



Minutes

Meeting of the Senate

Date: 11 December 2024

Present: The President & Vice-Chancellor in the Chair

Dr A Akram, Professor T Baldwin, Professor P Bath, Professor S Beck, Professor B Birdi, Professor R Blakeley, Professor A Blom, Dr J Burr, Professor M Carre, Professor H Christensen, A Clements, Dr C Codina, Dr T Cooper, Dr SJ Cooper-Knock, Professor J Cordiner, Professor L Cross, J Ekogiawe, Professor S Fitzmaurice, Professor J Flint, Professor G Gee, N Ghani, Dr L Gray, Dr S Hale, Dr V Halliday, Professor R Hand, Professor S Hartley, Professor P Hatton, Dr F Henshaw, Professor S Hincks, T Hodgson, Professor J Hodson, Professor G Jewell, Dr I Kersbergen, Professor R Kirkham, M J Lourido Moreno, Dr S Marsh, Professor M Marshall, Professor F Matthews, Professor M Mayfield, Professor F McLeay, Professor C Miller, Professor T Moore, Professor N Morley, Professor D Mowbray, Dr C Nic Dháibhéid, Dr S D North, Professor C Ó Brádaigh, Professor J Oakley, Dr R Orfitelli, Professor G Panoutsos, Dr L Preston, T Rocha Lawrence, Professor S Rushton, M Scannell, Professor M Strong, R Sykes, Professor M T Vincent, Dr N Walkinshaw, D Watson, Professor H Woolley.

Secretary: J Strachan

In attendance: E Allan, S Callan, K Clements, R Frith, A Priestley, K Sullivan, D Swinn, S Taylor.

Apologies: The Senate received apologies from 19 members.

Welcome

The President & Vice-Chancellor (P&VC) welcomed members to the meeting. There was one new member of Senate since the last meeting.

1. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

1.1 No conflicts were declared.

1.2 Pre-Submitted Questions

1.2.1 Four questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting, which would be covered under the relevant items.

- 1.2.2 One further question had been submitted after the deadline for pre-submitted questions; due to mitigating circumstances it had been agreed to respond to this question at the meeting under the relevant item.
- 1.2.3 There were several matters arising to respond to from the previous meeting; time had been allowed to provide updates on these at the end of the meeting.

2. President & Vice-Chancellor's Report to Senate

- 2.1 The President & Vice-Chancellor (P&VC) presented the report, which provided information on key current and forthcoming developments in the policy environment and against each of the themes in the University's Strategic Plan. Attention was drawn to the following updates and developments since the written report was prepared:
- 2.1.1 Reputation Campaign: The University had recently launched the latest phase of the ongoing reputation campaign to help improve awareness of the University amongst key stakeholders through a range of different but targeted communications. The campaign was designed to support wider work around bolstering the University position in key global rankings where reputation was an important component of the assessment and had been timed accordingly.
- 2.1.2 USIC: The University had recently renewed its partnership with Study Group, meaning international students would continue to study on preparation programmes at the International College. It was positive to note that a new contract had been negotiated and Members noted the length of the contractual period. The USIC partnership would continue to make a significant contribution to delivering institutional student population targets. A pre-submitted question relating to this update was noted as follows:
- a) A pre-submitted question from the Students' Union (SU) highlighted a recent BBC report that the cost of renewing the Study Group contract was £100m; the SU queried the quality of this service and why the University was outsourcing this work at such a high cost, particularly in the current financial climate, rather than delivering it in-house.
 - b) It was highlighted that the University, along with many other Russell Group universities, worked with private providers to deliver pre-University pathway programmes for international students. This was a common model across the sector and the University had worked with Study Group since 2015 and had benefited from a pipeline of international students progressing to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes following successful completion of their pathway programme. Study Group were specialists in teaching pre-University programmes and therefore provided international students with a strong platform for success on their substantive programmes. Study Group also had extensive sales and marketing teams across the world to build a pipeline of applicants, and this was not something the University could replicate on this scale.
 - c) It was factually incorrect to say that the contract with Study Group cost the University £100 million. The University did not pay USIC to teach the students on the pathway programmes: this was covered by the fees that Study Group directly charged the international students. In terms of the financial relationship, the University paid a commission to Study Group for the students if they progressed to the University. It was highlighted that it was in USIC's interest to prepare the students in the best way for

University programmes and University colleagues in schools and faculties worked very closely with USIC to monitor the performance of students and feed into curriculum design via an Academic Management Board. During further discussion, it was clarified that the University did not make any upfront payments to Study Group.

