



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Senatus Academicus Special Meeting

Tuesday 28 April 2026, 2-3pm

G.07 Meadows Lecture Theatre, Doorway 4, Old Medical School, Teviot Place / Microsoft Teams
Voting will be undertaken using Wooclap.

Agenda

1. Welcome and Apologies 14:00-14:05, 5 minutes	
2. Engagement and Oversight of the Academic Size and Shape Project 14:05-15:00, 55 minutes For approval	S 25/26 4A
Date of next Ordinary meeting: Tuesday 19 May 2026	
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Special Meeting of Senate

28 April 2026

Engagement and Oversight of the Academic Size and Shape Project

Description of paper

1. This paper aims to ensure that the University of Edinburgh Senate is properly engaged by the University Court and Executive in the development of the Academic Size and Shape project before any further approval, design, application, or implementation at University or College level. It addresses the lack of transparency regarding requested data and asserts Senate's statutory responsibility for the strategic academic principles currently being formulated within the project.
2. This paper does not, in itself, constitute a judgment of the Academic Size and Shape principles and other work developed by the Staff Workstream as part of the Academic Size and Shape Project. Instead, it addresses how Senate must be engaged in overseeing this project, contributing to its principles and design prior to implementation

Action requested / Recommendation

3. Senate is asked to approve the following:
 - 3.1. Senate **recognises** that the Academic Size and Shape project encompasses a range of matters, some of which are purely administrative/financial and therefore rightly within the remit of the University's executive officers.
 - 3.2. Senate **determines** that aspects of the Academic Size and Shape project will have an impact on the academic work of the University, and therefore the oversight and approval process for these aspects falls within Senate's remit. Characterising these developments as purely administrative or financial, and acting as such, would constitute a departure from the University's established legal governance framework.
 - 3.3. Senate **notes** that co-governance between Senate and Court is required by statute and is recommended by the latest professional codes.
 - 3.4. Senate **requests** that the University Executive carefully consider the work of the Academic Size and Shape project, and presents to both Senate and Court a plan for governance of the project.
 - 3.5. Senate **notes** that it is yet to receive a response to its request of 10th December 2025:

"to receive all past agendas, papers, and minutes of the University Initiatives Portfolio Board, Learning and Teaching Board, the Research and Innovation Board, and the Staff workstream Board from appropriate responsible parties."

Senate further **expresses its disapproval** that this request has not been fulfilled in a timely manner, and **urges** a prompt response.

Background and context

Governance at the University of Edinburgh

1. The University of Edinburgh, as an ancient Scottish University, is governed by the Universities (Scotland) Acts 1858 to 1966 and the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016.
2. The role of Senate is set out in the 1889 Universities Act, as updated in 1966 as:
“To regulate and superintend the teaching and discipline of the University and to promote research” ([Universities Scotland Act 1889](#));
“to promote research” was added by the [Universities Scotland Act 1966](#).
3. The [Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance \(2023\)](#) includes the following point about the relationship between Senate (described as the “academic board”) and Court (described as the “governing body”):
“The governing instruments for each institution will set out how an academic board functions, including how the responsibility for oversight and regulation of the institution’s academic provision is vested in the academic board. The institution is expected to have appropriate measures in place to clarify the different responsibilities of the governing body and the academic board and to encourage a high level of mutual understanding between them.”

The Academic Size and Shape Project

4. In September 2025, the Principal and Provost announced in an [e-mail to all staff](#) that the University Executive had approved various projects under the heading of “improving our ways of working.” These projects have been organised into five “workstreams” (<https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/SupportingStrategicInitiatives>) which are described as being “supported by the University Initiatives Portfolio Board and other governance structures”.
5. Some details of the governance structure for the workstreams are provided at <https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/SupportingStrategicInitiatives/SitePages/Governance.aspx> showing that each of the workstreams has a project board that reports to the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB), which in turn reports to the University Executive. Senate is not mentioned on this page.
6. The Academic Size and Shape project is part of the Staff workstream (<https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/Staffworkstream>). The summary of the project given on the workstream page is:
“We will review academic staff allocations and capacity in alignment with our teaching portfolio review and broader academic strategic objectives.
We will further refine our cross-University framework for assessing programmes and courses, ensuring that our portfolio is future-facing, aligned to student demand, and financially sustainable.”
7. The University Executive produced a set of Principles for the Academic Size and Shape Project in the final months of 2025. These were shared with the Joint Trade Unions and Heads of Schools. However, they were not brought to Senate for scrutiny or approval.

