

Report from the meeting of Senate held on 9th June 2021

1. Principal and Vice Chancellor's and Executive Board Report

Senate received a report from the Principal and Vice Chancellor and Executive Board to update members on substantive items considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of Senate.

The Principal informed Senate that she had spoken with Mr Jamie Hepburn, the recently appointed Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training.

Senate expressed congratulations to the GCU Foundation which had won a CASE (Council for Advancement and support of Education) Circle of Excellence Grand Gold Award for the MINT (Mentoring, Internships, Networking and Talks) Programme. The University had received the highest award possible from almost 3000 entries from 530 institutions.

2. Response to Covid 19

The Chief Operating Officer reported that guidance from the Scottish Government was awaited but there was a clear aspiration to provide a positive student experience. The student testing facility on campus would be closing shortly and would be replaced with the provision of self-testing kits for staff and students. The public symptomatic testing centre would be closing in mid-august, and the Arc would consequently be available for University use for the new academic year. An announcement was expected shortly regarding the vaccination of overseas students, and the University had forwarded information to home students about the vaccination registration programme for those aged 18-29.

It was noted that some members of staff had concerns about returning to Campus, and the COO advised that the collaborative working between the University and the Trade Unions via the Health Safety and Wellbeing Committee had ensured a safe environment for both staff and students. For staff who had already returned to campus, there had been ongoing dialogue between individual staff members and senior managers in order to understand and address concerns, and this had been very well received by staff. It was suggested that informal reorientation for staff, with the ability to come onto campus prior to starting work would help allay any concerns, and it was agreed to explore this, together the provision of an external social space. Arrangements to support the return to campus for London staff would also be made.

It was noted that the pilot to enable students arriving from overseas to quarantine in university accommodation rather than in government appointed hotels, had not produced the results expected, and there were no plans by the government to roll this out.

3. Tackling Racism at GCU – Recommendations and Action Plan

Senate received the Tackling Racism at GCU Recommendations and Action Plan that outlined the steps taken by the University to tackle racism, and detailed the findings, work to date and recommendations of the Tackling Racism at GCU Working Group. Dr Tuleen Boutaleb, the Chair of the Working Group reported that Executive Board had developed an action plan based on the recommendations, with each action being owned by a member of the Executive.

Senate discussed issues relating to the decolonisation of the curriculum and cultural shift and how the latter could be measured and evaluated. The need for both qualitative and quantitative data was noted, as was the need to involve the University's research centres. The position of students on placement or work experience was highlighted, and it was acknowledged that this

element of the student experience was not reflected in the literature around racism in HE and Dr Boutaleb advised that this would be considered by the Working Group. The experience of those who were white, but not white Scottish or British, and as such had also experienced discriminatory behaviour was noted, and Senate was informed that the use of the term BAME was being reviewed to ensure a fully inclusive approach.

4. Ethnicity in the Student Population 2020/21

One of the recommendations for tackling racism agreed by the University was to Ensure BAME student and staff data are part of regular, mainstream University reports, and Senate considered a report that provided the current overview of GCU data for home and RUK undergraduate students, with comparisons provided to Scottish sector data where available. Within the BAME classification, there was a variation between different ethnicities in relation to successful applications, retention, attainment and graduate outcomes. This data would be considered by Schools to determine appropriate courses of action. Whilst not yet available, this analysis of student data would be extended to post graduate students and in relation to gender also.

5. IHRA Definition

Senate discussed a request received by the University to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism. While it was considered that the University's existing policies were sufficiently robust to prevent anti-Semitism, and to deal with it were it to arise, all HEIs were being asked to address the request, and many had already signed the declaration, particularly in England. Scottish HEIs had either signed already or were giving the matter active consideration. Given the direction of travel in the sector and in wider society, consideration of the request was therefore required by the University. In discussion, it was noted that, while the definition itself was unproblematic, concerns had been raised in the sector about an example accompanying the definition. A Senate member advised that the UCU shared these concerns, but he was supportive of the idea of signing the declaration subject to a caveat of the type outlined in the discussion paper. A caveat had accompanied the adoption of the definition elsewhere. After further debate it was agreed that this approach should be commended to Court. The caveat adopted by the University of Sunderland was thought to be appropriate, although some members suggested making explicit the distinction between Judaism and the State of Israel.

The report considered by Senate, which contains the IHRA definition and the caveat (as developed by the University of Sunderland), is attached for Court's consideration and decision.

6. HESA Performance Indicators

Senate noted a report highlighting the strong performance the University had in the 2021 HESA Performance Indicators, especially within the context of the Scottish sector. Key highlights included:-

- In 2019-20 GCU had a proportion of 96.3% young first degree entrants from a state school or College, well ahead of both our benchmark (91.2%) and the Scottish sector average (86.8%);
- Strong performance in the projected degree completion PI has been maintained and at 80.6%, was the highest projected degree completion in terms of Scottish modern universities, ahead of many universities and the Scottish sector as a whole (79.7%);
- The PI for 'Neither award nor transfer' was 8.3%, with GCU performing ahead of the Scottish sector (10.2%) and achieving the lowest drop-out rate in terms of Scottish modern universities; and
- GCU has the lowest percentage of non-continuation after first year of study across all entrants compared to the Scottish modern universities.

5. Reports from Standing Committees

Senate noted reports from the following standing committees: -

- Academic Policy and Practice Committee 17th March and 5th May 2021
- University Research Committee 24th March and 2nd May 2021
- International Committee held on 12th April 2021
- The School of Computing Engineering and the Built Environment held 23rd February
- The School of Health and Life Sciences held on 14th April

6. Banded Grading

Professor Andre Nelson, Chair of the Banded Grading Working Group presented a report highlighting the work of the Working Group and outlining a proposal to pilot the Banded Grading Framework across 4 undergraduate levels and types of assessment: MCQ, short-answer exam questions, essay, presentation, dissertation, and practical assessment. Senate noted the updated and that Director of Academic Development and Student Learning was taking over as chair of the Banded Grading Working Group.

7. Academic Calendar

A query was raised about the timing of the September University holiday, which coincided with the beginning of term. It was noted that this had been discussed before, as concerns had been raised about its impact on timetabling, but it was agreed to reconsider this for the 22/23 academic year.

8. Research Degrees Committee

Senate approved the award of 19 PhDs, 1 PhD by previous publication and 1 DBA.

9. Criminal Convictions Policy

Senate approved the updated Criminal Convictions Policy subject to minor clarifications raised at the meeting.

10. Other Matters Approved/Noted/Received for Information.

- Honorary Appointments.
- Recent academic staff appointments.
- Research Bulletin for Trimester B 2020/21
- The summary report from the meeting of University Court held on 22nd April 2021
- Notification of Head of Academic Department membership of Senate for 2021/22