

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minute of the meeting held on 21 June 2017 (2.00pm – 3.30pm).

Present: Professor F von Prondzynski (Chair), Mr F Antoniazzi, Professor D Ashall, Mrs M Buchan, Mrs K Close, Mr J Dunphy, Mr B Faturoti, Ms J Guest, Professor P Hagan, Mrs E Hancock, Professor J Harper, Ms K Harrison, Professor C Jayne, Dr A Lamb, Mrs A Lawani, Ms J Leith, Mr M Lewis, Dr K Martzoukou, Professor I Murray, Professor D McClean, Dr J McConnachie, Professor K Mackinnon, Professor C O'Neil, Mr E Pollock, Mr M Sollis, Ms J Steed, Professor J Steel and Mrs V Strachan.

Apologies: Professor D Cairns, Ms J Cutting, Professor E Gammie, Mr B McCann, Ms J Royle, Professor S Vertigans and Dr A Weidmann.

In Attendance: Ms H Douglas (Secretary) and Dr S Maxwell (Clerk).

1. **MINUTE**

Action

Academic Council **approved** the *Minute of the meeting* held on 15 March 2017 (AC/17/2). A *Matters Arising Report* was noted.

1.1 **Academic Calendar and Semester dates [AC/17/2/6]**

The Assistant Chief Academic Officer confirmed that the labelling of the week beginning 10 September 2018 in the Academic Calendar 2018/19 (*induction/freshers' activities and introductory teaching*) was to roll together freshers' activities and induction week. Normal timetabled classes would commence the following week; introductory teaching was linked only to induction. There were no proposed changes to public holidays, as this was a matter for Human Resources/unions, and any proposed changes to the date for summer graduation would be considered as a separate matter.

2. **CHAIR'S REPORT**

In his routine report, the Chair highlighted the following:

- *Director of Marketing:* Ms Jan Cutting would be stepping down from her post as Vice-Principal for Commercial and Regional Engagement to become the Director of Marketing. Ms Cutting had an impressive background in marketing and would be able to provide direction and leadership in this important area. The vacant post of Vice-Principal for Commercial and Regional Engagement would be filled again as quickly as possible;
- *Centre for Work-Based Learning:* the university was a founder member of a new *Centre for Work-Based Learning*, in partnership with Strathclyde and Heriot-Watt universities and Skills Development Scotland. The Director of Enhancement, Teaching, Learning and Access had been appointed Vice-Chair of the Centre and would be leading its Learner Journey work;
- *Graduate Apprenticeships:* following successful bids earlier in the year, two graduate apprenticeships had been launched: BSc (Hons) IT Management for Business and BSc (Hons) Software Development for Business. DELTA was coordinating a further submission in nine subject areas with relevant Heads of School. The graduate apprenticeship initiative was aligned with the university's professional focus and was a very worthwhile extension of the portfolio;

- *Funding:* as noted at the previous meeting, the university had received a 'flat cash' funding settlement. Although this was a cut in real terms, it represented a better outcome than might have been anticipated in the context of pressures on public funding. The Scottish Government had indicated that it wished to set up a 'Strategic Futures Group', which would include representation from the universities as well as government and the Scottish Funding Council, to look at medium and longer term options for higher education funding;
- *Partnership Arrangements:* discussions in relation to partnership arrangements would be the subject of more detailed discussion at future meetings of Academic Council. Potential partnerships currently under discussion included: Aberdeen University and the Oil and Gas Technology Centre; Strathclyde University; Bénédict Schools, and North East of Scotland College.

3. STRATEGIC PLANNING

3.1 RGU Strategy 2017/2021 Update and Institutional Priorities

The Vice-Principal (University Advancement) presented an update on the next RGU strategy. He explained the goals of the strategy, which were:

- to reflect an aspiration for RGU in changing learning and global environments – forward-thinking, and built on the foundation and strengths of RGU;
- to provide clarity and inspiration for members of the RGU community;
- to underpin a more detailed business plan capturing work across teaching and learning, research, and administrative activities;
- to set the stage for shaping what's next for RGU – in the classroom and research, across the broader campus, and in the community.

The engagement process had been wide-ranging, involving early stage discussions with the Strategic Planning Group (SPG), the Executive, the Senior Management Group (SMG) and the Board of Governors. Engagement with staff (face to face and online) was also taking place.

