



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Senatus Academicus

Wednesday 26 March 2025, 11am-12pm

Reid Concert Hall, Reid School of Music, Central Area / Microsoft Teams

### Confirmed Minute

**Attendees:** Peter Adkins, Gill Aitken, Andrew Alexander, Niall Anderson, Ruth Andrew, Jonathan Ansell, Kate Ash-Irisarri, Kasia Banas, Michael Barany, Matthew Bell, Shereen Benjamin, Philip Best, Ayesha Bibi, Richard Blythe, Lisa Boden, Christina Boswell, Barry Bradford, Laura Bradley, Mary Brennan, Aidan Brown, Mette Cameron, Carol Campbell, Celine Caquineau, Tony Carbery, Jeremy Carrette, Leigh Chalmers, Seongsook Choi, Neil Chue Hong, Aurora Constantin, Sam Coombes, Martin Corley, Juan Cruz, Jo Danbolt, Kirsty Day, Afshan Dean, Luigi Del Debbio, Jean-Christophe Denis, Chris Dent, Charlotte Desvages, John Devaney, Sameer Dhumale, Simone Dimartino, Kevin Donovan, Julia Dorin, Leonidas Doumas, Claire Duncanson, Susan Dunnett, Agata Dunsmore, Olivia Eadie, Murray Earle, Constantinos Eleftheriou, Andrea English, Mark Evans, Omolabake Fakunle, Tonks Fawcett, Sue Fletcher-Watson, Chris French, Vashti Galpin, Marc Geddes, Akrit Ghimire, Antonis Giannopoulos, Stuart Gilfillan, Laura Glendinning, Benjamin Goddard, Justin Goodrich, Iain Gordon, Kim Graham, Richard Gratwick, Patrick Hadoke, Karen Halliday, Rachel Happer, Colm Harmon, Tina Harrison, James Hopgood, Jenny Hoy, Emma Hunter, David Ingram, Jakov Jandric, Amanda Jarvis, Crispin Jordan, Aarnesh Kapoor, Itamar Kastner, Tobias Kelly, Meryl Kenny, George Kinnear, Dave Laurensen, Paul Le Tissier, Tom Leinster, Steff Lewis, Ewa Luger, Sophia Lycouris, Margaret MacDougall, Cait MacPhee, Upasana Mandhata, Peter Mathieson, Sarah McAllister, Fiona McClement, Avery Meiksin, John Menzies, James Mooney, Steven Morley, Ben Morse, Rachel Muers, Lyndsay Murray, Rupert Nash, Pau Navarro, Steven O'Hagan, Richard Oosterhoff, Diana Paton, Jamie Pearce, Josephine Pemberton, Nick Polydorides, Sarah Prescott, Jon Pridham, Colin Pulham, David Quinn, Ricardo Ribeiro Ferreira, Simon Riley, Aryelly Rodriguez Carbonell, Ewelina Rydzewska-Fazekas, Enrique Sanchez-Molano, Eberhard Sauer, Bernd Schroers, Matthias Schwannauer, Pablo Schyfter Camacho, Jo Shaw, David Smith, James Smith, Stewart Smith, Perdita Stevens, Alex Thomson, Sally Till, Tamara Trodd, Jeremy Upton, Shannon Vallor, Niki Vermeulen, Natasha Vijendren, Philip Wadler, Dylan Walch, Patrick Walsh, Lena Wanggren, Stephen Warrington, Michele Weiland, Mark Williams, Iain Wright, Benjamin Wynne.

**In attendance:** Lisa Dawson, Sinéad Docherty, Arlene Duffin, Lucy Evans, Nichola Kett, Dean Pateman, Fraser Rudge (Clerk).

**Apologies:** Sham Alhousiki, James Andrew, Liz Baggs, Kelly Blacklock, Julian Bradfield, Kevin Collins, Jeremy Crang, Kevin Dhaliwal, Anne-Maree Farrell, Susan Farrington, Mohini Gray, Helen Hastie, Dora Herndon, Melissa Highton, Jane Hislop, Willem Hollmann, Gavin Jack, Jim Kaufman, David Kluth, Barry Laird, Jason Love, Antony Maciocia, Lorna Marson, Catherine Martin, Gavin McLachlan, Kyleigh Melville, Marc J Metzger, Chris Mowat, Simon Mudd, Bryne Ngwenya, Suvankar Pal, Wayne Powell, Brodie Runciman, Mike Shipston, Charles West, David Wyllie, Ingrid Young.

