

## THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

Minute of the meeting held on 12 March 2019 (2.10pm – 4.40pm).

**Present:** Professor J Harper (Chair), Mr M Abibo, Dr I Agouris, Dr H Ahriz, Dr I Arana, Ms J Bisset, Dr P Bremner, Mr J Buckley, Dr D Cockburn, Dr N Connon, Dr S Cunningham, Ms L Curtis, Mr T Dounas, Dr G Droubi, Mr E Eke, Professor E Gammie, Professor P Hagan, Professor E Hancock, Mr A Johnston, Dr A Lamb, Ms J Leith, Professor K Mackinnon, Professor D McClean, Mrs D Mitchell, Professor I Murray, Dr E Rey-Marmonier, Ms J Royle, Mrs L Sharp, Mr M Shepherd, Mrs V Strachan, Ms J Tait, Professor S Vertigans and Dr A Weidmann.

**Apologies:** Ms P Andia, Professor D Cairns, Dr D Hill, Dr M Leon, Professor J McCall, Professor G McConnell, Dr A Peach and Professor J Steel.

**In Attendance:** Mr F Antoniazzi, Mr J Dunphy and Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary).

1.	<b>MINUTE</b>	<b>Action</b>
	Academic Council <b>approved</b> the <i>Minute of the meeting held on 6 December 2018 [AC/19/1]</i> , and noted a <i>Matters Arising Report</i> .	
1.1	<b>Strategic Discussion – Skills Agenda [AC/19/1/1.1]</b>	
	The short-life working group was continuing to meet to consider thematic stories that could be proactively promoted.	Mr J Dunphy
1.2	<b>Strategy Map [AC/19/1/4.1.1]</b>	
	The new <i>Strategy Map</i> had been finalised and circulated to all staff in early March 2019.	
1.4	<b>Academic Quality and Standards [AC/19/1/5]</b>	
	The Board of Governors had received the <i>Annual Appraisal Process Annual Report: Session 2017-18</i> at its meeting on 19 December 2018, and this would inform, in part, the University's <i>Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council: Institution-Led Reviews of Quality</i> .	
1.5	<b>Academic Appeals, Misconducts and Complaints [AC/19/1/7]</b>	
	The Academic Regulations Sub-Committee would be considering the annual reporting of academic appeals and misconduct appeals at its next meeting. Appeals, misconducts and complaints were also part of the evidence base for the <i>Annual Appraisal Process</i> , and the Department for Governance and Academic Quality was currently working with the <i>Business Information (BI)</i> team to develop data analysis and reporting within <i>Insight</i> .	

## 2. CHAIR'S REPORT

In a routine report, the Chair highlighted:

- *Funding:* following the announcement of a flat cash settlement for the higher education sector, and enrolments not yet meeting targets, the University was taking measures to contain expenditure. He was grateful for the commitment of members of the Executive and the Senior Management Group in their efforts to contribute to ensuring the University's ongoing financial resilience. There would be little or no scope to use core funding to cross-subsidise other activities. Consequently, the University's focus would remain on quality, standards and the student experience;
- *Graduate Apprenticeships:* the University had been successful in its Phase 3 bids for *Graduate Apprenticeships*, which included 180 fully-funded places for 2019. Two new Graduate Apprenticeships, in *BA (Hons) Finance* and *BSc Data Science*, had also been approved for development by Skills Development Scotland. Very positive feedback had recently been received from the *Student Experience Questionnaires* issued to Graduate Apprenticeships students, reflecting the high standards expected;
- *Borderless Campus:* as part of the delivery of the University's new *Strategy*, a *Digital Estates* project had been launched to enhance the University's online learning provision and this had been informed through consultation with a wide range of staff;
- *Non-continuation/retention rates:* the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) had recently published these, and the University's results showed considerable improvement on previous results, demonstrating the impact of the support and commitment of staff. They would also have a positive impact on the University's position in league tables. It was clarified that each institution had its own benchmark; these were not targets but average values that changed year-on-year if the overall value of the characteristic changed.

## 3. STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Council was updated on progress with two of the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)* objectives for Session 2018-19, which were to explore and develop a better understanding of:

- students' experiences of distance and online learning – this was utilising data obtained from the internal *Student Experience Questionnaires*;
- students' involvement in enhancements to campus services – and the three Student Presidents would shortly be engaging with students across the campus to identify issues, and a group of senior staff would meet to review the provision of appropriate enhancement mechanisms to respond to these issues.

