



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Senatus Academicus

Wednesday 9 October 2024, 1:10-4pm
Auditorium A (Shirley Hall), Chancellor's Building, Little France

Confirmed Minute

Attendees: Peter Adkins, Gill Aitken, Andrew Alexander, Mohammad Amir Anwar, Mteeve Amugune, James Andrew, Ruth Andrew, Jonathan Ansell, David Argyle, Kate Ash-Irisarri, Liz Baggs, Michael Barany, Matthew Bell, Shereen Benjamin, Philip Best, Richard Blythe, Christina Boswell, Catherine Bovill, Julian Bradfield, Barry Bradford, Laura Bradley, Mary Brennan, Paul Brennan, Carol Campbell, Celine Caquineau, Leigh Chalmers, Seongsook Choi, Neil Chue Hong, Aurora Constantin, Sam Coombes, Martin Corley, Juan Cruz, Kirsty Day, Afshan Dean, Jean-Christophe Denis, Chris Dent, Charlotte Desvages, Sameer Dhumale, Kevin Donovan, Julia Dorin, Leonidas Dumas, Claire Duncanson, Agata Dunsmore, Constantinos Eleftheriou, Ruth Elliott, Andrea English, Mark Evans, Omolabake Fakunle, Tonks Fawcett, Valentina Ferlito, Manuel Fernandez-Gotz, Emily Ford-Halliday, Chris French, Vashti Galpin, Akrit Ghimire, Antonis Giannopoulos, Stuart Gilfillan, Laura Glendinning, Benjamin Goddard, Justin Goodrich, Iain Gordon, Kim Graham, Liz Grant, Mohini Gray, Patrick Hadoke, Karen Halliday, Rachel Happer, Colm Harmon, David Hay, Thorunn Helgason, Dora Herndon, Melissa Highton, Jane Hislop, James Hopgood, Emma Hunter, David Ingram, Julie Jacko, Jakov Jandric, Amanda Jarvis, Susan Jarvis, Aarnesh Kapoor, Itamar Kastner, Meryl Kenny, Linda Kirstein, David Kluth, Barry Laird, Steff Lewis, Dawn Livingstone, Ewa Luger, Antony Maciocia, Cait MacPhee, Guangzhao Mao, Lorna Marson, Peter Mathieson (Convener), Lesley McAra, Hayley McCormack, Avery Meiksin, Tijana Mitic, James Mooney, Steven Morley, Ben Morse, Chris Mowat, Simon Mudd, Rupert Nash, Bryne Ngwenya, Steven O'Hagan, Richard Oosterhoff, Diana Paton, Cheryl Patrick, Jamie Pearce, Josephine Pemberton, Nick Polydorides, Jon Pridham, Colin Pulham, David Quinn, Syjil Ramjuthan, John Rappa, Tianyi Ren, Ricardo Ribeiro Ferreira, Ken Rice, Simon Riley, Aryelly Rodriguez Carbonell, Brodie Runciman, Enrique Sanchez Molano, Giulio Santori, Eberhard Sauer, Bernd Schroers, Tobias Schwarz, Pablo Schyfter Camacho, Sean Smith, Stewart Smith, Antonella Sorace, Perdita Stevens, Gavin Sullivan, Emily Taylor, Jessica Thackeray, Sally Till, Tamara Trodd, Jeremy Upton, Niki Vermeulen, Natasha Vijendren, Dylan Walch, Patrick Walsh, Lena Wanggren, Stephen Warrington, Michele Weiland, Charles West, Indigo Williams, Mark Williams, Iain Wright, David Wyllie, Ben Wynne, Maryam Yusuf.

In attendance: Adam Bunni, Gary Blackie, Lisa Dawson, Sinéad Docherty, Arlene Duffin, Lucy Evans, Richard Kenway, Nichola Kett, Cristina Matthews, Dean Pateman, Fraser Rudge (Clerk).

