



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Senatus Academicus

Tuesday 20 May 2025, 1:10-4pm

Larch Lecture Theatre, Nucleus, Kings Buildings / Microsoft Teams

Confirmed Minutes

Attendees: Peter Adkins, Gill Aitken, Andrew Alexander, Sham Alhousiki, Marialuisa Aliotta, Niall Anderson, James Andrew, Ruth Andrew, Jonathan Ansell, Mohammad Amir Anwar, David Argyle, Kate Ash-Irisarri, Liz Baggs, Michael Barany, Siân Bayne, Christine Bell, Matthew Bell, Shereen Benjamin, Philip Best, Ayesha Bibi, Richard Blythe, Lisa Boden, Christina Boswell, Julian Bradfield, Barry Bradford, Laura Bradley, Mary Brennan, Aidan Brown, Tom Bruce, Karl Burgess, Mette Cameron, Carol Campbell, Celine Caquineau, Tony Carbery, Jeremy Carrette, Leigh Chalmers, Seongsook Choi, Neil Chue Hong, Aurora Constantin, Sam Coombes, Martin Corley, Sharon Cowan, Chris Cox, Juan Cruz, Jo Danbolt, Kirsty Day, Luigi Del Debbio, Jean-Christophe Denis, Chris Dent, Charlotte Desvages, John Devaney, Sameer Dhumale, Kevin Donovan, Julia Dorin, Leonidas Doumas, Claire Duncanson, Tosin Durodola, Olivia Eadie, Ruth Elliott, Andrea English, Omolabake Fakunle, Tonks Fawcett, Valentina Ferlito, Sue Fletcher-Watson, Emily Ford-Halliday, Chris French, Vashti Galpin, Marc Geddes, Akrit Ghimire, Antonis Giannopoulos, Stuart Gilfillan, Laura Glendinning, Benjamin Goddard, Kim Graham, Richard Gratwick, Patrick Hadoke, Rachel Happer, Colm Harmon, Tina Harrison, Helen Hastie, Thorunn Helgason, Dora Herndon, Melissa Highton, Willem Hollmann, James Hopgood, Emma Hunter, David Ingram, Gavin Jack, Jakov Jandric, Amanda Jarvis, Crispin Jordan, Aarnesh Kapoor, Itamar Kastner, Tobias Kelly, Meryl Kenny, George Kinnear, Linda Kirstein, Dave Laurenson, Andy Law, Paul Le Tissier, Tom Leinster, Steff Lewis, Jason Love, Ewa Luger, Cait MacPhee, Peter Mathieson, Sarah McAllister, Gavin McLachlan, Avery Meiksin, Kyleigh Melville, Tijana Mitic, James Mooney, Steven Morley, Ben Morse, Chris Mowat, Simon Mudd, Rachel Muers, Rupert Nash, Pau Navarro, Bryne Ngwenya, Steven O'Hagan, Richard Oosterhoff, Diana Paton, Cheryl Patrick, Jamie Pearce, Josephine Pemberton, Nick Polydorides, Sarah Prescott, Jon Pridham, Colin Pulham, David Quinn, John Rappa, Tianyi Ren, Ricardo Ribeiro Ferreira, Ken Rice, Simon Riley, Brodie Runciman, Carin Runciman, Enrique Sanchez-Molano, Giulio Santori, Eberhard Sauer, Bernd Schroers, Matthias Schwannauer, Pablo Schyfter Camacho, Jo Shaw, David Smith, James Smith, Sean Smith, Stewart Smith, Antonella Sorace, Perdita Stevens, Alex Thomson, Sally Till, Tamara Trodd, Jeremy Upton, Niki Vermeulen, Natasha Vijendren, Julia Voigt, Philip Wadler, Dylan Walch, Patrick Walsh, Lena Wanggren, Stephen Warrington, Michele Weiland, Indigo Williams, Iain Wright, Ingrid Young.

In attendance: Lewis Allan, Nina Bremner, Lisa Dawson, Sinéad Docherty, Arlene Duffin, Richard Kenway, Nichola Kett, Fraser Rudge (Clerk).

Apologies: Kasia Banas, Kelly Blacklock, Catherine Bovill, Kevin Collins, Jeremy Crang, Hannah Crocombe, Afshan Dean, Kevin Dhaliwal, Murray Earle, Susan Farrington, Iain Gordon, Mohini Gray, Jenny Hoy, David Kluth, Antony Maciocia, Lorna Marson, Catherine Martin, Fiona McClement, Hayley McCormack, Marc J Metzger, Meera Mokashi, Suvankar Pal, Wayne Powell, Ash Scholz, Tobias Schwarz, Mike Shipston, Emily Taylor, Jessica Thackeray, Shannon Vallor, Charles West.