Prior to the meeting commencing, Senate members were reminded that the Senate meeting would be recorded to aid in the production of the minutes as per the Senate Recordings Privacy Statement.

## **1 Convener's Welcome**

The Convener, Principal Sir Professor Peter Mathieson, welcomed members to the special meeting of Senate which had been arranged following receipt of a requisition made under Senate Standing Order Two. It was explained that the meeting had been called by Senate members to consider the academic impact of current and prospective measures taken in response to the University's financial situation. It was confirmed that Senate had reached quorum.

Prior to the consideration of the meeting's papers, Senate received a brief presentation from the Convener on the University's financial situation, and on the University Executive's initial consideration of the concerns raised within the meeting's papers.

Senate was advised that the University's financial situation had been adversely affected by underlying factors which had caused longstanding fragility in the Scottish higher education sector, and which were well known and understood. Additional factors had recently exacerbated the financial challenges being experienced by the sector, and which were mostly beyond the University's control. In response, the University was focusing on aspects that were within its control, which included the University's estates, procurement, staff costs, and the ways in which the University operates.

Members were informed that the University was in the process of reviewing all already-approved estates projects. However, it was explained that any savings achieved through such review would be one-off, and that the University would need to address recurrent expenditure. Members were informed that the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff had increased significantly in recent years. The Convener commented that the University was paying its staff appropriately, and competitively with other institutions, however the growth in the staff costs had become unaffordable.

The Convener commented that the special meeting, and the papers and motions submitted to the meeting, had been helpful in assisting the University Executive to understand where Senate members needed additional information or to be more involved. It was added that the University Executive greatly appreciated the concern shown for the University's academic mission, and the Convener sought to assure Senate that the University's academic mission was central in the considerations of the University Executive and in the associated plan shared with the University Court. The Convener added that the University Executive wanted to work with Senate, the joint trade unions and other staff, and with student groups to plan, undertake, and measure the changes needed to ensure the University's future. The Convener concluded by stating that the stakes were too high for division and conflict, and that the university community must work together to avoid being in even more significant financial difficulties, as were being experienced elsewhere at the time.

It was explained that the university community could access information at the [University finances SharePoint site](#), which would continue to be updated as information became available.

## 2 Academic impacts of the University's financial resilience strategy

Senate received paper S 24/25 4A which articulated concerns about the scale, timeline, nature and communication of the University's current and proposed financial resilience strategy. Senate considered the paper, and noted the appendices which included an open letter to Court from 92 elected members of Senate, a list of co-signatories to an open letter, and a summary of comments provided by co-signatories to the open letter.

In introducing the agenda item, the Convener acknowledged the concerns raised by the paper authors and by the signatories to the open letters. The Convener noted that the paper included a request for further information and analysis, and highlighted the [University finances SharePoint site](#) which contained relevant information. Members were advised that further detailed work was underway, and that additional information would be published on the SharePoint site as it became available. Separately, noting the content of the motions, the Convener also sought to assure Senate that the University Court held the executive team to account, including on any cost saving plans developed to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the University.

Members were informed that arrangements had been made to enable Senate to vote on the motions as presented within the paper. The Convener confirmed that the outcome of the votes, and the associated statements, would be communicated to the University Court. It was further explained that feedback from the University Court to Senate would be provided through the Convener's communication at the ordinary Senate meeting due to take place in May 2025. Members were asked to note that, from a governance perspective, Senate could not compel the University Court to take specific action, or to not take specific action.

Dr Aidan Brown, Elected Academic Staff Member from the College of Science and Engineering, introduced the paper on behalf of the authors. Senate were informed that the paper had been drafted in response to significant concerns about the University's financial resilience strategy, where it had been considered likely that the costs associated with such an approach would outweigh the benefits. Dr Brown highlighted the concerns as detailed within the paper, and added that staff at the University had not yet seen evidence that justified the scale and speed of the large-scale cuts to University's expenditure. It was commented that the speed of the proposed changes, and the associated lack of opportunity for academic scrutiny to occur, had led to members of the university community to lose trust in the approach taken by the University Executive. It was explained that the paper included a number of suggestions that the University Executive could take to restore trust; and that Senate members intended to hold a vote at the May 2025 Senate meeting to evaluate the confidence of the University's academic community, as represented by Senate.

