

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING

OF THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS

held online Wednesday 7 October 2020

OPEN SESSION

This section of the meeting is open to all members of staff. 506 members of staff attended this open session.

1. Convener's Communications

An update from the Convener, Principal Professor Peter Mathieson

The Convener highlighted the enormous amount of hard work carried out in difficult circumstances across a huge range of activities in order to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, and to the revision of school examination results in the summer. Staff were thanked for their extraordinary efforts and commitment that have enabled the University to function effectively during this period.

In relation to the Covid-19 response, the Convener noted that:

- Pending any advice to the contrary from the Scottish Government, the University currently aimed to provide blended delivery of courses, with some in-person contact and some online contact.
- Current numbers of cases of Covid-19 among students are around 300, with numbers of current cases in staff at less than 10. There is currently no evidence of acquisition of infection in the classroom.
- As a result of changes to school exam grades, some courses are very over-subscribed because of the increase in the number of applicants who met the entry requirements. The University aimed to be flexible in relation to applicants who met their offer requirements.
- The University is prioritising providing a safe campus, providing support for students who are Covid-positive or are in self-isolation, and providing guidance and support on wellbeing to the community as a whole.

The Convener noted a number of priorities that preceded the pandemic, including Brexit, the pension dispute and the rising cost of pension contributions, climate change, and the imperative to improve student and staff experience. Financial challenges to the University are also a priority, including but not limited to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Convener moved on to address questions submitted in advance, and via the online meeting Q&A.

In relation to question on bringing students back to campus, the Convener noted that the University is acting in line with Scottish Government advice, and in line with other Scottish universities, and that extensive work and planning has gone into safety developments including scenario planning for infections occurring amongst the University population. While preparations for students to self-isolate in halls of residence were made, it was acknowledged that the difficulties of applying the public health definition of a 'household' to student accommodation were not fully recognised and the University is actively discussing this issue with public health authorities.

In relation to questions on Senate being informed and involved in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Convener noted that Senate is updated through the Convener's communications. However, Senate was not an integral part of the decision-making process that was adopted. The Adaptation and Renewal process has involved many members of staff and student representatives, representing many different constituencies. There was a requirement for extremely rapid decision-making, responding at times to guidance that was changing over hours or days, and under these conditions, a normal decision-making process was not possible. A great deal of effort has been put into communicating decisions to Senate and to all staff and students.

In relation to a question on whether decision-making has been influenced by staff views, the Convener noted the suggestion to create a four-day spring holiday came from out with the senior team, and that a Students' Association suggestion that students be released from their rental contracts in response to the initial outbreak of the pandemic was also adopted.

In relation to a question on why staff were being asked to work on-campus when Scottish Government advice is to work from home where possible, the Convener noted that the requirements for staff to work on campus changed with the start of semester and return of students, and it was no longer possible for some staff to work entirely from home. The University is in regular discussion with public health and government advisors and works within government guidance.

A question was raised about signage requesting people to wear masks in buildings. Signs have been updated across campus, and colleagues were encouraged to contact their building manager in the first instance if they have concerns that signs have not been put up.

The Convener confirmed that there are no announcements to make about compulsory redundancies, and that measures that are being taken are with the aim of avoiding compulsory redundancies.

Questions were raised about possible increases in staff workloads if staff numbers are reduced, and about how staff are being supported to avoid burnout. It was noted that if an application under the voluntary severance scheme is accepted, this is on the condition that the university can manage without that role.

A suggestion was received, noting that the Welcome Week app has been a success with high levels of use, and suggesting that this could be used out with Welcome Week to facilitate student social activities online.

The Convener closed the Q&A.

2. Strategic Presentation and Discussion

Adaptation and Renewal: Students – Reflections, Lessons and Next Steps

Senate heard presentations on the following topics:

Introduction – Professor Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students

Professor Harmon noted that the work of the ART: Students project was originally focused on Semester 1, but it is now clear that it will be a bigger piece of work, looking at Semester 2 and beyond. A key principle of the project has been that the University will closely follow Scottish Government guidance, and this will continue.