Progress with the objectives was being monitored through the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee.

It was suggested that increasing the profile and greater promotion of those receiving Student Achievement/Engagement Awards might encourage others to participate. It was **agreed** Council's Research Student Representative would be invited to the Awards Panel meeting.

Whilst it was acknowledged that partnership working was now a standard way of working across the University, Council **agreed** the *Student Partnership Agreement* remained an effective mechanism for demonstrating and measuring impact in a systematic way. It was also **agreed** that the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee be asked to consider alternative ways of evidencing the impact of partnership.

Mr F Antoniazzi

Mr F Antoniazzi &  
Mrs A Smart  
Mr J Dunphy &  
Ms L Ginsberg

The Chair, together with the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience and the Director of Student Life, had recently met with the RGU:Union to review the motions arising from the recent Annual General Meeting. The meeting had enabled useful context to be explored, with students discussing the value and feasibility of the motions.

There were no further items raised for discussion by Council's Student Representatives.

#### 4. **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

##### 4.1 **Business Plan 2018-19**

Council noted the mid-year report on progress with the delivery of actions in the *Business Plan 2018-19*, prior to its submission to the Board of Governors.

##### 4.2 **Outcome Agreement**

Council considered the mid-year progress report on the *Outcome Agreement 2018-19*. It was **agreed** the Director of Planning and Policy would give consideration to incorporating commentary on the intake targets for the controlled subject of Pre-registration Nursing and Midwifery.

Dr D Cockburn

Only very minor amendments had been proposed by the Funding Council to the version of the *Outcome Agreement 2019-22* already considered by Council in December 2018 and so had not been re-circulated.

Following guidance from the Scottish Government, the Funding Council had insisted the University adopt the target of 10% of their Scottish-domicile undergraduate entrants (SDUE) to come from an MD20 data zone by September 2020, despite previous indications the University might be permitted an 8.5% target in light of the demographical challenges faced by universities in the north-east of Scotland.

Karen Watt, recently appointed Chief Executive of the Scottish Funding Council, would be visiting the University during semester 2, and this would provide an opportunity to promote the University's perspective and commitment to widening access.

##### 4.3 **Semester 2 Enrolments: 2018-19**

Council considered a paper from the Business Information Manager. Neither on-campus or online provision had recruited to semester targets for home/EU, international or rUK markets. Considerable efforts were underway to secure September 2019 targets in what was becoming an increasingly competitive market, not least due to the uncertainties over Brexit.

#### 4.4 Academic Development Committee

Council noted a number of items of strategic and developmental business considered by the Academic Development Committee at its meeting held on 31 January 2019:

- *Business development:*
  - the University's continued success with *Graduate Apprenticeships*;
  - work on contracts with partners in Mexico was continuing, with colleagues from Business and Economic Development actively building and maintaining relationships with partners during the period of government transition in Mexico;
- *Market overview and motivations: Scottish Postgraduate Students:* the market for Scottish postgraduate students was exceptionally competitive but the University had experienced some growth in this area;
- *Implications of Brexit:* the University had two subject areas that relied heavily on EU recruitment and, therefore, were likely to suffer following Brexit: *Subjects Allied to Medicine* and *Business and Management*. This was complicated further by the fact that two of the University's competitors were also heavily reliant on EU recruitment to these subjects. Aggressive recruitment tactics were, therefore, anticipated. Within the Scottish sector the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen currently had the highest EU recruitment across a wide range of subject areas;
- *Course and module portfolio analysis:* *course portfolio analysis* had been completed in January 2019, with a number of courses/modes suspended and courses identified for additional, focused marketing. *Module portfolio analysis* was nearing completion;
- *Student recruitment:* the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience had met with all Heads of School to review recruitment targets that would be considered by the Executive on 13 March 2019. The effectiveness of the targets would be evaluated for 2019-20.

The Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience updated Council on an ongoing review of the university's short course provision that had recently identified a demand for initiatives in non-award, non-credit-rated provision using 'micro-credentialing'. A prototype of the micro-learning, digital 'bite-sized' learning was currently under development. This market had been identified by the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board as a priority for Scotland.

### 5. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

#### 5.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Council considered a report of the meeting held on 27 February 2019.

