortunate position, due to its track record and recent achievements, of being held in high regard by SDS.

Council agreed a short-life working group would be convened to discuss how best to package the university's approach to the skills agenda, drawing together all of its existing and future projects and initiatives, in order to provide a strong and unified narrative around the university's approach. This group would be asked to report to Council's next meeting in December 2018.

Prof F von  
Prondzynski

Academic  
Council Holding  
File [06.12.18]

### 3.5 Academic Development Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meetings held on 26 April and 7 June 2018.

#### 3.5.1 Awards of the University

Academic Council **approved** the following new four-year integrated master's awards for inclusion in *Academic Regulation A1, Schedule 1.1: Awards of the University*:

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Master of Dietetics (MDiet)  
Master of Diagnostic Radiography (MDRad)  
Master of Occupational Therapy (MOccTh)  
Master of Physiotherapy (MPhys)

#### 3.5.2 Strategic Business

Council was updated on the Committee's discussions of a number of items of strategic and developmental business, including strategic business in order to achieve the desired growth in both income and student numbers. To inform discussions on the capacity and capability to deliver the necessary growth, the Committee had considered the medium-term development of the course portfolio in light of the University's financial forecast, that showed a projected cumulative 10% increase in tuition fee revenue in each of the next five years.

The Committee noted that, among other challenges for achieving this growth, there was an increasingly competitive environment in which to secure a share of the Scottish Funding Council teaching grant. The graduate apprenticeship developments would play a key role in meeting the growth targets, but these were short-term contracts at present. The Committee had, therefore, considered a range of market insights and more detailed proposals, particularly with regard to the growth of online learning, short courses and international on-campus student recruitment, would be discussed at its next meeting in September 2018.

The Committee had also agreed that a clear marketing strategy for online distance learning recruitment was required, and this would be reflected in the fact that the Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access (DELTA) was leading a project, nearing completion, to enhance the quality and consistency of online learning provision.

In discussions, a number of important factors with an impact on potential growth in respect of the following were identified:

- *online distance learning student numbers*:
  - financial forecasts required the intake numbers to increase by approximately 320 students per year which, whilst not exceptional for the sector, would normally be achieved through collaborative partnerships;
  - the overall market for online distance learning in the UK had declined over the last five years and the university had lost market share;
  - the SAAS loan scheme was an opportunity to attract student numbers, but it came with an impact on curriculum design: part-time online courses had to be delivered in double the time of full-time courses, i.e. in two years rather than three as was commonly the case at present;
  - it was important to ensure developments were demand-led;

- one focus should be on whether the current provision could be sold more effectively;
- there should be a clear central marketing strategy for this market segment;
- *international student numbers* were starting to increase, and the focus would be to build on this progress, using market intelligence to inform and create impact, and help to identify potential new markets;
- *rUK student numbers* were very small and it was a highly competitive market, so tactics would need to be nuanced and focused;
- *home/EU postgraduate student numbers* had declined and a clear strategy was needed to address this decline.

The Committee considered detailed market insights for the above sectors at its meeting in June 2018, and further detailed discussion would take place at its September 2018 meeting.

### 3.5.3 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- a distance learning enhancement project update;
- process review for commercial proposals;
- course portfolio developments;
- market insights in relation to student numbers;
- addressing gender imbalance; and
- student recruitment and retention.

## 4. **ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

### 4.1 **Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee**

Council considered a report of the meeting held on 30 May 2018.

#### 4.1.1 *University Policy on Personal Tutoring*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2018-19, a revised *University Policy on Personal Tutoring*. The revisions were aimed at more clearly defining both the responsibilities for implementing the *Policy*, and for supporting academic staff acting as personal tutors. The Committee had asked that the support and development for staff, to be provided jointly by DELTA and Student Life, should be instigated as soon as possible.

The *Policy* was pitched as a critical minimum, and its effectiveness would be evaluated through annual reports from the School Academic Boards.

