



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Senatus Academicus

Wednesday 11 December 2024, 1:10-4pm
Larch Lecture Theatre, Nucleus, Kings Buildings / Microsoft Teams

Confirmed Minute

Attendees: Peter Adkins, Gill Aitken, Sham Alhousiki, Niall Anderson, Ruth Andrew, Jake Ansell, Mohammad Amir Anwar, Kate Ash-Irisarri, Liz Baggs, Kasia Banas, Michael Barany, Matt Bell, Shereen Benjamin, Philip Best, Ayesha Bibi, Richard Blythe, Lisa Boden, Catherine Bovill, Barry Bradford, Mary Brennan, Paul Brennan, Aidan Brown, Tom Bruce, Karl Burgess, Mette Cameron, Carol Campbell, Celine Caquineau, Tony Carbery, Jeremy Carrette, Leigh Chalmers, Seongsook Choi, Aurora Constantin, Martin Corley, Miguel Costa-Gomes, Chris Cox, Jeremy Crang, Juan Cruz, Jo Danbolt, Kate Davison, Afshan Dean, Jean-Christophe Denis, Chris Dent, Charlotte Desvages, John Devaney, Simone Dimartino, Julia Dorin, Leonidas Dumas, Claire Duncanson, Ruth Elliott, Andrea English, Omolabake Fakunle, Tonks Fawcett, Valentina Ferlito, Manuel Fernandez-Gotz, Sue Fletcher-Watson, Vashti Galpin, Marc Geddes, Akrit Ghimire, Antonis Giannopoulos, Stuart Gilfillan, Laura Glendinning, Benjamin Goddard, Justin Goodrich, Iain Gordon, Kim Graham, Liz Grant, Richard Gratwick, Paddy Hadoke, Rachel Happer, Colm Harmon, Tina Harrison, Helen Hastie, David Hay, Dora Herndon, Melissa Highton, Jane Hislop, Willem Hollmann, James Hopgood, Jenny Hoy, Emma Hunter, David Ingram, Max Jaede, Jakov Jandric, Amanda Jarvis, Susan Jarvis, Aarnesh Kapoor, Itamar Kastner, Jim Kaufman, Meryl Kenny, George Kinnear, Linda Kirstein, David Kluth, Andy Law, Paul Le Tissier, Tom Leinster, Janice Linne, Dawn Livingstone, Jason Love, Sophia Lycouris, Antony Maciocia, Guangzhao Mao, Peter Mathieson (Convener), Sarah McAllister, Lesley McAra, Hayley McCormack, Mike McGrew, Gavin McLachlan, John Menzies, Marc Metzger, Meera Mokashi, James Mooney, Steven Morley, Ben Morse, Simon Mudd, Rachel Muers, Lyndsay Murray, Zahid Mushtaq, Rupert Nash, Pau Navarro, Judith Newton, Bryne Ngwenya, Steven O'Hagan, Naraya Papilaya, Diana Paton, Jamie Pearce, Nick Polydorides, Sarah Prescott, Jon Pridham, Colin Pulham, Syjil Ramjuthan, John Rappa, Tianyi Ren, Ricardo Ribeiro Ferreira, Ken Rice, Simon Riley, Aryelly Rodriguez Carbonell, Carin Runciman, Enrique Sanchez-Molano, Giulio Santori, Bernd Schroers, Matthias Schwannauer, Pablo Schyfter Camacho, David Smith, Stewart Smith, Antonella Sorace, Perdita Stevens, Emily Taylor, Alex Thomson, Sally Till, Tamara Trodd, Niki Vermeulen, Natasha Vijendren, Julia Voigt, Dylan Walch, Patrick Walsh, Lena Wanggren, Stephen Warrington, Michele Weiland, Charles West, Indigo Williams, Iain Wright, David Wyllie, Ben Wynne.

In attendance: Nina Bremner, Lisa Dawson, Sinéad Docherty, Arlene Duffin, Lucy Evans, Richard Kenway, Nichola Kett, Dean Pateman, Gillian Richardson, David Robertson, Fraser Rudge (Clerk), Michael Rovatsos, Jon Turner, Martin Wilson.