### 5.1.1 Academic Regulations

Academic Council **approved** the following amendments endorsed by the Committee (and as recorded in QAEC/19/3/3.1.1):

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Academic Quality  
(Ms L Jack)

- (i) *Course Transfer and Temporary Suspension of Studies*: with effect from September 2019, *Regulation A2: Admission* be amended as follows:
  - re-titling of *Regulation A2: Admission* to *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment*;
  - restructuring of *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment*;
  - relocation of the regulations relating to transfer between courses and temporary suspension of studies from *Regulation A1: Courses* to *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment*.
- (ii) *Decisions on Admission*: with effect from September 2019, *Regulation A2: Admission* be amended to provide further guidance around the admission process, particularly in relation to the implications of failing a course on future application to the same/similar courses.
- (iii) *Clarification around terminology and students' status*: with effect from September 2019, a *Glossary of University Terms* be incorporated into the *Academic Regulations*.
- (iv) *Simultaneous Double Counting of Credits*: with effect from September 2019, *Regulation A2: Admission*, paragraph 5.2.4, be amended to provide further clarity around the simultaneous double counting of credit whilst enrolled on two or more awards of the University.

### 5.1.2 Items for Noting

The following additional items were noted:

- *Annual Appraisal Process – 2017-18: Progress and Update Reports*: Council noted the Committee's consideration of several progress reports relating to actions arising from the *Annual Appraisal Process* for Session 2017-18;
- *League Tables*: the Committee had considered detailed analysis of *academic and non-academic spend in UK league tables*, and *student:staff ratios*, two indicators used by the three primary university league tables in the UK, and the implications of these indicators on the University's position in the league tables. Further analysis had been requested and was being considered by the Executive;
- *Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Reviews*: the Committee approved an interim response from the School of Nursing and Midwifery, in respect of the review of *Nursing and Midwifery* in November 2015, and an interim response from the School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, in respect of the review of *Biomedical Sciences, Forensic and Analytical Sciences, Pharmacy and Nutrition* in October 2015;
- *Academic Quality Handbook*: the Committee approved proposed revisions to Section 3 of the *Academic Quality Handbook* designed to ensure the Student-Facing Support Services Review (SFSSR) process was more closely aligned with the Institution-Led Subject Review process. A three year programme of themes for the Review would be identified based on the University's strategic priorities and/or the Annual Appraisal Process and would be reflected in the *Programme of Quality Events*;

- *Self-Certification by Students*: the Committee’s discussion of, and support in principle for, a proposal from the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee that the University should adopt a self-certification process for students in support of the *Fit to Sit Policy*; and
- *Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee*: the Committee’s discussion of the Library’s 24/7 opening hours;
- Working Group on Pedagogy: the working group had been established with three nominations from each Head of School, and members were being encouraged to liaise with colleagues as part of the development of a succinct *Pedagogy Statement*, designed to assist course teams preparing for quality events, and by providing a common framework that would underpin the legitimate variations in practice across Schools.

## 5.2 External Examiner Appointments

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

- **approved** 8 new appointments and 7 extensions to duties; and
- **ratified** 2 new appointments, 1 re-allocation of duties and 1 termination of appointment.

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## 6. RESEARCH

### 6.1 Research Committee

Council noted a report of the meeting held on 13 February 2019 covering the Committee’s discussions of recent developments and issues, including:

- *Doctoral Supervision*: the Committee’s agreement to minimum levels of supervision of research students:
  - Principal Supervisor: a minimum of 50 hours per annum;
  - Second Supervisor: a minimum of 25 hours per annum.
- the Committee’s consideration of the recently published *Guidance on Submissions*, plans for finalising the draft *RGU Code of Practice for Equality and Diversity*, and the status of the mock reviews of outputs for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021; and
- a significant number of developments arising under the auspices of the Orkney Project.

Council was informed that the *University Research Week* was being held on 17-21 June 2019 with a wide range of sessions and development opportunities. This included *Graduate School Symposium 2019* which would take place on 19 June 2019. Council members were urged to encourage attendance by relevant and students.

