

## SENATUS ACADEMICUS

### UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS

held online Wednesday 2 June 2021

#### OPEN SESSION

This section of the meeting is open to all members of staff. 615 members of staff attended.

#### 1. Convener's Communications

The Convener provided a short update, followed by a Q&A session:

- Scottish Elections - since the February 2021 meeting of Senate, a new Government had been elected. The Convener had attended an introductory meeting with the new Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, and had outlined some of Edinburgh's priorities. The Minister was keen to visit the University in due course. The University also looked forward to having productive, working relationships with the Deputy First Minister, who had also been appointed Cabinet Secretary for COVID Recovery, and the new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.
- University Campuses – the University was planning for the return of undergraduate students to campuses in September 2021. Clarification was being sought from the Scottish Government on likely social distancing requirements and other COVID mitigations, but it was recognised that the University would need to remain flexible and able to adapt to changes to restrictions at short notice.
- Hybrid Working – staff surveys had indicated that a substantial majority of staff wished to continue some element of working remotely. Work was being undertaken by the Chief Information Officer and his team to understand what was necessary to give staff choice and flexibility, whilst also ensuring that the University's business needs were met.
- House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee Report, 'Universities and Scotland' – the recently published report examined the challenges and opportunities faced by Scottish universities as the sector adjusts to the pandemic and life outside the EU, and assessed the further action needed by Scottish and UK governments. The report suggested that the future funding landscape for Scottish institutions might be considerably more difficult than that of the past. It noted that additional funding provided by the Scottish Government during the pandemic for research and student hardship was time-limited, and that the forthcoming review by the Scottish Funding Council of the coherence and sustainability of universities and colleges in Scotland was likely to have a significant impact on the sector.
- Research Funding – a substantial proportion of the University's research funding comes from UK Government sources and three recent developments give cause for concern: cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding; possible changes to the way in which the UK's continued association with Horizon Europe would be funded; and recognition that, although the UK Government has

committed to increasing spending on research overall, money may be given to other research agencies and institutes and may not directly benefit universities.

- Financial Position – the University is approaching the end of the financial year and there would be detailed reporting on the University’s financial position in due course. In brief, the financial position was relatively healthy. The University had taken some difficult decisions, particularly around its capital programme, and as such, it had been possible to retain a surplus. It was noted that the pandemic had impacted less negatively on international student recruitment than had been anticipated.
- Freedom of Expression – the topic had attracted significant attention and debate within the sector and the media. The University had published a statement on its position on freedom of expression some months ago and the Russell Group had also subsequently published a statement. However, the topic remained controversial and the Convener suggested that there may be benefit in considering the matter further at a future meeting of Senate.
- Security of Universities – the Convener noted that a substantial amount of work was being undertaken in this area and that it was an issue that was likely to increase in prominence. UK security agencies understood that universities need to take risks in order to succeed and maximise their potential, but they need to understand these risks and mitigate them where possible.

In response to questions received from attendees, the Convener and other senior staff noted that:

- The University remains absolutely committed to the Humanities and Social Sciences. Edinburgh sees the strength of being a comprehensive university, and does not agree that STEM and non-STEM subjects should be funded differently.
- The University’s has confidence in its existing statement on Freedom of Expression, but the statement will remain under constant review.
- The University is in discussion with the Scottish Government about vaccination for all members of the community, including international students who arrive in the UK unvaccinated and those under the age of 18. The University’s position is in line with that of the Scottish Government and it will not therefore require members of the community to be vaccinated.

