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**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

**Minute of meeting held on 15 September 2021**

**Present:** Professor G McCormac (Chair), Mr C Brown, Ms N Cadinanos Gonzales, Dr A Desbois, Professor I Docherty, Dr P Dudchenko, Dr L Forbat, Professor K Grant, Professor A Green, Professor A Hadland, Professor A Jump, Dr M Lovatt, Ms A Mackay, Dr E Macleod, Professor M MacLeod, Professor H Nehring, Professor N Parish, Professor J Phillips, Prof M Priestley, Professor L Sparks, Ms Jill Stevenson, Professor J Tinson, Dr I Tabner, Dr D Telford, Professor T Whalley, Dr C Wilson, Professor N Wylie.

**In Attendance:** Ms I Beveridge, Ms J Morrow, Ms E Schofield, Mr D Soutar.

**Apologies:** Professor A Bowes, Professor J Donaldson, Dr A Gilburn, Ms T Miller, Professor R Norman, Professor R Oram.

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| **1.** | **REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP** | **AC (21/22) 1** |
|  | The current remit, composition and membership for Academic Council were noted. |  |
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| **2.** | **STANDING ORDERS** | **AC (21/22) 2** |
|  | Academic Council’s Standing Orders were noted. |  |
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| **3.** | **MINUTES** | **AC (20/21)**  **Minutes 4** |
|  | The minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2021 were approved. |  |
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| **4.** | **MATTERS ARISING NOT OTHERWISE ON THE AGENDA** |  |
|  | Council noted the following matters arising:   * Further to the discussion at the last meeting of Academic Council, the Outcome and Technical reports of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) had been finalised and published on the Quality Assurance Agency’s (QAA) website. The reports could be accessed at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/elir-reports> * Following Council’s endorsement of the strategic plan addendum at its last meeting, the addendum was approved by University Court at its meeting in June 2021, and had been published on the website. * University Court had also approved the Safeguarding framework, the Mental Health Strategy, the Gender-based Violence Strategy and the Corporate Parenting Plan. |  |
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| **5.** | **STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR AND**  **AN UPDATE ON THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT** | **Oral Report**  **AC (21/22) 3** |
|  | Council received a briefing from the Chair and an update on the external environment, which covered developments relating to matters including: the continuing Covid19 planning and response; the final SFC Report on Coherence and Sustainability; the 2020 Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension valuation; the 2021 admissions cycle; and the University’s success at the Tokyo Olympic Games.  Further points of note included:   * As part of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Regional Deal, plans for Scotland’s International Environment Centre had been approved. The Centre was one of the Deal’s 14 core projects and was being led by the University in partnership with Clackmannanshire Council and Forth Valley College. The project would create a community in Forth Valley to drive the creation of a net zero regional economy and deliver transformation in sustainable business practice. * The University had confirmed a new partnership with Chengdu University in China. Chengdu University-Stirling College would provide opportunities to study Data Science, Digital Media and Sports Studies degrees. Sport-related content would be included in all three of the degree programmes, reflecting the passion for sport shared by both universities. |  |
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| **6.** | **OVERVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING IN 2021/22** | **AC (21/22) 4** |
|  | Council received a paper providing an overview of arrangements for learning and teaching in 2020/21.  It was noted that since the onset of the Covid19 pandemic in March 2020 the University had worked through a process of adopting Remote Emergency Teaching and then developing Technology Enabled Education approaches, which had been in place since autumn 2020. The steps taken by the University had received endorsement through a number of routes such as the results of the recent ELIR and those of the 2021 National Student Survey (NSS). Nonetheless, the work that had been involved represented significant change and development, and the ongoing impact of the pandemic meant that such work continued to be necessary.  Detailed planning for teaching in spring 2022 had not started, a position that was in line with other institutions in the sector. Approaches would remain under review as consideration was given to how the University operated with the virus continuing to be present. As part of this, consideration would continue to be given both to aspects of current delivery that had not worked well, and to those that had been effective and should be retained in the future.  The fundamental importance of the student experience within ongoing development was recognised across Academic Council. It was acknowledged that work on the timely availability of timetable information for students was a continuing area of work for the University, which had a direct impact on students. In addition, potential skills gaps among students resulting from the pandemic required consideration, and the University was seeking to provide support for students in a variety of ways, including the availability of more than 120 skills/development workshops and the continuing enhancement of the Stirling Essentials module.  The University continued to engage with the Scottish Government and to contribute to discussions across the sector in respect of Covid19 planning. |  |
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| 7. | **ANNUAL REPORT ON INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW** | **AC (21/22) 5** |