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.

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Convener, Principal Sir Professor Peter Mathieson, welcomed members to the final Senate meeting of the 2024-25 academic session. It was confirmed that Senate had reached quorum.

The Academic Registrar, Lisa Dawson, updated Senate on consideration of the meeting's agenda and papers by the Senate Business Committee. Senate were informed that the Committee had met on 29 April 2025; had trialled a new approach for scrutinising Senate papers; had agreed that the papers submitted should all be presented to the May 2025 Senate meeting; and had given consideration to the order of the agenda, theming of items, and the recommended timings for discussion.

Separately, the Academic Registrar reported that two amendments had been proposed for consideration at the May 2025 Senate meeting. One amendment related to the Knowledge Strategy Committee paper, and would be addressed under agenda item 6.1. The other amendment had proposed a significant alteration to the delegated authority and the terms of reference of Senate's standing committees. This amendment was not considered to be valid under Senate Standing Order 13, as there was no corresponding motion on the agenda. It was reported that the proposer for the amendment had requested that their disagreement be recorded in the minutes.

2 Minutes and e-Senate Reports

Senate approved the minutes of the meetings of 5 February 2025 (S 24/25 6A) and 26 March 2025 (S 24/25 6B).

Senate approved the e-Senate report of 23 April to 7 May 2025 (S 24/25 6C). On behalf of Senate, the Convener congratulated the new Professors Emeritus and Emerita.

2.1 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

2.2 Senate Action Log

Senate noted the status of actions as detailed within the Action Log (S 24/25 6D).

3 Convener's Communications

The Convener and the Vice Principal Students, Professor Colm Harmon, provided verbal updates to Senate.

3.1 Report on the University Court's meeting of 28 April 2025

Following Senate's special meeting of 26 March 2025, the University Court had received a report on the meeting which had included the outcome of voting and the associated statements. In addition, Court received a paper prepared by the Senate Assessors to Court

which provided further information. The Convener invited the Senate Assessors to Court to provide further comment as required.

It was reported that, over the course of Court's meeting of 28 April 2025, there had been a robust and lengthy discussion on the University's finances. The Convener added that the University Court had reaffirmed its expectation that due attention be paid to the risks and potential unintended consequences of any actions proposed to achieve financial sustainability. Senate members' attention was drawn to the Court Communications paper, which had been provided under agenda item 9 (paper S 24/25 6P).

3.2 Report from the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDaMOB).

The Vice Principal Students, Professor Colm Harmon, updated Senate on initial consideration of the motions arising from the Portfolio Review and Diversity of Educational Provision paper (S 24/25 4B), which had been considered at the March 2025 special meeting of Senate.

Senate were informed that the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDaMOB) had received the motions arising from paper S 24/25 4B although, due to the scheduling of meetings, had not met in full since the Senate meeting of 26 March 2025. Initial consideration between the Co-Conveners of SEDaMOB, and from discussion with colleagues from the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, had indicated a need for the motions to be considered as part of governance arrangements associated with the Learning and Teaching Workstream. The Vice Principal Students confirmed that Senate and its standing committees would be engaged in, and receive updates, as appropriate.

The Vice Principal Students reported that the approach taken for review of the University's portfolio had been, and would continue to be, refined based on feedback from schools and colleges. Members were informed that consideration of programmes and courses now took into account a broader intersection of factors, including: revenues, costs, expected student demand, concentration and density of academic excellence, and importance to the wider portfolio. The importance of particular programmes to the objectives, priorities, and values of schools and colleges was recognised, although it was explained that colleagues would still need to be mindful of targets around financial contribution. As an example, it was reported that particular consideration had been given to how part-time variants of programs were accounted for. It was added that feedback from colleges had indicated that such consideration had been helpful, and that it had resulted in amendments to plans relating to a number of programmes. The availability of appropriate data sources was highlighted as a significant issue, and the Vice Principal Students recognised work underway by colleagues within Governance and Strategic Planning to address identified gaps and to support college-level working groups.

Senate received a brief update on the status of the Learning and Teaching Workstream's three priority areas, detailed below, where initial meetings had recently been held and proposals which were at various stages of development.

- Learning and Teaching Strategy, focusing on academic delivery.
- Enabling Initiatives, focusing on service provision.
- Future Students, focusing on business drivers.