## **2. Strategic Presentation and Discussion**

### **Looking Forward – Delivering on Strategy 2030**

Attendees received six presentations:

1. Delivering on Strategy 2030 – the Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance and University Secretary, Sarah Smith, provided an introduction to the presentation and discussion section of the meeting, noting that it aimed to explore ways in which the University might best deliver on the aspirations of Strategy 2030. Attendees were reminded that all staff had received a communication on 29 April 2021 sharing some of the work that had already been done in this area and inviting feedback. The communication focussed on a number of questions around enabling a way of working that allows staff to contribute their best to the University’s vision and purpose; Curriculum Transformation; supporting and enhancing our world-renowned research;

equality, diversity and inclusion and the development of community; the delivery of professional services; the University's estates and financial strategies; and the University's approach to decision-making and engagement. The Vice-Principal and University Secretary had received a number of thoughtful responses to the communication.

2. Key Planning Assumptions – the Director of Strategic Change, Barry Neilson, provided an update on the key planning assumptions for academic year 2021/22. Restrictions permitting, the intention was for students, staff and support services to be back on campus, and for significantly more in-person learning and teaching and research activity to take place than had been possible in 2020/21. Gaining staff and student confidence in the University's approach to the return to campus would be crucial. Sectoral guidance on academic year 2021/22 was, as the Convener had stated, not yet available, but the University was continuing to engage with the Scottish Government on a range of issues. Planning assumptions needed to balance optimism with a degree of caution, and had been shared with all staff via a Sharepoint site: [What You Need To Know \(sharepoint.com\)](#). Significant work on contingency planning was also underway.

Between now and September 2021, and as Edinburgh moved through the Government's COVID-19 protection levels, the University was aiming to set expectations and prepare as thoroughly as possible for the new semester. Priority areas for return to campus were being identified. Clear communications plans for both students and staff had been developed with Communications and Marketing.

3. Student Experience and Student Support – the Vice-Principal Students, Colm Harmon, addressed questions raised by colleagues about the University's student mental health provision. It was acknowledged that 2020/21 had caused significant challenges for students and therefore for the University's mental health services, despite increased investment in this area. The University's services provide a point of triage into NHS services and this can create a bottle-neck. Nonetheless, the University had managed to develop its mental health services over the academic year, and had focussed particularly on enhancing pastoral support and developing a sense of belonging. This had included staff development to help staff better support students with mental health difficulties, and the introduction of more robust case escalation processes. There had also been a focus on supporting survivors of sexual violence. The University had appointed its first Sexual Violence and Harassment Liaison Manager and was funding, on a fractional basis, a counselling support worker through Rape Crisis. It was clear that the needs for mental health support and support for those who experience sexual violence were increasing. Expanding relevant University services would be a focus of attention in 2021/22.

Early timetable modelling was now available and reflected a substantial uplift in in-person learning activities. Schools were, in general, prioritising in person delivery for senior and PGT-level teaching where classes tend to be smaller, and digital delivery for the teaching of larger classes in the earlier years. Feedback from 2020/21 suggested that students had struggled to understand the heterogeneity of teaching across disciplines and that they had a strong preference for synchronous teaching. These issues would require further consideration.

The Vice-Principal Students advised attendees that the Curriculum Transformation Hub had now been launched: [Curriculum Transformation Hub - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#). The critical question to address at this stage was 'What do we want for the Edinburgh student and graduate?' – who are they and what do

we want them to be? Consultation around this would continue until the end of this calendar year and potentially into the beginning of the next. It was noted that some concerns had been raised about whether or not this was the correct time to be embarking on this work. The Vice-Principal Students believed it was the right time, provided the work was done at the correct pace.

The Personal Tutor and Student Support Review would be given further consideration in the coming academic year with a view to implementing its recommendations, albeit potentially in part, in academic year 2022/23.

4. Research and Innovation – the Senior Vice-Principal, Jonathan Seckl, advised attendees that the University had entered its Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission two months earlier, which was a remarkable achievement. The submission was substantial and early metrics were encouraging.

It was acknowledged that research during the pandemic had been difficult. Far fewer researchers had been able to be on campus, and spend on research and outputs had reduced. However, grant applications and awards had increased. It was hoped that it would be possible to reduce restrictions around research environments in due course and therefore to increase activity.