Apologies: Marialuisa Aliotta, David Argyle, Kelly Blacklock, Christina Boswell, Laura Bradley, Neil Chue Hong, Kevin Collins, Hannah Crocombe, Kirsty Day, Kevin Dhaliwal, Murray Earle, Mark Evans, Anne-Maree Farrell, Susan Farrington, Thorunn Helgason, Gavin Jack, Julie Jacko, Barry Laird, Steff Lewis, Ewa Luger, Upasana Mandhata, Lorna Marson, Catherine Martin, Kyleigh Melville, Tijana Mitic, Chris Mowat, Richard Oosterhoff, Cheryl Patrick, Josephine Pemberton, Wayne Powell, Brodie Runciman, Ewelina Rydzewska-Fazekas, Tobias Schwarz, Mike Shipston, Geoff Simm, James Smith, Jessica Thackeray, Shannon Vallor, Philip Wadler, Mark Williams, Maryam Yusuf.

Prior to the meeting commencing, Senate members were reminded that the Senate meeting would be recorded to aid in the production of the minutes as per the Senate Recordings Privacy Statement. Separately, members were advised that an unofficial attempt to record the meeting using an AI notetaker had been identified and blocked. Senate members were reminded that personal recordings of Senate meetings were not permitted.

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Convener, Principal Sir Professor Peter Mathieson, welcomed members to the second Senate meeting of the 2024-25 academic session, and extended a warm welcome to new student members who were joining Senate for the first time. It was confirmed that Senate had reached quorum.

2 Minutes and e-Senate Reports

2.1 Minutes

Senate received the unconfirmed minutes of the meetings of 22 May 2024 (S 24/25 2A), 18 June 2024 (S 24/25 2B), and 9 October 2024 (S 24/25 2C).

The Academic Registrar, Lisa Dawson, provided an update to Senate on the process to consider the minutes held over from previous meetings, set out options for considering the minutes within the meeting, and highlighted relevant extracts from the Senate Standing Orders and the Senate Handbook.

At Senate's meeting of 9 October 2024, it was agreed that proposed corrections to the minutes of 22 May 2024 and 18 June 2024 would be considered through an out-of-meeting process. It was reported that 46 Senate members had participated in this process, which was equivalent to 18% of Senate membership. As a quorum had not been reached, the minutes had been returned to Senate for approval as presented to the October 2024 meeting. It was reported that 38 of the 46 participants in the online process had voted in favour of the proposed corrections.

Reference was made to Senate Standing Order five, which confirmed that minutes could not be approved in an inquorate meeting of Senate, and therefore, a quorum was being applied to the out-of-meeting process to consider the proposed corrections. The Academic Registrar observed that the out-of-meeting process had been introduced in response to feedback that Senate members wanted to spend less time discussing minutes within Senate meetings.

Reference was also made to page 12 of the Senate Handbook, which stated that *"The Senate Clerk is responsible for preparing Minutes of all meetings. The Minutes will convey the decision reached by Senate, key points raised by members and actions arising out of discussions. Minutes will not be a verbatim account of meetings and will give a balanced summary of discussions that took place. Minutes of the previous Ordinary Meeting (including meetings of E-Senate), or any intervening Special Meeting, or any Graduation Meeting and Ceremonial, will be submitted and approved at the opening of the next quorate meeting of Senate."*

It was explained that Senate would have the option to approve the minutes without a vote, approve the minutes with a vote, or vote not to approve the minutes. In the event that Senate voted not to approve the minutes, Senate would be able to consider the proposed corrections within the meeting or via the out-of-meeting process.

It was reported that two members had proposed corrections to the minutes of 9 October 2024, and that a document detailing the proposed corrections and associated consideration had been published on the Senate Members Portal. A member recommended that Senate not approve the minutes on the basis that there remained uncorrected factual inaccuracies, and that the proposed corrections be considered through an out-of-meeting process.

Senate was invited to vote on the minutes. During the voting period, reports were received from members who had experienced difficulty in logging onto Woodlap.

Senate did not approve the minutes of 22 May 2024 (S 24/25 2A) by a majority vote: 42 members approved, 49 members did not approve, and 15 members abstained.

Senate did not approve the minutes of 18 June 2024 (S 24/25 2B) by a majority vote: 42 members approved, 48 members did not approve, and 18 members abstained.

Senate did not approve the minutes of 9 October 2024 (S 24/25 2C) by a majority vote: 49 members approved, 50 members did not approve, and 11 members abstained.

Action: Senate Clerk to facilitate out-of-meeting consideration of the minutes.