A Senate member observed that, at its meeting of 26 March 2025, Senate had voted to approve the following motion: *“The status of any part-time degree that has been paused or closed due to the Portfolio Review must be reconsidered in view of the comprehensive and holistic criteria to be developed.”* The member commented that they had been contacted by colleagues who had advised that part-time and small intake specialist programs had been closed, and that these colleagues had been unable to appeal such decisions.

The Vice Principal Students reflected on the holistic and evolving approach that colleges were taking with regard to portfolio review, and reflected on management information which suggested that the number of programmes to be paused or closed was lower than had previously been anticipated. The Vice Principal Students expressed concern that colleagues did not think there were pathways for dialogue within colleges. The Head of the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Professor Sarah Prescott, commented that the College’s portfolio review process was intended to be collaborative and holistic; and that staff could raise concerns or contribute to the process through their school and also directly to their college.

A Senate member requested publication of the criteria being used to review the University’s portfolio and identify programmes for closure or suspension. In response the Vice Principal Students explained that there were no prescriptive university-level criteria for portfolio review, and that the University’s colleges were developing and refining the criteria used to allow for a nuanced consideration that was responsive to local needs, priorities, and values. The Head of the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, Professor David Argyle, sought to reassure Senate that consideration was occurring within and between the colleges, and that nuanced consideration of programmes and courses was taking place. Separately, it was commented that the current portfolio review process represented a significant undertaking as the University had not previously reviewed its portfolio on a regular basis. In future, it was anticipated that portfolio review would become a business-as-usual process responsive to changing university and societal needs.

3.3 Comments on the University’s financial situation

In advance of agenda item 7.2, the Convener commented on the University’s financial situation as follows.

Senate were informed that in semester two of the 2023-24 academic year, the University Court received a presentation from the then Director of Finance on the next iteration of the five-year rolling budget. After due consideration, Court did not approve the five-year budget as it did not deliver the previously agreed level of financial surplus (expressed as the Court-agreed EBITDA range of 7-9%). Instead, Court approved a one-year budget subject to a series of “management adjustments” to improve the situation in-year and return the University to a clear operating surplus. Subsequently, budget holders each reduced their expenditure plans for the coming year. It was explained that one of the underlying trends within the University’s control was the rapidly escalating staff costs across all budget areas of the University. To address this a process of staff recruitment restraint was implemented. It was reported that recruitment restraint had been effective at reducing the rate of rise of staff costs, but had not led to any sustained reduction in those costs.

The Convener reported that, in the intervening period, the financial situation in the UK higher education sector had become significantly more challenging. It was explained that the change in external environment had led to the revised financial plan which sought to close the affordability gap in the University’s expenditure plan, and which aimed to prevent

the University of Edinburgh from joining the approximately 70% of UK universities that were expected to report financial deficits. Senate were informed that, in June 2025, the University Executive would present a revised financial plan to the University Court. It was explained that the revised financial plan would include details of the savings delivered to date by the interventions already made, and what further steps were needed to deliver the savings required to return the University to a financially sustainable position. The Convener acknowledged and recognised that staff across the University, including Senate members, had considerable doubts and anxieties in relation to the University's financial situation and the associated financial plan.

The Convener commented that the May 2025 Senate meeting was taking place in the context of this sector-wide financial situation, the University Executive's responses to the challenging financial situation, and the proposed vote of no confidence in the University Executive and its leadership. The Convener invited Senate members to consider the following before deciding how to vote:

1. Universities across the UK, especially research-intensive comprehensive large universities like the University of Edinburgh, have relied for the last 10 years or so on a fragile financial footing whereby cross-subsidy has been required to enable the University to continue to provide high quality activities in those areas which have been systematically under-funded, namely education of home students and all of the University's research. It was explained that cross-subsidies were mostly provided from international student tuition income and any other areas where financial surplus can be generated for reinvestment, such as accommodation, catering and events activities.
2. The fragility of that financial model had been exposed at most universities across the UK, including the University of Edinburgh, whereby spiralling costs had not been matched by increases in income alongside a sustained reduction in the attractiveness of the UK to international students.
3. Responsible university leadership required that pro-active steps be taken to address financial challenges. The Convener added that old universities, like the University of Edinburgh, have been able to survive for centuries because of their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and that the University needed to adapt to the changed environment.
4. The current University Executive, senior leadership team, and Principal were responsible, on behalf of all University stakeholders, to prepare a financial plan which the University Court could approve, which would be deliverable, and which would meet the requirements of the challenges that faced the University.
5. Should Senate members wish to express lack of confidence in the current University Executive and its leadership then they would be free to do so. However, it was the Executive's responsibility to lead the University through challenging circumstances and, speaking on behalf of the University Executive, the Convener commented that it would be preferable for the talented, committed members of the university community to work together to shape and deliver the necessary steps that would ensure the University's future financial security.

