

Heriot--Watt University

THE SENATE

Minutes: 06 February 2025

In the Chair:	Professor Richard A Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor	
Present:	<p>Dr Nasir Al Lagtah Professor Mushtak Al-Atabi Dr Yousef Al-Guamei Dr David Cavallaro * Dr Hassam Chaudhry Dr Florence Chiao Mei Choong Professor Malcolm Chrisp Dr Demitrios Cotsovos Dr Ross Curran Professor Paul Dalgarno Dr Louise Delicato Dr Christopher Dodd Professor Jo Drugan Dr Taha Elhag Dr David Ellis * Mr Cameron Fields Professor Igor Guz Dr April Henning Professor Annie Hill Dr Timothy Johnson Dr Barbara Keating Mr Karamjeet Singh Dr Britta Kalkreuter Dr Craig Kennedy Professor Reza Kouhy Dr Suzanne Lampert Ms Jasmine Low Dr Alex MacLaren * Dr Bill MacPherson Ms Holly McAdams Dr Alistair McConnell Dr Richard McCracken * Professor Martin McCoustra Dr Ruairaidh Mcintosh</p>	<p>Dr Yvonne McLaren-Hankin Professor Steve McLaughlin * Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer Dr Thomas Methven Professor Basheer Muhammed Professor Gillian Murray Dr Katie Myhill Dr Noor Zainab Habib Dr Hendrik Nahler Dr Shereen Nassar Mr Adrian Nathai Professor Mehdi Nazarinia Dr Yasemin Nielsen Dr Stefano Padiila Ms Rachel Poole Professor Joanne Porter Dr Marta Romeo Professor Christian Saemann Dr Mohammed Saleh * Ms Devanshi Sharma Dr Florian Sheuring Ms Rhidima Shivkumar Dr Ryad Soobhany Dr Kathr in Stark Dr Katerina Strani Dr Nazia Talat Dr Hai Chen Tan Dr Monica Tamariz Ms Pearlyn Tee Dr Marta Vallejo Professor Fiona Waldron Dr Robin Westacott Dr Tze Chuen Yap</p>
* denotes partial attendance		
In attendance:	<p>Professor Duncan Hand Ms Samantha Kane Dr Maggie King Ms Ruth Moir</p>	<p>Mr Alan Smith [M25/8] Professor Gillian Thomson [M25/7] Ms Megan Morgan (Clerk)</p>
Apologies:	<p>Mr Mohamed Al Musleh Dr Fiona Armstrong Professor Lehel Banjai Dr Anne Bernassau Professor Martha Caddell Ms Sue Collier Dr Neamat El Gayar Professor Anna Fenge Ms Jun Fujiwara Dr Yun li Go Dr Noor Zainab Habib Dr Daniel Hale Ms Angela Justin</p>	<p>Mr Andrew Lee Professor Sara Lombardo Professor Angus Laing Ms Holly McAdams Professor Dame Heather McGregor Mr Lee Miles Mr Fraser Muir Dr Shameel Muhammed Ms Kirsty Scanlan Dr Harpreet Seth Ms Ridhima Shivkumar Ms Andrea Sneddon Ms Pearlyn Tee Dr Humphrey Yiu</p>
Unnotified absence:	<p>Dr Erkal Ersoy Dr Adnan Ilyas Dr Ramon Inglada Dr Jia Lu</p>	<p>Dr M Shadi Mohamed Mr Nader Shouly Dr George Vasdravellis Dr Euan Winton</p>

