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**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

**Minutes of meeting held on 9 September 2020**

**Present:** Professor G McCormac (Chair), Professor A Bowes, Professor M Cusack, Professor I Docherty, Professor J Donaldson, Dr P Dudchenko, Ms L Ehresmann, Professor K Grant, Dr A Gilburn, Professor A Green, Dr E Macleod, Professor M MacLeod, Professor H Nehring, Professor R Norman, Professor R Oram, Professor J Phillips, Ms A Smith, Professor L Sparks, Mr A Seel, Mr E Stainbank, Ms J Stevenson, Dr I Tabner, Professor J Tinson, Professor T Whalley, Professor N Wylie.

**In Attendance:** Ms I Beveridge, Dr A Griffiths (Secretary), Ms J Morrow, Ms E Schofield,

Dr D Telford.

**Apologies:** Dr A Desbois, Dr L Forbat, Prof M Priestley, Ms A Smith, Dr C Wilson.

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| **1.** | **TERMS OF REFERENCE** | **AC (20/21) 1** | | | | | | |
|  | The current terms of reference of Council were noted.  The Chair welcomed new members to Academic Council who were attending their first meeting. | | | | | | | |
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| **2.** | **STANDING ORDERS** | **AC (20/21) 2** | | | | | | |
|  | Academic Council’s Standing Orders were noted. | | | | | | | |
| **3.** | **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING** | | **AC (19/20) Minutes 4** | | | | | |
|  | The minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2020 were approved. | | | | | | | |
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| **4.** | **MATTERS ARISING NOT OTHERWISE ON THE AGENDA** | |  | | | | | |
|  | Council noted that there were no matters arising that were not covered elsewhere on the agenda. | | | | | | | |
| **5.** | **STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR AND AN UPDATE ON THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT** | | | | **Oral Report & AC (20/21) 3** | | | |
|  | Council received a briefing from the Chair and an update on the external environment:  **COVID-19**  The Chair noted the continued impact of COVID-19 on the University and the broader higher education sector, and outlined the University’s approach, planning, and arrangements in response to the continued challenges of the pandemic as the institution progressed into the autumn semester. It was further noted that whilst there was a focus on returning to as normal an operating situation as possible, the safety of students, staff, and the local community was paramount, and the University had taken significant measures in line with government guidelines to ensure this.  **National Student Survey 2020**  The Chair noted the University’s recent success in the National Student Survey where the institution placed 18th in the UK and received high satisfaction scores across all areas of the survey.  **Guardian University Guide 2021**  The Chair noted the University’s success in the Guardian University Guide 2021 where the institution placed 28th in the UK, marking a seventeen-place increase, with thirteen subject areas having improved upon last year’s performance, and three subject-areas placed in the top 10 in the UK (Criminology, 3rd; Economics 5th; and Journalism, joint 5th). It was further noted that, within Scotland, Criminology was ranked 1st, Journalism 2nd, and Economics, Business, Management, Marketing, and Media and Film Studies 3rd across all Scottish institutions.  **EU Student Status**  The Chair noted that the Scottish Government had announced that EU students from 2021/22 would no longer be eligible for home fee status in Scotland, and that funds previously supporting EU students would be retained within the HE sector, but that it was unclear as to where these funds would be invested, and that considerations were still being made by the Scottish Government in this area.  **School Qualifications and Admissions**  The Chair noted the impact of both the Scottish and UK Governments’ decisions to move from moderated assessment of Highers/Advanced Highers/A Levels to Centre Assessed Grades on admissions to the University ahead of the new academic year. It was noted that the increase in admissions above the quota for Scottish Home students would be funded by the Scottish Government.  **UKRI Postgraduate Funding for International Students**  The Chair noted that from 2021/22, international students would be eligible for all UKRI-funded PG studentships, which would include full stipend to support living costs and also fees at the UK rate.  Council discussed statements by the Chair and the updates from the external environment commenting on work that had progressed within the university following the Universities Scotland/Advance HE declaration and activity to support the zero-tolerance approach to racial harassment, the positive reception of the recent NSS and Guardian league tables results, and matters surrounding the SFC sustainability review.  Council noted statements from the Chair and the update on the external environment. | | | | | | | |
| **6.** | **OVERVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING IN AUTUMN 2020** | | | | | | **AC (20/21) 4** | |
