

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minute of the meeting held on 6 December 2018 (2.00pm – 4.00pm).

Present: Professor J Harper (Chair), Mr M Abibo, Dr I Agouris, Ms P Andia, Dr I Arana, Ms J Bisset, Mr J Buckley, Professor D Cairns, Dr D Cockburn, Dr S Cunningham, Ms L Curtis, Dr G Droubi, Mr E Eke, Professor P Hagan, Mrs E Hancock, Dr D Hill, Mr A Johnston, Dr A Lamb, Dr M Leon, Professor J McCall, Professor D McClean, Professor G McConnell, Mrs D Mitchell, Professor I Murray, Dr E Rey-Marmonier, Ms J Royle, Mr M Shepherd, Mrs V Strachan and Ms J Tait.

Apologies: Dr H Ahriz, Dr P Bremner, Mrs K Close, Dr N Connon, Mr T Dounas, Professor E Gammie, Ms J Leith, Professor K Mackinnon, Dr A Peach, Mrs L Sharp, Professor J Steel, Professor S Vertigans and Dr A Weidmann.

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

Welcome: The Chair welcomed all new and existing members of Academic Council to the first meeting convened under its new composition, revised to meet the requirements of the *Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016*, and that required more that 50% of the membership to be elected staff and students, and at least 10% to be elected students.

1.	MINUTE	Action
	Academic Council approved the <i>Minute of the meeting held on 20 June 2018 [AC/18/3]</i> , and noted a <i>Matters Arising Report</i> .	
1.1	Strategic Discussion – Skills Agenda [AC/18/3/3.4]	
	A short-life working group had been meeting to consider thematic stories that could be proactively promoted. A further report would be made to Council's next meeting.	Mr J Dunphy Academic Council [12.03.19]
2.	COMPOSITION AND REMIT	
	Council noted an extract from <i>Organisational Regulation 03</i> relating to its composition and remit.	
3.	CHAIR'S REPORT	
	<p>In a routine report, the Chair highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Senior Management:</i> the appointment of Mrs Elizabeth Hancock as Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience, Mrs Veronica Strachan as Assistant Chief Academic Officer and Secretary to the Board, and Mrs Dawn Mitchell as Head of School of Health Sciences. Mr Mark Sollis, Vice-Principal for University Advancement had left the University and responsibilities for the various aspects of his portfolio had been assigned to existing members of the Executive; – <i>Strategic Clarity and Priority Actions:</i> the need to confirm priority actions for the current session, as well as develop a revised and simplified <i>Strategy Map</i> (refer to item 4 below). Strengthening financial resilience would be a key strategic priority for the University; 	

- *International Partnerships*: there had been a number of positive developments in terms of major international partnerships during the session;
- *Graduate Apprenticeships*: the University's success in securing further funding to deliver graduate apprenticeship courses exemplified the University's strategic direction, and bids for further cohorts had been submitted, with the outcome anticipated in December 2018;
- *RGU: Accelerator*: this strategically important initiative had had a notable impact, with 165 submissions, 103 of which had progressed to second stage consideration by an international panel of 40 judges. It was anticipated that approximately 30 teams would be successful in progressing to phase 2 where funding support would be available to help further develop the individual proposals.

4. STRATEGIC PLANNING

4.1 University Strategy, Business Plan and Risk Register

4.1.1 Strategy Map

Council considered a *Strategy Map* that recast the strategy in a format designed to improve the clarity of purpose and mission and underpin activities at strategic and operational levels. The *Strategy Map* also incorporated revised key performance indicators against which the Executive and Board would measure implementation of the *Strategy*. Its re-development had been informed by consultation with staff ahead of its submission to the Board of Governors on 19 December 2018. Although subject themes had been removed in response to feedback from staff, these would not be abandoned altogether.

It was **agreed** consideration would be given to incorporating aspects relating to the University's engagement with the local community, public and third sectors, and alumni, prior to its submission to the Board of Governors.

Prof J Harper &
Dr D Cockburn

4.1.2 Draft Business Plan 2018-19

The draft *Business Plan 2018-19* incorporated a summary of high-level risks for 2018-19. The intention was for this one year interim business plan to replace the three-year business plan approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting in June 2018. This would enable a review and re-prioritisation of the *Strategic Investment Plan*. It was intended this one year interim business plan would be followed by a three year rolling business plan, that would be submitted for the Board's approval in summer.

4.1.3 Items for Noting

Council also noted:

- the significant achievements identified in the *Business Plan 2017-18 – End of Year Report*; and
- *Key Performance Indicators – End of Year Report 2017-18*.

4.2 Outcome Agreement

Council noted:

- *Outcome Agreement 2017/18 - Self-Evaluation Report*;
- the draft *Outcome Agreement 2019/20–2021/22*.