Apologies: Niall Anderson, Nikos Avramidis, Kelly Blacklock, Lisa Boden, Aidan Brown, Tom Bruce, Mette Cameron, Tony Carbery, Kevin Collins, Jeremy Crang, Jo Danbolt, Sumari Dancer, John Devaney, Kate Davison, Kevin Dhaliwal, Simone Dimartino, Paul Du Plessis, Susan Dunnett, Olivia Eadie, Murray Earle, Anne-Maree Farrell, Susan Farrington, Sue Fletcher-Watson, Richard Gratwick, Helen Hastie, Jenny Hoy, Marc J Metzger, Gavin Jack, Jim Kaufman, George Kinnear, Kaitlyn Louth, Jason Love, Sophia Lycouris, Catherine Martin, Sarah McAllister, Gavin McLachlan, John Menzies, Andrew Morris, Judith Newton, Wayne Powell, Sarah Prescott, Carin Runciman, Ewelina Rydzewska-Fazekas, Jo Shaw, Mike Shipston, Geoff Simm, David Smith, James Smith, Alex Thomson, Shannon Vallor, Philip Wadler, Kate Wilson.

Prior to the meeting commencing, Senate members were reminded that in principle agreement to record Senate meetings had been granted at the meeting of 18 June 2024 to aid in the production of the minutes. Members were advised that a privacy statement had been drafted and had been included within the meeting information. Members agreed that the meeting could be recorded.

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Convener, Principal Sir Professor Peter Mathieson, welcomed members to the first Senate meeting of the 2024-25 academic session, and extended a warm welcome to all those joining for the first time. It was confirmed that Senate had reached quorum.

2 Minutes and e-Senate Reports

Senate was advised that the process for reaching consensus on the wording of the 22 May 2024 (S 24/25 1A) and 18 June 2024 (S 24/25 1B) minutes had not reached agreement, and the Convener asked Senate's consent to continue to seek agreement outside of the meeting. There were no objections.

The Convener congratulated on behalf of Senate the new Emeritus Professors confirmed in the 11-25 September e-Senate, and asked if there were objections to approving the e-Senate report of 11-25 September 2024 (S 24/25 1C). It was noted in response that members had not had sight of each other's full comments and suggested an out of meeting process be followed for that minute as well. The Convener agreed to this.

The Convener observed that the University Court did not receive Senate minutes until they had been approved by Senate and commented that lengthy delays between Senate meetings and confirmed minutes being presented to Court may adversely affect Senate effectiveness. A member recommended prioritising making draft minutes available as soon as possible after meetings. The Convener said he thought that has always been the case, and hoped that recording the meeting would make this more efficient. He confirmed that every effort would be made to issue unconfirmed minutes that are both comprehensive and quick.

2.1 Matters arising and the Senate Action Log

There were two matters arising from the minutes of the previous meetings.

2.1.1 Meeting of 22 May 2024

Under minute eight, Taught Postgraduate Curriculum Framework, it was observed that the minute stated that the Edinburgh Student Vision would be provided to the first Senate meeting of 2024-25. It was further observed that Senate had approved a motion at its meeting of February 2024 that requested that final approval of the Edinburgh Student Vision be brought to Senate, without delegation to any other body, as soon as possible.

The Vice-Principal Students, Professor Colm Harmon, expected an overall package around undergraduate proposals to be presented in the Spring meetings and agreed that Edinburgh Student Vision would be included as a distinct item on the agenda of the December 2024 Senate meeting.

2.1.2 Meeting of 18 June 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2024 contained members' comments arising from the e-Senate of 3-14 June 2024. Under the heading, People & Money Improvement

Plan 24-26, it was observed that Senate members' comments had been passed to the author of the e-Senate paper and it was queried whether there should also be a standing item on the Senate Action Log. The Provost, Professor Kim Graham, provided a brief update on the work of the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB) and the associated two-year roadmap for addressing issues associated with the People and Money system. The Convener indicated that a regular report from the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB) would cover this as well as other items. **Action:** The Provost agreed to provide an update at the December 2024 Senate meeting.