2.2 e-Senate report of 11-25 September 2024 (S 24/25 2D)

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the replacement of text within section three of the e-Senate report of 11-25 September 2024: Report from the Senate Exception Committee. Paragraph two was replaced with the following text:

"One member of the Senate Exception Committee provided corrections to the paper, which Senate Support has made. Future items of Senate Exception Committee business will explicitly confirm, where relevant, that the requirements for award have been met and that the award could not await the next meeting of Senate."

Senate approved the e-Senate report of 11-25 September 2024, by a majority vote: 94 members approved, 5 members did not approve, and 14 members abstained.

2.3 e-Senate report 13-27 November 2024 (S 24/25 2E)

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the addition of text to section three of the e-Senate report of 13-27 November 2024: Communications from the University Court.

Under item 3, insert: "One member noted that this report appeared to contradict the Principal's claim from the October Senate meeting that he could not report to Court on Senate's business until minutes have been approved."

The Convener acknowledged the inclusion of the Senate member's comment within the e-Senate report; and that he had commented at the October 2024 meeting on the desirability of having minutes approved so that a full report of Senate business could be made to the University Court. It was explained that, in the absence of approved minutes, the Convener could still provide a report to Court but this was limited to a very high-level overview about what Senate discussed and any other items to be brought to the attention of Court.

Senate approved the e-Senate report of 13-27 November 2024, by a majority vote: 104 members approved, 1 member did not approve, and 14 members abstained.

2.4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the 9 October 2024 meeting.

3 Convener's Communications

The Convener provided a verbal update to Senate on the financial context of the University, and invited comments from the Edinburgh University Students Association Vice-President Education.

3.1 Financial Context

The Convener commented briefly on the financial challenges affecting the University, and on the all-staff meeting with senior leaders held on 10 December 2024.

The Convener explained that the intention of the all-staff meeting was to present information to staff on how the University's current and forecast financial position had been interpreted by the senior leadership team. Senate was advised that around 3000 members of staff joined the all-staff meeting online, and that around 300 members of staff joined the meeting in person. The Convener reflected on the effectiveness of the meeting for communicating the severity and the urgency of the University's financial situation, and acknowledged the meeting format could be improved for future events. In response to a query, the Convener clarified that an Interim Director of Finance had been appointed pending recruitment to the open-ended Director of Finance vacancy.

It was queried why the all-staff meeting had not been recorded for the benefit of staff who had been unable to attend at the time. In response, it was clarified that prior consideration had been given to recording the meeting and that it had been anticipated that there would be sufficient alternative sources of information available to the university community. It was explained that information would be provided through a dedicated SharePoint site, and from further staff engagement opportunities yet to be arranged.

It was separately observed that the process used by staff to prioritise questions in the all-staff meeting had inadvertently resulted in a number of similar questions being asked. It was suggested that an alternative format could include questions from trade union representatives. The Convener acknowledged that changes to the format of future all-staff meetings would be considered, and reflected on the existing communication channels between the senior leadership team and the trade unions.

There were brief discussions on the planned voluntary severance scheme, and on communications relating to the potential for compulsory redundancies; and on the impact of tuition fee increases for international students.

3.2 Communications from the EUSA Vice-President Education

As part of the Convener's Communication item, the Convener invited the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) Vice-President Education, Dylan Walch, to report on issues affecting the student population that were of relevance to Senate. The EUSA Vice-President Education reported that the Students' Association had received feedback on several issues that were likely to be of interest to Senate.

It was reported that students had provided feedback on challenges associated with transitioning to university, and with adapting to different ways of learning. It was explained that, in several cases, students had fed back that they had not received sufficient

information on how to approach their assessments, and that they were unsure what was expected of them.

Student feedback to EUSA had also indicated that relatively few lectures were being recorded, and the EUSA Vice-President Education commented that there were many valid reasons why students could not attend lectures and would therefore benefit from being able to engage asynchronously. Feedback had also been received on timetabling, and the volume of contact time available to students.

The EUSA Vice-President Education acknowledged that feedback had also been received from students on topics including: housing, travel, inclusivity, student voice, and food provision around campus. Recurrent feedback indicated that students often found it challenging to locate and access various University services.

There was a brief discussion on how the feedback raised would be acted upon to improve the student experience. It was suggested that consideration of the student experience could be enhanced by having student feedback considered more prominently in university papers and committee decisions. It was also suggested that the mechanisms for escalating issues affecting the student experience from school, to college, to university could be improved. Separately, the EUSA Vice-President Education commented that there were effective communication channels between the EUSA sabbatical officers, and the University's senior leadership team.