Senate discussed the paper and associated motions. A member, reflecting on their career at the University, commented that they had never known the University to be under such a significant threat. To effectively address the issues facing the University, the member spoke of the need to leverage the collective wisdom of the university community, and for the issues to be addressed in a collaborative and collegiate manner. The member commented that this perspective was reflected in the motions that had been presented to the meeting, and viewed the motions as an offer for engagement by the university community. The Convener confirmed that the University Executive wanted to accept such an offer of engagement, and added that detailed plans were being developed for each workstream which would include opportunities for engagement with academic and professional services colleagues.

The Convener acknowledged that there was significant uncertainty associated with the measures taken in response to the University's financial situation, and commented that the speed and pace of the changes had been intended to provide lasting certainty to the university community as quickly as possible. The Convener reiterated that the University needed to act decisively to address its financial situation.

It was explained that Senate were being asked to approve nine motions, which sought to confirm statements of Senate's collective view and to confirm statements to be communicated to the University Court. In response to a request for clarification, it was confirmed that voting would take place for each motion.

By majority vote, Senate approved the nine motions as specified within the paper. Detail of the motions, including the record of voting, is included in appendix one.

### **3 Portfolio Review and Diversity of Educational Provision**

Senate received paper S 24/25 4B and noted the concerns that had been articulated regarding the approach taken to date on portfolio review, and the potential impact of such an approach.

In introducing the agenda item, the Convener acknowledged the concerns raised by the paper authors and advised that arrangements had been made to enable Senate to vote on the motions as presented within the paper. The Convener confirmed that the outcome of the votes, and the associated statements, would be communicated to the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDaMOB). Members were informed that SEDaMOB had oversight of portfolio review, that its membership included Heads of College, and that it reported to the University Executive. Members were further informed that the University Executive considered any proposals made regarding programme closures. It was confirmed that feedback from SEDaMOB would be provided to the May 2025 meeting of Senate.

Professor Diana Paton, Elected Academic Staff Member from the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, introduced the paper on behalf of the authors. In introducing the paper, it was commented that the topic was closely related to the previous agenda item. It was explained that there were similar concerns relating to the speed of change, and on a lack of opportunity for academic scrutiny of the impact of programme and course closures. The need for regular review of the University's portfolio was acknowledged, however it was recommended that such reviews take account of a broader range of evidence than had been used to date. Professor Paton highlighted salient points from the paper, and added that recent changes arising from the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board had partially addressed some of the concerns. It was commented that, while a positive direction of travel had been observed, it would still be valuable for Senate to consider the motions as presented.

Ben Morse, co-author of the paper, added that some of the programmes which had already been closed had facilitated the development of specialist skills that were in demand by employers. It was commented that the closure of such programmes would have a broader societal and sectoral impact, which could adversely affect the graduate recruitment of the University's students; and which could adversely affect the standing of the University and its Careers Service with valued long-term partners. It was further commented that, as part of fulfilling its societal duty, the University must ensure these stakeholders' voices are heard as part of decisions on the curriculum via continued engagement with the Careers Service Employer Engagement Team.

The Convener invited Senate members to comment on the paper and motions.

The EUSA Vice-President Education, Dylan Walch, commented that the Edinburgh University Students' Association supported the undertaking of regular and holistic reviews of the University's portfolio and added that these should be based on multiple criteria in addition to finance.

The Deputy Head of College (CAHSS), Professor David Smith, acknowledged the concerns raised within the paper, yet commented that aspects did not appear to be reflective of the College's new portfolio review process which had been constructed collaboratively. Senate received a brief update on the development of a business-as-usual portfolio review process within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. It was explained that the development of this process had been a significant undertaking due to the scale of the College's portfolio, and that progress had been achieved through collaborative efforts involving colleagues from across the schools. The Deputy Head of College (CAHSS) acknowledged the effort involved and thanked colleagues for their support. It was added that discussion at the working group had been productive and that the guidance produced was comprehensive, holistic, and capable of providing nuanced consideration. The Deputy Head of College further reflected on recent discussions within and between the College's schools, which had shown that nuanced consideration of the portfolio could be achieved through dialogue.

A member observed that the University's website stated that part-time masters programmes played a significant role in widening participation by providing flexible learning opportunities for those students that have different responsibilities and are unable to study full time. The rationale for closing part-time masters programmes was queried. In response the Vice Principal Students, Professor Colm Harmon, confirmed that the portfolio review guidance had been updated in response to college feedback to avoid viewing part-time programmes as being distinct from the equivalent full-time programmes. The Vice Principal Students added that regulatory work was underway to negate the need for specific administrative distinctions between the full-time and part-time versions of programmes; and commented that this was anticipated to improve the student and staff experience.