2.1.3 Action Log

Senate noted the status of actions as detailed within the Action Log (S 24/25 1D).

3 Convener's Communications

The Convener provided a verbal update to Senate on the financial context of the University and the UK higher education sector, consideration by the University Court of the University's Responsible Investment Policy, and the status of government funding associated with the procurement of an exascale supercomputer.

The Convener acknowledged that updates on Research Ethics and Defence, and on Timetabling, would be provided elsewhere on the agenda (minutes eight and ten refer).

3.1 Financial Context

Senate was advised that the UK higher education sector was experiencing a period of significant financial challenge, and the Convener spoke briefly on how the finances of universities were being affected by increased estates and staff costs, that public funding was insufficient to meet the full cost of student tuition, and that recruitment of international students had decreased.

The Convener reported that the University of Edinburgh had been fortunate to observe continued growth in international student numbers but added that such growth had been insufficient to meet the University's increased expenditure. The Convener commented that the University needed to take action to ensure it maintained its strong financial position, and explained briefly the ways in which the University could do so through income generation and reduction in expenditure.

The Convener observed that the number of staff at the University had grown significantly in recent years, and that staff costs had increased following the changes to the pay grade scale. Senate was advised that the University's Senior Leadership Team had agreed to implement constraints on the recruitment of new and replacement staff for the foreseeable future. The Convener clarified that the University had not imposed a recruitment freeze and explained that new staff appointments were only to be made in exceptional circumstances, where such roles would be critical to the University's mission. The Convener reported that, in the period since constraints had been placed on staff recruitment, there had been a reduction in the number of professional services staff employed by the University. A comparable reduction in academic staff numbers had not been observed, and the Convener commented that a reduction in staff numbers across both groups would be required. Separately, it was commented that the University would be exploring opportunities to reduce expenditure through improved procurement practices.

3.2 Responsible Investment

The Convener reported on work associated with the review of the University's investments and investment related policies. It was explained that two short life working groups had been formed to consider the definition of armaments for investments, and investment approaches in the international context. Senate was informed that both groups had made recommendations for consideration by the University Court, and that Court had since considered these recommendations at a special meeting on 3 October and then at its ordinary meeting of 7 October 2024. Separately, it was reported that the University had consulted on its approach to responsible investment, and that approximately 1900 responses had been received. Senate was further advised communications arising from consideration by Court were being prepared and would be issued shortly.

3.3 Exascale

The Convener commented that the outgoing UK Government had committed in writing to commission an exascale computer at the University of Edinburgh, and reported that the incoming UK Government had since conducted a review of capital commitments and had withdrawn the investment.

Members were advised that the University had conducted a significant amount of preparatory work in advance of procuring an exascale supercomputer, and that discussions with the UK Government regarding funding were ongoing as to its future. The Convener commented that a final decision on the funding was anticipated at the end of October 2024, as part of the UK Government's spending review. Senate was also advised that the funding associated with Artificial Intelligence Research Resource Plus (AIRR+) had been cut.

4 Edinburgh University Students' Association - Vice President Education Priorities 2024-25

Senate noted the priorities of the Edinburgh University Students' Association Vice President Education and the Sabbatical team for the 2024-25 academic year as detailed in the paper (S 24/25 1E).

The EUSA Vice President Education, Dylan Walch, contextualised the priorities within the student experience, and commented that students needed to:

- Receive sufficient course-related information to make informed choices about their studies.
- Be able to identify and locate sources of information, guidance, and support at the point it is required and in an easily accessible format.
- Receive appropriate support to mitigate external factors that can affect basic needs and adversely affect academic potential.
- Develop a feeling of belonging with peers and staff, and to be able to approach academic staff for pastoral support when required.

The Convener thanked the EUSA Vice President Education and invited comments from Senate members. Several Senate members separately thanked the EUSA Vice President Education, and the Edinburgh University Students' Association sabbatical team, for their work to enhance the student experience. The Provost reflected on discussions held with the sabbatical team and commented that the priorities were well aligned with those of the University's senior leadership team.

