

**AC (23/24) Minute 1**

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

**Minute of the meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2023**

**Present:** Professor Sir G McCormac (Chair), Professor K Blair, Professor I Docherty, Professor J Donaldson, Ms N Foley, Dr A Gilburn, Ms K Gethings, Dr D Griffiths, Professor A Green, Professor A Jump, Dr M Lovatt, Dr G MacIntosh, Dr E Macleod, Professor M MacLeod**,** Professor L McCabe,Professor D McGhee, Dr J Morgan, Professor G Ochoa, Professor N Parish, Professor L Sparks, Ms J Stevenson, Dr I Tabner, Professor J Tinson, Dr C Wilson, Professor N Wylie.

**In attendance:** Ms I Beveridge, Ms A Higgins, Ms J Morrow, Dr D Telford.

**Apologies:** Professor K Grant, Professor A Hadland, Professor R Norman, Professor D Oliver, Professor J Phillips, Ms E Schofield.

**WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

A number of new staff and student members were attending Academic Council for the first time and were warmly welcomed to the committee.

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| **1.** | **REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP** | **AC (23/24) 1** |
|  | Council noted the current remit, composition and membership. |  |
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| **2.** | **STANDING ORDERS** | **AC (23/24) 2** |
|  | Council’s Standing Orders were noted. |  |
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| **3.** | **MINUTES** | **AC (22/23)** |
|  | The minute from the previous meeting held on 30 May 2023 was approved. | **Minute 4** |
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| **4.** | **MATTERS ARISING NOT OTHERWISE ON THE AGENDA** |  |
|  | Further to Council’s endorsement of an amendment to Ordinance 22 – Appointment of Honorary Staff at the last meeting on 30 May 2023, the amendment to add clinical honorary titles to the range of honorary titles that can be granted by the University was approved by University Court in June 2023 and the revised version of the Ordinance had been published. |  |
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| **5.** | **STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR AND**  **AN UPDATE ON THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT** | **Oral Report**  **AC (23/24) 3** |
|  | Council received a briefing from the Chair and an update on the external environment, which covered developments relating to matters including:   * The 2022/23 academic year had been very successful for University of Stirling sport. In the 2022/23 season, there had been wide ranging achievements across all sports including that University of Stirling swimmers had won 16 medals at the Commonwealth Games and the men’s football team had reached the fourth round of the Scottish Cup. In addition, the University had finished in overall 13th position in British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS). * Funding was once again available to UK researchers through the Horizon Europe programme, following the confirmation of an agreement having been reached between the UK and the EU. The programme remained an important source of potential funding. * Council had noted at its meeting in May 2023 that the Home Secretary Suella Braverman had made a statement on 23 May 2023 regarding immigration and the government’s aims to reduce net migration. The statement had announced a set of measures which the government considered would contribute to a reduction in net migration. A range of efforts to lobby the government in respect of the planned measures had been made but had not resulted in any change. The developing position regarding immigration and impact on higher education would continue to be monitored. * The UCU had announced a further 15 days of strike action from 11 September 2023 through to 29 September 2023. A range of information had been provided through FAQs for both staff and students which were available on the website. * Council noted the updates. |  |
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| **6.** | **STUDENT NUMBERS** | **AC (23 24) 4** |
|  | Council received a report on the forecast student intake and indicative population for 2023/24, taking account of both autumn and spring intakes.  Whilst autumn 2023 enrolment was ongoing, the overall forecast picture was positive, in the context of the University’s continuing strategic focus on consolidating unregulated student recruitment. The overall student population was anticipated to reach 11,620 FTE which would represent the University’s largest ever student population, with record levels of UG overseas and PGT overseas students, and the largest UG RUK population since the change to the fee regime for RUK students in 2012/13.  The external environment continued to change and develop and this could have ongoing impact on student recruitment in a range of ways. Council noted the national position in respect of numbers of students undertaking and applying for nursing degrees. Application volumes were showing a 40% reduction, despite significant levels of investment being committed by individual institutions to marketing and promotion. Lobbying was taking place to seek a government level drive on recruitment to the profession nationally. |  |
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| **7.** | **GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** | **AC (23/24) 5** |
|  | Council discussed the paper on generative artificial intelligence (AI) and learning and teaching.  Generative AI had been a topic of significant discussion at a global level in recent months and it was important for the University to develop a considered view of how curriculum delivery might require to be adapted in the developing landscape of generative AI. Time had been taken to explore the emerging context and appropriate responses and plans.  A set of both immediate and ongoing actions had been prepared and disseminated within the University and consideration and deliberation would continue in order to inform further the University’s position and approach. In addition, staff were encouraged to share evidence of practice, and to use Student Staff Feedback Committees as fora to discuss the topic. An institutional group to provide a level of oversight would be convened in due course. |  |
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| **8.** | **ANNUAL REPORT ON INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW** | **AC (23/24) 6** |
|  | Council received the annual report to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on Institution-led Review in 2022/23.  The report outlined the University’s Institution-led Review activity in the preceding academic year and included a statement of assurance from the University Court that the University was undertaking Institution-led Review in line with SFC guidelines on quality assurance and enhancement.  Council endorsed the report for onward submission to University Court for approval. |  |
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| **9.** | **STUDENT surveys** | **AC (23/24) 7** |