Council noted that work was still in progress on the *Business Plan* and that the institutional priorities would be fully articulated in the Plan.

Key questions for Academic Council discussion of the strategic framework were:

- Does it present as authentic to RGU – and our future?
- Can we use this framework to inspire and provide clarity of the strategic direction for our staff, students and supporters?
- What should be considered in order to provide support for the RGU community?

Council agreed that a particular strength of the strategy was its inclusivity.

Council also agreed that it would be helpful if a concise articulation of the strategy was developed. It was **agreed** that a planned 'elevator pitch', which could be printed and shared, would assist in the presentation of the strategy. It was also suggested that video be utilised for the launch of the strategy.

3.2 Business Plan and Risk Register 2016/17

The *Third quarter update on the Business Plan and Risk Register 2016-17* had been withdrawn from the agenda and would be circulated to members when available. The *Business Plan* and *University Operating Plan* [refer below] would be combined in future, aligned to institutional priorities.

Dr D Cockburn

Mr M Sollis

3.3 University Operating Plan 2016-17

Academic Council noted the third quarter update on the *University Operating Plan 2016/17* prior to its onward transmission to the Board of Governors.

Board of
Governors
[06.07.17]

3.4 Student Recruitment

Academic Council received an overview of the current situation in respect of student recruitment, admissions and marketing from the Dean of Student Recruitment. The following points were noted/discussed:

- The university was likely to meet its Scottish Funding Council institutional target, albeit with an imbalance across courses. The active promotion of STEM subjects would continue and some subjects – possibly Engineering, Computing and Nursing – would be considered for Clearing.
- The *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)* 2016 target was conservative but challenging, and colleagues were encouraged to do everything reasonable to ensure the target was achieved.
- There were positive indications that full-time international applications and offers were increasing, with both undergraduate and postgraduate numbers increasing compared with last session. Improving the conversion rate was important but subject to multiple factors including accommodation offers, funding, price and other competitors' offers. The TEF results [refer item 4.3] would be sent by text or email to students holding offers.
- There was an increasing volume of applications from students from the rest of the UK.
- The promotion of SAAS loans for Scottish-domiciled postgraduates was an important activity and the support and involvement of Heads of School was particularly welcome.
- Marketing would be giving particular attention to promoting the university's distance learning provision.
- Levels of student recruitment were linked to the volume of natural organic traffic to the university website, so increasing this through systematic improvements to the university's position in natural search engine rankings was a priority.

Heads of School

Ms J Cutting

Overall, the student recruitment market continued to be challenging, but there were positive indications of improvements and opportunities in some areas.

3.5 Academic Development Committee

Academic Council noted a report of the meetings held on 20 April and 1 June 2017 and, in particular, the following points:

- the Committee itself had become more strategic and forward looking as a result of the reconstitution of its membership that followed the university's restructuring. The membership – consisting of all Heads of School and a number of Heads of Departments – had supported effective reflection on demand issues and a proactive approach to developments;
- the Committee had recognised that January entry into postgraduate courses was not well-designed, and work was being undertaken, notably by the School of Creative and Cultural Business, on the development of pedagogically effective and resource efficient models for courses with more than one intake point;
- portfolio development across the disciplines had been a significant area of discussion at meetings, including in the areas of: health care management, biotechnology, product design, and film/digital media. Heads of School were exploring emerging opportunities in these fields;
- there had been commendable course developments proposed by the School of Engineering in the energy field. These had been developed in response to recommendations from a recent Institution-Led Subject Review;
- the School of Computing Science and Digital Media had re-badged its MSc Information and Network Security as MSc Cyber Security to resonate more effectively with the market.

4. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

4.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the meeting held on 25 May 2017.

4.1.1 *Quality Events*

Academic Council **endorsed** the *Review, Validation and Professional Body Event Outcomes* report and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's recommendation that executive summaries of the outcomes of Institution-Led Subject Reviews be incorporated into the report for onward submission to the Board of Governors.

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4.1.2 *Academic Regulations*

Academic Council **approved**:

- (i) from Session 2017-8, *Regulation A3*, Section 1, paragraphs 7 and 8, be revised as follows [new text underlined]:

7.9 Where the *Student Appeal Form: Academic Appeal* is lodged later than 12 months following the publication of results then it shall not be considered and the Head of School shall communicate this to the student by email, normally within 10 working days of the lodgement of the appeal. There shall be no further right of appeal.