The Scottish Funding Council's guidance had been extensively revised to reflect the additional reporting requirements for the Commission on Wider Access targets and the use of the Wider Access and Retention Fund. Commentary was also expected on the following cross-cutting themes: partnership working and collaboration; Brexit; society and culture; and cybersecurity.

The University's *Outcome Agreements* were available on the website¹. It was **agreed** they could usefully be shared with the wider University community due to their factual content.

Dr D Cockburn

4.3 Academic Development Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meetings held on 27 September and 8 November 2018.

4.3.1 Awards of the University

Academic Council **approved** the *Master of Science (MSci)* for inclusion in *Academic Regulation A1, Schedule 1.1: Awards of the University*.

Governance and
Academic Quality
(Ms L Jack)

4.3.2 Strategic Business

Council noted a number of items of strategic and developmental business considered by the Academic Development Committee:

- *Course Portfolio Analysis*: the Committee had commenced its annual overview of the whole course portfolio, with the aim of maintaining a portfolio that was sustainable in the terms of income and growth;
- *Marketing, Student Recruitment and Admissions*: the Committee had received a detailed presentation on plans for 2019-21, to safeguard future resilience by identifying priority actions and developments for the following market segments:
 - Scottish Funding Council undergraduate home/EU;
 - postgraduate home/EU on-campus;
 - undergraduate/postgraduate international;
 - undergraduate/postgraduate online -UK and international;
 - conversion activity – all markets;
- *Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA)*: five new Graduate Apprenticeship courses had commenced delivery, and two further Graduate Apprenticeship courses in the School of Computing Science and Digital Media were delivering to stages 1 and 2. A number of initiatives had commenced to assure ongoing quality of delivery during this period of expansion in provision.

¹ <https://www3.rgu.ac.uk/about/planning-and-policy/outcome-agreement>

4.3.3 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- course portfolio developments;
- the University's comparative performance.

5. **ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

5.1 **Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee**

Council considered reports of meetings held on 18 October 2018 and 26 November 2018.

5.1.1 *Annual Appraisal Process: 2017-18*

Academic Council considered and **endorsed** the *Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2017-18: Annual Report*, for onward reporting to the Board of Governors subject to very minor amendment. Council was reassured the *Annual Appraisal Process* provided a sound evidence base for it and the Board of Governors to have confidence in, and be satisfied with, the quality and standards of award-bearing courses. Given the recent period of significant institutional change, the Committee was of the view that this was a highly commendable performance.

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 one, and the Committee was satisfied appropriate action was being taken.

The Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience and the Assistant Chief Academic Officer had met with all Heads of School to discuss their respective School Academic Board Appraisal Reports, and had been very satisfied with the demonstrable engagement in the *Annual Appraisal Process* by the Heads of School. The meetings had been robust, informative and constructive, and had proven reassuring that Heads had ownership of issues and shown a readiness to respond to issues in real time. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee was satisfied the *Annual Appraisal Process* had confirmed actions were adequate and appropriate.

The following key observations had been made by the Committee:

- There were a few common improvement themes which arose from the *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports* and/or the discussions with the Heads of School. The Committee agreed to refer these for the attention of the respective members of the Executive.

Board of
Governors
[19.12.18]

- The Committee was satisfied that, based on an analysis of 168 *External Examiner Annual Reports*, comments from external examiners had overall been very positive. There had been a notable increase in the number of positive comments received from examiners relating to *staff support of/commitment to students/student engagement*. The following three areas were most frequently commended by external examiners:
 - *course organisation and management/administration of Assessment Board process;*
 - *assessment practices/innovation/range of methods;*
 - *feedback to students.*
- *Student Experience Questionnaires:*

Undergraduate

 - *overall satisfaction:* target = 90%; achieved = 81.5% (up 2%);
 - *assessment and feedback:* target = 77%; achieved = 72.4% (up 4%).

Postgraduate

 - *overall satisfaction:* target = 90%; achieved = 82% (unchanged);
 - *assessment and feedback:* target = 77%; achieved = 76% (up 5%).
 - *assessment and feedback* was identified as an institutional enhancement priority for Session 2017-18, and it was commendable that the question category had increased by four percentage points at undergraduate level, to 72.4%.
 - *Student Experience Questionnaire* results demonstrated improvements for each individual question.
- *National Student Survey (NSS):*
 - The University remained equal to or above the Scottish average in the majority of question categories. Within the context of the Scottish sector, seven subject areas performed exceptionally well and were highest amongst institutions delivering the subject: *Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology* (joint); *Fine Art*; *Others in Subjects allied to Medicine*; *Medical Technology*; *Others in Biological Sciences* (joint); *Publicity Studies*; and *Building*. Moreover, of these *Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology* and *Fine Art* were joint first among UK institutions and a further three ranked second: *Nutrition*; *Accounting*; and *Sociology*.
 - Although a small number of subjects demonstrated significant improvement – including *Nursing* and *Art and Design*, two of the largest subject groupings in the NSS – the majority had declined, and these would be addressed within *School Action and Enhancement Plans*.
 - Analysis of the qualitative comments from the 2018 NSS had highlighted two prominent positive themes:
 - *Staff:* over five hundred comments in the NSS referenced staff positively, and for all Schools positive comments outweighed negative. In particular, guidance and support students received from staff had the highest volume of positive comments.
 - *Placements and work-related experiences:* respondents commented favourably on placement opportunities, links with industry and focus on skills for employment.