It was queried how the University, and Senate, could best support the Edinburgh University Students' Association to achieve its priorities. The EUSA Vice President Education commented briefly on how Senate members could help to facilitate the student voice during meetings of Senate, and in providing greater clarity on where the student experience was considered within Senate and its standing committees. It was commented that work to improve the student voice was ongoing with key members of staff, and as part of the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group. Senate was advised that a Student Experience Framework had been developed by the Students' Association to support consideration of the student experience by university committees. A copy of the framework would be shared with Senate in due course.

Senate discussed the mechanisms through which it sought student feedback, and how this feedback was acted upon. It was observed that student representatives devoted time and effort to the improvement of teaching and learning at the University, but they may not benefit directly from their contribution. The EUSA Vice President Education commented that it was important that students received appropriate reward and recognition for contributing to the effective governance of the University. It was observed that the remuneration process in use at the Edinburgh University Students' Association appeared to be effective, and it was queried whether a similar approach could be used by the University.

A member commented that it was important to address issues affecting the personal and academic lives of students holistically, and that they expected the new Director of Students posts would help in this regard. Separately, the Convener updated Senate on recent discussion at the University Court on student support and added that this had been well received by Court members. The Convener commented on a conversation regarding the Student Support Model, where it had been perceived that academic advising had been diminished following the introduction of the Student Support Model. The Convener advised that the Student Support Model had been intended to augment, rather than replace, academic advising. Communications would be shared through colleges and schools to reassert the expectation that academic staff provide academic advice to students.

A member commented on the importance of academic staff having sufficient time to discuss students' academic options and career aspirations, and a request was made to consider mechanisms to facilitate this as part of the ongoing evaluation of the Student Support Model. The Vice-Principal Students commented briefly on the evaluation process, which was being facilitated by the University's colleges. A Senate member commented on the experience of academic staff, who had anticipated an adverse impact on relationships between students and academic staff due to the introduction of the Student Support Model. The member remarked that many schools have retained shadow academic support systems in the face of perceived hostility from above, and many staff are feeling unsupported and angry. The EUSA Vice President Education thanked Senate for the comments received and suggested that, in addition to providing advice, academic staff could also support students with course choices by providing course review documentation from prior years.

5 Award of degrees: delegation of authority to Boards of Examiners

By a majority vote, Senate approved the proposal to delegate authority to Boards of Examiners, on a trial basis, to award or confer degrees. The outcome of the vote was as follows: 95 members approved, 32 members did not approve, and 5 members abstained.

Dr Adam Bunni, Head of Academic Policy and Regulation, introduced the paper (S 24/25 1F CLOSED). It was explained that the proposal paper had been revised following discussion at the June 2024 meeting of Senate and following consultation with Senate members via the Senate Members Portal. Members were advised that the proposed delegation of authority

would initially be limited to the period between 1 January and 31 December 2025. The trial delegation period would be reviewed in the 2025-26 academic session, with a view to permanent delegation if Senate was satisfied the trial had been successful.

Senate discussed the proposal extensively, and members considered the potential benefits to all students arising from having earlier confirmation of their award; which could include the facilitation of further study; the facilitation of visa-related applications; or support in securing employment and, by extension, reducing the potential for individuals to experience financial difficulty from being out of work. It was commented that the proposal would also support the University in providing medical students with their awards within externally mandated timescales. Specific reference was made to the introduction of medical licensing assessments by the General Medical Council. The EUSA President, Dora Herndon, confirmed that the Edinburgh University Students' Association endorsed the proposal.