#### 4.1.2 *Organisational Regulation 07: Assessment Boards*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2018-19, amendments to *Organisational Regulation 07: Assessment Boards* that reflected recent organisational changes, and provided improved clarity regarding Assessment Board membership and the attendance of external examiners.

Mr F Antoniazzi  
& Mrs A Smart

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Whyte)

#### 4.1.3 *Quality Events*

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

Board of  
Governors  
[28.06.18]

#### 4.1.4 *Academic Regulations*

Academic Council **approved**, for implementation in Session 2018-19, amendments to the following, as contained in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's minute of 30 May 2018 (item 4.1 referred):

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- *Regulation A2*, paragraphs 5.1 – 5.6: the amendments related to the introduction of two categories of recognition of prior learning (RPL), one relating to admission and entry, and one to on-course RPL; specific timescales relating to the claiming of on-course RPL; and removal of the requirement for external examiners to have access to candidates' RPL portfolio claims;
- *Regulation A3, Section 1*: timescales for the submission of academic appeals by students, reduced from 20 working days to 10 working days;
- *Regulation A3, Section 1* and *Section 2*: communication of outcomes/decisions by email only, with hard copy only provided at the student's explicit request;
- *Regulation A3, Section 2*: the addition of the QAA definition of contract cheating into paragraph 6.1.1, as a recognisable form of academic misconduct;
- *Regulation A3, Section 2: Student Misconduct Procedure*: this had been substantially revised to incorporate: changes to timescales; increased alignment with the *Academic Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure*; replacing 'penalty' with 'sanction' and the addition of three new sanctions; and increased clarity around the relationships between fitness to practise procedures and the *Student Misconduct Procedure*;
- *Regulation A4*, paragraphs 12 and 13: amended in order to insert reference to the potential use of viva voce examinations when considering an academic appeal; the inclusion of an explicit statement that a successful appeal would not result in the appellant's grade/mark being amended by an Assessment Board unless a material procedural or computational error had been established; and the addition of a cross reference to *Regulation A4* in paragraph 9.2.2 of *Regulation A3, Section 1*;
- *Regulation A4*, paragraph 9.14: deletion of the paragraph which was seldom used and the rationale for permitting an undergraduate student an additional assessment opportunity was unclear, particularly as this was not available to postgraduate students.

Academic Council also **approved** an amendment to the *Academic Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure* to bring it into line with the proposed *Student Misconduct Procedure*. Currently, the *Academic Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure* required a recommendation to be made to the Principal for a referral of a case to the Student Appeal Committee. The *Student Misconduct Procedure* permitted the Assistant Chief Academic Officer and Deputy Academic Registrar or Academic Quality Officer to send a case directly to the Student Appeals Committee, without referral to the Principal. As this was seen as an anomaly, and was an additional step to the process, it would be removed from the *Student Appeals (Award and Progression) Procedure* without it compromising the process.

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#### 4.1.5 *Student Engagement and Partnership – Session 2017-18*

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee had considered two discrete reports, covering *Student Engagement with Quality* and the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*.

The *SPA 2017-18* had focused around two objectives:

- *Well-being and resilience:*
  - development of the *Student Mental Health Agreement/Compact* and, although “Student” was in the title, the *Agreement* was aimed at the active participation of the whole of the university community;
  - RGU:Union had collaborated with 13 other unions to undertake research exploring students’ mental health and well-being and this had received over 500 responses. The survey also examined what impact mental health issues had, and had served to reinforce views based on anecdotal evidence;
  - the Disability and Dyslexia Service had established a *Staff Resilience Development Network* aimed at supporting staff in their role of supporting students. Contributors to the network were sought from various academic Schools, Counselling and DELTA;
- *Student Voice:*
  - an appreciative enquiry process had been completed to identify and disseminate examples of effective practice in relation to working in partnership, and this had led to identification of the following that would be progressed prior to the start of Session 2018-19:
    - *Closing the feedback loop:*
      - a suggested approach for effectively communicating course/School enhancement activity to the student body; and
      - building on the *Student Experience Questionnaire* promotional activity, creation of a suite of banded templates and resources to assist in ‘closing the feedback loop’, for proactive use by both academic and service colleagues;
    - *Promoting partnership dialogue:*
      - creation of case studies of effective practice identified from the research;
      - development of a prescriptive timeline for key representative and partnership, aimed at maximising and streamlining activity;
      - further development and support for key representative roles, and specifically the Student School Officers;
      - review of the remit and guidance for ‘staff/student liaison’ to empower colleagues to foster a partnership ethos;
      - suggested guidance for a local ‘partnership event’ early in Semester 1 to introduce key individuals and facilitate discussion of School priorities (e.g. Heads of School/Course Leaders/Student School Officers/student representatives).