- Although *Assessment and feedback* remained a lower scoring area, there was a commendable 5% improvement in satisfaction from the previous session. A number of strategic actions had been initiated to enhance students' experiences of the assessment cycle and an initial improvement in *Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)* results had been evident this session.
- *Student Achievement:* at an institutional level:
Undergraduate
 - Student achievement threshold targets were met for:
 - first sitting pass rate [target = 80%; achieved = 91.46%, with all QAA Subject Benchmark areas meeting the target];
 - overall employability [target = 97%; achieved = 97.6%]; and
 - professional level employment [target = 80%; achieved = 81.1%].
 - The percentage of good honours achieved at first sitting had increased by five percentage points to 75%.
- Postgraduate
 - Student achievement threshold targets were met for:
 - first sitting pass rate [target = 80%; achieved = 90.4%]; and
 - professional level employment [target = 80%; achieved = 89.3%].

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.

Board of
Governors
[19.12.18]

5.1.3 *Organisational Regulations*

Academic Council **approved**, with immediate effect, revisions to the remits of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee; *Organisational Regulation O4* would be revised accordingly.

Mrs F McLean
Whyte

5.1.4 *Items for Noting*

Council also noted the following:

- *International College at Robert Gordon University (ICRGU):* the positive outcome of the *Educational Oversight for embedded colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas Holdings UK Ltd, April 2018 - International College at Robert Gordon University (April 2018)*, which stated:

"From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the International College at Robert Gordon University (ICRGU) is making commendable progress with implementing its action plan from the April 2016 Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges). ... In the 2016 review, ICRGU received a commendable judgement for the quality of learning opportunities. Actions have led to improvements in the management of the provision; there is highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points and the information the College produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy."

- *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*: the Committee's discussion regarding the achievements under the 2017-18 objectives:
 - explore resilience and wellbeing;
 - develop the student voice;
 and the objectives for Session 2018-19, which were to explore and develop a better understanding of:
 - students' experiences of distance and online learning;
 - students' involvement in enhancements to campus services.

5.2 External Examiner Appointments

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

- **approved** 2 new appointments and 2 extensions to duties; and
- **ratified** 17 new appointments, one extension to duties, and four re-allocation of duties.

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6. RESEARCH

6.1 Research Committee

Council noted a report of the meeting held on 7 November 2018 covering the Committee's discussions of recent developments and issues, including:

- *Peer Review*: the observation that the quality of applications and manuscripts prepared internally had to improve to avoid the introduction of a formal mandatory peer review system;
- *Orkney Project*: the significant number of developments arising under the auspices of the Orkney Project;
- *Research Excellence Framework (REF)*: current developments with REF preparations, including consideration of an early draft *RGU Code of Practice for Equality and Diversity*, and which would also be the subject of discussion at the Senior Management Group meeting on 12 December 2018; and
- *Innovation and Intellectual Property*: the introduction of the *Policy on Intellectual Property Commercialisation*, which had been approved by the Board of Governors on 10 October 2018.

Several pump-priming awards for interdisciplinary projects had been made, from a pool of 76 applications. Members were reminded that the Research Team could support staff, including early career researchers, develop any ideas for external funding and this could including the appointment of mentors.

6.2 Research Degrees Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meetings held on 3 October 2018 and 14 November 2018.