MINUTE REF		ACTION BY	ACTION DATE
M25/1	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES		
1.1	The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and noted the apologies as above.		
M25/2	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: 28 NOVEMBER 2024 (SE-25-1)		
2.1	The Senate received and approved the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2024.		
M25/3	MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION LOG (SE-25-2)		
3.1	The Senate received and noted the Action Log. It was agreed that completed actions would now be removed from the Log.		
3.2	The Chair confirmed the Joint Meeting with the Court was scheduled for 12 March 2025. Logistical details would follow; the theme would be Strategy 2035 development. The Senate noted the rescheduled October meeting to 20 October 2025, due to a conflict with the September Semester Consolidation Week.		
M25/4	REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL & VICE-CHANCELLOR (SE-25-3)		
4.1	The Senate received and noted the report which outlined the University's key strategic achievements and other developments in the Higher Education Sector.		
4.2	The Chair reported on the evolution of Strategy 2035, the thematic focus areas and the work of the Strategy Review Group. The sprint-based approach included Sprint 1 (Institutional Impact Statement) and Sprint 2 (Growth Directions), with outcomes approved by Court in December 2024. Sprint 3 was underway and focused on the Staff and Student Experience, Learning and Teaching, and Research and Knowledge Exchange, framed through the lens of Employability and Real-World Challenges. The joint meeting of the Court and Senate would assimilate the sprint outcomes to form a strong collective view on the ambition of the size and shape of the University. Senators were advised to engage with the Strategy 2035 Hub Resources .		
4.3	The Chair provided an update on key areas and highlighted:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The University's current financial position and associated cost control measures. b) Collective action required to improve UK student retention. c) A positive January 2025 student intake, with thanks to all involved. d) The internal student surveys conducted in December 2024 generated an average student satisfaction rating of 83.5% across all Schools and disciplines, albeit with variable response rates. e) The University had improved its sustainability rankings, rising 277 places to 211th globally in the QS Sustainability University Rankings 2025; ranked 6th in Scotland; and 107th in the UK in the People & Planet Rankings 2024-2025. f) Examples of excellence in research development demonstrated across the University. g) Progress made on the Shaping Futures Campaign. 		

- 4.4 Senators commented on entry requirements for English language and discussed the potential correlation with student retention. The Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life) outlined ongoing work to track language ability markers and student success. When available, data would be shared with disciplines.

M25/5 GLOBAL STUDENT UPDATE (SE-25-4)

- 5.1 The Senate received and noted the update from the Student Union President (UK).
- 5.2 The Student Union President (UK) reported preliminary findings from the Big 6 Student Union Annual Survey on student experience, conducted globally for the first time. The Senate noted that anonymous survey results indicated that some students felt disconnected from teaching staff. Strongest connections were with class groups. Students had expressed a desire for more connection with teaching staff and students in different year groups. A holistic, intersectional approach was recommended to address barriers and promote a sense of academic belonging.
- 5.3 In discussion, Senators raised the following points:
- a) There was a need to identify best practice and ensure consistency across programmes.
 - b) Strengthening student connections across year groups was essential.
 - c) Historical data was required to track engagement trends and inform future strategies.
 - d) Post-covid, student-staff connections had weakened; the reintroduction of institutional-wide personal tutor meetings was suggested as a potential solution.
 - e) Low attendance may impact student engagement; further analysis was required.
 - f) Academic staff were keen to support engagement but faced low event turnout; increased coordination with Student Union was required.
 - g) Strong student communities, such as within Chemical Engineering, provided useful models for engagement.
- 5.4 The Senate noted that a strategic and collaborative approach to student engagement was required. The Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life) noted that many of these issues were at the heart of recent initiatives. For example, Student Experience Officers and discipline teams would lead efforts to enhance student belonging. Enhanced reporting, at lower levels of granularity, from future Big 6 surveys would be beneficial.

M25/6 ORDINANCES & REGULATIONS COMMITTEE: REPORT OF MEETING ON 31 OCTOBER 2024 AND 27 JANUARY 2025 (SE-25-5)

- 6.1 The Senate received and considered the report presented by the Chair of the Ordinances and Regulations Committee (ORC).
- 6.2 The Senate endorsed to the Court the proposed modifications to Ordinance E1, which allowed students increased flexibility in paying fees, charges, fines, and debts. Senators welcomed the changes and noted that students would no longer face 'Canvas holds' during exam periods, which disrupted learning. Helpful liaison with the Finance office was noted.

6.3 The Senate endorsed to the Court the proposed modifications to Ordinances B2, B3, B10, C1 and L1 to ensure clarity and consistency in the appropriate to electoral ties.

6.4 The Senate approved Regulation A4 (Courses, Programmes and Assessment). Paragraph 214.1 was amended to remove the maximum credit limit for industrial placements, which allowed Schools increased flexibility to allocate 0-120 credits within an academic year.

M25/7 WIDENING ACCESS & SUPPORT: AMPLIFYING AND EMBEDDING STRATEGIC CHANGE (SE-25-6)

7.1 The Senate received and noted the update on initiatives aimed to widen access to higher education, presented by the Associate Principal (Access and Inclusion).