4 Action Log

Senate noted the status of actions as detailed within the Action Log (S 24/25 2F).

5 Finance, HR and Research Improvement Programme

Senate received the update on the Finance, HR and Research Improvement Programme (S 24/25 2G). Members were invited to submit questions and comments for response from the paper authors Professor Dave Robertson, Programme Sponsor; and Gillian Richardson, Director of Strategic Change (Interim).

Senate members contributing to the discussion recognised the value to Senate provided by the paper, and by the resources accessible through links contained within the paper. However, it was observed that the update and linked resources did not provide clear timelines for the resolution of ongoing issues affecting the student and staff experience; and it was commented that further information could have been provided on the specifically academic costs associated with the ongoing issues. It was requested that, for future updates, additional focus be placed on how academic concerns were being addressed.

The paper authors acknowledged the impact of the ongoing issues to the student and staff experience. It was explained that the improvement programme was tackling issues which had a deep impact on the University's core operations; and that it was important that the programme focused on the priority actions identified. The paper authors commented that it was important that the programme be able to consult with key stakeholders, and for the programme to provide assurance around transparency and decision making. Senate were advised that University staff could access progress updates on the [Finance, HR and Research Improvement Programme Information Hub](#).

The timescale for provision of budgetary reports was queried, and it was commented that it was important for researchers and project managers to have current financial information. It was observed that staff were currently required to use manual workarounds to receive

necessary information. The paper authors acknowledged the importance of accurate financial data for decision-making and management of grant funding, and commented briefly on work undertaken and work planned to address issues associated with reporting. It was explained that further consultation was required in order to define user requirements and that, in time, it was anticipated that associated work would move the University away from manual reporting methods and improve organisational efficiency. Within the workstream, it was observed that research and facilities management reporting had been prioritised. Separately, the paper authors recognised the significant contribution made by the recently disbanded Research Stabilisation Group.

6 Timetabling and Course Selection

Senate received the update on work to improve timetabling and course selection for students and staff (S 24/25 2H). Members were invited to submit questions and comments for response from the project co-sponsors, Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students; and Professor Iain Gordon, Vice Principal, Head of the College of Sciences and Engineering. Prior to Senate discussion, the Deputy Secretary Students commented that several fruitful discussions on timetabling and course selection had been held with colleagues in schools and colleges across the University's, whom she thanked for their contributions.

Several Senate members contributing to the discussion gave thanks for the information provided, and acknowledged that positive progress was being made. It was observed that timetabling affected both the student and staff experience, and members provided examples for context. From the student perspective, it was reported that delayed provision of teaching and exam timetables adversely affected students' ability to plan for travel, and to plan around family and work commitments. It was observed that travel arrangements were often more expensive the later they were made, and that earlier provision of timetables would likely support students' finances.

From the staff perspective, an example was given whereby a lack of clarity on room allocation for a large class had created uncertainty on how to plan teaching activity. In another case, a member of staff had been required to take a prolonged period of annual leave in December because they didn't know when they would be teaching in semester two. Separately, it was commented that student-facing professional services staff would benefit from receiving information which clearly articulated changes to systems and student-facing activities.

Senate discussed briefly the existing systems for course selection, which a member commented had the potential to cause students and staff unnecessary duplication of effort and a poor user experience. It was also queried whether there were plans to allow self-enrolment on courses, and how the University would ensure that students made fully informed choices if so. The project co-sponsors acknowledged existing dissatisfaction with the course enrolment processes, and explained that it was intended to improve course enrolment processes in parallel with work on timetabling.

The timescale for implementation was queried, and it was noted that a period of detailed planning and analysis would occur from January 2025 to the end of the 2024/5 academic year. The project co-sponsors advised Senate that changes were due to be implemented in full prior to September 2027, and that incremental improvements would be implemented sooner wherever possible. It was reported that consideration had been given to the implementation timescale and, while a shorter implementation timescale was desirable, it was considered important allow sufficient time to consult with key stakeholders and to resolve complex issues.

7 Curriculum Transformation update - Edinburgh Student Vision

Senate received a paper which detailed the process used to develop, consult on, test and refine the Edinburgh Student Vision (S 24/25 2I). Members were invited to submit questions and comments for response from the paper authors Professor Colm Harmon, Vice Principal Students; and Dr Jon Turner, Curriculum Transformation Programme Lead. Following discussion, Senate approved the Edinburgh Student Vision for use as a key reference point for the Curriculum Transformation Programme and for learning & teaching more broadly.