The Data-Driven Innovation (DDI) Programme was going from strength to strength and exceeding its targets.

The University had a strategy to drive up industry engagement and this was proving successful. The funding environment overall was challenging, but the University was managing well and the outlook was positive.

5. Estates and Infrastructure – the Vice-Principal (Interim) Corporate Services, Catherine Martin, provided attendees with a recap on the previous year, noting that Edinburgh has one of the largest and most complex estates of all UK universities. The initial lockdown in March 2020 was managed by the Estates department over a very compressed period, while re-opening was governed by the Adaptation and Renewal Estates and Digital Infrastructure Group. This Group then folded into the 2021/22 Planning Group in spring 2021.

There had been challenges throughout the period for those who were continuing to work on campus. The University's lateral flow testing centre was established at short notice before the Winter Break. Actions were also taken in relation to the University's capital programme, with the deferral for two years of projects that were not yet subject to contract.

Looking ahead to 2021/22, around 94% of campus buildings were now open to some degree, albeit not at full capacity. The University was at this stage planning for 1m social distancing with additional safety measures in place. Physical distancing guidance for non-educational and research environments would be established in line with sectoral guidance when this is available.

A risk assessment approach to the use of the estate had been adopted. This included an overarching general teaching risk assessment and local risk assessments for specialist spaces. COVID security measures were being put in place to allow the University to bring vibrancy back to the campus in a safe way.

The expectation was that students would be on campus in 2021/22 and therefore that a proportion would be in University-managed accommodation. Appropriate

safety measures were being put in place and the University was continuing to discuss with the Scottish Government the possibility of providing quarantine facilities for those students coming to Edinburgh from Red List countries.

The University was looking afresh at its capital development programme through a short-life working group convened by the Principal which would report to University Executive and Estates Committee in September 2021.

Beyond 2021/22, consideration was being given to de-carbonisation of the University's heating systems.

The Vice-Principal recognised the critical importance of high quality operational estate management over the past 15 months and the colleagues who had been instrumental in facilitating this.

6. Hybrid Working – the Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer and Librarian to the University, Gavin McLachlan, noted that he was overseeing a programme to look at the future of hybrid working at Edinburgh. This was a fast-moving area, and the University had initiated its programme by developing a set of guiding principles. Key principles were around enabling staff to perform at their best, regardless of whether they were working on or off campus; emphasising people and well-being; campuses being a centre of gravity; staff being informed; and not fixing new hybrid work patterns for the first year.

Hybrid working would be one aspect of the University's overall approach to flexible working. Any working patterns established would need to balance the needs of the organisation with those of teams and individuals, and would be underpinned by optimal use of the estate and modern digital approaches.

Local managers would provide staff with information about any return to campus and would be guided in their decisions around this by information provided centrally around prioritisation of staff, the Estates re-opening programme and the Hybrid Working Framework, which it was hoped would be published the end of June 2021.

The Hybrid Working Programme consisted of four steps: tranche 1 feasibility study (end of April to end of June 2021, although it was noted that timings may change if Edinburgh did not progress through the COVID-19 protection levels as anticipated); tranche 2 feasibility study (end of June to end of September 2021); interim hybrid working arrangements to allow ongoing testing and evaluation (September 2021 to April 2022); and incorporation of best practice into the University's Flexible Working Policy and the fixing of working patterns (from May 2022).

The Convener thanked the presenters for their contributions to the presentation and discussion and opened the Q&A section of the meeting. The following responses were provided to attendees' questions:

- In relation to a question about whether or not the University would be participating in the Scottish Government's four-day working week pilot study, it was noted that this was a pledge that was included in the SNP's election manifesto. No further details were known as yet. The University would look to see what was most appropriate for the institution when more details were available, in conjunction with work already being undertaken on hybrid and flexible working.

