

**AC (23/24) Minute 3**

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

**Minute of the meeting held on Wednesday 6 March 2024**

**Present:** Professor Sir G McCormac (Chair), Professor J Donaldson, Professor E Duncan, Dr A Gilburn, Ms K Gethings, Professor K Grant, Dr D Griffiths, Professor A Jump, Dr G MacIntosh, Professor M Macleod, Professor L McCabe, Professor R Norman, Professor G Ochoa, Professor D Oliver, Professor J Phillips, Professor L Sparks, Professor J Tinson, Dr C Wilson, Professor N Wylie.

**In attendance:** Ms I Beveridge, Ms A Higgins, Ms J Morrow, Ms E Schofield, Dr D Telford, Ms K Lawson

**Apologies:** Ms K Batbayar, Professor K Blair, Professor I Docherty, Ms N Foley, Professor A Green, Professor A Hadland, Dr M Lovatt, Professor D McGhee, Dr J Morgan, Professor N Parish, Dr I Tabner.

**WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Committee were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were noted, as above.

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| **1.** | **MINUTES** | **AC (23/24)** |
|  | The minute from the previous meeting held on 29 November 2023 was approved. | **Minute 2** |
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| **2.** | **MATTERS ARISING NOT OTHERWISE ON THE AGENDA** |  |
|  | Following Council’s endorsement of the Digital Strategy and Research and Innovation Strategy at its last meeting, both strategies were approved by University Court in December 2023.  The 2022/23 Annual Report on Academic Council Effectiveness that was approved at the last meeting of Council was approved by University Court at its meeting in December 2023. |  |
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| **3.** | **STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR AND**  **AN UPDATE ON THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT** | **Oral Report**  **AC (23/24) 26** |
|  | Council received a briefing from the Chair and an update on the external environment, which covered developments relating to matters including:   * It was anticipated that universities would receive notification of budget allocations for 2024-25 from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) during March 2024. The position was challenging in that the unit of resource was likely to decrease and as such there was an expected gap in budgets for teaching for the sector in the region of £28.5 million. The sector had expressed two priorities, firstly to seek to protect the unit of resource, and secondly to protect research funding. The SFC would take decisions on funding allocations during March 2024. * The next Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment has been delayed for one year to 2029, with results anticipated in December 2029. This was to provide further time for a range of issues with the assessment approach to be resolved. Colleagues were encouraged to maintain focus and momentum in respect of REF and preparations for it, regardless of the revised timeline. * The position in respect of student immigration continued to be monitored. As part of an overall drive to reduce net migration, a package of reforms to visa requirements for international students came into effect on 1 January 2024. A survey had been carried out by Universities UK (UUK) in January 2024 with all UK universities on expected forecasts for international student recruitment and ‘actuals’. In January 2024 the sector expected a 10-11% decline compared to January 2023, however, the actual decline had been 44% from the forecast. The Migration Advisory Committee was undertaking a review of the graduate visa route that would report in May 2024. In addition, the UKVI had announced that guidance would be issued in April 2024 on requirements for on campus course delivery.   Council noted the updates. |  |
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| **4.** | **STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT** | **AC (23 24) 27** |
|  | Council received the draft People Strategy and a presentation on its development and purpose.  The People Strategy was one of a number of key enabling strategies underpinning the new Strategic Plan. There had been input from several areas across the University in its development and staff engagement events had taken place in early 2023.  The strategy had been developed to provide strategic direction and focus to enable and underpin the University’s success through its people - to drive employee engagement, productivity and the retention of the best skills and talent. It was formed around three key headline areas: Attract, Engage and Grow. These areas would be brought to life through five dedicated themes of activity: talent attraction and retention; staff experience and engagement; skills growth and career development; health, well-being and inclusion; and reward and recognition.  Going forward, it would be important that the impact of the strategy was evaluated through identified measures of success.  Council endorsed strategy for onward submission to University Court for approval. |  |
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| **5.** | **QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND STANDARDS REVIEW** | **AC (23/24) 28** |