Senate engagement with Academic Size and Shape

8. In December 2025, Senate requested specific papers and data to clarify the scope and impact of the work carried out in the workstreams (paper S2526-2E). Senate also approved an additional motion, requesting “to receive all past agendas, papers, and minutes of the University Initiatives Portfolio Board, Learning and Teaching Board, the Research and Innovation Board, and the Staff workstream Board from appropriate responsible parties.” To date, Senate has received neither these materials nor a formal explanation for the delay.
9. The March 2026 meeting of Senate received a paper titled “Academic Size and Shape Project: An Introduction” (S 25/26 3 H), presented by Lucy Evans and Iain Gordon (as project co-sponsors) and Matthias Schwannauer (as project lead). The paper invited Senate to “note”, “endorse” and “comment on” different aspects of the project.
10. Since S 25/26 3 H was a closed paper, we do not quote extensively from it here. However, we note that it included as an appendix the “Academic Size and Shape Principles Document” which is available to all staff at <https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/Staffworkstream/SitePages/Academic-size-and-shape-principles.aspx>.
11. Senate engaged in a lively discussion of paper S 25/26 3 H, with critical questions from Senate members about how specific points in the document would impact the University’s academic work.
12. Following discussion of S 25/26 3 H, Senate members sought clarity on whether further developments of the Academic Size and Shape work (including those discussed during the meeting) would be brought back to Senate for further discussion and approval.
13. Senate approved the motion: “Senate wishes to approve any proposals for design and implementation with regards to Academic Size and Shape before implementation.”
14. On 3 April 2026, a group of 33 Senate members submitted a requisition for a Special Meeting to enable Senate to have a focused discussion on the Academic Size and Shape project. The intended purpose of the meeting was:
 - “Receiving and discussing the Executive’s and/or Court’s plan for Senate governance of the Academic Size and Shape process, including College-level processes
 - Voting to approve, amend, or reject the plan for Senate’s governance of the Academic Size and Shape process”However, the Executive and Court declined to provide any papers for this meeting. (A copy of the meeting requisition, and the correspondence that followed, is provided as an Appendix.)

Discussion

15. In correspondence through Senate Support (included in the Appendix), the Executive and have contended that the work of the Academic Size and Shape project falls outside Senate’s remit. However, a lack of transparency – both in terms of the outstanding request for information from Senate’s 10 December 2025 meeting, and the absence of a governance plan from Court/Executive – prevents Senate from independently verifying this claim. Without the requested information, Senate cannot fulfil its statutory responsibility.

16. The fact that paper S 25/26 3 H was brought to Senate, and included on the Billet for the March 2026 meeting, suggests that at least some aspects of the Academic Size and Shape project have been regarded as relevant to Senate's remit.
17. The detail of Paper S 25/26 3 H makes clear that the Academic Size and Shape project is intended to relate to academic strategy (pars. 1, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 16) and to teaching and research offerings (par. 10), confirming that significant elements fall within Senate's remit.
18. In particular, the Principles included in S 25/26 3 H and available at <https://uoee.sharepoint.com/sites/Staffworkstream/SitePages/Academic-size-and-shape-principles.aspx> include matters that fall directly within Senate's remit. Examples of these include, among others:
 - 18.1. **Curriculum.** Under the "Student Size and Shape" principle, the commentary includes a suggestion of "consideration of standardised curriculum structures."

The document does not suggest where such "consideration" should take place, but these matters certainly seem to be within Senate's remit (as evidenced, for example, on the recent work on the Curriculum Transformation Project).
 - 18.2. **Course structure.** Under the "Minimum Credits" principle, points such as "clear and consistent structure for courses and programmes" and "ensure that Edinburgh qualifications align with regulatory requirements" are also relevant to Senate's remit. There was a particular concern expressed during the discussion of S 25/26 3 H, including from student members, about the suggestion that this principle could mean that 10-credit courses were no longer permitted.