|  | Council received the annual report to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on Institution-Led Review in 2020/21.  Council noted that the report outlined the University’s Institution-led Review activity in the preceding academic year, and included a 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.  Council endorsed the report for onwards submission to University Court. |  |
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| **8.** | **STUDENT surveys** | **AC (21/22) 6** |
|  | Council received a paper on the results of the 2021 NSS, Postgraduate Taught Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Survey (PRES).  In the challenging context of the pandemic, industrial action and flooding on campus, the overall satisfaction scores and survey results represented a considerable achievement and reflected the hard work and commitment of staff.  Strong response rates had been achieved in comparison to previous years. NSS was 74%, up from 69% in 2020 and higher than the UK response rate (69%). The PTES response rate was 29% (up from 9%) and the PRES response rate was 37% (up from 14%), both of which were higher than the respective sector response rates.  In relation to the NSS, whilst in absolute terms the University, along with the rest of the sector had obtained a lower score for Overall Satisfaction than in the previous year, the results represented a strong performance and a consolidation of the excellent results of 2020, which were the best for the University in over a decade.  The performance in the PTES placed the University 8th out of the 88 participating institutions, whilst in the PRES we ranked 44th out of 89.  The University would continue reviewing the feedback provided in the surveys, and a full analysis of free text comments would provide further insight. The feedback would be used to inform ongoing planning and development and there were structured processes in place to facilitate this. Meetings to discuss the results of the surveys had been arranged with each Faculty, the Education and Student Experience Committee and its Sub-Committees would consider and discuss the feedback, and the Institute for Advanced Studies would undertake particular review of the PRES results.  It was noted that an error in the data used to determine the Times Higher Education (THE) World University rankings had resulted in the University being mistakenly placed in the top 351-400 universities in the world. This error had been highlighted to THE which had confirmed that the University’s correct ranking amongst the top 301-350 universities would be noted in the version of the rankings to be published in October 2021. |  |
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| **9.** | **REPORTS FROM COUNCIL COMMITTEES** |  |
|  | To receive reports from Council’s Committees: |  |
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| **9.1** | Education and Student Experience Committee Report: 1 July 2021 | **AC (21/22) 7** |
|  | Education and Student Experience Committee Annual Report 2020/21 | **AC (21/22) 8** |
|  | Council received the reports from the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC).  A wide range of policy work had been considered by the Committee during 2020/21, including the new Curriculum Development and Management Policy and Procedure. The project to implement and configure a Curriculum Lifecycle Management system was continuing and would facilitate the operation of the Policy and Procedure. It was recognised that given the scale of the University’s curriculum data and the necessary complexity of the system, ongoing configuration would likely be required for a period in order to achieve optimal operation. Colleagues’ engagement and contribution to this would be important.  Council noted the significant range and volume of work that had progressed through the committee during the previous academic year, and ESEC’s effective discharge of its remit and operation in 2020/21. |  |
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| **9.2** | University Research Committee Report: 13 May 2021 | **AC (21/22) 9** |
|  | University Research Committee Annual Report 2020/21 | **AC (21/22) 10** |
|  | Council received the reports from the University Research Committee (URC).  It was noted that the end of year total research award value was £26.5 million. This was a record for the University, and an excellent outcome that reflected the efforts of staff in both academic and professional service teams.  Plans were in development to refresh the University research strategy ahead of the preparation of the next institutional Strategic Plan. Key elements would be the need for sustainability and agility to adapt as external circumstances changed, and a series of papers would set out the strategic position on research through and beyond the pandemic.  Council noted the significant range and volume of work that had progressed through the committee during the previous academic year, and URC’s effective discharge of its remit and operation in 2020/21. |  |
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| **10.** | **SEMESTER DATES** |  |
|  | Council received a paper setting out proposed semester dates for academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24. It was acknowledged that the consideration of semester dates and the structure of the academic year had become more complex over time. There was a range of perspectives across the University that had been taken into account through the engagement and consultation that had been ongoing over a period of months. A single, institution-wide set of dates was required, and the proposed semester dates reflected the preferences of the significant majority of areas.  Council agreed that it would be preferable for the dates of the UG and PGT Mid-Semester Reading Weeks to be aligned, and ­approved the semester dates for 2022/23 and 2023/24, subject to this amendment. | **AC (21/22) 11** |
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| **11.** | **ANY OTHER BUSINESS** |  |
|  | Council noted that there were no other items of business. |  |
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| **12.** | **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** |  |
|  | Council noted that the date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 1 December 2021 at 2pm. |  |
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**Academic Registry**

**September 2021**