

Report from the meeting of Senate held on 19th October 2020

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 Chair gave a brief update in relation to covid-19 and reported that the Scottish Government guidance to universities remained unchanged, and it supported the continuation of blended learning with a mix of online and face-to-face teaching where it was necessary, and safe and appropriate to do so. It was highlighted that the University was taking a cautious approach, with a very small number of students (around 10%) with on-campus classes. In discussion it was noted that the University should expect to continue with online delivery for some months to come. Thanks were expressed to the Students' Association, Student Services, Security and all others involved in supporting students who were self-isolating. The work of the Director of Estates and the Estates team in relation to the work undertaken on campus was also commended. The Principal acknowledged the partnership approach taken by the trade unions and the University in supporting a safe return to campus, and the work undertaken by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

Senate was informed that the SFC review of FE/HE had incurred further delays and it was anticipated that it would not take place until after the elections in May 2021

2. Response to Covid 19

Further to the update provided by the Principal, the Chief Operating Officer gave a verbal update on the University's approach to supporting a safe return to campus. It was confirmed that there was no plan at present to increase the number of students on campus, and that work was underway to minimise the risk of a spike in cases when students return to campus in January following the Christmas break. The relatively small number of cases of Covid-19 in Caledonian Court had been well managed and supported, and the University had received very positive feedback from students and parents. There were daily meetings to monitor cases, and public health officials had an open invitation to attend these. Two formal meetings had been held with public health, which was happy with the University's approach and had made no recommendations for action

3. Evaluation Strategy for Going Digital: Progress Update

At its June meeting, Senate approved the Going Digital Framework and endorsed the need to ensure a robust evaluation of the move to online delivery and the enhanced use of technology to support the learning and teaching experience at GCU. Accordingly, Senate received a paper that outlined the draft evaluation framework and timeline. Monitoring the implementation of the 'Going Digital' framework will allow an evaluation of its efficacy and provide evidence that will inform future decision making. It was anticipated that a comprehensive evaluation will not only identify, best practice, challenges and solutions but will also take account of sector developments in considering the possible implications of any findings. Future Learning and Teaching design and delivery will be informed by the findings. The evaluation measures the impact of activity in each of the three Enabling Pillars of the Going Digital Framework: Guidelines on quality and standards for digital learning; Key Tools to Support Digital Learning; and Building Digital Learning Capabilities, aligned to the 12 Pedagogic Principles.

One key element of the evaluation, was a Student Experience study planned for delivery mid Trimester A to get feedback from students on initial student experience, and feedback would also be sought from staff on their experience of preparation and delivery of online learning.

Senate endorsed the Going Digital Evaluation Strategy

4. Annual report on institution-led review of quality and governing body statement of assurance for AY 2019/20

Senate noted the Annual Report on Institution-led Review of Quality and the Governing Body Statement of Assurance that form part of the University's reporting arrangements to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The Governing Body Statement of Assurance was approved by Court at its meeting on 9th September 2020.

5. National Student Survey 2020

Senate received an overview of the National Student Survey (NSS) 2020 results, outlining a high-level summary of the University's performance at institution, sector, School, programme and subject level, and an overview of activity that supported the improved position and ongoing developments to enhance the student experience in the coming year.

Key outcomes of the NSS 2020 were:

- The University's response rate was 67%, compared to 73% last year.
- GCU achieved an overall satisfaction score of 85%, a +4% improvement on last year, placing GCU on a par with the Scottish sector rate and exceeding the UK by +2%.
- Overall satisfaction improved in all Schools: GSBS 92% (+4%); SHLS 85% (+2%); SCEBE 82% (+10%).
- GCU scores across all themes improved, most significantly for Overall Satisfaction, Organisation and Management, Student Voice (all +4%) and Assessment and Feedback (+3%).
- GCU ranked 2nd in Scotland for Q.10 Feedback on my work has been timely and Q.22 I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.
- A total of 29 programmes (out of 63 publishable programmes) achieved 90% or more overall satisfaction. A total of 13 programmes performed below 80% for overall satisfaction (9 in SCEBE, 2 in SHLS and 2 in GSBS), compared to 21 in 2019.
- At subject level, the University performed very strongly in a number of areas with a total of 19 subjects achieving 90% or more overall satisfaction, compared to 13 subjects in 2019. Of these, eight subjects are positioned 1st in Scotland for overall satisfaction, compared to six in 2019.
- In 2020 there were 44 'unpublished' programmes. Whilst these programmes do not count towards the School overall outcomes, they contribute to the overall GCU published NSS results. Overall satisfaction of this group of programmes was 75%, which has caused a negative impact on our overall results.
- As in previous years, we received marginally more positive than negative 'open comments' in the 2020 NSS, with 1126 positive and 1021 negative comments received. Open comments have been shared with Schools to support their local level reviews of performance in the NSS.

A number of factors were considered to have contributed towards the improved performance including

- A strong, consistent University strategic focus on enhancing the student experience and in understanding issues experienced by students and staff.
- Consistent collaborative planning focused on targeted actions for aspects of programmes that are underperforming rather than just providing broad brush generic plans that are carried over from year to year.