These points relate to academic policies and/or regulations, which are certainly within Senate's remit. Indeed, the Terms of Reference for Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee include "2.3 Scrutinise and approve proposals for new or revised academic policy or regulation, ensuring that policy and regulation is only introduced where it is necessary, and that all policy and regulation is suitably accessible to its intended audience."
 - 18.3. **Promotion of research.** Part of the "Research excellence" principle notes a "need to be supported by commensurate income generation." Some members of Senate expressed concerns that in general, the Academic Size and Shape documentation foregrounds teaching and does not give sufficient attention to the importance of research and innovation at the University. As the document is presently framed, members perceive a risk that teaching will be permitted to define our research activity, to the extent that we risk Edinburgh ceasing to be a research-intensive University, with consequent negative impacts on our research income, national and international reputation, and recruitment of staff and students.
19. To be clear, the examples above are not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, they are intended to provide some illustrative reference points for a discussion of Senate's role in the Academic Size and Shape project.

Resource implications

20. The requested actions are largely resource-neutral. The request in paragraph 3.4 would require some effort from the Executive to review their governance plan and present it to Senate and Court.

Risk Management

21. It is important for the University to ensure that there is appropriate governance oversight of a major strategic change project.

Responding to the Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development Goals

22. N/A

Equality and Diversity

23. N/A

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

24. Decisions should be communicated to Court and the Executive. The plan requested in paragraph 3.4 should be brought to Senate at the next available opportunity.

Consultation

25. This paper was composed collaboratively with input from a wider group of elected academic members.

Further information

Author(s)

George Kinnear (Mathematics)

Jill MacKay (R(D)SVS)

Ross Galloway (Physics and Astronomy)

Presenter(s) (if required)

Freedom of information

Open

Appendix: Special Meeting Requisition and Responses from Senate Support

SPECIAL MEETING REQUISITION (03/04/2026)

Pursuant to Senatus Standing Order 2, the undersigned Members wish to call by requisition a Special Meeting of the Senatus Academicus within fourteen days for the object of:

- Receiving and discussing the Executive's and/or Court's plan for Senate governance of the Academic Size and Shape process, including College-level processes
- Voting to approve, amend, or reject the plan for Senate's governance of the Academic Size and Shape process

This follows the motion of Senate in March 2026, requiring Senate approval of "any proposals for design and implementation with regards to Academic Size and Shape before implementation" (ref. Senate Summary of Business 4th March 2026 p.3, in relation to paper S 25/26 3H). Senate requires clarification of how this motion will be enacted given the legal responsibility for Senate to regulate and supervise the teaching and discipline of the University.

1. Rachel Muers (Divinity)
2. George Kinnear (Mathematics)
3. David Ingram (Engineering)
4. Emily Ford-Halliday (Design ECA)
5. Michael Barany (SPS)
6. Ross Galloway (Physics and Astronomy)
7. Eberhard Sauer (HCA)
8. Stuart Gilfillan (GeoSciences)
9. Jill MacKay (R(D)SVS)
10. Diana Paton (HCA)
11. James Mitra (SPS)
12. Itamar Kastner (PPLS)
13. Sue Chapman-Kelly (MHSES)
14. Tom Leinster (Mathematics)
15. Lucy Grig (HCA)
16. Jacob Bard-Rosenberg (ECA)
17. Ingrid Young (CMVM)
18. Crispin Jordan (CMVM)
19. Jean-Christophe Denis (Physics and Astronomy)
20. Mirko Canevaro (HCA)
21. Luigi Del Debbio (Physics and Astronomy)
22. Dario Luis Banegas (MHSES)
23. Afshin Mehrpouya (UEBS)
24. Andy Aydın-Aitchison (Law)
25. Naomi Appleton (Divinity)
26. Ben Goddard (Mathematics)
27. Nicola Boydell (CMVM)
28. Courtney Stafford-Walter (MHSES)
29. Pau Navarro (R(D)SVS)
30. Karen Gregory (SPS)
31. David Farrier (LLC)
32. Kirsty Day (HCA)
33. Kevin Donovan (SPS)

Email from Senate Support to Senators signing the requisition (14/04/2026)

Dear Senate members,

We are writing in response to your requisition for a special meeting of Senate on Academic Size and Shape, signed by 33 members of Senate. A possible date for this meeting is Tuesday 28 April at 2pm.