Professor Harmon described the initial stages of the ART: Students project as working towards reopening campus, and defining and developing hybrid teaching. He noted that there may be lessons that can be learned from this experience of hybrid and digital delivery of teaching and learning.

One aspect of the University response that may distinguish it from other universities is the fact that Schools own the decisions on how to deliver hybrid models. ART: Students engaged with Schools to find out for example which programmes they wanted to deliver, which programmes they wanted to move to digital delivery, and which courses they wanted to run. Schools then worked on planning hybrid delivery and ART: Students worked to support Schools in this. This took place in the context of marketing legislation that requires students to be informed of major changes to programme delivery: this required that some decisions on course and programme delivery had to be made very quickly, to meet deadlines to provide students with information.

Professor Harmon reported that the hybrid model has been delivered to a large extent, but the proportion of in-person synchronous teaching hours is highly variable across programmes, following decisions by Schools on how to deliver teaching. Professor Harmon identified this variation as a concern for students, including some complaints about low levels of synchronous and in-person teaching, and this will be raised with Heads of Schools.

Previous planning assumptions that restrictions would be relaxed by semester 2 have been revised, and hybrid delivery will continue into semester 2. Professor Harmon noted that some programmes, particularly those with accreditation requirements that necessitate in-person lab work, for example, had intended to deliver these courses in semester 2 and work is underway with the relevant Schools to address this.

Looking towards the next academic year, Professor Harmon indicated that lessons from the experiences of course and programme delivery in 2020/21 will be fed into discussions on curriculum reform, but emphasised that these discussions are still to be had, and no decisions have been made about retaining any elements of hybrid delivery.

Student Support – Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary Student Experience

The Deputy Secretary reported on the work undertaken by the Rethinking Student Administration and Support strand of the ART: Students project, including moving induction, orientation and matriculation processes online, enhancing online student skills and development resources, and developing online events to support students' sense of community and belonging. Work has continued on projects on administering the special circumstances process, the development of the Study and Work Away (SWAY) team in Edinburgh Global, and the launch of EdHelp, which has been used heavily since the start of semester, and received very positive feedback. Highlights of online support and opportunities included an online course fair, and a Welcome video from the Principal, which was accessed by far larger numbers of students than would normally be able to attend the annual in-person Welcome event in the McEwen Hall.

Timetabling has been extremely complex and challenging and continues to be challenging going into hybrid delivery in semester 2.

Building Ongoing Curriculum Resilience – Tracey Slaven, Deputy Secretary Strategic Planning

The Deputy Secretary outlined the priorities and structure of the curriculum resilience work undertaken to date. Three main strands of work were identified: adapting the curriculum and curriculum delivery for semester 1; learning lessons from semester 1 and feeding these lessons into semester 2 planning and delivery; and learning longer-term lessons from the experience of hybrid teaching. The work was led by a central group, but decisions on curriculum delivery were discipline specific and made within Schools.

Changes to the student cohort have resulted from both the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes to UK examination results, with higher than anticipated numbers of home undergraduate students being admitted.

Plans are currently being revised to take account of the current Covid-19 context and teaching in semester 2 will be delivered as hybrid.

Internationalising Edinburgh – Professor James Smith, Vice-Principal International

Professor Smith described developments in international student and staff mobility and transnational activity, noting that ongoing changes in these areas have been exacerbated by the effects of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The University of Edinburgh is involved in extensive student and staff mobility and is very successful in attracting ERASMUS funding, receiving 25% of all funding distributed to the UK. This mobility tends to be Euro- and Anglo-centric, with a year-long exchange for students still seen as the ‘gold standard.’ In future, more diverse opportunities are likely to be of value, to provide greater access to students with a range of needs and commitments. Feedback from students indicates that shorter term, more experiential learning opportunities would be particularly valued. Measures to improve sustainability, such as carbon offsetting, virtual mobility, and ‘internationalisation at home’ are also being explored.

Demand for transnational education is increasing and this is expected to continue, with numbers of overseas students undertaking a UK degree while located abroad now outnumbering those who travel to the UK. The focus of the University has been on opportunities in South and East Asia, but it is now necessary to increase the range of opportunities. One current project, Una Europa, a collaboration with seven leading European universities, was highlighted.