The Convener commented that the University needed to be capable of meeting what was anticipated to be a challenging future, and that this would require a reshaped University which did things differently. The Convener acknowledged that this would include a smaller staff-base, but added that the University must also use different ways of working to make workloads manageable and to enhance staff and student experience.

The Convener concluded by reflecting on the University's illustrious past, and the steps that the current university community needed to take to underpin its illustrious future. The Convener called for the university community to work together to help navigate the University through such a challenging time.

Comments were invited from the Senate membership. A Senate member noted the impact of international student recruitment on the University's budgets, and queried whether recent geopolitical changes had made the UK a more attractive destination for international students and whether the University's budgets had been revised accordingly. The Convener acknowledged that there were reasons for optimism, although cautioned that any revisions to budgets would need to be made following confirmation of the number of international students enrolled at the University. It was reported that the University's student recruitment teams were aiming to match the 2024-25 intake and, given the significant effort it took to achieve the 2024-25 intake, it was considered unlikely that significant growth could be achieved without sacrificing quality. The Convener added that any optimism would need to be tempered by the UK Government's migration white paper, which indicated a reduction in the graduate visa from 24 to 18 months. It was explained that such a change may discourage Indian students, which was a key market for the University.

A Senate member queried the Convener's reference to responsible finance management in relation to the current budgetary situation and asked him to acknowledge receipt of a letter signed by staff in two schools in 2021 raising concerns about wasteful spending and inadequate consultation on finance matters. The member asked the Convener to acknowledge that the introduction of People and Money cost the University several million pounds and that the University may be financially better off if this system had not been introduced. The Convener acknowledged receipt of the letter and that People and Money cost a lot of money.

3.4 Acknowledgement of individuals attending Senate for the last time

Throughout the meeting, the Convener acknowledged individuals who were attending Senate for the last time including the Vice Principal Research and Enterprise, Professor Christina Boswell; the Acting Senate Clerk, Fraser Rudge; and the Edinburgh University Students' Association Sabbatical Officers.

The Convener recognised the valuable contributions that the Edinburgh University Students' Association Sabbatical Officers had made to the university community and to Senate throughout the year, and wished them all well for the future. Reflecting on her time on Senate, the EUSA President commented that there had been several instances where the behaviour of staff members had fallen below acceptable standards, and cited examples including members shouting over other members and at students, inappropriate clapping, and laughing at other members. It was added that such behaviour could be construed of as

bullying, and was not acceptable. The EUSA President called on Senate members to express points of disagreement in a more collegial way in future.

4 Report from the Honorary Degrees Committee (CLOSED MINUTE)

Senate considered the nominations for award of Honorary Degrees and Fellowships as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6E CLOSED), and which had been considered at the meeting of the Honorary Degrees Committee held on 14 May 2025.

Senate considered an amendment proposed by Rupert Nash and seconded by Aidan Brown. By a majority vote, Senate approved an amendment to remove a nomination from the paper (S 24/25 6E CLOSED). 59 members approved, 58 members did not approve, and 16 members abstained.

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the remaining nominations as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6E CLOSED).

5 Insights into student use of Artificial Intelligence

Senate noted the student perspective on AI in education as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6F).

The EUSA Vice President Education, Dylan Walch, highlighted information on how students were using AI and highlighted students' desire for clarity through guidance; for consistency through the use of templates; and for training on how to use AI appropriately.

Senate were informed that work was underway to revise the student guidelines for use of generative AI. It was explained that the guidelines had been considered at a recent meeting of the Senate Education Committee, and had been circulated to colleges for consultation. It was anticipated that the revised guidelines were expected to be published by the end of June 2025. A Senate member commented on the need for continued discussion between students and educators on the usage of AI, for recognition that both students and educators faced pressures associated with AI, and for recognition that the pace of change associated with AI would make it challenging to retain up-to-date guidance.

There was a brief discussion on students' usage of third-party AI tools over use of the Edinburgh (access to) Language Models (ELM), and whether usage could be improved through enhanced communication.

6 Committee Business

6.1 Knowledge Strategy Committee – Future Governance

Senate received paper (S 24/25 6G), and noted the request for Senate to approve:

- i) the standing down of Knowledge Strategy Committee on 1 August 2025
- ii) the replacement of Knowledge Strategy Committee as a joint standing committee of the University Court and the Senate with a new University Library and Collections Strategic Committee.

Senate Clerk's Note: this was the option recommended by the paper authors. Alternative options had been set out in the paper, and an additional option was approved via an amendment.