- 2.1.3 Senior Staffing: As reported by email, Professor Ashley Blom, Vice-President and Head of the Faculty of Health, would be leaving the University at the end of February next year to join the University of Manchester as Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health. Professor Blom had achieved a significant amount during his time at Sheffield, including the move to the new Faculty of Health structure in 2023 and overseeing a sharp upward trajectory in research across the three schools. He had also taken on a highly important ambassadorial role with CAR and the Forged in Sheffield, Shaping the Future campaign. Senate would receive an update on the Faculty's leadership arrangements in due course.

It was also reported that Steve Foxley, Chief Executive of the AMRC, would be leaving the University in the near future to take up the post of Chief Executive of the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult. Although this was also a loss for the University, the AMRC would be left in a positive position and, on behalf of Senate, the Chair congratulated Steve Foxley on his new role and offered thanks for his work and achievements with the AMRC. It was noted that the University had liaised with key regional and industry stakeholders on its plans for the future of the AMRC and its leadership, about which Senate would receive a further update in due course.

- 2.1.4 SCHARR: Senate was pleased to note that the University had received a letter from the Secretary of State for Health, recognising and thanking the School of Health and Related Research for its international reputation and its recent work to model options for prostate cancer screening. SCHARR had recently completed a first report on this issue, which considered a once in a lifetime antigen test. SCHARR had now been awarded the contract to extend this analysis and examine the case for population screening and a targeted option for men at higher risk.

Student Fee Cap: Since Senate last met, the government had announced an inflation-based increase in the undergraduate home fee cap to £9,535 for 2025/26. This came alongside a statement about the government's intentions for significant reform of the higher education sector and Bridget Phillipson, the Secretary of State for Education noted that further 'investment [could] come only with the promise of major reform'. This would mean change and the University was working with policymakers on their agenda, to inform the University's own planning as more detail was developed.

In response to a pre-submitted question about whether the increase in tuition fees would impact continuing students as well as new students (starting in the 2025/26 academic year), it was highlighted that in order for the University to charge the revised fee for continuing students a number of things needed to be in place. First, the government needed to lay the relevant statutory instrument, which was expected early in 2025. Second, all Universities would need to consider whether their standard terms and conditions (T&Cs) allowed for

them to inflate the fee for continuing students. The University regularly sought legal advice on its T&Cs and it was believed they did allow for this increase to be applied to continuing students. However, the University felt it was appropriate to await confirmation that the statutory instrument passed; if this did proceed, continuing students would be advised accordingly as soon as possible.

- 2.1.5 In response to a question about whether listening events on the Universities research agenda were still planned, it was clarified that the University was developing its plans for Listening Events to take place later in 2024/25.
- 2.1.6 In response to a query about whether Senate had been consulted on the recent announcement that the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC), currently situated in Student and Academic Services, would be moving into the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Summer 2025, and then joining the School of English ahead of the 2026/27 academic year, it was clarified that this was proposed as part of the new School structure, which Senate was consulted on in 2023 prior to formal approval by Council in 2024.

3. Matters Requiring Approval

- 3.1 Senate received and noted a summary of the matters for which Senate's formal approval was sought.

4. National Student Survey

- 4.1 Senate received and noted a presentation on the 2024 National Student Survey (NSS), which included an overview of key headlines, year on year trends, institutional rankings (Russell Group), performance against OfS benchmarks, results by school, continued areas of focus and key risks. It was highlighted that at institutional level, performance had improved for every question with the exception of one. The University ranked first in the Russell Group on aggregate performance, 1st in three themes and no lower than 4th. The University's areas of focus remained the same as the previous years; there continued to be variation across the schools and work would continue to ensure the University was delivering a consistent experience. During discussion, it was noted that the biggest risk for the University was complacency. It was positive to note that areas where there had been improvement were the areas the University had consistently been working to improve, but it was important to continue to support schools to focus on how local issues could be identified using the improved data and reporting capabilities, and how institutional tools and frameworks could help make the improvements.

