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**ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

**Minute of meeting held on 2 June 2021**

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

**In Attendance:** Ms I Beveridge, Ms Joanna Morrow, Ms E Schofield.

**Apologies:** Dr E Macleod, Professor R Norman, Dr I Tabner

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| **WELCOME AND APOLOGIES** | | | | | |
| Following the recent election process, the newly elected Students’ Union Officers had taken up post on 1 June 2021 and the new student members of Academic Council were welcomed to their first meeting:   * Nela Cadinanos Gonzales (Union President) * Calum Brown (VP Education) * Alyson MacKay (VP Communities) * Natasha (Tash) Miller (Sports Participation and Engagement Officer)   Thanks were once again extended to the student representatives who had contributed to Academic Council over the previous year. | | | | | |
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| **1.** | **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING** | | | | **AC (20/21) Minutes 3** |
|  | The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021 were approved. | | | | |
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| **2.** | **MATTERS ARISING NOT OTHERWISE ON THE AGENDA** | | | |  |
|  | It was noted that further to the discussion at the last meeting of Academic Council, the ELIR Main Review Visit had taken place in April 2021. The outcome of the Review was that the University received the highest possible judgement of ‘effective’ which confirmed:  “*the institution has rigorous arrangements, in line with sector expectations, for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and for securing the academic standards of its awards, and is using these arrangements systematically”*.  A fuller update on ELIR and the outcome achieved would be provided under item 4 on the agenda.  Council also noted that following the discussion on REF that Council had at its last meeting, the University’s REF submission had been made by the due date of 31 March 2021. The results were expected in April 2022. | | | | |
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| **3.** | **STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR AND**  **AN UPDATE ON THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT** | **Oral Report & AC (20/21) 23** | | | |
|  | Council received a briefing from the Chair and an update on the external environment. Particular points of note included:   * Harry Adam had been elected as the Chair of University Court and would undertake a four year term. It was noted that Harry was an alumnus of the University and a former Students’ Union President, and had been a member of Court since 2005, becoming Vice-Chair in 2012. * The University’s planning and response to Covid19 was continuing, taking account of the available Government guidance and the route map out of the pandemic. Planning for the autumn 2021 semester was underway and on the assumption that coronavirus remained under control – enabling the Government’s route map out of the pandemic to remain on schedule — the intended approach to autumn teaching would be to leverage the best elements of face-to-face and online learning and combine these providing tailored in-person teaching opportunities and community-building experiences. This approach would: offer regular in-person learning opportunities for all students; offer in-person smaller group teaching sessions, in safe and appropriate spaces on campus; offer practical skills sessions or laboratory work in relevant subjects; deliver large lectures (for 50 people or more) live online or pre-recorded – and available to watch again. Smaller lectures would be a mixture of online and in-person and also available to watch again; deliver online assessments, including examinations, as the standard form of assessment—noting that there may have to be adjustments to this for professional subjects; schedule all live teaching sessions, so that students had clarity about their timetable; allow field work, where possible, subject to relevant risk assessments.   Regular updates and communications continued to be provided to applicants, students, and staff in order to keep everyone in the University community as up to date as possible.   * Following an application submission in 2020, the Psychology department had been awarded an Athena Swan Bronze Award, recognising the steps being taken by the department to achieve gender equality for staff and students.   Council discussed approaches to online assessment and the ongoing importance of managing academic integrity. Discussion and planning regarding these topics continued in the ADLT+ Group, chaired by the Deputy Principal, Education and Students, and which comprised a number of staff members such as the University Chief Examiner, along with the Associate Deans for Learning and Teaching (ADLTs). In addition, software platforms for online assessment continued to be explored to determine the most suitable tools for use within the University.  Information security was highlighted as an area of continuing importance for the University. The threat landscape in respect of information security was growing and evolving over time and the impact of a security breach could be both costly and highly disruptive. A number of other institutions in the sector had experienced such disruption, often over relatively extended periods of time. A range of developments had been progressed over recent months to ensure the University’s operations remained as secure as possible. These developments had included the introduction of Multi-Factor Authentication. Guidance on information security and other information services in the University remained available for staff and students, and would continue to be provided in line with a gradual return to the campus.  Academic Council noted the recent developments in the external environment. | | | | |
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| **4.** | **ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR)** | | | **Oral Report** | |
|  | The ELIR process had concluded with the Main Review Visit which had taken place remotely between 19 and 23 April 2021. The ELIR Panel had awarded the University the highest available judgement of ‘effective’.  In addition to the overall judgement, the Panel had recognised five areas of commendation in respect of: the University’s response to the Covid19 pandemic; the learning environment, including the ongoing development of the campus and the University’s work as Scotland’s University for Sporting Excellence; the range of student support available across the University including through the Library, Student Learning Services and the Stirling Essentials module; the effectiveness of the Institution-led Review arrangements, in particular the approaches to Learning and Teaching Reviews; and the University’s commitment to and work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.  The Panel also noted a very concise set of recommendations relating to: the management and sharing of data; the approach to periodic review of student-facing professional services; oversight of the PGR student experience; research supervisor training; and the availability of information on external examiners and their reports.  This represented an excellent outcome for the University, and was testament to all of the work undertaken by staff across the institution. Thanks were extended to all colleagues for this continuing work that had been ongoing over the five year period since the previous ELIR as well as in preparation for the review process.  Particular recognition and thanks were noted for: the vital input that had been contributed by the previous Students’ Union President and VP Education, and the students who had participated in meetings with the ELIR Panel; the range of staff members who had supported the provision of information to the Panel and contributed to meetings; the former Academic Quality and Governance Manager who had undertaken extensive work on the required quality mapping in advance of the review visits; and the Academic Registrar who had made a significant contribution through the preparation of the Reflective Analysis document and the management of the review preparation, process and visits. The key leadership of the Deputy Principal, Education and Students in relation to the University’s learning, teaching and quality activity and strategy was also recognised.  First drafts of the ELIR reports – the Outcome Report and the Technical Report – were expected in June 2021 and it was anticipated that final versions would be published on the QAA’s website in August 2021.  A revised version of the ELIR Steering Group that had overseen the preparations for ELIR would be convened in due course to oversee the required follow-up in response to the review outcomes.  Academic Council noted the oral report. | | | | |