By majority vote, Senate approved the five motions as specified within the paper. Detail of the motions, including the record of voting, is included in appendix two.

#### **4 Date of next meeting: 20 May 2025**

In response to a query, it was commented that the next meeting would be held in the Larch Lecture Theatre, Nucleus, Kings Buildings.

The Convener closed the meeting by thanking members for their expressions in support of the sanctity of the University's academic mission, and for members' constructive comments on seeking to be engaged and involved with the challenges facing the University. The Convener acknowledged that there would be areas of difference in terms of specific details, but sought to reflect back a spirit of engagement on behalf of the University Executive.

**Appendix One – Record of Voting for Paper S 24/25 4A: Academic Impacts of The University’s Financial Resilience Strategy**

<b>Motions from Paper S 24/25 4A</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Not Approve</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
<b>A. Senate is asked to approve the following as statements of Senate’s collective view:</b>			
A.1 Measures currently being taken, and proposed, to implement rapid, large-scale cuts to the University’s expenditure are harmfully impacting research, teaching and the student experience, as well as staff morale and wellbeing. There is a significant risk that these measures will further harm research, teaching and the student experience in years to come. In addition, these measures risk damaging the University’s future potential for income generation, including via student recruitment, staff capacity for research income generation and innovation, and external partnerships.	98	13	5
A.2 Plans for change which impact the delivery of the University’s core academic mission of teaching and research should include meaningful consultation with academic and professional services staff and should include scrutiny and approval by Senate.	108	10	4
A.3 The Executive should make significant and rapid improvements to its approach to communication, consultation and engagement regarding the University’s financial situation to limit further harm to internal morale and external reputation (see appendix C under ‘Communication’).	111	5	4
A.4 As a matter of urgency, the Executive should provide to all staff a clear demonstration that savings of the scale and pace indicated (£140 million over 18 months) are indeed the best way to ensure the University’s financial resilience whilst also preserving its academic mission, or reconsider this scale and pace.	110	6	3

Motions from Paper S 24/25 4A	Approve	Not Approve	Abstain
<b><i>B. Senate is asked to approve the following statement to be communicated to the University Court:</i></b>			
B.1 Senate considers the scale and timetable of the Executive's currently proposed changes to be incompatible with maintaining the University's academic mission, reputation and the quality of education it provides.	90	18	10
B.2 Senate requests Court to require that the Executive provides a clear and credible account of how and why the University reached the point where large-scale, urgent and damaging cuts were unexpectedly announced, following large commitments to estates, facilities, and staff payroll expenditure that were premised on the University's sound financial position.	101	12	5
B.3 Senate requests Court to require the Executive to present a thorough analysis of the costs and benefits of its current and proposed actions, including course and programme closures, cuts to operating budgets where these impact student experience and staff capacity to undertake research and teaching, and potential staff redundancies.	104	10	7
B.4 Senate requests Court to require the Executive to develop a plan that will enable proper academic scrutiny, via Senate, College and School bodies, of any changes which are necessary to secure budget sustainability.	100	13	7

<b>Motions from Paper S 24/25 4A</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Not Approve</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
C.1 That Senate will hold a vote at its meeting in May to evaluate the confidence of the University academic community, as represented by Senate, in the Executive's leadership, and that providing the analyses in points B.2-B.4 above is likely to be necessary to secure this confidence.	89	20	11

**Appendix Two – Record of Voting for Paper S 24/25 4B: Portfolio Review and Diversity of Educational Provision**

<b>Motions from Paper S 24/25 4B</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Not Approve</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
D.1 The process of Portfolio Review must be developed to include both an assessment of the real financial costs of delivering courses and programmes and a holistic view of their wider costs and benefits (including in relation to student experience, specialist academic provision, student choice, widening participation and equalities).	99	13	4
D.2 When assessing enrolments of programmes that have both part-time and full-time routes, the combined FTE for both routes must be assessed, rather than the part-time route considered as a unique degree.	94	9	8
D.3 The status of any part-time degree that has been paused or closed due to the Portfolio Review must be reconsidered in view of the comprehensive and holistic criteria to be developed.	82	23	14
D.4 Schools must be encouraged to maintain and enhance access to their Programmes for students who wish to study part time.	91	15	14
D.5 The costs and benefits of joint and specialist degree programmes must be considered holistically, in light of other programmes with which they share provision.	106	10	3