|  | Council received a paper providing an overview of arrangements for learning and teaching in Autumn 2020. It was noted that there had been an effective and impressive effort across the entire university to develop a comprehensive adaptation of the University’s approach to learning and teaching throughout the ever-changing situation that COVID-19 presented.  It was further noted that during Spring Semester 2019/20 the University successfully adapted to remote emergency teaching in a short space of time, and as part of this process a range of technological enhancements had been introduced. These technological enhancements in the delivery of learning and teaching had also been further developed over the summer in preparation for the initial predominant delivery of online teaching in the Autumn Semester of 2020/21.  Further to this, it was noted that faculties had made significant changes to their learning and teaching portfolios in preparation for the Autumn Semester 2020/21, which had also been continually informed by Scottish Government and public health information. Changes to the portfolio and methods of learning and teaching were also noted to have been completed in line with quality assurance expectations as set down by the QAA guidance, and records had been kept in line with the University’s duties in the area of quality assurance and enhancement.  It was noted that the online learning and teaching in Autumn Semester would be significantly different to that of the emergency provision in Spring Semester 2019/20, with learning and teaching provision being presented in a richer and developed way to ensure students would receive an enhanced learning experience. It was also noted that planning was underway for learning and teaching provision in the Spring Semester 2020/21, with a planned focus, where permissible with government and public health guidelines, on the expansion of face to face teaching. It was however emphasised that a digital first approach would be taken to learning and teaching provision, and whilst an increase in face to face learning and teaching would be desirable, there would be the ability to adapt back to a wholly online delivery if a change in public health circumstances dictated it.    Council noted the overview of arrangements for learning and teaching in autumn 2020. | | | | | | | |
| **7.** | **RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK** | | | **Oral Report** | | | | |
|  | Council received an update on the upcoming Research Excellence Framework which highlighted the significant changes to the REF since its recommencement from 31 July 2020, and the implications of these changes to the institution going forwards.  It was noted that the census date for staff remained as the 31 July 2020, with the impact assessment period extended to cover 1 August 2020 up to the 31 December 2020. It was noted that the impact assessment period was extended to support submissions that have been affected by the pandemic in order that evidence collection could continue. It was further noted that submissions could contain a 100-word statement in relation to the effect of COVID-19 on the impact of evidence where applicable. It was emphasised however that a great deal of evidence for impact had been collected as much of this activity continued over the course of the pandemic.  It was noted that appointment to panels and sub-panels was proceeding well, and that the University had been informed that six members of staff had been appointed to the sub-panel which was extremely positive for the size of the institution.  In relation to the University’s current REF progress, it was noted that the final full submission was progressing well, and that at the next progression review point of November 2020 the full submission was expected to be nearing completion. The REF advisory group would then review this throughout December 2020/January 2021, and that January-March 2021 would be focused on the final polishing of the submission rather than substantive changes. It was noted that the University had made good progress on the development of its submission.  Council noted the update on the upcoming Research Excellence Framework. | | | | | | |
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| **8.** | **ANNUAL REPORT ON INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW** | | | | | **AC (20/21) 5** | | |
|  | Council received the annual report to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on Institution-Led Review in 2019/20.  Council noted that the report outlined the University’s institution-led review activity to the SFC as well as providing a signed statement of assurance from the University Court that the University was undertaking institution-led review in line with SFC guidelines on quality assurance and enhancement. The report summarised the institution-led review outcomes of learning and teaching reviews in 2019/20, review of professional services that support institution-led review, national enhancement themes activities undertaken by the University, the University’s approach to student engagement, and contextual information that reflected on student retention and student surveys.  It was further noted that at the outset of the pandemic, whilst the SFC/QAA provided allowances for institutions to pause institution-led review activity, the University undertook to continue with and complete its institution-led review activity. This resulted in the proactive completion of remaining learning and teaching reviews for Academic Year 2019/20 through a rapid adaption to an online format to support these activities, which wasa positive position in comparison to many other institutions. It was also noted that feedback received from the QAA was extremely positive towards the University’s approach in this area, and that this approach had informed sector-wide good practice in the area of conducting learning and teaching review processes online.  Council endorsed the annual report to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on Institution-Led Review in 2019/20 for onwards transmission to University Court. | | | | | | | |