- iii) additions to the terms of reference to the Senate Standing Committees to make explicit Education Committee's existing role in the regulation and oversight of educational IT matters and to reference links between the Senate Standing Committees and IT Committee. These changes were to take effect from 1 August 2025.

Senate was informed that an amendment had been received in relation to the paper, and the proposer explained that the amendment was intended to address governance and reporting concerns.

Under action item 2, a fourth option be included within the paper: "the IT Committee, Library Committee, University Collections Advisory Committee, and any other university-wide management committees of remit relating to the disbanded Knowledge Strategy Committee will report to the University Executive as well as (when applicable) to the University Court Estates Committee and University Academic Senate when proposing actions within the Court or Senate remits. These committees may, at their discretion, consult with Senate and/or its Standing Committees on the development of strategy and proposals."

By a majority vote, Senate approved the amendment. 83 members approved, 37 members did not approve, and 7 members abstained.

Senate were informed that, following approval of the amendment, the associated action for Senate to consider a replacement for Knowledge Strategy Committee had been withdrawn. Members were informed that the implications of the amendment would be considered, and that a revised paper would be presented to Senate for consideration at a future meeting. The Convener invited Senate to vote on the remaining two motions contained within the paper.

By a majority vote, Senate approved the standing down of the Knowledge Strategy Committee on 1 August 2025. 109 members approved, 11 members did not approve, and 7 members abstained.

By a majority vote, Senate approved the additions to the terms of reference to the Senate standing committees, as specified within the paper (S 24/25 6G). 74 members approved, 39 members did not approve, and 15 members abstained.

6.2 Senate Standing Committee Membership

Senate received the paper (S 24/25 6H) which set out the Senate standing committee membership for 2025/26.

In response to a request for clarification on what Senate was being asked to approve, the Head of Academic Quality and Standards explained that Senate Standing Order 22a required Senate to approve the membership of its standing committees. Members were informed that Senate Standing Order 22a dated back to 1959, and that it had been drafted in relation to a committee structure that had long since ceased to exist. Senate were advised that, in the absence of a contemporary, and unambiguous, standing order the paper had included proposals for the practical application of Senate Standing Order 22a as it was drafted. Senate's approval for these proposals was not being sought at this time and it was

confirmed that Senate was only being asked to approve the standing committee memberships.

By a majority vote, Senate approved the Senate standing committee membership for 2025/26 as specified within the paper (S 24/25 6H). 117 members approved, 8 members did not approve, and 13 members abstained.

6.3 Senate Annual Internal Effectiveness Review

Senate received paper (S 24/25 6I), which set out plans for the 2024-25 Senate Annual Internal Effectiveness Review.

The Head of Academic Quality and Standards introduced the paper, and informed Senate that the main point of change from previous years was the removal of a summer survey of Senate and Senate standing committee members. Instead, a report would be drafted using data which had been collected from surveys of Senate members following each ordinary Senate meeting. Separately, members were further informed that consideration would be given to developing surveys for use in the 2025-26 academic year that would also generate data to assist in reviewing the effectiveness of changes implemented in response to the AdvanceHE external review of Senate effectiveness.

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the plans for the 2024-25 Senate Annual Internal Effectiveness Review.

6.4 Senate Exception Committee Membership

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the Senate Exception Committee membership for the 2025-26 academic year as set out in the paper (S 24/25 6J). Senate noted the process to be followed to fill vacancies in the Committee's membership.

6.5 Senate External Review Task and Finish Group

Senate noted the update on progress made against the AdvanceHE external review report recommendations and suggestions as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6K). In addition, Senate noted the Group's recommendation that the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group conclude on 31 July 2025.

The Convener of the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group, Professor Richard Kenway, reported briefly on the Group's consideration around standing committees terms of reference. Senate were informed that the Group did not consider it possible to properly address recommendations and suggests associated with the terms of reference and level of delegated authority for the Senate standing committees in the absence of a Senate terms of reference. Senate were further informed that the Group would consider, at its meeting of 27 May, the wording of a recommendation for a holistic review that would be presented to Senate's October 2025 meeting for consideration. Members were informed that the University Court, as the University's supreme governing body, would be responsible for the development of a Senate terms of reference or similar.