In introducing the paper, the paper authors explained that Senate had last considered the Edinburgh Student Vision at its meeting of February 2024. In the period since, market sensitivity testing had been conducted with applicants and current students, and the language used within the Edinburgh Student Vision had been tested and refined. Several Senate members contributed to the discussion.

It was queried whether the final component in the design of programmes, to 'build understanding and engagement with global challenges', would be problematic for staff within 'pure' academic disciplines. In response, Dr Turner commented that consideration was being given to how the University can use both the core disciplinary elements of degree programmes and the elective space for students. He further commented that there was a desire to provide students with additional opportunities to engage with global challenges through the introduction of challenge courses and cross-university experiential learning courses as electives. Another member commented that they considered it important to recognise that each element of the Edinburgh Student Vision could also be achieved within a discipline, and cautioned against the perception that cross-disciplinary, elective courses, were the only route to meet the Edinburgh Student Vision.

A member commented that they were pleased to see reference within the student attributes to being inclusive and open to diverse perspectives, but were disappointed that there was no reference within programme attributes to academic freedom or the skills and dispositions which underpin academic freedom. The 'ability to disagree well' was given as an example.

Usage of the term "highly employable" was queried. It was explained that, while consultation with staff had indicated a preference for a term that was broader than 'employability', market sensitivity testing had highlighted employability as being of significant importance to students and applicants.

A member asked how minor edits for syntax and clarity should be made, and members were advised that these should be sent to Dr Jon Turner and would be addressed before the wording was finalised.

Noting reference within the paper to consultation, a member commented that they would have not been aware of work on the Edinburgh Student Vision if they hadn't been a member of Senate. It was suggested that additional communication with the wider University Community would have been beneficial. Two Senate members commented that they considered Senate to have been well engaged throughout the process. In response, the paper authors commented that work on the Edinburgh Student Vision had been ongoing for a long time, and that broad consultation early in the development process had transitioned into more targeted engagement recently. Separately, a member commented that they would have appreciated further information on how the Edinburgh Student Vision had developed over time. In response, Senate were advised that a document was due to be published on the Curriculum Transformation Programme Hub SharePoint site which would include detailed annotations of the changes made.

A member invited the paper authors to comment on their expectations with regards to implementation; and separately commented that they had found existing resources to be helpful in defining specialist professional programs alongside the University's vision. The paper authors commented that they viewed the Edinburgh Student Vision as aspirational and ambitious; that consideration was being given as to how the Vision could be integrated into relevant documentation and approvals processes, and that additional resources and support were being developed. Reference was also made to the Skills for Success Framework and the Curriculum Framework. Separately, it was recognised that the design components of the Edinburgh Student Vision would already be embedded within much of the University's curriculum, and that staff would be able to expand on what existed already.

In response to an invitation to comment from the Convener, the EUSA VP Education commented that the Students Association' were happy with the Edinburgh Student Vision as drafted and were looked forward to receiving associated information on implementation.

8 Update on the Learning and Teaching Strategy

Senate received the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030, and associated implementation plan, as had been presented to the 7 November 2024 meeting of the Senate Education Committee (paper S 24/25 2P). An extract from the draft minutes of the November 2024 Senate Education Committee meeting was also provided for information, and which detailed amendments to be actioned which had arisen from that meeting.

Members were invited to submit questions and comments for response from Professor Colm Harmon, Vice Principal Students; and Professor Tina Harrison, Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement). Prior to discussion, Senate received information on the consultation process associated with the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which had included targeted consultation with key stakeholders in schools and colleges; consideration at relevant meetings, and via a SharePoint site open to all staff. There had also been liaison with colleagues developing the Edinburgh Student Vision.

Members were also updated on recent consideration by the Senate Education Committee, where the fundamental areas covered within the Strategy had been met with broad approval with some minor amendments suggested. Senate members were invited to consider and comment on the Strategy prior to its return to the Senate Education Committee for final consideration and approval.

A member commented on linkages between university strategies and resourcing, and it was queried whether any investment would be made in support of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. It was explained that no additional investment had been approved for the implementation of the Strategy, and that the Strategy was intended to act as a framework to guide activities and processes that were resourced through existing university structures.