| **9.** | **STUDENT SURVEYS** | | | | | **AC (20/21) 6** | | |
|  | Council received and discussed the report on the results of the NSS, PTES, PRES, and SES.  In the area of the NSS it was noted that this year the institution had obtained an excellent result, and that the Faculty of Health and Sport Science in particular had made significant strides in improving their position following the results in 2019. Of further note was the success of the Stirling Management School who obtained an overall satisfaction rating of 90%.  Across all areas of the NSS it was noted that the institution had positively increased its position, and of note was continued excellent performance in the area of “teaching on my course”. Eleven of the University’s subject-areas were ranked in the top quartile, and overall subject-areas in other quartiles of the survey rankings were moving in the right direction following significant work to improve their positions.  Improvements would be focused on how the University was using and responding to module evaluations. Investment in EvaSys feedback software was being taken forward to improve the area of closing the feedback loop to students, by providing real-time feedback in response to their comments. Work was also continuing with supporting subject-areas in lower quartiles to improve their positions in future iterations of the survey.  In the area of PTES and PRES, it was noted that publicization of survey completion was stopped early as a result of the pandemic, and response rates were low in comparison to NSS. Consequently, it was of note that the data provided was not significantly representative of student experiences, and consideration would be given to how the University improved response rates in this area and utilised the data effectively.  It was also noted that the SES, which is the internal university survey aimed at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year students, maintained the same response rate as in previous years. It was noted that this year’s results indicated a downward trend in student satisfaction. Furthermore, as the results of SES had commonly been a predictive indicator for the final yearly NSS result, it was noted that the University was required to consider carefully the results of the SES and act on them in a remedial way to mitigate the potential impact on the final NSS outcome.  Council noted the report on the results of the NSS, PTES, PRES, and SES. | | | | | | | |
| **10.** | **REPORTS FROM COUNCIL’S COMMITTEES**  **Annual Report to Academic Council from the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC)** | | | | | **AC (20/21) 7** | | |
|  | Council received the annual report from the Education and Student Experience Committee.  It was noted that the ESEC report provided a summary of the progress of the committee over the period of 2019/20 and an evaluation of the committee for that reporting period. A summary of the activities for 2019/20 was provided and noted by Council, and it was further noted that a significant proportion of this activity was made in preparation for the University’s upcoming ELIR in 2021 and to mitigate the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning, teaching, and the student experience at the University.  Council noted the annual report from the Education and Student Experience Committee. | | | | | | | |
|  | **Annual Report to Academic Council from the University Research Committee** | | | | | **AC (20/21) 7** | | |
|  | Council received the annual report from the University Research Committee.  It was noted that the Research Committee report provided a summary of progress of the committee over the period of 2019/20 and an evaluation of the committee for that reporting period. A summary of activities for 2019/20 was provided and noted by Council, and it was further noted that the focus on reporting funding and grant applications in the past year had been helpful in fostering interdisciplinary research and supporting grant applications. Further to this, it was noted that over the course of the reporting period, several developments had been made in the area of research strategy, and significant work had been undertaken in response to developments in the external environment.  Council noted the annual report from the University Research Committee. | | | | | | | |
| **11.** | **ANY OTHER BUSINESS** | | | | | | | |
|  | Council noted that there was not any other business. | | | | | | | |
| **12.** | **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**  Council noted that the date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 2 December 2020, location TBA. | | | | | | | |

**Dr Alexander Griffiths**

**Academic Registry**

**September 2020**