Department for
Governance and
Academic Quality

8.1 An appeal shall be deemed valid for consideration by an Assessment Board only if:

- (i) the *Student Appeal Form: Academic Appeal* is submitted to the School no later than 20 working days after publication of the results. The only exception to this requirement would be where the Head of School and Assistant Chief Academic Officer have previously concluded, in accordance with [paragraph 7.7](#) of this Regulation and taking account of paragraph 7.9, that the appeal may be considered because the *Student Appeal Form: Academic Appeal* had been lodged beyond the 20 working day period due to verifiable, evidenced circumstances which were outwith the control of the student; and
- (ii) from Session 2017-18, Regulation A3 – Section 2, paragraph 10.1, be amended as follows [new text underlined]:

10. PENALTIES

10.1 Criteria

When determining a proportionate penalty, the following criteria will be used, taking due cognisance of whether the penalty relates to academic or non-academic misconduct as described in [paragraph 6](#) of this Regulation:

- (vi) the proximity in time of multiple established misconducts (for example, whether two established cases of the same form of misconduct, such as plagiarism, occurred in quick succession) and whether the student has had an opportunity to learn;

4.1.3 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee had considered proposed amendments to the *Recruitment and Admissions to Higher Education Policy* and the *Appeals Procedure for Applicants*, and requested further amendments be made. Consequently, the amended *Policy* and *Procedure* would be submitted for approval by Chair's Action to permit implementation from Session 2017-18;
- a single communication would be issued to students at the point of re-enrolment on any changes to university policies and regulations. A statement would also be added to the *Terms and Conditions of Admission* document to make clear that policies and regulations were subject to change, and to refer applicants/students to the university's website for the most current versions.

4.2 **External Examiners**

In respect of nominations received from the School Academic Boards, Council **approved** 13 new appointments and 20 extensions, and **ratified** 2 new appointments and 1 extension.

4.3 **Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)**

Academic Council was advised that the university had achieved an excellent outcome in the *Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)* with the award of Gold.

The Deputy Principal highlighted that the Panel's findings, determined on the basis on the university's metrics and narrative submission, indicate:

"... that students from all backgrounds achieve outstanding outcomes. Very high proportions continue with their studies and progress to employment, highly skilled employment or further study at levels notably exceeding the provider's benchmarks. The metrics indicate outstanding levels of satisfaction with academic support, again exceeding benchmarks. [The Panel's] judgement reflects, in particular, evidence of:

- a systematic approach to engaging students as partners in the development of the learning experience;
- strategic investment in outstanding physical resources which are used by students to enhance learning and progression;
- a comprehensive range of opportunities for students to develop knowledge, skills and understanding that are most highly valued by employers;
- opportunities for students across the university to engage consistently and frequently with developments at the forefront of professional practice."

The award was subject to an embargo on publicity until 22 June 2017 but, thereafter, it would be used vigorously in PR, marketing and recruitment activity. A total of 299 universities, colleges and alternative providers of education across the UK had submitted to *TEF*. Submission was optional in Scotland, and the university was one of the five Scottish universities to submit (the others being St Andrews, Dundee, Heriot-Watt, and Abertay). The university's *TEF* award in the Gold category positioned the university in the top 20% for teaching excellence, recognising the performance and commitment of staff and the response of students, as well as the university's focus on widening access and graduate prospects. The Deputy Principal was commended for leading the *TEF* submission.

5. RESEARCH

5.1 Research Committee

Council noted the report of the Committee's meeting held on 15 May 2017 and, in particular, the Committee's consideration of the following:

- *research strategy*: recent developments included:
 - the Vice-Principal (University Advancement) had been visiting Schools as part of the development of the university's strategy;
 - distribution of the Research Excellence Grant was still under discussion;
 - several Schools had placed bids for Major Project Funds for 3D printing facilities;
 - development of the research area of the website was in progress;
- *Early Career Researcher Network (ECRN)*: an ECRN had been established and had held its first meeting; it would provide support and opportunities, including funding opportunities, specifically related to early career researchers;

- *Research Ethics*: following a review of the university's ethical review process it had been agreed that a working group would be convened to develop a new ethics review process;
- *Orkney Project*: recent and anticipated meetings in relation to the Orkney project were noted. The project provided valuable opportunities in collaboration and interdisciplinarity;
- *Research Excellence Framework (REF)*: significant discussions were still in progress. The Vice-Principal (Research) would update Council when more information was available;
- *City Region Deal*: regular meetings were being held with the University of Aberdeen and *Opportunity North East* in respect of the *Oil and Gas Technology Centre*.