- In relation to a question about what the University was doing to support staff mental health following an extremely challenging 14-month period, it was noted that all staff wellbeing resources had been pulled together within the Health and Wellbeing hub: [Health & Wellbeing | The University of Edinburgh](#). In addition, the University:
  - had given seven additional respite days;
  - was operating a ‘best endeavours’ approach;
  - how allowed unused annual leave to be carried forward into the following year;
  - was experimenting with meeting and / or email-free days in some areas;
  - was constantly reviewing activity to see where pressures on staff might be reduced;
  - and was giving consideration to what might be done to reduce wait times for the Staff Counselling Service.
- In response to a question about whether or not the quality of the University’s current professional services was viewed as being sufficient, it was noted that there were opportunities to build from strengths: colleagues’ existing significant expertise and experience would be used to identify where there was scope for efficiencies or improvements in quality.
- While we broadly remain an Edinburgh-based University, it was noted that hybrid working practices now make it possible for some University roles to be undertaken anywhere in the world. Going forwards, the University may need to reconsider its recruitment practices to ensure that it remains competitive and is able to attract the best talent.
- In response to a question about making available detailed information about the University’s income and expenditure, to enable areas to engage fully with discussions around Curriculum Transformation and other strategic priorities, it was noted that the University does publish this information at the end of each financial year. In addition, updates on the University’s financial position are produced by the Director of Finance and his team throughout the year. Attendees were advised that the University has six main budget areas (the three Colleges plus the three professional services groupings), and that cross-cutting projects such as Curriculum Transformation do not map directly onto any one of these six areas. As such, discussions about the best mechanism for funding these strategic priorities were underway.
- Strategy 2030 was developed prior to the pandemic. The University was confident that the Strategy still remained fit for purpose, though recognised that the speed at and way in which its aspirations were achieved may have been affected by the pandemic.
- Attendees were advised that the Hybrid Working Programme was not an Information Services Group (ISG) project as such: the project was being convened by the Chief Information Officer, but much of the work was being undertaken by colleagues in Human Resources, Finance and other areas. The Hybrid Working Group included representatives of HR and the Unions, and senior representation from across the University. Final decisions were being taken by University Executive.
- In response to a question about ways in which the University might better support the local community, particularly young people who were finding it more difficult to secure apprenticeships and entry-level roles because of the pandemic, it was noted that the University has a strong track record of community engagement and widening participation. However, it was recognised that there may be value in making the University’s work in this area more visible, and community engagement would also be given careful consideration as part of the Curriculum Transformation work.

- Attendees asked about the link between the University's increased research grant success rate and the provision of increased research support resource. In response, it was noted that the University was in the process of reviewing the way in which it supports research through 'Growing Research Together'. It was hoped that it would be possible to accelerate the pace of this work and to make improvements within the next 12 months.
- There was discussion around an assumption that student support is necessarily better provided in person. It was agreed that there were some situations in which support could be provided just as, if not more effectively, online. Other situations were better handled in person. It would be important for the University to strike a balance going forwards. However, it was also noted that the expectation was that the campus would be the heart of the student experience from September. As such, it would be essential to provide students with visible, accessible, in-person support services on campus.
- It was recognised that staff would need to be provided with further guidance around the successful delivery of hybrid meetings as staff gradually returned to campus.
- Concerns were raised about overseas students who were prohibited from travelling to Edinburgh in September and students who needed to self-isolate and were therefore unable to participate in in-person teaching. It was noted that the University's working assumption was that students would be on campus in September and that any delays to arrival would be relatively short. However, to facilitate hybrid teaching where required, all centrally bookable lecture theatres and seminar rooms were being equipped with hybrid Level 1 classroom technology. In addition, a small number of teaching spaces would be equipped at Level 2, and a smaller number still at Level 4. Other hybrid options were also available to staff and they were encouraged to discuss these with learning technologists within their areas.
- In relation to PGT student numbers, it was noted that the University had committed to no growth for growth's sake. PGT provision would be considered as part of the Curriculum Transformation work. This would include creative thinking about the required components of a PGT programme.
- In relation to ensuring that staff expertise, values and priorities were central to the implementation of Strategy 2030, it was noted that the University sees the implementation of the Strategy as a collective responsibility. The 29 April 2021 communication discussed earlier in the meeting invited staff to contribute to discussions, and also raised questions around the University's approaches to engagement and decision-making. The results of staff surveys would be used to guide developments and the Staff Experience Committee, which reports into University Executive, would have a significant role to play in this work.
- Further consideration would be given to the format of online Senate meetings to see if there were better ways of handling attendees' questions and to ensure that presenters made use of accessibility best practice.