In response to an invitation from the Senate Convener for comment, a Senate member queried whether such a review could also include other University bodies which considered items that might be relevant to Senate but which did not have existing reporting lines into Senate or its standing committees. As examples, the member identified the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB) and the five workstreams associated with the 'Changing

our size, shape and ways of working' programme of work. It was suggested that the absence of clear reporting lines might lead to governance-related risks. The Provost, Professor Kim Graham, explained that UIPB reported into the University Executive, which in turn reported into the University Court. Of the five workstreams, to be overseen by UIPB, the Provost confirmed that items within Senate's remit would be referred to Senate and its standing committees as appropriate.

7 University Finances

7.1 Budget Working Group

Senate received the Budget Working Group's report and recommendations (S 24/25 6L).

Dr Tamara Trodd, Elected Academic Staff Member from the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, introduced the paper on behalf of the authors. Senate were informed that the Budget Working Group had distributed a survey to staff in February 2025 and that 291 responses had been received. In addition, it was explained that the survey responses had been analysed alongside 346 free text comments that had been received in relation to paper S 24/25 4A, which had been considered at the March 2025 special meeting of Senate. Respondents were thanked for their participation, and members were advised that anonymised comments would be shared with Senate following the meeting as an appendix to the report.

Dr Trodd highlighted key findings arising from the report, which included adverse impacts being reported on staff morale, on activities which contributed to the student experience, and on activities relating to the University's next Research Excellence Framework submission. Separately, it was commented that several respondents had appreciated having the opportunity to be consulted and to raise their concerns. Dr Trodd concluded by providing a brief overview of the recommendations arising from the report, as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6L). Senate were invited to discuss the report and recommendations arising from the Budget Working Group.

Speaking on behalf of the Edinburgh University Students' Association, the Vice President Education commented that there had been recognition of the concerns outlined within the paper and acknowledgement of the need for change. It was commented that the report appeared to focus primarily on university staff, whilst the impact of changes would affect students and the wider university community. Concern was expressed at the prospect of funding being withdrawn from activities and items which benefited the student experience, and which would be challenging to see restored in the future. In relation to recommendation one, it was observed that 'staff experience' was referenced while 'student experience' was not. In response, it was explained that the recommendation sought a closer working partnership between Senate members, which included students, and the University Executive. It was further commented that recommendation six sought local reporting on the effects of budgetary resilience measures, and that it had been envisioned that the student voice would be sought as part of local reporting mechanisms.

A Senate member commented that they found aspects of the report's recommendations to be difficult to fully accept, as the recommendations appeared to imply that the University's senior leadership team did not already approach decision making in a manner which was inclusive, transparent, evidence-based, and sensitive to the risks of centralised change management. The member commented that they expected the senior leadership team were doing their best to approach decision making in such a way, and considered whether issues

could be partially attributed to a perspective or experiential gap between colleagues being informed of decisions and those colleagues making decisions based on information that was not publicly available. The Convener and Provost thanked the member for their comments, and for recognising that the recommendations included principles that the senior leadership team believed that they were already working to. The Convener and the Provost acknowledged that there remained a need for improved communications to provide assurance to Senate and the wider university community.

A Senate member commented that, while they believed that senior colleagues were making decisions in good faith based on the information available to them, there had been examples of decisions that had been difficult to understand from the perspective of a member of academic staff. Portfolio review was given as an example, and it was commented that the number of students enrolled on courses and programmes had appeared to have been used as a proxy for cost. The member added that there did not appear to have been financial analysis undertaken which accurately reflected the differences in operating costs for part-time and full-time programmes; and that other factors such as stakeholder consultation or predicted market demand had not been sufficiently considered. Another Senate member reported that programmes in hydrogeology and in geosciences had been closed, and the member highlighted that there was a critical skills gap in the country for workers with related expertise. The member added that, were such a skills gap to continue, it would likely adversely affect the UK's ability to transition to renewable sources of energy. The Provost commented briefly on the need for review of the University's portfolio; and confirmed that the criteria used for portfolio review had been, and would continue to be, refined based on feedback. Senate members were informed that initial review of the University's portfolio had identified a significant number of programmes that had not met minimum requirements for student numbers. It was explained that the closure of certain programmes would enable staff to better focus on the remaining programmes which would help to improve the student and staff experience, and would support the University's financial sustainability. There was a brief discussion on the cost of programmes that shared courses with other programmes.

By a majority vote, Senate approved the recommendations from the Budget Working Group as specified within the paper (S 24/25 6L). 96 members approved, 35 members did not approve, and 11 members abstained.

7.2 Financial Resilience Strategy Update and Confidence in the University Executive

Senate discussed the paper and the associated confidence motion (S 24/25 6M).