5.1.2 *Athena Swan*

Council noted an update on the actions to support an application for the Athena Swan, Institutional Bronze Award. At present, the university was the only higher education institution in Scotland that had, to date, failed to secure a Bronze award, and it was seeking to remedy this.

A number of developments that would contribute to an improved bid were outlined, including the Aurora programme. The recently completed staff survey would also provide key information and enable the university to progress with its application, possibly in the autumn. Consideration would be given to School/Departmental submissions at a later date.

Prof P Hagan

5.2 **Research Degrees Committee**

Council considered a report of the meeting held on 17 May 2017.

5.2.1 *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:

Graduate School
(Mr M Simpson)

- (i) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Jayachandra Chilukamari, School of Engineering, with effect from 03 February 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A Computational Model of Visual Attention".
- (ii) The degree of DInfSc be conferred on Mr Michael Frelas, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 21 April 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The impact of knowledge management processes on organizational resilience: Data Mining as an instrument of measurement".
- (iii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Abdulhakeem Garba, Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment, with effect from 09 March 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Renewable Energy Technologies Assessment in Providing Sustainable Electricity to Nigerian Rural Areas".
- (iv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Umar Lawan, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 02 May 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Female Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: An Investigation".

- (v) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Zainab Sa'eed Musa, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 16 February 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "The Dynamic Relationship Between Oil Wealth and Economic Growth: The Case of Nigeria".
- (vi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Oluyomi Abayomi Osobajo, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 07 October 2016, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Enhancing B2Com relationship quality: A research study investigating the oil producing company to host community relationship in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria".
- (vii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Paul Hugh Cleverley, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 8 May 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Re-examining and re-conceptualising enterprise search and discovery capability: Towards a model for the factors and generative mechanisms for search task outcomes".
- (viii) The degree of DBA be conferred on Ms Alia Abboud, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 1 February 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Faith Based Organisations in Lebanon: Objectives and Practices".
- (ix) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Alla El-Awaisi, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 26 May 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Pharmacy's Perspectives of Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice: An Investigative Study in Qatar & the Middle East".
- (x) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Urenna Vivian Adegbotolu, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 16 January 2017, in recognition of a programme entitled: "Demulsification and Recycling of Spent Oil Based Drilling Fluid as Nanofiller in Polyamide 6 Nanocomposites".
- (xi) The degree of DInfSc be conferred on Mr Paul Scott Stevenson, School of Creative and Cultural Business, with effect from 2 June 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Increasing Evidence Informed Decision Making Practices In Senior Non-Clinical NHS Managers".
- (xii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Caroline Gausden, Gray's School of Art, with effect from 7 June 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Social Art Practices as Feminist Manifestos: Radical Hospitality in the Archive".
- (xiii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Ahmed Butu Ibrahim, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 14 April 2017, in recognition of a programme entitled: "Energy and Sustainability Transitions: The Case of Community Renewables for Off-grid Rural Electrification in Nigeria with Emphasis on *Shape* Community Project".
- (xiv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Laud Charles Ochei, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 24 May 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Architecting the Deployment of Cloud-hosted Services for Guaranteeing Multitenancy Isolation".
- (xv) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Azmi Omar, School of Computing Science and Digital Media, with effect from 9 June 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Insourcing a Government Information System: A Case Study from Malaysia".

- (xvi) The degree of PhD be conferred on Mr Victor Osu, School of Engineering, with effect from 3 May 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "A critical evaluation of the prospects for a transition towards Ocean Based Renewable Energy development in Nigeria".
- (xvii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Ms Ibukun Sokari, Aberdeen Business School, with effect from 9 June 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Technology Innovation Management in the Nigerian Banking Industry: Integrating Stakeholders' Perspectives, An Exploration of Strategy and Policy Implications".
- (xviii) The degree of PhD be conferred on Miss Julia Waack, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, with effect from 12 June 2017, in recognition of a programme of work entitled: "Uptake and depuration of cyanotoxins in the common blue mussel *Mytilus edulis*".