Members considered whether the role of boards of examiners and external examiners would change following approval of the proposal. It was observed that the period around board of examiners meetings was busy, and it was commented that the proposed change may place additional pressure on professional services staff to ensure that errors did not occur. Separately, a member commented on the varying ability of staff to understand data generated for boards of examiners and, by extension, the ability to identify errors. There was a brief discussion on the risk of the University issuing an inflated degree certificate in error, and for this certificate to be misused by the recipient. Members expressed differing opinions on the likelihood and impact of errors that might arise from reducing the timescale between the board of examiners confirming an award, an award decision being confirmed to the student, and the student receiving their award. It was noted that the paper appears to delegate unrestricted authority to boards to award any degree, including those outwith the subject of the board, and separately queried whether the process for withholding degree confirmation over fees was compliant with GDPR.

To provide staff with the opportunity to identify and correct errors, it was suggested that a delay be implemented between an award decision being made by a board of examiners and an award being conferred. It was separately suggested that an additional stage could be added to the board of examiners process. It was observed that the University did not collate data on errors associated with the award of degrees, and it was commented that such errors would likely be easier to prevent than to fix. Members were advised that consideration had been given to the timescale between a board of examiners conferring an award and the award being issued, and that it was anticipated that there would still be sufficient time to identify and correct errors. It was advised that Taught Assessment Regulation 64 made provision for the University to correct errors and amend its records. It was observed that, for the majority of students, provision of degree certificates would remain at graduation ceremonies and, consequently, the risk profile between the proposed and existing practices was likely to be similar. A member observed that the paper did not specify how the trial period would be evaluated.

A member commented on the historical and ceremonial value associated with retaining Senate graduation meetings. Senate members separately commented that the meetings occurred very rapidly, with uncertain memberships, and out of sight of those graduating.

6 Senate Committee Administration

6.1 Senate Standing Committee Membership (S 24/25 1G)

Without requiring a vote, Senate approved the memberships of the Academic Policy and Regulation Committee, the Senate Education Committee, and the Senate Quality Assurance Committee.

Senate approved a motion to reopen the election process for Senate-elected members to vacancies on the Senate Education Committee and the Senate Quality Assurance Committee by a majority vote: 91 members approved, 8 members did not approve, and 12 members abstained. There was a brief discussion on the election process and timescale.

The following amendment to the paper was accepted without requiring a vote. *“Senate notes the contexts described in paragraphs 18 and 19 of paper S 23/24 3L about the Task and Finish Group’s role in developing proposals that will affect committee memberships and remits, and that the group has not had time yet to bring these proposals to Senate. Senate approves this continuation of the existing committee structure on an interim basis pending revisions to committee structures, memberships, and remits that Senate may consider in the current academic year or subsequently.”*

The following amendment to the paper was accepted without requiring a vote. *“Senate notes that these committee compositions are being made exceptionally outwith the requirements of Standing Orders paragraph 22.”* It was observed that the Standing Order stated that “all members of Senatus shall be invited annually to submit suggestions for membership of these Committees”, and that this had not happened. Separately, it was commented that the Senate Standing Orders had not been updated to reflect the inclusion of Senate-elected members on the Senate Standing Committees, and that the Senate Standing Orders were in need of review and revision.

6.2 Senate Standing Committee Priorities (S 24/25 1H)

Senate noted the Senate Standing Committees priorities for academic year 2024/25 (paper S 24/25 1H).

It was observed that the paper had been held over from the May and June meetings of Senate, and that Senate had previously been asked to approve the priorities. It was clarified that subsequent review of the Senate Standing Orders and of the Committees’ terms of reference identified that explicit Senate approval was not required. Senate was asked to ‘note’ the priorities, and to disregard reference within the paper asking Senate to ‘endorse’ the priorities. Members were advised that the terms of reference for the Senate Standing Committees, as approved by Senate, stated that the Committees would “follow a schedule of business set prior to the start of the academic year and which is agreed through consultation with Senate, the Conveners of the other Senate Committees, and other relevant members of the community”. A brief summary of the consultation process was outlined.