Dr Charlotte Desvages, Elected Academic Staff Member from the College of Science and Engineering, introduced the paper as the proposer of the motion. It was observed that, at the special meeting of 26 March 2025, Senate had voted by large majorities to approve a range of motions seeking information and assurances in relation to the University's financial situation, the financial resilience strategy, and the need to preserve the University's academic mission. It was further observed that Senate had approved a motion to hold a vote on the following motion at its meeting of 20 May 2025: "Senate has no confidence in the University Executive's leadership in relation to the University's financial situation."

It was noted that Senate's special meeting of 24 April 2025 had included presentations on the University's finances and on the workstreams associated with "Reimagine our size, shape and ways of working to secure the long-term future of our University". Dr Desvages reflected on the information provided within the updates, and the extent to which questions

submitted before and during the special meeting had been answered or alternative plans communicated. The role of Senate in the academic governance of the University was highlighted, and it was commented that Senate had received insufficient information and assurances to fulfil its role. It was explained that there had been a loss of trust and confidence in the academic community of the University Executive, and that the motion was intended to evaluate the confidence of the University's academic community as represented by Senate.

Senate discussed the motion extensively. Members expressed concerns about the process for implementing change at the University, which members of the university community often felt to be top-down and lacked opportunity for engagement and consultation with staff 'at the coalface'. A concern was expressed that members of the University executive were not sufficiently open to challenge and query on the financial resilience strategy. Separately, a member queried the impact of the financial resilience strategy on the University's reputation and on its ability to recruit staff and students; and the extent to which equality impact assessments were being undertaken and published.

It was commented that the productivity and creativity of university staff was being adversely affected by anxiety, and that colleagues were looking for reassurance. It was further commented that colleagues were open to change, and that members of the university community needed opportunities to be engaged with and to provide input. Another member recognised that university staff, including the senior leadership team, were working in good faith but were under significant pressure.

A member of Senate reported that heads of school had been involved in discussions for a long period of time; and reflected that heads of school could have an increased role in disseminating information at a school level going forward. The member further reflected that, while information was now being provided in increased quantities, heads of school had previously been considering limited amounts of information as it had become available. Another member recognised that effective communication in large institutions was often challenging, and commented that there was room for improvement.

A Senate member commented on the need to recognise that the University, alongside a significant proportion of UK universities, was facing financial difficulties and that action was required to restore the University to a financially sustainable position. The member reported on discussions with staff at other universities, where it had been recognised that addressing the University's financial position at an early stage would likely be beneficial in the long term.

Several members spoke of the need for the university community to work together collaboratively, with some expressing concern that the contentious nature of the motion could make future collaboration across the University more challenging. An author of the paper commented that colleagues wanted to work in an institution with a high degree of trust between staff and the senior leadership team, and that the decision to provide feedback to senior colleagues through such a vote had not been taken lightly. They added that they would continue to do their best for the University following the vote, and commented on the need for Senate to work with the senior leadership team as critical friends.

In response to a query on what would happen should Senate vote to approve the motion, it was explained that the outcome would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting, be communicated to the University Executive, and be communicated to the University Court.

By a majority vote, Senate approved the motion that “Senate has no confidence in the University Executive’s leadership in relation to the University’s financial situation.” 91 members approved, 43 members did not approve, and 13 members abstained.

8 Research

8.1 Recommendations for enhancing Senate oversight of research

Senate received the paper (S 24/25 6N) which set out draft proposals for enhancing Senate oversight of, and engagement with, research matters.

The Vice Principal Research and Enterprise, Professor Christina Boswell, informed Senate that the provisional proposals detailed within paper S 24/25 6N had been drafted in response to the AdvanceHE External review report recommendations, and had been informed by discussions at meetings of the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group and the Research Strategy Group. It was explained that feedback from Senate was sought to further refine the proposals, prior to further consideration by all relevant bodies.

The Vice Principal Research and Enterprise reported that the following considerations had informed the development of the proposals. The importance of Senate oversight and engagement with relevant research matters had been acknowledged, and the potential contribution of the Senate membership to consideration of research-related issues had been recognised alongside consideration by the relevant school, college and university bodies with responsibility for research. Members were informed that careful consideration would be required to ensure that any future research governance structure was appropriately streamlined, and avoided the potential for unnecessary duplication. It was added that careful consideration would be required to ensure that staff making research-related decisions held suitable expertise and knowledge. Reference was made to the importance of contributions from colleagues within the Edinburgh Research Office, Edinburgh Innovations Information Services, and Edinburgh Global. Senate was informed that, with those considerations in mind, two main proposals had been developed for a 12-month trial.

Firstly, the Research Strategy Group would enhance its reporting into Senate with additional research-related items being identified for consideration by Senate and allocated discussion time as appropriate by the Senate Business Committee.