7.2 In discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) Alternative pathways for widening access should be explored, and collaborations with colleges should be strengthened to address gaps.
- b) Previous widening participation measures should be evaluated to identify successes and avoid ineffective approaches. A review of past initiatives would be conducted to refine future outreach approaches.
- c) Partnerships with targeted schools could be further strengthened.
- d) Senate commented that the impact of the loss of personal tutors in some areas had led to a sense of disconnect amongst students. The impact of this change would be assessed. Additional support mechanisms, including training for student advisors would be explored.
- e) The [Career Ready Programme](#) was commended, which provided disadvantaged Scottish students with paid internships and mentorship. Expanding mentorships within the programme was recommended.
- f) Staff training on access and inclusion and supporting widening participation students should be rolled out.
- g) Opportunities to strengthen talent pathways in AI, Robotics, Environmental and Marine Sciences would be explored.
- h) Current initiatives for experiential on-campus learning, including laboratory visits and workshops for prospective students should be expanded.

Prof Gillian Thomson Ongoing

Prof Gillian Thomson March 2025

All Ongoing

M25/8 GRADUATE OUTCOMES AND EMPLOYABILITY (SE-25-7)

8.1 The Senate received and noted the update, presented by the Head of Careers and Graduate Futures.

8.2 The Head of Careers and Graduate Futures provided an overview of Graduate Outcomes Surveys. The Senate noted the positive outcomes for the undergraduate cohort in the UK HESA Survey, the university ranked 1st in Scotland and 2nd in the UK, despite low response rates. The approach to providing a tailored career plan to the individual students' ambitions was welcomed.

8.3 In discussion, Senators considered the challenges of collecting data across different campuses; the importance of integration data collection; and the impact of small percentage changes on rankings. The ongoing plans to improve career readiness, the need to support international graduates facing employment

difficulties, and the importance of both internal and external surveys in achieving accolades were noted.

**M25/9 UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION:
REPORT OF MEETING ON 16 JANUARY 2025 (SE-25-8)**

9.1 The Senate received and noted the Researcher Concordat Annual Report without comment.

**M25/10 SENATE COMMITTEE FOR INTERIM BUSINESS &
EFFECTIVENESS: REPORT OF MEETING ON 22 JANUARY
2025 (SE-25-9)**

10.1 The Senate received noted the report without comment.

**M25/11 UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR LEARNING & TEACHING:
REPORT OF MEETING ON 15 JANUARY 2025 (SE-25-10)**

11.1 The Senate received and noted the report.

11.2 The Postgraduate Student Experience Review was highlighted as a valuable report with positive actions. A query was raised regarding the Learning and Teaching Strategy Transformation Report and operational mapping. The impact of continuous transformation, resources and workload implications was discussed.

11.3 Meeting to be held with Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life) to address the points that the individual Senator had raised.

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**M25/12 UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR QUALITY & STANDARDS:
REPORT OF MEETING ON 20 JANUARY 2025 (SE-25-11)**

12.1 The Senate noted the report.

12.2 A query was raised on the use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in assessments and the associated risk of academic misconduct. Senators discussed appropriate assessment design and noted that the Academic Integrity Group had provided relevant resources on [AI in Learning and Teaching](#). It was highlighted that Vivas remained crucial in maintaining academic integrity. AI was recognised as both a challenge and an opportunity, with the MaCS trial of the software *CodeRunner* identified as an effective tool in appropriate assessment design. Senators discussed the importance of adhering to academic procedures to ensure students met the required standards.

12.3 *Post-meeting note:* subsequent to the meeting, the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) and the Head of Academic Quality met with the Executive Dean, the Associate Executive Dean (Education and Student Life) and the Associate Executive Dean (Academic Quality) in the School of Social Sciences to discuss the academic integrity issues raised by a Senator during the meeting. It was agreed that the School's Associate Executive Dean (Education and Student Life) and Associate Executive Dean (Academic Quality) would undertake an internal investigation and thereafter discuss findings and actions with the Executive Dean. It was further agreed that any University-wide actions would be taken forward, following the discussion of findings and actions, by the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) and the Head of Academic Quality.

M25/13 SENATE FORWARD AGENDA (SEN-25-12)

13.1 The Senate noted the forward agenda without comment.

M25/14 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

14.1 Wednesday 12 March 2025 (Joint Meeting with the Court)
Wednesday 23 April 2025
Thursday 12 June 2025