A member queried whether the Senate Education Committee priority relating to the student experience, and actions taken in response to student survey results, would include surveys that were specific to international students such as the International Student Barometer. The Vice Principal Students agreed that it was helpful to understand the student experience from multiple perspectives, and that the University was considering augmenting its mechanisms for facilitating the student voice with the International Student Barometer.

6.2.1 Member proposed amendment

Senate approved the following amendment by a majority vote: 54 members approved, 43 members did not approve, and 16 members abstained. *“Senate would like SQAC to prioritise helping Senate to better understand and scrutinise the arrangements and effectiveness for quality assurance regarding internal systems and change processes, including recent/ongoing changes to Exceptional Circumstances, Timetabling, Student Support, and Virtual Learning platforms.”*

Prior to the vote occurring, it was reported that the Senate Quality Assurance Committee’s existing priorities related to areas of external compliance that could not easily be deprioritised. To reduce the potential for duplication of effort, an alternative proposal was presented for actions to be placed against relevant members of university staff to report on existing plans for evaluation of the aforementioned topics. Following receipt of the reports, Senate could then take an informed decision on assigning such a priority. The proposer of the amendment expressed the preference that the associated work be progressed through the University’s governance structure as detailed within the amendment, so that Senate be able to provide oversight of, and engage with, the associated work.

6.2.2 Member proposed amendment

The following amendment to the paper was accepted without requiring a vote.

“Senate notes that committees currently undertake a combination of operational and governance activities, and sets the following supplemental priorities for all committees:

- 1. With the Task and Finish group, identify opportunities to clarify the relationship between operations and governance so that Senate committees are ultimately supporting Senate’s governance role with operations led by appropriate role-holders and executive or management committees. This should include working toward a draft delegation schedule for Senate approval.*
- 2. Build capacity in Senate to understand and to scrutinise academic policy, strategy, and external compliance activities related to the committee’s remit.”*

The Vice Principal Students commented that work was underway to address the related recommendations arising from AdvanceHE report on Senate Effectiveness, and that the Senate Standing Committees would support the work of the Task and Finish Group. The Convener of the Academic Policy and Regulation Committee, Professor Paddy Hadoke, added that he did not consider the amendment to be contentious but did observe that some of the amendments presented to the meeting appeared to question Senate’s delegation of authority to the Senate standing committees. It was suggested that Senate members could approach the Conveners of the Senate standing committees should they have any queries or concerns about the operation of the committees.

A Senate member observed the operational role of the Senate standing committees and commented that they would appreciate the opportunity for Senate to have a more active role in providing oversight and scrutiny of institutional developments before they are finalised by the relevant Senate standing committee. It was added that the Senate membership would likely be able to make meaningful contributions prior to a paper being finalised. The Convener of the Academic Policy and Regulation Committee commented that the membership of the Senate standing committees included Senate elected-member representatives and that the Senate members were able to contribute to the work of the standing committees through these representatives. It was separately commented that

normal governance practice suggested that decisions made by a standing committee, acting within its remit, should not be subject to significant discussion or revision by the committee it reported to.

6.2.3 Member proposed amendment

Senate discussed, but did not accept or vote on, the following amendments.

“Senate would like SEC to report to Senate on the impacts of austerity measures including budget cuts and hiring freezes on academic work (research and teaching, and associated support workload) and student experience at the university, as well as the process of planning and implementing austerity measures to appropriately account for academic and student experience impacts. A timeline for these austerity measures and their review should be clearly identified.”

“Senate would like SQAC to report to Senate on the QA measures taken at different levels of the university to identify and mitigate the impact of austerity measures on academic work and student experience. A timeline for these austerity measures and their review should be clearly identified.”

The Vice Principal Students commented that, for both amendments, the term ‘austerity measures’ was not adequately defined and would require clarification prior to consideration by Senate and its standing committees. Separately, the Vice Principal Students commented that the intended action did not appear to be within the remits of the Senate standing committees, and that the committees did not have the means to conduct such a review.

Separately, the Convener clarified that the University had not imposed a recruitment freeze, rather recruitment was to be restrained with new staff appointments only to be made in exceptional circumstances where such roles were critical to the University’s mission.