Secondly, that the provision be made for up to three suitably qualified elected members of Senate to be added to the Research Strategy Group. The Vice Principal Research and Enterprise commented that the Research Strategy Group already had a sizeable membership, and that concerns had been raised on the potential for an increased membership to adversely affect the effectiveness of the group to consider complex matters in a timely manner.

It was explained that a further paper would be presented to Senate with finalised proposals in due course. A Senate member thanked the Vice Principal Research and Enterprise and colleagues for the development of the proposals, and for recognising Senate’s role in relation to research. Noting the motion passed under the previous agenda item, the member highlighted the importance of proceeding collaboratively and commended the proposals as an important way to facilitate such collaboration.

8.2 Research Ethics and Defence and Security

Senate received the paper (S 24/25 6O) which summarised progress made in enhancing the ethics policies and processes governing University research on defence and security, and which set out the recommendations of the Working Group on Research Ethics and Defence (READ).

Senate noted the Working Group's recommendations, and that the recommendations had been endorsed by the Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group and the Research Strategy Group. Senate noted the amendment to the University Research Ethics Policy, which had been approved by the Research Strategy Group and the University Executive.

A brief verbal update was provided by the Working Group's Convener, Professor Christina Boswell, Vice Principal Research and Enterprise. It was reported that the Working Group had held several very constructive discussions, and that members of the Group had recognised the value, validity, and importance of research in defence and security; and the need for a robust and transparent approach to such research that can inspire confidence in rigour and ethical standards. Senate received a brief overview of the principles which had guided the Working Group's recommendations; information on how the recommendations would be implemented, including through a new online ethics system; and a brief update on discussions with funders, who had provided indicative support for the approach being developed. It was also reported that an initial review of pre-existing defence and security research had been conducted, and that an agreed framework would be required to further assess such research.

Senate were invited to discuss the report and recommendations arising from the Research Ethics for Defence Working Group. Senate members thanked the members of the Working Group for their efforts; and positive feedback was provided on the collegial and collaborative nature of the Group's discussions, and the speed with which the Group had been able to consider issues and develop recommendations. It was requested that Senate be kept updated on the implementation of the recommendations.

It was observed that the Working Group's recommendations would affect professional services and technical staff who supported academic and research staff, and it was commented that such staff should be engaged and communicated with to enable the effective implementation of the recommendations. In response, Senate received a brief update on the anticipated plans for communication following final approval of the recommendations; and the Vice Principal Research and Enterprise recognised colleagues' contributions from across the University which helped to promote security and peace.

A Senate member commented that they appreciated the University taking its own nuanced approach to defence and security related research. The member added that they hoped the implementation of the recommendations would lead to defence and security related research becoming less contentious; for the contribution of defence and security related research to be recognised; and that the university community would have increased confidence in the defence and security research being undertaken. The member concluded by reflecting on recent geopolitical changes, and the role the University played in supporting defence and security related research within the UK.

There was a brief discussion on whether the online ethics system could be integrated with systems associated with the grant application process and the management of charitable and philanthropic donations.

Items for information

9 Court Communications

Senate noted the communications from the University Court as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6P), and which related to the University Court meeting of 28 April 2025.

10 Court Resolutions

Senate noted the paper (S 24/25 6Q) which invited members to make observations on draft Resolutions No. 3/2025 to No. 87/2025 which concerned: the foundation of personal chairs, the alteration of the title of a personal chair, and changes proposed to the Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations (2024-25) and the Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations (2024-25).

11 Senate Election Results

Senate noted the outcome of the elections for academic staff to serve on Senate from 1 August 2025 as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6R).

12 Students' Association Sabbatical Officers' Priorities for 2024/2025 Reflection

Senate noted the paper (S 24/25 6S) which provided a reflective report on the priorities for the 2024/2025 sabbatical team and Vice President Education, as set out at the October 2024 Senate meeting.

13 Learning and Teaching Strategy – Implementation Plan Update

Senate noted the paper (S 24/25 6T) which provided an update on the development of the implementation plan for the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

14 Senate Standing Committee Priorities for Academic Year 2025-26

Senate noted the standing committees' priorities for the 2025-26 academic year as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6U).

15 Research Strategy Group Report

Senate noted the report from the Research Strategy Group as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6V), and which related to the Group's meeting of 20 March 2025.

16 Report of Chair Promotions for Academic Year 2024-25

Senate noted the report of the recommendations for promotion to Chair following the 2024-25 academic promotion round as detailed within the paper (S 24/25 6W).

17 Date of next meeting: 1 October 2025