It was queried what key performance indicators would be used to monitor and evaluate the success of the Strategy. In response, it was commented that the Senate Education Committee had given initial consideration to the associated implementation plan, and it was commented that the Learning and Teaching Strategy had been intended as a framework to support existing activity. Senate was informed that, from consultation with heads of school, a preference had been stated for measurement through existing university key performance indicators, and that additional indicators were not desirable. Members were informed that the Senate Education Committee, in dialogue with Senate, would give ongoing consideration of the implementation plan and required new key performance indicators.

9 Senate External Review Task and Finish Group - Senate Business Committee Proposal

Senate received the proposal to form a Senate Business Committee, which had been developed by the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group in response to AdvanceHE's 2023 review of Senate effectiveness (paper S 24/25 2J).

Members were invited to submit questions and comments for response from the Convener of the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group, Professor Richard Kenway. Prior to discussion, the Convener of the Task and Finish Group thanked Senate members for contributing to the consultation exercise held, and encouraged members to engage with forthcoming consultation requests. Separately, it was commented that there were several interconnected issues highlighted within the Advance HE External Review report and that it would be helpful to implement changes approved by Senate as rapidly as possible to support their timely monitoring and evaluation.

A member commented on the proportion of student members on Senate, and the differing terms of office between student and staff Senate members. It was suggested that, following the initial trial period, changes be made to the composition of the Senate Business Committee to allow new staff and student members to be elected each year. It was suggested that elections for staff representatives be staggered over a two-year period; and that the maximum term of office for an elected member of staff be set at two years. The Convener of the Task and Finish Group, welcomed the suggestions, and commented that they could be considered as part of the planned review of the trial period. Separately, it was observed that the elected student representative would be the only member of the Committee who was not being paid for their time. As a point of equality and equity, it was requested that elected student representatives receive payment for their role on the Committee. It was further commented that doing so would help to ensure students from more diverse backgrounds were able to participate. The Convener and Academic Registrar acknowledged that the request, and advised that there were ongoing discussions with HR that were of relevance.

It was queried whether the elected members of the Senate Business Committee would be expected to consult with, and report back to, their constituency. If so, there would likely be significant workload implications for the members. It was further commented that the role of equitably representing large constituencies, which may have discordant views, would likely be challenging. The Convener of the Task and Finish Group acknowledged the concern, and explained that the Group had sought to ensure that all of the different constituencies of Senate were represented on the Senate Business Committee. Professor Kim Graham, Provost and Convener of the proposed Senate Business Committee, also acknowledged the concern and commented that further consideration would be given once the Committee had been formed.

It was noted that there were only four professional services members on Senate, and it was suggested that the elected professional services vacancy be shared to enable staff to alternate during periods of peak workload.

The following amendment to the paper was accepted without requiring a vote. As a point of clarification, the following text replaced point 5 of the terms of reference.

"Support the development of papers that can effectively serve Senate's governance remit, including inviting contributions from relevant university committees or individuals where applicable. The Committee may suggest that aspects of papers be pursued outwith Senate or further developed for a future meeting."

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the proposal to form a Senate Business Committee.

Noting the proposed implementation plan, the Convener of the Senate Business Committee commented that there may be insufficient time before the February 2025 meeting of Senate for the Senate Business Committee to be constituted and put into operation. There was a brief discussion on whether the Senate Business Committee could have a role in considering issues associated with the minutes of Senate meetings.

Action: Senate Clerk to implement the Senate Business Committee.

10 Generative AI: Teaching, Learning, Sustainability, and Data Security

Senate received a paper which sought to provide clarity and oversight of policy and guidance on the use of generative AI, as well as the implications for teaching, learning, sustainability, and data security (paper S 24/25 2K).

The paper was introduced by two of the paper authors, Dr Charlotte Desvages and Professor Rachel Muers, who explained that the paper had been prompted by concerns around the use of generative AI by students; and by how the usage of generative AI was being discussed and managed by the University. Particular reference was made to the 'Guidance for working with Generative AI in your studies' document which had been published in October 2024. The paper authors elaborated on the concerns raised within the paper as follows.

Firstly, it was explained that concerns had been raised regarding how the use of generative AI could affect teaching and learning, and also of the suitability of a one-size-fits all approach. Accordingly, the paper authors sought for associated university policy or guidance to be grounded in evidence from pedagogical research and for it to respect pedagogical differences across different disciplines.