Members proposing the amendment commented that there was scope for greater clarity on university actions related to cost control and restraint on staff recruitment; and that the restraint on staff recruitment had already been perceived to have adversely impacted the ability of academic staff to provide teaching, support students, and further research activity.

The Convener observed that the terminology used within the proposed amendment was contentious, as it related the current financial situation and matters that were at the discretion of individual budget holders who held delegated authority. The amendment proposers confirmed that they were happy to use the terminology from the Convener and Vice Principal Students for the amendment. The Convener indicated that rewordings would not be considered on the fly.

It was observed that schools could report on issues affecting them, including restraints on recruitment or budgetary issues, as part of the annual quality report process. A Senate member requested that, in due course, that Senate receive a report on relevant feedback on issues arising from the school quality reports. A member of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee explained that the school quality reports were focused on teaching and delivery of postgraduate research activity. They interpreted the intention of the amendment as seeking an impact assessment of a business decision and commented that they did not consider such action to sit within the remit of the committees.

6.2.4 Member proposed amendment

The following amendment to the paper was accepted without requiring a vote.

“Senate tasks SEC, SQAC, and APRC to evaluate from their respective remits the current situation and proposed alternatives for regulations and approaches for examination formats, with particular attention to resit examinations, and to bring any proposals for policy or strategy revisions to examinations and resits for the full Senate’s consideration and approval.”

The Vice-Principal Students, Professor Colm Harmon, explained that analysis of institutional data on assessment and of sectoral benchmarking was underway. A paper would be produced for initial consideration by the Senate standing committees, and that the final paper and any recommendations arising would be presented to Senate for consideration and approval.

6.3 Annual Report of the Senate Standing Committees 2023-24

Senate noted the annual reports for the 2023-24 academic session from the Education Committee, the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee, and the Quality Assurance Committee (paper S 24/25 1I).

6.4 Senate Standing Committees – upcoming business

Senate noted the main points of activity and business that the Senate Standing Committees would consider between October and December 2024 (paper S 24/25 1J).

7 Senate External Review Task and Finish Group

The Academic Registrar, Lisa Dawson, provided a verbal update to Senate on the work of the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group.

It was reported that several practical measures approved at the June 2024 meeting of Senate had since been implemented, including:

- the annual meeting time for Senate being increased to 12 hours;
- the adoption of a meeting format of four, three hour long, meetings;
- meetings being scheduled within the standard university semester;
- meetings being scheduled to commence at 1.10pm, and conclude by 4pm;
- meetings arranged in a hybrid format as standard;
- the arrangement of informal networking events for members prior to Senate meetings; and
- the development of privacy statement to accompany the recording of Senate meetings, to support the drafting of minutes.

Senate was informed that the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group had developed a proposal to form a Senate Business Committee, which was intended to provide an effective and transparent agenda setting process for meetings of Senate and e-Senate. It was explained that the proposal would shortly be circulated to Senate members for consultation. Following which, it was intended that the proposal paper and accompanying implementation plan be finalised and brought to the December 2024 Senate meeting for approval.

Senate members were advised that the Task and Finish Group's next priority was to contribute to the external review recommendation that the Vice Principal Students "reviews the Terms of Reference, coverage and scope of the three Senate Committees with a view to identifying any overlap and considering if they together cover all university academic priorities." It was reported that, as part of this process, members of the Task and Finish Group had recently attended meetings of the three Senate standing committees.

The Convener of the Task and Finish Group added that any proposals arising from the Group would be put to Senate for consultation prior to Senate approval being sought. Senate members were encouraged to engage with consultation requests.

The Convener thanked members of the Task and Finish Group for their ongoing work in support of Senate.

8 Research Ethics and Defence and Security

The Vice-Principal Research and Enterprise, Professor Christina Boswell, provided a verbal update to Senate in her capacity as Convener of the Research Ethics for Defence Working Group.