- Local accountability and responsibility at all levels, and the introduction of academic department planning as part of the University's strategic planning process.
- Academic leadership in schools and departments.
- The close and effective partnership between the University and the Students' Association to ensure all action plans are created in partnership and reflect student feedback.
- Quick identification of any issues and their resolution as they occur.

Senate commended the work of all involved in achieving the improved results. It was noted that further developmental work was required in some areas and that priorities for action had been identified.

6. Research Integrity Annual Statement and Report

Senate endorsed the annual statement on Research Integrity, which provided

- a summary of actions and activities that had been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues;
- assurances that the processes in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation; and
- a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that had been undertaken and outlining any lessons learned from the process.

The final version of the statement will be published on the University's Research Integrity webpage.

7. Reports from Standing Committees

In a departure from past standard practice whereby the confirmed minutes of Senate's standing committees and school boards were submitted to Senate as Part C items for "information only", in line with the requirements of Senate's newly approved Standing Orders for session 2020/21 onwards, Senate considered reports from the following standing committees: -

- Academic Policy and Practice Committee 16th September 2020
- University Research Committee 2nd September 2020

This new approach will ensure that Senate receives relevant and timely information about standing committee and school board activity.

8. Graduate Outcomes 2017-18

Senate noted a high level summary of the 2017/18 Graduate Cohort Outcomes report for the Scottish sector by activity; Standard Occupational Classification; salary bands and graduate reflections. Graduate Outcomes replaced the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE), surveying graduates who completed a higher education course in the UK after August 2017. The report highlighted that GCU had 91% of graduates in employment and/or further study, above the Scottish rate of 89%, and a total of 77% of GCU graduates who are in employment were in the highly skilled occupations.

9. Minor Procedural Amendments to the, 'Terms of Reference and Standard Operations of Progression and Award Boards and Associated Groups.'

Senate approved some minor procedural amendments to the Terms of Reference and Standard Operations of Progression and Award Boards and Associated Groups, to ensure that all progression and award boards and associated activity would be paperless from 2020/21 onwards.

10. MITs: 2020-21

Further to recent discussions and amendments to the Mitigating Circumstances Policy (Mits), Senate approved the following changes to the current Mits policy:-

- a) The requirement to provide evidence to be suspended for 2020/21 Trimester A, to be reviewed in January 2021 with respect to Trimester B, and again in May with respect to Trimester C;
- b) In place of evidence, students are asked to provide a declaration that their circumstances meet the criteria of being 'exceptional, serious, acute and unforeseen';
- c) Only situations where a student has been directly impacted by COVID-19 (ill health, unforeseen caring responsibilities etc.) will be considered as a legitimate ground for MITS; and
- d) The MITS web pages will be reviewed and updated – ensuring clarity in guidance in terms of what is and is not considered legitimate, including examples. Details of other support mechanisms will be highlighted, particularly in relation to any long term condition that may have an impact throughout their studies.

11. Updated Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, named GCU, alongside all post-16 further and higher education providers, as Corporate Parents to looked after children and care-experienced young people in Scotland. Under the Act, GCU is required to fulfil six named duties. In order to do this, the Corporate Parenting Strategy has an Action Plan, which has been updated with the University's current and evolving provision as well as any associated actions. Senate approved the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan and noted that it will be published online and reported on, in due course, in compliance with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

12. Approval of Chair's Action

Senate homologated the following Senate Chair's Actions

- a) the appointment of Professor Bruce Wood (SCEBE) as an academic staff member on the Senate Disciplinary Committee for the period 1st August 2020 to 31st July 2023; and
- b) the amendment to the Academic Calendar for Session 2020/21 to include an extended period of pre-teaching induction commencing 21st September 2020

13. Revised Senate Schedule of Meetings 2020/21

As a result of the anticipated continuation of no meeting Friday, Senate agreed to reschedule the remaining Senate meetings of the 2020/21 Academic year as follows:-

Friday 4th December moved to Wednesday 2nd December 2020

Friday 26th February moved to Wednesday 24th February 2021

Friday 4th June moved to Wednesday 9th June 2021

Meetings will continue to be held from 9.30am to 11.30am and will be held virtually until further notice. Updated meeting invitations will be sent to all attendees

14. Other Matters Approved

- The award of 12 PhDs, 3 Prof Ds, 1 DBA and 3 PhD by previous publication.

- The updated membership of the Senate Disciplinary Committee to include new student officers
- Senate is requested to approved revised Schedule of meetings for 20/21

15. Other Matters Noted/Received for Information.

- Senate Programme of Work 2020/21
- Honorary Appointments.
- Recent academic staff appointments.
- The membership of Senate for 2020/21 updated to included newly elected Head of Department and Student Association members.
- The confirmed minutes of APPC held on 6th May 2020.
- The confirmed minutes of the Research Committees held on 13th May 2020.
- The confirmed minute of the meetings of the International Committee held on 30 January 2020
- The summary report from the meeting of University Court held on 25th June and 9th September 2020.
- Research Bulletin for Tri C.
- The Guide to Student Representation at GCU.
- APPC Composition and Terms of Reference 2020/21
- URC Composition and Terms of Reference 2020/21

Date of the next scheduled meeting of Senate is Wednesday 2nd December 2020