#### 4.1.6 Items for Noting

The following items, in particular, were noted:

- *Annual Appraisal Process*: Council noted the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's consideration of several reports relating to actions arising from the *Annual Appraisal Process* for Session 2016-17, and its endorsement of changes to the *Annual Appraisal Process* for Session 2017-18 in relation to the process and associated proformas, development of *Tableau* business information dashboards, and the process for the *Student-Facing Support Services Review*.
- *Institutional Learning and Teaching Enhancement Projects*: Council was informed of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's consideration of updates on progress during the current session in the following *Institutional Learning and Teaching Enhancement Projects*:
  - assessment: online submission, marking and return of coursework;
  - enhancement of the online learning experience;
  - lecture capture.
- *Subject Level Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)*: Council noted the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's consideration of an extensive and detailed report from the Director of Planning and Policy Development and the Planning Analyst that provided an indication of the university's performance in the *Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Year Three Metrics dataset at subject level* (an alternative approach to the existing institution-level award), which was being piloted by the UK government in 2017-18 and 2018-19, prior to its formal introduction in 2019-20.
- *National Student Survey (NSS)*: The NSS had closed on 30 April 2018 and the results would be released on 27 July 2018. The university had achieved its highest ever overall response rate of 82%.

#### 4.2 Mental Health and Well-Being

Council received an informative presentation from the Director of Student Life regarding measures taken by the university, in partnership with RGU Union, to address student, and staff, mental health and wellbeing. This highlighted:

- Wellbeing underpinned every strand of the university's strategy, relating to:
  - identity;
  - embracing diversity and equality;
  - cultivating student success;
  - enriching the student experience; and
  - engaging the university's communities.
- Current and future issues related to:
  - mental health;
  - gender-based violence (GBV);
  - equality and diversity;
  - access;
  - intersectionality, relating to increasing complex and intermingled factors;
  - British Sign Language, that would shortly become an official Scottish language; and
  - the Prevent strategy, to reduce extremist-inspired violence.

- A significant number of activities had already been initiated relating to:
  - the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*;
  - adaptation of existing internal services;
  - clubs and societies;
  - the future agenda of the university's Equity and Diversity Advisory Group and its Equality Champions;
  - further development of the university's personal tutorial system;
  - building resilience in students;
  - academic initiatives;
  - development of appropriate policies; and
  - rejuvenation of the university's *Healthy University* initiative.
- A *Mental Health Agreement, or Compact*, has been developed that underpins the university and RGU Union partnership, and provides a framework for the whole university community to work with. This stated:

RGU strives to create a culture within our community that promotes and supports positive wellbeing in order to create the best possible student experience.

1. Explore mechanisms to identify students at risk of poor mental health and put in place early intervention strategies and identify pathways to appropriate support.
2. Create opportunities to normalise conversations around mental health in the RGU community and embed this in the culture.
3. Actively encourage groups and activities to increase a sense of belonging amongst students.
4. Design and deliver sessions which facilitate staff and students to become more confident in addressing their own and others' mental health.
5. Increase the promotion of internal and external support services for greater student awareness of mental health issues, and access to wider information on appropriate professional and self-help.

- Future issues would include:
  - how the whole university community could be engaged, including Support Services, Schools and RGU Union;
  - how it could become responsive and adaptable;
  - ensuring activities were embedded in partnership;
  - ensuring actions were data-driven;
  - ensuring interventions were targeted;
  - consideration of implications for curriculum design;
  - addressing the needs of on-campus students, and also all of our learners, including those studying off-campus.