|  | Council received the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) Report that was published in late January 2024.  The review had taken place in November 2023.The key outcome was the judgment of confidence that the University continued to make effective progress in respect of arrangements for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. This outcome was the highest level of outcome available through the review process and built upon the positive outcome of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) that had taken place in 2021. It meant that the University retained its ‘QAA Quality Mark’ for meeting or exceeding UK expectations for quality and standards.  In line with the format of external academic quality reviews, the QESR report identified areas of good practice and recommendations. It was particularly positive that two of the three areas of good practice had been areas of recommendation for development in the last ELIR, which was testament to the focused work that had taken place in follow-up to the ELIR.  The University was required to prepare an action plan to respond to the recommendations which would be published in summer 2024. The development of the plan, and broader follow-up to the QESR, would be overseen by the External Quality Review Monitoring Group.  Council recorded thanks to the Academic Registrar for the work that had been undertaken to prepare for the QESR and the outcome.  Council noted the report and positive outcome of QESR. |  |
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| **6.** | **AMENDMENT TO ORDINANCE 16 – HONORARY DEGREES** | **AC (23/24) 29** |
|  | Council received a proposed amendment to Ordinance 16 – Honorary Degrees.  Ordinance 16 set out Council’s authority to grant honorary degrees (Doctor of the University (DUniv) and Master of Arts (MA). The proposed new amendment sought to take account of a very small number of circumstances in which it may become necessary for an honorary degree to be rescinded, or an offer of an honorary degree withdrawn, in order to maintain the University's integrity.  There were not currently any such circumstances, however it was acknowledged that other universities had experienced the need to rescind honorary degrees and the revision of the Ordinance would ensure the University's position remained suitably comprehensive and robust.  Council endorsed strategy for onward submission to University Court for approval. |  |
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| **7.** | **RESEARCHERS CONCORDAT** | **AC (23/24) 30** |
|  | Council received the Researchers Concordat report and forward action plan.  The paper summarised the University’s progress in delivering on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers 2021-2023 action plan and presented the formal report on activity, and forward action plan for 2023-26. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and other research funders increasingly required funding recipients to be signatories to the Concordat and it was expected that this would form part of the REF assessment within the People, Culture and Environment sub-profile. The University had become a signatory in October 2020.  Thanks were expressed to the Research Environment Group and Research, Innovation and Business Engagement (RIBE) for the work in developing the Concordat plans.  Council endorsed Research Concordat report for onward submission to University Court for approval. |  |
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| **8.** | **REPORTS FROM COUNCIL COMMITTEES** |  |
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| **8.1** | Council received the report from the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) meeting held on 21 February 2024.  Council noted the report and particularly that:   * The National Student Survey (NSS) was open and response rates were currently ahead compared to the same point in 2023. The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) had opened in the week beginning 4 March 2024. Colleagues were reminded to promote the surveys to students. | **AC (23/24) 31** |
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| **8.2** | Council received the report from the University Research Committee meeting held on 15 February 2024.  Council noted the report. | **AC (23/24) 32** |
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| **8.3** | Council received the report from the Joint Policy Planning and Resources Committee held on 27 February 2024.  Council noted the report and particularly that:   * The university had implemented changes to both the paternity leave and flexible working policies in response to legislative updates. | **AC (23/24) 33** |
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| **9.** | **ANY OTHER BUSINESS** |  |
|  | **COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**  Council endorsed the re-appointments to the Academic Promotions Committee.  **STUDENTS’ UNION ELECTIONS**  Student Union (SU) 2024-25 elections had taken place. Congratulations were extended to Leen Ali who had been re-elected as SU President and also to the following new sabbatical officers who would take up their posts in June 2024:   * Adelayo Adebayo – Vice President Education * Justine Pedussel – Vice President Communities * Laura Shaw – Sports President | **AC (23/24) 34** |
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| **10.** | **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** |  |
|  | Wednesday 29 May 2024 at 2pm. |  |
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