5.2.2 *Amendments to Academic Regulation A6: Research Degrees*

Academic Council **approved** the proposed amendments to *Academic Regulation A6: Research Degrees*, including:

- (i) *Examiners' Recommendations*: updating the examiners' recommendations for the first examination and for the re-examination, including a specific statement that to achieve a doctoral degree both the thesis and oral defence must be passed, as two separate and discrete elements. In addition, more clarity would be provided by the examination team when an oral defence was required at re-examination and when a research student failed. The examiner guidance would include feedback on deficiencies of the thesis in terms of the original intended award as well as the corrections required to bring the thesis to the right standard for the award.
- (ii) *Reference to the QAA Quality Code, the QAA Qualification Descriptors and the QAA Qualification Characteristics*: to provide an appropriate framework within which academic standards would be set and maintained.
- (iii) *Development of a Decision Tree*: development of a new schedule to provide a 'decision tree' of examiners' recommendations.

5.2.3 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- *progress monitoring of research students*: a revised progress/monitoring methodology had been developed to facilitate six-monthly reviews of research students throughout their registration period;
- *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017*: the survey closed on 18 May 2017, with a final university response rate of 82%, which was significantly higher than the sector average of 46%;
- *Carnegie Trust Scholarships*: both bids submitted for the 2017 competition had cleared the first round of consideration.

6. PROCESSES FOR VISITING AND EMERITUS APPOINTMENTS

Academic Council approved a revised process and criteria for renewing and making new appointments of Visiting or Emeritus Professors. Council noted, in particular, the criteria for appointment and termination, and the requirement to maintain a central record of appointments. Where an appointment was made directly by a Head of School, a case for nomination should still be made in writing to the Vice-Principal (Research).

Heads of School

Academic Council noted the list of Emeritus Appointments (June 2017).

7. GENDER ACTION PLAN

The Scottish Funding Council required all colleges and higher education institutions to produce a *Gender Action Plan* to address instances of gender imbalance by subject area in relation to Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants. Council considered a paper on the content and process proposed for the university's *Gender Action Plan* and noted, in particular, the target subject areas within the university where there was a significant gender imbalance. Target subject areas were: Engineering; Computer Science; subjects allied to Medicine; Social Studies, and Creative Art and Design.

The university was required to produce the *Gender Action Plan* and publicise it on the website by 31 July 2017. Further work would be undertaken by the Gender Action Plan short life working group to finalise the *Plan* for executive approval by 31 July 2017. The Board of Governors would be asked to note the *Plan* and seek Chair's approval by the due date.

Board of
Governors
[06.07.17]

8. 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.

Secretary's Note: Due to a typographical error, it appeared that all 6 respondents to the evaluation of the Research Degrees Committee had indicated that meetings were too short. In fact, all 6 had responded that the length of meetings was "about right".

9. VALEDICTORY

The Chair wished to record Academic Council's appreciation of two members who would shortly be leaving the university. Professor Christopher O'Neil and Professor Chrisina Jayne would both be leaving the university to take up new posts at other institutions. They were commended for their wide contributions, participation and leadership, and Council wished them every success in their future posts.

The Chair also wished to record very warm thanks to Mr Edward Pollock, Student President (Communication and Democracy) who was demitting his post and returning to the university to complete his studies. Mr Pollock had made an outstanding contribution, leading the student voice, and contributing to the continued development of a constructive and successful relationship between the Student Union and the university.

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

- Mr Bukola Faturoti - representative from the Law School;
- Dr Konstantina Martzoukou - representative from the School of Creative and Cultural Business.

10. **ACADEMIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

The following were recently elected as School representatives on Academic Council from Session 2017/18:

School of Applied Social Studies	- Mr Mike Shepherd
School of Computing Science and Digital Media	- Dr Ines Arana
School of Creative and Cultural Business	- Dr Neil Connon
Scott Sutherland School	- Dr Marianthi Leon
The Law School	- Mrs Laura Sharp

Academic Council currently had no co-opted members. *Organisational Regulation O3* allowed up to two co-opted members.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Monday 4 December 2017, at 2.00pm, in room H230, Health and Social Care Building.

Professor F von Prondzynski, C
3 July 2017