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| **5.** | **DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN** | | **AC (20/21) 24** | | |
|  | The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) had termed the period 2020-22 as being ‘emergency years’. In light of this, at its meeting in December 2020, University Court had approved the development of an extension to the current Strategic Plan to cover the period 2021-23. A new five-year Plan for the period 2023-28 would subsequently be prepared.  A short addendum to the current Strategic Plan, in respect of 2021-23, was being produced and consultation had been ongoing, ahead of a final version being considered by Court at its meeting in June 2021.  Council recognised the challenges that the Covid19 pandemic had created, and the challenging financial and operating contexts that were continuing. Within this landscape, the balance of key activities across the University would be an important consideration within the strategic approach going forward.  The University continued to engage in proactive discussion with government in relation to sector funding and strategy, and with the SFC in respect of its ongoing ‘Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability’. It was expected that this review would report within the following weeks.  Academic Council endorsed the strategic plan addendum. | | | | |
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| **6.** | **SAFEGUARDING FRAMEWORK** | | **AC (20/21) 25** | | |
|  | The ‘Research and Innovation Code of Practice for the Protection of Children and Adults at Risk of Harm (Safeguarding)’, and the revised ‘Respect at Work and Study Policy’ had both been approved in recent months, and now operated alongside a range of other related policies and approaches. The Safeguarding Framework had been developed as an overarching framework to support members of the University navigate and engage with this policy landscape.  Members of Council had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the framework and Council’s discussion around the scope of the framework would be taken into account.  Academic Council endorsed the Safeguarding Framework. | | | | |
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| **7.** | **EDI AND DIVERSITY STRATEGIES** | **AC (20/21) 26/27/28** |
|  | The strategies presented to Academic Council formed part of ongoing work to nurture the inclusive environment at the University. This work was being progressed in collaboration with the Students’ Union, and with a number of strategic partners within the Forth Valley area. The strategies set out the direction of travel over the coming years, and would be accompanied as appropriate by enabling and monitoring plans.  The Mental Health Strategy would be a joint strategy of the University and the Students’ Union and set out the whole-institution approach which would be required to effectively progress this important area of work.  The Gender-based Violence Strategy would be the second joint strategy of the University and the Students’ Union on this topic, and would build on the work progressed under the previous Preventing and Tackling Sexual Misconduct and Violence Strategy. There would be a focus on prevention within the strategy and Council discussed the value in ensuring this focus was clear from an early stage in the document.  The Corporate Parenting Plan set out the principles of how the University would perform its statutory duties as a corporate parent. The Safeguarding Framework referred to estranged students, and the Corporate Parenting Plan would also be relevant to students who were estranged from their families. Council discussed the mechanisms for student disclosure or identification and the need for careful and appropriate recording and sharing of student information.  Academic Council endorsed the Mental Health Strategy, Gender-based Violence Strategy and Corporate Parenting Plan. | |
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| **8.** | **APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES** | **AC (20/21) 29** |
|  | Academic Council noted the report. | |
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| **9.** | **REPORTS FROM COUNCIL’S COMMITTEES** |  |
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| **9.1** | **Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) Report – 5 May 2021:** | **AC (20/21) 30** |
|  | Council received thereport from the most recent meeting of the Education and Student Experience Committee.  The update provided on the Committee’s business was noted, particularly that focussed discussion had taken place on the developing Curriculum Development and Management Policy and Procedure which would in turn, inform the ongoing configuration of the new Curriculum Lifecycle Management system.  Academic Council noted the report. | |
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| **9.2** | **University Research Committee Report – 4 February 2021** | **AC (20/21) 31** |
|  | Council received the report from the meeting of the University Research Committee held on 4 February 2021.  The update provided on the Committee’s business was noted, with some particular aspects highlighted:   * Within the University’s REF submission, 447 staff members and an estimated GPA of 3.35 had been included. The final GPA would be confirmed in the REF results. In 2014, 301 staff had been included and the confirmed GPA had been 2.96. * Case studies from the REF submission would be showcased on the University’s website over the summer period. * A total of almost £24 million had been secured in research awards so far in 2020/21. * The outline business case for Scotland’s International Environment Centre (SIEC) had been approved by the UK and Scottish Governments and work was continuing to achieve full business case approval.   Academic Council noted the report. | |
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| **9.3** | **Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee Report – 24 May 2021** | **AC (20/21) 32** |
|  | Council received the report from the meeting of the Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee held on 24 May 2021.  The update provided on the Committee’s business was noted, including that the consideration and management of risk was an ongoing activity within the University.  Academic Council noted the report. | |
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| **10.** | **ANY OTHER BUSINESS** | |
|  | Council noted that there were no other items of business. | |
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| **11.** | **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** | |
|  | Council noted that the date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 15 September 2021 at 2pm. | |

**Academic Registry**

**June 2021**