Student Perspectives – Ellen MacRae, President of the Students’ Association

Ms MacRae highlighted current key priorities for students and the Students’ Association, particularly support for mental health and wellbeing. Tackling student isolation, resulting from Covid-19 restrictions and potentially exacerbated by asynchronous online teaching, was also highlighted. The importance of students having opportunities to develop communities with like-minded peers was highlighted. It was also noted that in some contexts, moving services online has increased their accessibility to students, and lessons should be learned from this.

Ms MacRae will continue to work with the University on planning for semester 2, and to ensure that the University continues to listen to students throughout this process. Ms

MacRae highlighted in particular the importance of ensuring students are informed of arrangements for semester 2 as early and as fully as possible, to allow students to plan and to try to reduce students' anxiety and uncertainty.

Following the presentations, there were questions and discussions, including on the topics below:

- Online teaching resources, including captioning of recorded lectures and capacity to deliver a 'hybrid classroom' involving simultaneous in-person and online teaching, are being continuously developed. It was confirmed that the University does not require staff to edit automatic captioning, though staff may choose to do this.
- Support for mental health and wellbeing of staff, particularly for new staff and to avoid burnout, was discussed. Staff were encouraged to discuss issues with line managers, and links to support and resources were circulated to all attendees following the meeting.
- The collaborative and supportive approach of the Students' Association, and their vital role in supporting and representing students was recognised and affirmed.
- Some comments challenged the senior leadership on 'over-promising' the availability of in-person teaching to students, and asked for greater clarity on definitions of hybrid teaching including requirements for synchronous and in-person teaching.
- It was confirmed that no decisions have been made concerning whether changes to teaching delivery made this year will continue in the longer term (for example increased hybrid or online teaching). Experiences this year will be fed into the Curriculum Review project led by the Vice-Principal Students, but discipline-specific requirements and School approaches will remain paramount.
- The quality of technology and internet access available to online students in their home location was recognised as a barrier to accessing online teaching in some instances, and this is not an issue that the University can easily address.
- It was reiterated that the University will continue to comply with Scottish Government guidance on Covid-19 restrictions, and it was noted that keeping education open remains a priority and that based on discussions with the Scottish Government, traveling to work in education continues to be considered necessary travel.
- In response to comments on whether staff feedback is taken into account by senior leadership, it was affirmed that staff feedback is heard, but that many and contradictory views are heard, from many sources, and that not all feedback can or will be acted upon.

The Convener thanked the presenters and all participants for their contributions to the presentation and discussion.

The Convener closed the open session of Senate, noting that Senate members were invited to join the formal meeting of Senate at 4pm.