The Convener closed the open session of Senate, noting that Senate members were invited to join the formal meeting of Senate at 4.00pm.

## **FORMAL MEETING OF SENATE**

This section of the meeting is open to Senate members only.

**Present:** P Mathieson (Chair), F Abou Jawad, A Akinola, R Andrew, M Barany, R Baxstrom, C Beckett, S Benjamin, S Bennett, J Bradfield, H Branigan, M Brennan, D Byrne, C Campbell, D Cavanagh, U Chan, K Chapman, N Chue Hong, A Connor, J Crang, H Critchley, J Crook, S Cunningham-Burley, J Danbolt, L De Mets, A Desler, K Donovan, L Dritsas, L Duncan-Karrim, J Dunlop, H Ellis, J Evans, M Evans, S Ewing, S Forbes, C French, D Friedrich, L Grant, G Gray, D Gray, D Grumett, K Halliday, L Hamilton, G Harrison, T Harrison, D Hay, E Haycock-Stuart, S Henderson, C Heycock, M Highton, J Hillston, A Holloway, J Hopgood, J Hoy, M Khattar, L Kirstein, A Maciocia, F Mackay, S MacPherson, K Matthews, E Mavin, G McLachlan, J Menzies, D Miell, N Moran, S Morley, T Morrison, A Murray, J Murray, P Navarro, C Naydani, B Ngwenya, R Nicol, P Norris, M Novenson, I Omah, M O'Toole, K Pantoula, D Paton, C Phillips, J Reynolds-Wright, R Reynolds, K Rice, S Riley, J Robbins, S Rolle, T Schwarz, A Scully, R Semple, G Simm, S Smith, A Snell, A Sorace, S Stock, P Taylor, E Taylor, J Terry, N Tuzi, J Upton, P Walsh, S Warrington

In attendance: G Douglas, T Gold, S MacGregor, R Siro, P Ward

**Apologies:** E Bomberg, C Boswell, S Bowd, C Caquineau, J Cruz, J Evans, D Evensen, S Fawknor, R Fisher, C Harmon, K Jenkins, R Kenway, S Lamont-Black, K Lingstadt, W Loretto, L McAra, A McCormick, N McCrossan, L Mckie, A Morris, D Robertson, J Sakovics, M Shipston, J Smith, T Stratford, A Tudhope, J Turner, K Vellodi, B Wahi-Singh

### **3. Senate Members' Feedback on Presentation and Discussion Topic**

Senate members provided the following additional feedback on the presentation and discussion topic:

- The importance of ensuring that staff members who feed into strategic discussions can see how their input makes a difference to high-level decision making was reiterated. The Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance and University Secretary agreed that this was an issue that required ongoing consideration.
- Members discussed the transparency of the University's budget model and the sense that some programmes which generate significant income for the University do not always benefit from this resource. The Convener noted the complexities of the institution, but was keen to discuss this matter further outside of the meeting.
- In relation to student mental health support, it was noted that the University's expenditure in this area increases year on year. Members were supportive of this, but also expressed the view that there would be benefit in undertaking work to build student resilience. This was likely to be particularly necessary amongst the new student cohort entering in 2021/22 given how disrupted their final years of school had been by the pandemic.
- Members discussed the value for knowledge exchange of the University hosting academic conference and meetings, but noted the climate impact of such events. It was agreed that the academic community should be thinking carefully about ways of reducing travel. However, in-person gatherings were also important if the University was to remain internationally significant. There was therefore a place for continuing to hold such gatherings, but ensuring that knowledge exchange was maximised; best use was made of available hybrid technology; and that events' carbon footprints were accurately quantified and offset.