Council welcomed the presentation and reinforced the importance of ensuring rapid and effective staff development to enable delivery of its commitments. A launch event would also be organised for the *Mental Health Agreement/Compact*, supported by the Chair. It was **agreed** the Chair, the Director of Student Life and Student President (Education and Welfare) would meet to progress this initiative. The Chair also requested a demonstration of the Silver Cloud software.

It was suggested that 'mental resilience' might be promoted as an RGU graduate attribute in the future.

Mr F Antoniazzi,  
Prof F von  
Prondzynski &  
Ms K Harrison

Mr F Antoniazzi  
& Mrs V  
Strachan

It was noted the Board of Governors would be undertaking a visit to the Student Life directorate on 6 November 2018 to, amongst other things, engage with the university's mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

#### 4.3 External Examiners

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

- **approved** 23 new appointments, 11 extensions to duties and four re-allocations of duties; and
- **ratified** two new appointments, and one re-allocation of duties.

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### 5. RESEARCH

#### 5.1 Research Committee

Council noted a report of the meeting held on 10 May 2018 covering the Committee's discussions of recent developments and issues, including:

- its inaugural *Research Week* between 18 – 22 June 2018, a week of staff development and awareness-raising presentations;
- the very significant number of developments arising under the auspices of the *Orkney Project*;
- the extensive programme of *researcher development events* planned for the remainder of the current session, and for Session 2018-19; and
- recent developments with the implementation of the university-wide *Research Asset Management Project*.

#### 5.2 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meeting held on 16 May 2018:

##### 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 PhD be conferred on Ms Mayowa Ayodele, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 3 May 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Effective and Efficient Estimation of Distribution Algorithms for Permutation and Scheduling Problems".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Anil Bandhakavi, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 23 January 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Domain-specific Lexicon Generation for Emotion Detection from Text".
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Prabhakar Bhatta, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 11 May 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An investigation of genetic polymorphism in association with Type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome".

Graduate School

- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Chikezie Emele, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 17 January 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Examining health information source-selection, access and use by men in rural areas of South-East Nigeria: Mapping culturally appropriate health information provision".
- (v) The degree of MRes be conferred on Ms Fiona Gibb, School of Nursing and Midwifery, with effect from 10 April 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Strengthening maternity service user involvement in midwifery clinical skills education through co-design of a mobile app".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Steven Hair, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 4 April 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Determining the role of the LPI/GPR55 system in the development of obesity and associated cardiovascular consequences".
- (vii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Amin Hedayetullah, School of Engineering, with effect from 17 April 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Optimisation of identification of particle impacts using Acoustic Emission".
- (viii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Leigh-Anne Hepburn, Gray's School of Art, with effect from 23 April 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Enabling Philosophical Design Space for Transdisciplinary Collaboration".
- (ix) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Maria Kopsida, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 26 March 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Targeting histone deacetylase (HDACs) enzymes with novel bisnaphthalimidopropyl derivatives (BNIPs) as alternative breast cancer therapies".
- (x) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Adekunle Oke, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 4 April 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Understanding waste recycling behaviour in the UK: Home-Work Consistency".
- (xi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Edidiong Okon, School of Engineering, with effect from 23 April 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Preparation, characterisation and carrier gas transport characteristics of inorganic and organic membranes for application in lactic acid esterification with ethanol".
- (xii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Habiba Shehu, School of Engineering, with effect from 8 May 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Innovative Hydrocarbons Recovery and Utilization Technology Using Reactor-Separation Membranes for Off-gases emission during Crude Oil Shuttle Tanker Transportation and Natural Gas Processing".
- (xiii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Laurie Smith, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 2 March 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An Investigation and Examination of the Levels and Types of Bacterial Contamination on the Surface of Clean Room Operators' Garments".
- (xiv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Karan Dakup, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 29 May 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Adoption of Eco-innovations: a study of SMEs in the Scottish food and drink sector".