It was explained that the Research Ethics for Defence Working Group had been established following consideration of the Research and Partnerships in the Defence Sector paper (S 23/24 3P) considered at the 22 May 2024 meeting of Senate. The Working Group had since met four times and was anticipated to meet for a final time in November 2024. Following which, it was expected that the report and recommendations would be finalised and presented for consideration by the Research Ethics and Integrity Review Group, the Research Strategy Group, and the University Executive (for changes to the Research Ethics Policy). Members were advised that the final report and recommendations would be presented to the February 2025 meeting of Senate for consideration.

The Vice-Principal Research and Enterprise thanked members of the working group and the paper authors for their collegiate consideration of the issues. It was reported that constructive discussion had been underlined by mutual respect across two aspects. Firstly, the recognition shown by participants that the University did conduct, and should continue to conduct, defence and security related research which could have positive applications and societal benefits. Secondly, the recognition that such research needed to be, and benefited from being, governed by a robust framework of ethical standards and due diligence.

Senate was advised that the Working Group had agreed several interim recommendations, which were summarised as follows.

- That the University Ethics Policy be amended to include a clearer statement on the values guiding research.
- That an annex be added to the University Ethics Policy setting out further guidance on addressing ethical risks in research on/related to Defence and Security.
- That implementation of the aforementioned changes be operationalised through the new University-wide ethics form, and accompanying processes for mitigating risks and for escalating and reviewing high risk projects.
- That there be a clearer interface and alignment between research ethics processes and the Income Due Diligence Group.
- A provisional audit of projects identified as relating to defence and security be conducted pending finalisation of the new guidance.

- Following agreement on the new principles and processes, the University conducts a full review of all live projects within the scope of the new guidance.

In response to a query on the usage of the terms 'defence' and 'security', it was clarified that the Working Group had discussed the definitions extensively and had agreed to use the broader term 'defence and security'.

A member queried how the new guidance would interact with research partnerships. The Vice-Principal Research and Enterprise explained that interaction would continue to occur through the established ethical approval and due diligence procedures. It was added that the Working Group had been reviewing these procedures to identify whether there would be any gaps or loopholes following the introduction of the revised guidance.

Two members echoed earlier comments on the collegiate and constructive approach taken by the working group. A member observed, having recently attended a UKRI event, that the work undertaken stood the University in good stead and ahead of comparable institutions.

9 2023-24 Internal Effectiveness Review of Senate and its Standing Committees

Senate noted the findings and actions arising from the 2023-24 Internal Effectiveness Review of Senate and its Standing Committees (paper S 24/25 1K).

10 Review of Timetabling Processes

The Deputy Secretary Students, Lucy Evans, provided a brief verbal update to Senate on timetabling, and advised that a further update would be provided at the next meeting.

The Deputy Secretary Students recognised the critical importance of teaching time to the student experience and acknowledged that there had been timetabling-related issues at the start of the 2024-25 academic year, for which she apologised.

It was explained that the effectiveness of the timetabling system had been adversely affected by several issues which included the need to migrate to new timetabling software; integration issues between the new timetabling software and Learn; by ongoing work on Appleton tower; and due to the receipt of a significant number of late requests to amend the timetable. Members were advised that, in the period since August 2024, approximately 9000 requests had been submitted to amend the timetable with the majority of these requests having been made in September 2024.

The Deputy Secretary Students reported that the legacy timetable system had been replaced, and that immediate actions had been taken to address acute issues. Senate was advised that a project was in development, with staff and student input, to ensure holistic and long-term improvements to the timetabling system. The project was expected to cover timetabling related policies and processes, work to ensure the suitability of teaching rooms, and work to reduce the number of change requests submitted.

In response to an invitation to comment from the Convener, the EUSA Vice President Education commented that the ability to attend lectures and classes was foundational to students' learning, and that he hoped the timetabling project would deliver tangible benefits to the student experience.

11 Date of next meeting: 11 December 2024