Break

FORMAL MEETING OF SENATE – from 4pm

This section of the meeting is open to Senate members only

Members Present: MATHESON, Peter (CHAIR), AINSLIE Jonathan, BARANY Michael, BECKETT Chris, BENJAMIN Shereen, BENNETT Stuart, BOND Helen, BOWD Stephen, BRANIGAN Holly, BRENNAN Mary, BYRNE Daire, CAQUINEAU Celine, CAVANAGH David, CHAN Un Ieng, CHUE HONG Neil, CONNOR Andrew, CONVERY Alan, COOMBES Sam, COOPER Sarah, CRUZ Juan, CUNNINGHAM-BURLEY Sarah, DA COSTA Lucy, DANBOLT Jo, EVENSEN Darrick, DESLER Anne, DRITSAS Lawrence, DUNCAN-KARRIM Leah, DUNLOP James, ELLIS Heather, EUSA VP Activities, EUSA VP Community, EUSA VP Education, EVANS Mark, EWING Suzanne, FERNANDEZ-GOTZ Manuel, FISHER Bob, FRENCH Chris, FRIEDRICH Daniel, GORDON Iain, GRANT Liz, GRAY David, GRAY Gillian, GRUMETT David, HALLIDAY Karen, HAMILTON Lorna, HARMON Colm. HARRISON Tina, HAY David, HENDERSON Sarah, HEYCOCK Caroline, HIGHTON Melissa, HILLSTON Jan, HOLLOWAY Aisha, HOPGOOD James, JARRETT Jenny, JENKINS Kirsten, KELLEY Simon, KIRSTEIN Linda, LAMONT-BLACK Simone, MACIOCIA Antony, MACKAY Fiona, MACPHERSON Sarah E, MARTIN Craig, MATTHEWS Keith, MCCAFFERY Sara, MCKIE Linda, MENZIES John, MORLEY Steven, MORRISON Tara, MULHOLLAND Neil, NAVARRO Pau, NGOBENI Ayanda, NICOL Robbie, NORRIS Paul, OOSTERHOFF Richard, ORR Mike, O'TOOLE Michelle, PHILLIPS Claire, REYNOLDS Rebecca, REYNOLDS-WRIGHT John, RICE Ken, RILEY Simon, ROBBINS Jeremy, ROLLE Sabine, SCHWANNAUER Matthias, SCHWARZ Tobias, SHIELDS Kirsteen, SMITH Sarah, SNELLGROVE Lucas, SORACE Antonella, TAYLOR Emily, TAYLOR Paul, THOMAS Robert, TREW Arthur, TURNER Jon, TUZI Nadia, VELLODI Kamini, WAHI-SINGH Bhanu, WARRINGTON Stephen

In Attendance: LINGSTADT Kirsty, MACGREGOR Sue

Apologies: ALIOTTA, Marialuisa, ANDREWS Richard, BOMBERG Elizabeth, BOSWELL Christina, CHAPMAN Karen, COLLINS Kevin, COX Chris, DU PLESSIS Paul, EUSA President EUSA VP Welfare, FAWNS Tim, FFRENCH-CONSTANT Charles, HAYCOCK-STUART Elaine, HILLSTON Jane, JIWAJI Zoeb, KENWAY Richard, MIELL Dorothy, MARTIN Catherine, MCARA Lesley, MCKIE Linda, MCMAHON Sean, MORAN Nikki, MOLE Damian, O BRAADAIGH Conchur, PATON, Diane, SECKL Jonathan, SHIPSTON Michael, SIMM Geoff, TERRY Jonathan, TUDHOPE Sandy, TURNER Neil, UPTON Jeremy

3. Senate members' feedback on presentation and discussion topic

Comments were received from two Senate members (both Wardens in halls of residence), highlighting issues faced by students self-isolating in halls. New students in particular are liable to feel very isolated if they have not had opportunities to develop a social group. Students who are self-isolating are also using halls as a learning and teaching environment, and this may have a negative impact on their studies. If restrictions are likely to be long term, it may be necessary to review policies in order to ameliorate problems, such as reviewing how students are allocated to flats (and therefore to potential social groups).

The Convener noted that it is recognised that the definition of a household being used in public health management does not fit the situation of students in halls of residence, and the University is raising this with public health authorities, to try to develop effective definitions of households.

The Senate members, and their fellow Wardens, were thanked for the vital work they are doing in supporting students. The Senate members were invited to follow up with the Vice-Principal Students so that their comments can be fed into the ART: Students work.

4. Report from E-Senate (S 20/21 1 A)

To approve the minute of E-Senate held from 15 September 2020 to 23 September 2020

The Convener noted that comments were received in response to the papers below:

- eS 20/21 1 B – ELIR Reflective Analysis, presented for approval
- eS 20/21 1 C – Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council on Institution-led Review and Enhancement Activity, presented to Senate for noting
- eS 20/21 1 F – Draft Resolution, Removal of members of the University Court, presented to Senate for comment
- eS 20/21 1 G – Rector Election dates, presented to Senate for comment.

Papers C, F and G were for noting or comment: the comments have been passed to the paper authors for consideration.

Paper B, the ELIR Reflective Analysis, was presented to Senate for approval. Objections were received from one Senate member. For E-Senate, a nil response is considered approval, and unanimity is not required, and therefore the paper was deemed approved, but the objection has been noted in the minutes.