- (xv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Ama Lawani, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 28 May 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Investigating Project Management Practice in Nigerian Government Construction Organisations: A Systems Thinking Approach".
- (xvi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Blessing Mbipom, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 30 May 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Knowledge Driven Approaches to e-learning Recommendation".
- (xvii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Ahmed Hussein, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 30 May 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Deep Learning Approaches for Imitation Learning".

This brought the number of research degrees conferred in Session 2017-18 to 39.

## 5.2.2 Amendments to A6: Research Degrees

Council **approved** minor amendments to *Regulation A6: Research Degrees*:

- *Authorised Interruption of Studies*: the amendment was proposed to remove any suggestion that applying for an authorised interruption of registration was optional. If a student wished or needed to have an authorised interruption of registration, they must apply for the interruption:

5.5.1 If a research student is prevented, by ill-health or other valid cause, from making progress with the research, the student ~~may~~ shall apply for an authorised interruption of registration ...

- *Termination of Registration and/or Enrolment*: the amendments were proposed as the text, and purpose of the text, had not been modified since the dissolution of the three Graduate Schools. The revised text returned the responsibility for requesting a termination of a student's registration to the supervisory team, as occurred before the three Graduate Schools were established. The opportunity was also being taken to remove the pre-emptive opportunity for a research student to submit an Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form prior to consideration of the case by the Research Degrees Committee, given any extenuating circumstances and supporting evidence might be considered as part of research degree appeal:

5.7.1 Where the ~~Graduate School and/or~~ supervisory team and/or the Graduate School has concerns with the progress of a research student and/or is unable to communicate with the research student for a period exceeding two months (or for such other period as required by UK Visas and Immigration service), the supervisory team shall complete a Termination of Registration/Enrolment (RDTerm) form, providing supporting evidence as appropriate, and submit this to the Head of the Graduate School. ~~Head of the Graduate School shall write to the research student to give 28 days to submit an Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form, together with verifiable/relevant evidence.~~

5.7.2 The Research Degrees Committee shall consider the *Termination of Registration/Enrolment (RDTerm)* form, supporting evidence provided by the supervisory team and/or Graduate School ~~or supervisory team and, if submitted by the research student, the Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form.~~ If approved by the Research Degrees Committee, the termination will be effective from the date of the Committee meeting.

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- *Internal Convenership of Oral Defence*: The amendment was proposed to reintroduce the requirement for the internal convener to be from outwith the research student's School. This requirement had been dropped from the Regulation when the three Graduate Schools were established:

9.1.8 The Research Degrees Committee shall ensure, through the appointment of an Internal Convener normally from outwith the School concerned ...

### 5.2.3 *Items for Noting*

The following items, in particular, were noted:

- *Carnegie Trust Scholarships 2018*: the School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences had successfully secured a funded doctorate scholarship for 2018;
- *SITS Continuous Improvement Project/eVisioning the PgR journey*: a workflow document for SITS Tribal to plan the above project would be finalised by early June 2018 and it was anticipated SITS Tribal would commence work on this project in autumn 2018;
- *alternative to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)*: this survey was launched on 8 May 2018 and would allow the Graduate School to assess if PGR perceptions of their study experience had improved since the 2017 survey;
- *staff equivalent Outlook for research students*: the Committee endorsed the view this provision should be in place for the new cohort in October 2018, together with appropriate email distribution lists owned and maintained by IT Services;
- *Research Degree Internal Review (RDIR) – 28 June 2018*: The Committee noted work currently being undertaken as part of the preparations for the above event.

## 6. COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP 2018/19

Council considered a paper from the Governance and Academic Quality department, regarding proposed revisions to *Organisational Regulation O3*.

Council considered proposals for a further amendment to the composition of Academic Council to address the requirements of the *Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016*. Subsequent to the Board's approval of the above composition in March 2018, it was noted that no provision had explicitly been made to include a Student President. Currently, "a Student Union President" was an ex officio member of Academic Council.