Academic Council  
Members

## 6.2 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meetings held on 20 February 2019.

### 6.2.1 Conferral of Awards

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

Graduate School

- (i) The degree of DInfSc be conferred on Ms Caroline Anderson, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 29 November 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Making Records Ready: Responding to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Taiye Gbadamosi, School of Engineering, with effect from 11 February 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Development of a Novel Photocatalytic Reactor for the treatment of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons".
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Benedicta Iwuagwu, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 4 February 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An investigation into the molecular mechanisms of hyperbaric oxygen using a human dermal microvascular endothelial cell line and a porcine retinal explant model".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Madeleine Marcella-Hood, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 23 January 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Scottish style: the construction of Scottish identity amongst fashion and style influencers on Instagram".
- (v) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Bryan McCann, School of Health Sciences, with effect from 9 January 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A Proposed Model of Perceived Motivationally-Relevant Social Agent Influence during Athlete Development".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Suraj Paneru, Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment, with effect from 14 February 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Appraisal of Energy Efficiency Retrofit: Government Incentives and Social Housing Organizations' Perspective".
- (vii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Franziska Pohl, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 22 January 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Potential Application of Rapeseed Pomace Extracts in the Prevention and Treatment of Neurodegenerative Diseases".
- (viii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Anil Prathuru, School of Engineering, with effect from 19 October 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Structural and residual strength analysis of metal-to-metal adhesively bonded joints".
- (ix) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Onamiru Ubiebor, The Law School, with effect from 14 January 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An analysis of the competing factors within an extradition decision".

- (x) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Elizabeth Wuyep, School of Engineering, with effect from 15 February 2019, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Chemical and Physical Effects of Interaction between Oilfield Chemicals and Formation Rocks and Integration with Sand Failure Prediction Models".

This brought the total number of research degree awards conferred in Session 2018-19 to 23.

#### 6.2.2 *Items for Noting*

The following items considered by the Committee were noted:

- *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2019*: the Committee supported a recommendation that an equivalent survey to the one run by the Graduate School/DELTA last year would help to assess if PGR perceptions of their study experience had improved since 2018. A review of participation in the sector-wide PRES survey in 2020 would be considered later in the year;
- *Graduate School Symposium 2019*: the above event be held on 19 June 2019 during the *University Research Week*;
- *Review of Assessment Criteria for Masters (MSc by Research/MRes/MPhil) and Doctorate (PhD and Professional Doctorate)*: the Committee had approved revisions to the University's Master's (SCQF Level 11) and Doctorate (SCQF Level 12) assessment criteria. These changes were reflective of the current version of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level descriptors, and clearly distinguished between MRes, MPhil and PhD/Professional Doctorate. Additional statements had also been added where it was felt important to ensure a consistent standard across theses.

### 7. **ACADEMIC CALENDAR AND SEMESTER DATES**

Council considered a paper relating to the *Academic Calendars for 2019/20 and 2020/21* and semester dates for 2021/22.

When Council had confirmed the *Academic Calendar 2019-20* in March 2018, following its original approval in March 2017, it noted it was possible that further discussions might result in slight modifications to the timing of the start of semester 2 in future *Calendars*.

This session had been the first year of operation of the revised *Academic Calendar*, and feedback had been received, by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, at the recent RGU:Union Annual General Meeting and the RGU:Union meeting with the Principal and members of the Executive, that the long interval between the end of the formal teaching and assessment period in semester 1 (17 December 2018) and the start of semester 2 may have led, in some areas, to problems with student re-engagement.



Consequently, Academic Council considered the feasibility of moving the semester 2 start forward by one week. Recognising there were some concerns amongst staff about the proposal it was **agreed** a group would be asked to review the implications and gauge the appetite for change prior to further discussion at its meeting on 18 June 2019. The group would also considered necessary adjustments that would be required to the current unchanged *Academic Calendar 2019-20* if a change to semester 2 dates was not approved.

## 8. **COMMITTEE CALENDAR: 2019-20**

The draft *Committee Calendar: 2019-20* was noted prior to its submission to the Board of Governors. This contained dates for meetings of the Board of Governors, Academic Council (and their Standing Committees and Sub-Committees), the Executive, Senior Management Group and quality events.

## 9. **RGU/QAA ANNUAL DISCUSSION**

The annual discussion with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was held on Tuesday 5 March 2019.

## 10. **HONORARY DEGREES**

The Honorary Degrees Committee met on 28 February 2019 and nominations would be forwarded to the Chair's Committee.

## 11. **BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Following the resignation of the academic staff Governor, two nominations were received and an election was held. The ballot count took place on Thursday 7 March 2019 and Mr Eric Ogilvie-Brown was duly elected to serve on the Board of Governors with a term of office expiring on 31 December 2022.

## 12. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 18 June 2019 at 2.00pm in N204, Sir Ian Wood Building

Professor John Harper, C

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