The Convener invited Senate to approve the minutes.

Dr Michael Barany objected to the approval of the minutes, on the basis that it was inappropriate for paper eS 20/21 1 B (ELIR Reflective Analysis) to be approved by E-Senate when an objection from a Senate member had been received. Dr Barany suggested that given the length and timing of the E-Senate paper eS 20/21 1 B and the scope and seriousness of concerns raised in the E-Senate process, the Convener action to deem the paper approved on the basis of nil responses was inappropriate and the paper, concerns, and responses to concerns merited further consideration by the Senate. Dr Barany noted that he had received a response to his comments from the author of the paper, but felt this did not take on board the seriousness of the objections raised. Dr Barany further noted that he had provided detailed comments on the paper in writing. His initial comments on paper eS 20/21 1 B were made available to all Senate members at the time via the Senate website, as per the process for comments received on E-Senate papers. He noted that his subsequent written discussion of the comments with the paper author have not been shared with Senate.

Professor Tina Harrison, as the author of the paper, was invited to respond. Professor Harrison set out the context of the development and approval of the ELIR Reflective Analysis prior to its presentation to Senate, including approval by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee, review by the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland Director assigned to the University of Edinburgh, and review by a senior external assessor from another Scottish university. The document development process has taken around a year, and there have been multiple opportunities for staff to comment on drafts of the document during that process. The request to Senate for approval of the document noted that additional editorial work was still to be done, and Professor Harrison stated that many of the comments made by Dr Barany will be taken on board during that editorial process.

The Convener invited Senate members to make any further comments. Three comments suggested that Dr Barany could be involved in further work on the document. Several Senate members noted that that document has been through multiple stages of approval, including by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee, and has been open for extensive consultation during development. It was noted that the Dr Barany could liaise with the paper author on editorial amendments to the document. The author of the report did not consider that more substantial, non-editorial amendments were required.

The Convener noted that unanimity is not required for Senate to give its approval, although members can require that their dissent from a decision is recorded.

The Convener asked Senate members to vote on whether they supported the objection to approving the E-Senate minutes. Members were asked to use the 'raise your hand' function to indicate that they supported the objection. Three Senate members indicated that they supported the objection, with one abstention. Ninety-nine Senate members were in attendance. The objection was therefore not supported by a majority, and the E-Senate minutes were approved.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

5. **Edinburgh University Students' Association Priorities for 2020-21 (S 20/21 1 B)**
To note

Senate noted and welcomed the VP Education's priorities. These priorities have also been reported to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee and Senate Education Committee, and those committees are discussing how they can support the Students' Associations' objectives.

6. **Honorary Degrees Committee report (S 20/21 1 C (CLOSED))**
To approve

The recommendations were approved.

7. **Senate Effectiveness Review 2019/20 (S 20/21 1 D)**
To note and comment

Senate supported the recommendations in the report.

Some comments were received on the low engagement of members with the review questionnaire, and alternative ways of engaging staff, such as focus groups, were suggested.

8. **Senate Standing Orders – minor updates (S 20/21 1 E)**
To approve

The updates to the Standing Order were approved.

- 9. Senate Exception Committee Remit and Membership (s 20/21 1 F)**
To approve

The updated remit and committee membership were approved. New members of the Exception Committee, and those who volunteered, were thanked for their involvement.

- 10. Senate Elections 2020/21 – provisional dates (s 20/21 1 G)**
To note and comment

Senate noted the paper. No comments were received.

- 11. Senate Standing Committees – upcoming business (s 20/21 1 H)**
To note and comment

Senate noted the paper. One comment suggested this was a useful addition to the agenda.

ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL OR NOTING

- 12. Student Partnership Agreement update (s 20/21 1 I)**
To note

Senate noted the update.

- 13. Research Policy Group update (s 20/21 1 J)**
To note

Senate noted the update.

- 14. Senate Committee Effectiveness Review – Questionnaire Initial Analysis (s 20/21 1 K)**
To note

Senate noted the paper.

- 15. Senate Exception Committee report (s 20/21 1 L (CLOSED))**
To note

Senate noted the report.