5. Library Subscriptions

- 5.1 Senate received and noted a report, which summarised the rationale leading to changes to the Library's content budget and mitigations in place for the decision not to renew the University's deal with Elsevier from 2025. It was highlighted that this was part of a long term realignment of the publishing model and the University was not acting in isolation. UEB had agreed a strategic approach to reducing content spend over the next three years with a focus on a more sustainable and equitable model, replacing big deals with smaller targeted deals, individual subscriptions and increased working across consortia (including N8,

Research Libraries UK, Russell Group) to share resources e.g. through inter library loans. One of the immediate consequences of the approach agreed was that the University would not be extending its Elsevier 'big deal' beyond December 2024; during discussion, it was noted that this did not affect an author's ability to publish in Elsevier journals. It would still be possible to publish in any Elsevier journal and comply with the current REF open access policy. In response to a query, it was noted that the Library was working with faculties and schools to finalise mitigations, including where material appeared on reading lists. It was highlighted that colleagues could contact the librarian for their school with any questions and more information, including answers to frequently asked questions was available online.

REPORTS FROM STATUTORY BODIES

6. Report on the Proceedings of the Council

(Meetings held on 14 October and 6 November 2024)

6.1 Senate received and noted the Report on the Proceedings of the Council.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE

7. Report of the Senate Academic Assurance Committee

(Meeting held on 12 November 2024)

7.1 Senate received and noted the Report of the Senate Academic Assurance Committee (SAAC), noting that there were specific matters requiring approval. It was highlighted that at its last meeting SAAC had concentrated on the quality of the University's PGR programmes and the wider PGR experience/ SAACs conclusions were briefly summarised and it was noted that SAAC was assured that the University's PGR programmes were of high quality and met relevant regulatory requirements, evidenced by the OfS's metrics on continuation, completion and progression, where the University performed positively compared to peer institutions.

7.1.1 During discussion, it was highlighted that over the last 3 years the University had prioritised increasing PGR submission rates within the tuition fee paying period. SAAC found this work had been effective, with on-time submissions increasing, and on track to exceed the goal of a 20% increase by 2026/27. PGR supervision was generally high quality, but SAAC was not yet assured there was a shared understanding of when and how to identify and address supervision which fell below expectations and, relatedly, further work was needed to ensure all PGRs felt confident to raise concerns about supervisors. SAAC identified two main areas for improvement: the use of data to inform the University's PGR work and to improve the experience for PGRs with disabilities. The University's Disability Equality Strategy included actions focused on PGRs, and the PGR leadership team also had a plan to address concerns in the latest PGR Voice survey. SAAC welcomed this but emphasised the need to give the work the appropriate priority, with a clear statement of what satisfactory progress would look like by 2027. This was an area SAAC was likely to want to revisit in the future.

7.1.2 During discussion about mitigations for the risk that current financial pressures at the University and across the sector may impact on the training and development of PGRs, a

related question was raised about when and why teaching had been removed from PGR core competencies. It was clarified that, when the University looked at the framework for competencies, some PGRs did want teaching experience but many others were not focussed on an academic career. Senate was assured that the University continued to provide those opportunities for those that wanted them and was supporting those PGRs to get teaching scholarships

8. Report of the Senate Education Committee

(Meeting held on 6 November 2024)