Secondly, there were environmental concerns associated with the usage of generative AI. It was observed that usage of generative AI could adversely affect the University's core commitments around sustainability and net zero; and that such concerns could be compounded were usage of AI to be incentivised by the University. It was separately commented that the 'Guidance for working with Generative AI in your studies' did not satisfactorily cover the University's sustainability commitments, and that further information was required to help students think critically on the use of generative AI in the context of its environmental impacts.

Thirdly, there were overarching concerns around the governance arrangements associated with consideration of generative AI. The paper authors argued that Senate was the appropriate governing body for consideration of matters relating to generative AI, and that Senate members could provide meaningful support for the development of generative AI policy and guidance.

The Convener invited Senate members to comment on the paper, and explained that Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer, and Librarian; and Professor Michael Rovatsos, Convener of the AI Adoption Task Force, were present and could comment where required.

Separate from consideration by the AI Adoption Task Force, Professor Mary Brennan, Dean of Education in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, began Senate discussion by reporting that there had also been extensive consideration on the usage of generative AI by staff within and between the University's colleges, and with colleagues at other higher education institutions. It was commented that staff networks and workshops were being arranged to support discussion on the opportunities and threats arising from generative AI, how generative AI could be effectively used within an academic setting, and what concerns staff had regarding its usage. It was also reported that initial discussions had highlighted that students now had a strong lived experience of using generative AI, and that generative AI was being used frequently at both the secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Senate members discussed the potential benefits to students from the use of generative AI, and several members commented that they expected the majority of students were now using generative AI to supplement their studies. It was suggested that generative AI could be used by students to supplement learning, to scaffold assessments, and to develop skills that would support their employability. It was commented that generative AI was not inherently bad, and that students had sought guidance on how to use it appropriately. It was further commented that students would welcome the opportunity to be consulted as part of the development of AI related policy and guidance. A member commented that they were concerned about the potential for university communications to students to support a narrative that increased use of AI was inevitable, and suggested that the commercial interests of AI providers were not necessarily aligned with those of students and staff.

The financial and environmental cost of the University's provision of ELM (Edinburgh (access to) Language Models) to all staff and students was queried; and it was asked if such costs could be expected to grow as usage increased and if the University could measure such increases. The Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer, and Librarian acknowledged that the University incurred financial costs from the usage of ELM, and observed that alternative AI platforms placed financial costs on users. It was explained that the universal provision of ELM to students was intended to ensure equitable access to generative AI, and that it would help to mitigate against associated forms of digital poverty.

The Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer, and Librarian explained that the University's Sustainable IT Group considered the sustainability and environmental impacts of all of the University's IT infrastructure, including that associated with provision of ELM. It was further explained that ELM was operated from existing University hardware, and that work was underway to introduce an alternative open-source large language model under ELM that would be hosted within the University. This was described as low-power AI, and was anticipated to significantly reduce the environmental impact arising from the University's usage of generative AI, and which would have a significantly lower environmental cost than alternative internet-based large language models.

Members were informed that data protection considerations had also informed the provision of ELM. It was explained that the University had a zero data retention contract with its provider, and that this meant that none of the data input into ELM was used to train commercially available AI models. All individual inputs onto ELM were held only in that instance, and were housed on the University's secure servers. Accordingly, students and staff were encouraged to use ELM instead of commercially available AI tools.

Professor Michael Rovatsos, Convener of the AI Adoption Task Force, explained that the Task Force had evolved from a short life working group that had initially been asked to produce recommendations for the Senior Leadership Team on the opportunities and challenges associated with generative AI. It was clarified that the Task Force was not part of the University's governance structure, and was primarily concerned with building the University's capacity to effectively engage with generative AI. In reference to the 'Guidance for working with Generative AI in your studies' document, it was explained that the associated guidance had been reviewed by the AI Adoption Task Force and had been informed by consultation facilitated by the Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement). It was further explained that the guidance had been developed in a fast moving and ambiguous situation.

The Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement) commented that the guidance document would continue to evolve, that further review activity was planned for early 2025, and that there would be opportunities for students and staff to engage with the review. It was added that information on the types of questions that students would like to be addressed by university guidance would be particularly helpful for the review. It was briefly explained that university guidance had initially sought to respond to concerns around the misuse of generative AI, and that the focus had shifted to how generative AI could be used appropriately. It was also explained that academic staff were able to communicate to students where the use of generative AI would not be appropriate in learning, teaching and assessment. Separately, the Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement) commented that recent feedback from an employer panel had indicated that employers were asking for universities to help students develop the ability to use AI responsibly and effectively.