We note within the requisition, the purpose of the meeting is:

- *Receiving and discussing the Executive's and/or Court's plan for Senate governance of the Academic Size and Shape process, including College-level processes*
- *Voting to approve, amend, or reject the plan for Senate's governance of the Academic Size and Shape process*

This follows the motion of Senate in March 2026, requiring Senate approval of "any proposals for design and implementation with regards to Academic Size and Shape before implementation" (ref. Senate Summary of Business 4th March 2026 p.3, in relation to paper S 25/26 3H). Senate requires clarification of how this motion will be enacted given the legal responsibility for Senate to regulate and supervise the teaching and discipline of the University.

Firstly, to clarify, the wording of the motion approved at the 4 March meeting was "Senate wishes to approve any proposals for design and implementation with regards to Academic Size and Shape before implementation."

In providing this response we have taken advice from Court Services on governance and decision making of the Academic Size and Shape work; we would be grateful if, following your reading of the information below, you could confirm whether you wish to proceed with the special meeting or have this on the agenda for the May meeting.

The remit of Senate is to "To regulate and superintend the teaching and discipline of the University and to promote research" (Universities Scotland Act 1889, with 'to promote research' having been added by the Universities Scotland Act 1966).

Alongside this, the [Court-approved principles of delegation to the Principal](#) state that "apart from the items reserved to Court, the Court has delegated full authority to the Principal to act on its behalf in all matters affecting the well-being of the University", subject to certain principles, which include appropriate reporting to Court.

The University's Academic Size and Shape work is not a matter of regulating or superintending the teaching or discipline of the University, nor of promoting research. It is rather a strategic assessment of required capacity and prioritisation to deliver the institution's mission and strategic goals sustainably, now and in the future. It is therefore within the remit of the University's executive officers, working through the Principal and on behalf of Court, and not that of Senate. Senate might take an interest in how this work could potentially impact on the business of regulating and superintending teaching or promoting research, but it has no responsibility or remit to approve the work.

The Academic Size and Shape work is proceeding under clearly-defined governance structures that have been communicated to Court, which include reporting to the University Executive.

Senate members may call a meeting to discuss any issue but should be aware that Senate will not be able to engage in decision-making at such a meeting if the topic is outwith Senate's remit. The Convener of Senate is not obliged to allow any voting on matters outwith Senate's remit. If such votes were allowed to take place, Senate should be aware in advance that they would carry no force outside of Senate. As part of this, in the event that any appeals were made to Court to take action of any kind, Court would not be obliged to respond.

Information about Academic Size and Shape can be accessed here [Academic size and shape](#)

As noted mid-way through this email, please do confirm if you wish to proceed with a special meeting. As a reminder the paper presented to the March meeting of Senate confirmed “as the Project develops the academic strategy elements for the Framework, we will provide updates and proposals for consideration to Senate, as appropriate. Development of the work, will be driven by members of our academic community and include members of Senate throughout planning and with recommendations discussed through established governance structures.”

Best wishes

Senate Support

Email from Rachel Muers to Senate Support (17/04/2026)

Dear colleagues in Senate Support (cc signatories of the requisition)
Thank you again for your response and for finding a time for the extraordinary meeting. Following some discussion, we would like to proceed with the extraordinary meeting at the time suggested and with the purpose originally stated.
With best wishes, Rachel

Email from Senate Support to Senators signing the requisition (20/04/2026)

Dear Rachel,
Cc/ signatories

Thank you for your response.

The University Court/Executive has confirmed that a paper will not be provided to Senate on the topic outlined in the request. Can I please confirm if the signatories will be providing a paper for this item? **Could I please ask that the paper be submitted by Tuesday 21 April, as this is 7 days in advance of the proposed meeting date.** An electronic meeting of the Senate Business Committee will be held on Wednesday to consider the agenda for the Special Meeting.

As the purpose of the meeting has not changed since that originally set out in the attached requisition, Senate will not be able to engage in decision-making at such a meeting if the topic is outwith Senate's remit. The University's Academic Size and Shape work is a strategic assessment of required capacity and prioritisation to deliver the institution's mission and strategic goals sustainably, now and in the future. It is therefore within the remit of the University's executive officers, working through the Principal and on behalf of Court, and not that of Senate. Senate might take an interest in how this work could potentially impact on the business of regulating and superintending teaching or promoting research, but it has no responsibility or remit to approve the work.

Best wishes,

Senate Support
Academic Quality and Standards
Registry Services