- 8.1 Senate received the Senate Education Committee (SEC) report, noting that there were specific matters requiring approval. The following was noted:
- 8.2 Academic Misconduct Policy - Senate considered and approved the new policy on Academic Misconduct. It was highlighted that the SEC had agreed that the term “unfair means” would be superseded by “academic misconduct” and that the associated web pages, Student Hub and resources should be updated accordingly. It was also highlighted that the policy set out three levels of severity of offences and it clarified that for Poor Academic Practice (the lowest level of offence), there should be no penalty. The response to this should be a warning and appropriate support to raise their academic practice. Senate welcomed the policy.
 - 8.2.1 In response to a pre-submitted question about the processes in place for publicly disclosing a student’s academic misconduct, it was noted that decisions to publicly disclose student academic misconduct, e.g. in response to a reference request, or to professional bodies, would be where there had been severe academic misconduct. Such decisions would be taken by the faculty, with advice from central professional services, to ensure fair and consistent application of the policy.
 - 8.2.3 During discussion a number of queries and drafting suggestions were highlighted about how to feed into the policy review process and whether the range of penalties could be expanded on and developed to provide greater clarity. It was agreed to forward the suggestions and queries directly to the Vice President for Education and the Head of the Academic Programmes Office for consideration.
- 8.3 New and Significantly Amended Programmes – Senate considered the new, significantly amended, and closed programmes and title changes approved by Faculties between 1 September and 30 October 2024. It was highlighted that the proposals had been agreed with faculties and noted that SEC had referred two cases back to the faculties; these had been reviewed and amended and included in the report. The Chair of SEC thanked everyone who had been involved in this work. It was also highlighted that the University was looking at low recruiting programmes and working on programme simplification; this work was ongoing with faculties. It was anticipated that a proposal would be brought forward to withdraw modules under 20 credits; this reflected a direction of travel towards 20 and 40 credit modules and would bring the University into line with other Russell Group universities. Faculties would be consulted on this in the new year with a view to bringing a proposal back to Senate In due course.

- 8.3.1 There was significant discussion about the rationale behind the number of postgraduate taught (PGT) programme closures, which some members felt was high. There was a request for historical programme closure data for comparison with concerns raised about the decision making process, in particular how proposals were initiated, and whether there was a relationship between proposals about minimum viable cohorts and the proposal to remove modules under 20 credits. It was noted that programme closures and suspensions were driven by a variety of factors, including very low recruiting modules and duplication. On this occasion the level of proposed closures also reflected ongoing work to actively streamline the Universities programmes. It was highlighted that all programme closures had been considered at multiple levels of review, originating at school level, in collaboration with the Academic Programmes Office, and reviewed by the Faculty Education Committees before being recommended to SEC. It was highlighted that a proposal on Programme Simplification would be brought to the next Senate meeting, following consultation with the faculties, together with a full report on work around the portfolio, which was currently underway. **[Action by: MV]**
- 8.3.2 The value of historical programme closure data was debated. It was noted that for this to be useful it would need to be accompanied by a range of contextual data, including student population, and concern was raised that this would be onerous to provide. However, the concerns of some members about the process for initiating and reviewing programme closure proposals were noted.
- 8.3.3 In response to a concern raised that the option of study abroad year had been removed from some programmes, it was clarified that these changes recognised the University's institutional placement year model. Under the provisions of this model, all students had the opportunity to undertake an optional placement year as part of their programme of study where there was no existing placement provision within a programme.
- 8.3.4 Ultimately, Senate approved the new, significantly amended, and closed programmes and title changes approved by Faculties between 1 September and 30 October 2024.
- 8.5 Student Protection Plan - Senate approved the updated Student Protection Plan. In response to a query about the wording of section 3.4.2, which stated that the assessed risk of the qualification a student obtained being significantly different from that for which they enrolled as 'very low', it was agreed to review the wording of this section. This was in response to some members indicating that the wording implied that this outcome rarely or never happened. **[Action by: MV]**
- 8.5.1 In response to a pre-submitted question which highlighted a typographical error in the paper, it was noted that the report author had been informed.
- 8.6 General Regulations – Senate approved the recommended amendments to General Regulations XIV in 14(a), 15(a), 15(b) and 15(c) from 2025-26 (a tracked changes version was shared with Senate in the papers). It was noted that this was to facilitate an important enabling step to support schools. In order to build sustainable recruitment pipelines with quality overseas institutions, Global Engagement had proposed two new recruitment partnership models; the proposed amendments would allow discussions to proceed with partners currently precluded from these arrangements. It was highlighted that no

partnerships were yet in place and any changes to courses would be presented to Senate for approval in accordance with normal procedures.