|  | Council discussed the paper on institutional student surveys which provided an overall consideration of 2023 survey results.  The National Student Survey (NSS) had changed significantly since 2022 in respect of questions, and the timing and presentation of results. There was no longer an overall satisfaction score for institutions in England but this had been retained in Scotland and would continue to have a link to league table performance.  NSS performance in 2023 was weaker than the previous year although there was notable variation across the University. After having been positioned in the top 30 UK institutions in 2022, Stirling was now placed between 75 and 85. It was noted that approximately 46% of respondents were students on five of the University’s programmes and therefore the results were skewed by this. Elements of the results on mental health support had been surprising given the significant work and focus that had been invested in this area, although satisfaction with the service delivery itself was high. Support provision for mental health and the communication of the details regarding this were being developed and enhanced on a continuing basis and staff training and support as an essential element of effective support for students continued to be available and promoted.  Data was available to staff via the BI tool and faculty level meetings to consider the results in detail had been arranged. The survey results would also be considered through a range of routes and fora such as the Education and Student Experience Committee. |  |
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| **10.** | **STRATEGIC PLAN** | **AC (23/24) 8** |
|  | Council considered the draft 2023-2028 Strategic Plan.  The draft had been developed to the current point following extensive engagement and consultation with the University community, and taking account of the themes that emerged from the feedback from staff and students.  Further comment or feedback continued to be welcomed from members of Academic Council and the wider University community.  It was anticipated that the plan would be considered for approval by University Court at its meeting in October 2023. |  |
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| **11.** | **QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND STANDARDS REVIEW** | **Oral Report** |
|  | Council noted that one of the outcomes of the Scottish Funding Council’s ‘Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research’, which reported in June 2021 had been the development of, “a single quality assurance and enhancement framework for tertiary education, to uphold academic standards, and enhance the learning experience of all students”.  Work was continuing at sector level to develop the new framework which was to be implemented from 2024/25, and which would for the first time, create a single quality framework from which both colleges and higher education institutions (HEIs)would operate.  The most recent cycle of Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) had been completed in the 2020/21 academic year. In order to ensure the continuation of the statutory quality assurance cycle, Phase 1 of the new framework would be in operation during the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years.  In Phase 1, every HEI would be required to engage with an Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and a Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) coordinated by the QAA and undertaken by a panel of academic and student reviewers.  The University’s Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) took place in November 2022, with a range of documentation provided to QAA Scotland in advance. The QESR would take place on 22 November 2023 and again, a range of documentation would require to be submitted to QAA in late September 2023.  The QESR visit would take place over a day, and would involve meetings with both students and staff. A report on the review would be prepared and published to the QAA website.  Further updates would be provided to Academic Council in due course. |  |
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| **12.** | **REPORTS FROM COUNCIL COMMITTEES** |  |
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| **12.1** | Council received the report from the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) meeting held on 21 June 2023.  Council noted the report and particularly that:   * A new Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Strategy (LTQES) was being developed, aligned with the new Strategic Plan. A draft of the new LTQES would be considered by ESEC at its meeting in October 2023 and progress would subsequently continue to finalise the new strategy. * Ongoing work led by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS) was continuing to review the points of interaction between PGR students and the University across the entire PGR lifecycle, and agree development and enhancement to support efficiency and the student experience. In addition, the Code of Practice for Research Degrees had been reviewed and revised for 2023/24 in line with developing policy and practice. | **AC (23/24) 9** |
|  | Council received the annual report from the Education and Student Experience Committee for 2022/23.  Council noted the report and that ESEC had continued to undertake and meet the requirements of its remit in the previous academic year. | **AC (23/24) 10** |
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| **12.2** | Council received the report from the University Research Committee meeting held on 31 August 2023.  Council noted the report and particularly that:   * The design of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) had changed for the 2028 REF and this would have an impact on the University’s research activity as well as the structure and content of the data that was returned to HESA. | **AC (23/24) 11** |
|  | Council received the annual report from the University Research Committee for 2022/23.  The report noted that there had been changes to the composition and format of the committee during the academic year.  Council noted the report and that the Committee had continued to undertake and meet the requirements of its remit in the previous academic year. | **AC (23/24) 12** |
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| **13.** | **COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS** | **AC (23 24) 13** |
|  | Council approved the appointments to the Academic Panel (Taught). |  |
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| **14.** | **ANY OTHER BUSINESS** |  |
|  | Academic Council noted that another ‘Be Heard’ campaign would shortly be launched, focussed on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data, and aiming to progressed standardisation in data categories and support continuous enhancement in EDI within the University community and culture. |  |
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| **15.** | **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** |  |
|  | Wednesday 29 November 2023 at 2pm. |  |
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