6.2.1 *Conferral of Awards*

Graduate School

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 Maisa Al Mardini, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 20 June 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Sectarianism and the Accounting Profession: The case of Lebanon".
- (ii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Solomon Amos, School of Engineering, with effect from 5 July 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Cross sensitivity analysis of optical fibre based sensing for high pressure high temperature measurement in oil and gas applications".
- (iii) The degree of DBA be conferred on Mr Richard Brooks, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 15 October 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Decommissioning The North Sea: Increasing Flexibility Of Approach Through Proportionate Regulation And Evidence Based Practice".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Neil Gibson, School of Applied Social Studies, with effect from 18 September 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Is there a role for therapeutic photography in social work with groups?".
- (v) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Mary Howard, The Law School, with effect from 15 October 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Impacts of Cultural Differences on International Arbitration based on the example of Iran".
- (vi) The degree of DInfSc be conferred on Mr Ashraf Ismael El Sayed, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 15 October 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Impact of National Culture on Knowledge Management Process in the Context of an Economic Transition to a Knowledge Based Economy. The Case of Qatar".
- (vii) The degree of DInfSc be conferred on Ms Mazni Md Yusof, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 28 August 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An Academic Library Position in a University: Understanding the Position and its Positioning Process".
- (viii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Sarah Nwinee, School of Engineering, with effect from 12 November 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Sustainable Treatment of Oil Contaminated Waste: Oil-Based Mud (OBM) Drill Cuttings and Soil".
- (ix) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Ifeyinwa Orakwe, School of Engineering, with effect from 23 October 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Design and testing of an integrated catalytic membrane reactor for deoxygenating water for down-hole injection and process applications".
- (x) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Justina Setkute, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 15 October 2016, in recognition of a programme entitled: "In Search of Digital Marketing Communications Success: The Case of Oil and Gas Industry B2B SMEs".

- (xi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Paul Smith, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 7 November 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "An Analysis of the Relevance of Deliberative Democracy, Agonistic Pluralism, and Pluralist Group Theory in Explaining Twitter Activity During the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014".
- (xii) The degree of MRes be conferred on Mr Vivek Viswambaran, School of Engineering, with effect from 7 September 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Optical Fibre Based Minimally-Invasive Blood Glucose Monitoring System".
- (xiii) The degree of MRes be conferred on Mr Alan White, School of Nursing and Midwifery, with effect from 10 September 2018, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Exploration of how a mobile health (mHealth) intervention may support midwives in the management and referral of women with pre-eclampsia in rural and remote areas of Highland Scotland".

6.2.2 *Research Degree Appraisal*

Council noted the Committee's consideration of the *Research Degree Appraisal*. This was the third such consideration following the formation of the single Graduate School in the summer of 2016.

6.2.3 *Items for Noting*

The following items that the Committee had considered were noted:

- *RGU Alternative Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) for 2018*: an internal follow up survey to the external *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017*. Overall student satisfaction had increased from 71% to 74%;
- *SITS Continuous Improvement Project/eVisioning the postgraduate research student journey*: implementation was anticipated in August 2019;
- *application processing*;
- *research student maximum periods of registration report*;
- *Research Degree Internal Review (RDIR) – 28 June 2018*: the confirmed Graduate School response to the outcomes from the RDIR would be disseminated to the wider University community, including research students.

Dr A Lamb &
Mr M Simpson

7. **ACADEMIC APPEALS, MISCONDUCT AND COMPLAINTS**

Council **agreed** the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee would be asked to review the annual *Monitoring of Complaints: September 2017 – August 2018* report.

Academic
Regulations
Sub-Committee

The *Annual Report on Academic Appeals and Misconduct: Session 2017-18* would be available for Council's next meeting.

Academic Council
12.03.19

8. **ACADEMIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

Council noted the *Academic Council Membership List: 2018-19*, updated following the recent nominations/elections for School representatives in accordance with the revised composition.

9. **ACADEMIC COUNCIL APPOINTEE ON THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Following a ballot in which 25 votes were cast Professor Donald Cairns, Head of the School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences would serve as the Academic Council appointee on the Board of Governors, serving from 1 January 2019 for a four year period.

Council extended its thanks to Professor David McClean, who was demitting from this office on 31 December 2018, for his valuable and responsible contributions during what had been, at times, a very challenging role.

Prof D McClean

10. **APPOINTMENT OF PROFESSORS, TEACHING FELLOWS, ENTERPRISE FELLOWS AND READERS**

The following had recently been appointed:

Teaching Excellence Fellows

Dr Konstantina Martzoukou, School of Creative and Cultural Business

Ms Fiona Roberts, School of Health Sciences

Dr Fiona Work, School of Nursing and Midwifery

Mrs Donna Wynne, School of Health Sciences

Readers

Dr Giovanna Bermano, Vice-Principal for Research Office

Dr Jon Blackwood, Gray's School of Art

Dr Christine Edwards, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences

Dr Eyad Elyan, School of Computing Science and Digital Media

Dr Mamdud Hossain, School of Engineering

Dr Rachel Knott, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences

Dr Leslie Mabon, School of Applied Social Studies

Dr Radhakrishna Prabhu, School of Engineering

11. **ACADEMIC REGULATIONS – CHAIR'S ACTION**

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

12. **HONORARY DEGREES**

The following honorary degrees were conferred at the graduation ceremony on Tuesday 4 December 2018:

Anne Cleaves	Hon DLitt (<i>honoris causa</i>)
Josh Littlejohn	Hon DBA (<i>honoris causa</i>)

13. **DATE OF MEETINGS**

Tuesday 12 March 2019 at 2.00pm in N204, Sir Ian Wood Building

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