The major office bearers, of which there might be up to five, were described in the [RGU Union Constitution<sup>1</sup>](#) (updated in April 2017), as "Sabbatical Officers". The Sabbatical Officers were elected by a secret ballot in which all Ordinary Members were entitled to vote, and no Ordinary Member might hold a Sabbatical Office for more than two years in total. Each 12 month term ran from 1 August until 31 July of each year. RGU Union currently had three Sabbatical Officers:

President (Communications and Democracy)  
 President (Education and Welfare)  
 President (Sport and Physical Activity)

<sup>1</sup> [www.rguunion.co.uk/about/constitution/](http://www.rguunion.co.uk/about/constitution/)

Academic Council **agreed to recommend to the Board** the addition of “RGU Union Sabbatical Officer” as the fourth elected student member on Academic Council from Session 2018-19. If approved, this would result in the following composition of Academic Council:

*Ex Officio*

Principal  
Deputy Principal and Chief Academic Officer  
Vice-Principal for Commercial and Regional Innovation  
Vice-Principal for Research  
Vice-Principal for University Advancement  
Heads of School and the Graduate School

*Elected*

Two members of staff from each School (preferably one male, one female), not including the Graduate School

Four students (to include one undergraduate, one postgraduate taught, one research student, and one RGU Union Sabbatical Officer)

*In attendance*

Other officers may be in attendance at meetings

In terms of officers' attendance at meetings, the Chair had indicated that the Assistant Chief Academic Officer, the Director of Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access and the Director of Student Life should routinely attend Academic Council, with other officers attending from time to time subject to the business under discussion. This would be considered on a meeting by meeting basis.

Academic Council also approved, subject to the proposed amendment relating to the “RGU Union Sabbatical Officer”, the revised version of *Organisational Regulation O3: Academic Council*.

Governance and  
Academic Quality  
(Mrs F McLean  
Whyte)

## 7. COMMITTEE EVALUATION

As was customary, Council considered a paper evaluating its performance and that of its Standing Committees, together with a review of members' attendance. Overall, feedback had been positive and all those responding considered that the respective remits had been effectively carried out.

## 8. VALEDICTORY

The Chair wished to record very warm thanks to Ms Kerry Harrison, Student President (Education and Welfare), who was demitting her post at the end of her term of office and leaving the university having completed her studies. Ms Harrison had made an outstanding contribution, leading the student voice and mental health initiatives, and contributing to the continued development of a constructive and successful relationship between the RGU Union and the university.

In addition, Academic Council extended its thanks for the valuable contributions of the following members, who were demitting at the end of their terms of office:

- Mr Michael Ife, Student President (Communications and Democracy), the student representative;
- Dr Ama Lawani, representing the research student community;
- Dr Bryan McCann, representing the School of Health Sciences;
- Dr Jennifer McConnachie, representing the School of Engineering;
- Ms Josie Steed, representing Gray's School of Art.

## 9. OUTCOME AGREEMENT

The final *Outcome Agreement 2018-21* agreed with the Scottish Funding Council was available at [www.rgu.ac.uk/outcome-agreement-rgyou](http://www.rgu.ac.uk/outcome-agreement-rgyou).

## 10. ACADEMIC COUNCIL APPOINTEE ON THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Professor David McClean's term of office as Academic Council's appointee on the Board of Governors would expire on 31 December 2018, therefore nominations would be sought in the autumn for his replacement.

## 11. HONORARY DEGREES

The following would receive honorary degrees at the summer 2018 graduation ceremonies:

Jennifer Craw	<i>DBA (honoris causa)</i>	(11 July 2018 at 10.30am)
Gillian Docherty	<i>DTech (honoris causa)</i>	(13 July 2018 at 2.30pm)
Professor Mona Siddiqui	<i>DEd (honoris causa)</i>	(13 July 2018 at 10.30am)

## 12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Academic Council would be held on Thursday 6 December 2018.

Professor F von Prondzynski, C  
4 July 2018

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