- The view that research does not cover its costs was challenged: although grant income may not fully cover costs, the University's research also generates significant REF income and builds the University's reputation, allowing it to attract the highest calibre staff and students. Members discussed the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research and the importance of ensuring that they are not viewed as separate areas of University business.

## **SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS**

### **4. Report from E-Senate**

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

A Senate member raised a question about item 10 of the Report - the Report of the Senate Exception Committee. The Exception Committee Report noted that degree awards may be rescinded if students had unpaid tuition fee debt, and it was asked if the University could be more flexible around this given the circumstances of the pandemic.

In response, it was noted that the University's approach was in line with that of the sector and that it is standard practice for students not to be permitted to graduate until debt is at least understood, and preferably cleared. Enhanced measures that had been put in place by the University to support students financially during the pandemic included:

- stopping the practice of withdrawing students' access to the University's IT systems when in debt.
- making significantly more student hardship funding available: in a typical year, £1.2 million would be made available, and an additional £2 million had been available this academic year.

It was noted that widening participation students are not responsible for paying their own fees and would therefore not incur tuition fee debt.

### **5. Annual Report of the Senate Standing Committees**

Members approved the Annual Report.

The Convener of Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) advised members that a large number of concessions requests had recently been dealt with by Convener's Action. These had been well-filtered by Colleges and Schools and none were rejected.

Members were invited by the Convener of Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) to identify any gaps in the priorities for the coming academic year outlined in the paper. A question was raised about the extent to which sustainability was being considered by the three Senate Standing Committees. The Convener expressed confidence that sustainability was very prominent in the University's thinking, and it was noted that sustainability was embedded within a number of the priorities detailed in the paper, including Curriculum Transformation and Digital Maturity. However it was acknowledged that there would be value in making this issue more explicit in the Standing Committee priorities, and the Conveners would give this further thought.

*Action: Senate Standing Committee Conveners to give further thought to ways in which issues relating to sustainability might be made more explicit in the Committee priorities for 2021/2.*

### **6. Senate Standing Committees: Membership and Terms of Reference**

Members approved the Senate Standing Committees' memberships and terms of reference, though noted that a senior member of CMVM staff appeared to have been omitted from the APRC membership.

*Action: Senate Clerk to check the membership of APRC*

The potential value of including on the membership of the Standing Committees additional 'at large' members of Senate was discussed. A number of members were supportive of this, agreeing that it could assist in making the Committees more representative and enhance discussions around high-level University policy. It was also recognised that:

- the current terms of reference and memberships for the Standing Committees were approved in September 2019 and were therefore relatively new;
- the Standing Committees were already large;
- there was an expectation that those already on the memberships of the Committees were not there as individuals but to represent their constituencies.

It was agreed Senate would welcome a discussion paper on this topic at a later date.

## **ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL OR NOTING**

### **7. Conferment of the Title of Emeritus Professor**

The paper was approved.

### **8. Report from the Honorary Degrees Committee**

The paper was approved. It was noted that the number of nominees was small because the University was, where possible, keen to wait for normal graduation arrangements to resume before awarding Honorary Degrees.

### **9. Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) – Outcome**

The paper was noted.

### **10. Research Strategy Group Update**

The paper was noted.

### **11. Senate Membership 2021/2**

The paper was noted.

### **12. Senate Exception Committee Terms of Reference and Membership**

The paper was approved.

### **13. Senate Standing Orders – Minor Amendment**

The paper was approved.

### **14. Annual Review of Effectiveness of Senate**

The paper was noted.