The Convener of the AI Adoption Task Force noted the request within the paper for information on evidence used by the AI Adoption Task Force, and clarified that the Task Force didn't hold pedagogical evidence for decision making and that extensive research would be required to obtain such evidence. There was a brief discussion on whether, in the absence of evidence, it was appropriate to issue university-level guidance that could affect students' learning outcomes. It was explained that students had sought guidance on how to use generative AI appropriately, and that the development and issuance of such guidance was reflective of the reality that students were already using generative AI. A Senate member commented that AI related research was being conducted across the University and elsewhere, and that such research could be used to inform future work. Another member commented that they had found the guidance to be helpful; and they spoke briefly on the use of 'truth boxes' which allowed students, where applicable, to explain how they had used generative AI. Separately, a member commented that the guidance had been interpreted as university policy, and added that clarification on the ability of schools and colleges to develop generative AI related policies would be appreciated.

The Convener of the AI Adoption Task Force concluded the discussion by offering a brief reflection on the discussion. It was commented that differing viewpoints on the appropriate use of generative AI could make decision making controversial; that the University community would appreciate clarity on the decision-making pathways used to consider issues associated with generative AI; and that work around the curriculum and the Edinburgh Student Vision could provide useful opportunities to discuss what students should learn about generative AI and on how they should be assessed.

Members were advised that a response paper from the AI Adoption Task Force would be presented to the February 2025 meeting of Senate.

Action: AI Adoption Task Force to respond to Senate's request for information.

11 Budget Resilience, Teaching, and Research

Senate received a paper which sought the formation of a Senate working group to assess the effects on teaching and research activities due to financial challenges facing UK higher education and the academic implications of the University's responses to these challenges (paper S 24/25 2L).

Members were invited to submit questions and comments for response from the paper authors Dr Itamar Kastner, Dr Stuart Gilfillan, Professor David Ingram, and Professor Diana Paton. In introducing the paper, it was commented that the formation of the working group would provide a mechanism for Senate to receive information on how financial constraints were affecting the University.

A member reflected on implications associated with the quantity and quality of teaching provided to students, and reflected that a reduction in quantity would not necessarily lead to a reduction in quality. Separately, there was a brief discussion on balancing the level of investment committed to new initiatives against the University's financial circumstances.

A member queried whether the financial situation could lead to a cap being applied to academic promotions, and suggested that the working group could look at the impact of the financial situation on academic promotions. The Convener informed Senate of discussions relevant to the suggestion. It was reported that consideration had been given to capping or freezing academic promotions, or changing the timescale for promotion rounds, and that such options had been discounted on the grounds that they would be likely to disincentivise a key population that the University sought to incentivise.

A member reflected on whether, if the University's financial situation deteriorated, the perceived potential for compulsory redundancies would dissuade staff with disabilities, illness or caring commitments from seeking promotion or from disclosing such information to the University. The member suggested that the Working Group could consider such issues. The Convener acknowledged the concerns raised, and commented that he would support such consideration by the Working Group.

It was suggested that the Working Group could support the review of the Student Support Model, and assess the level of resourcing and the associated implications for the experience of students and professional services staff.

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the proposal to form a working group.

The paper authors thanked Senate for approving the proposal to form the working group, and explained that the next steps would include issuing a call to the Senate membership for volunteers to join the group. A request was made for a member of the senior leadership team to volunteer to join the working group.

Action: Authors of paper S 24/25 2L to implement the Senate working group on Budget Resilience, Teaching, and Research.

Items for information

12 Senate Standing Committees

12.1 Standing Committee Remits - Interim Update

Senate noted the interim update on progress with the AdvanceHE External Effectiveness Review of Senate recommendation relating to Senate Standing Committee remits (paper S 24/25 2M).

12.2 Senate Standing Committees – upcoming business

Senate noted the main points of activity and business that the Senate Standing Committees would consider between December 2024 and February 2025 (paper S 24/25 2N).

12.3 Outcome of elections to Senate Standing Committees

Senate noted the outcome of the October 2024 election process to elect Senate-elected members to the Senate Education Committee and to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (paper S 24/25 2O).

13 Date of next meeting: 5 February 2025