9. Report of the Senate Research and Innovation Committee

(Meeting held on 30 October 2024)

- 9.1 Senate received and noted the Report of the Senate Research and Innovation Committee (SRIC) and approved SRIC's 2024-25 Terms of Reference (ToR) and Membership, which had been updated to align them with the ToRs for the new School Research and Innovation Committees and to ensure oversight of the trusted research agenda, the new University Research Centres of Excellence (replacing the Flagship Institutes) and four new reporting committees/boards. During discussion, an update was shared on Research England's ongoing work on the processes for REF 2029 and the University's own institutional level preparations. During discussion about participation on REF Panels and the level of work this had meant for colleagues involved in the past, colleagues were reassured that this was recognised and Heads of School would need to take this into account.

10. Report of the Senate University Research Ethics Committee

(Meeting held on 13 November 2024)

- 10.1 Senate received and noted the Report of the Senate University Research Ethics Committee (SUREC), noting that there were specific matters requiring approval. It was highlighted that the Committee had considered a report on the ethics applications processed across the University from September 2023 - August 2024 inclusive. The report formed part of the Committee's annual monitoring of the ethics review arrangements in place within schools/departments. The total number of ethics applications completed during this period had increased compared to the previous academic year, mainly due to a change in the way some schools managed the ethics requirements for PGT students. It was also highlighted that there had been an increase in the proportion of applications completed by UG/PGT students compared to staff and PGR students compared to the previous year. The Committee agreed that the report provided assurance that the Ethics Review Procedure was operating effectively, but it was highlighted that some schools had raised concerns relating to the interface between the ethics process and approval processes for other aspects of research. The Committee had raised the matter via the Director of Research, Partnerships & Innovation and a number of actions had been agreed. In response to a query about potential inconsistencies in actions arising from the Committee's consideration of potential breaches of the Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue, it was noted that the Committee was aware of the matter and was looking into this; it was also noted that a Sub-Group of the Committee was looking at all potential breaches.

OTHER MATTERS

11. Students' Union Annual Report: Complaints and Discipline 2023-24

- 11.1 Senate received and noted the report from the Sheffield Students' Union (SU), which provided Senate with an annual on cases dealt with under the SU's complaints and

discipline procedures in accordance with Education Act 1994. The report provided a summary of key issues, trends and areas for further action.

12. Report on Action Taken

- 12.1 Senate received the report and noted that the President & Vice-Chancellor, acting on behalf of the Senate and on the recommendation of the relevant Committees of Senate, had approved two Sir Henry Stephenson Endowment Trustee appointments and one Lay Member appointment to the Military Education Committee.

13. Major Research Grants and Contracts

- 13.1 A report listing major research grants and contracts awarded since the last meeting of the Senate was received and noted.
- 13.2 During discussion, the SU raised deep concern about one of the companies the University had entered a research contract with, highlighting allegations of greenwashing and this company's status as one of the world's largest producers of oil and emitters of CO₂. It was further noted that the UN was allegedly investigating the company in relation to climate change concerns. Colleagues acknowledge the concerns raised. Clarification was provided that the project in question was a decarbonisation project which aimed to help the company to better understand and reduce their CO₂ emissions.

14. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

(Meeting held on 9 October 2024)

- 14.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2024 were approved.

15. Matters Arising on the Minutes

- 15.1 Updates were provided on the matters arising on the minutes that were due and were not covered elsewhere on the agenda. The following updates were shared:
- 15.1.1 In response to actions relating to the Advance HE recommendations, specifically in respect of minutes 4.5.2, 5.7.1, 4.7.1 and 4.9, the following was noted:
- a) Feedback from Senate to Council: It was confirmed that the AdvanceHE Report along with the full draft minutes of the previous Senate meeting had been shared with Council, the definitions and hierarchy of governance documents and updates to the powers and delegations; Council had accepted the advice of Senate and approved those with immediate effect.
 - b) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on proposed changes to the membership of Senate: In respect of the proposed changes to the membership of Senate, Council established a small subgroup, comprising student, staff and lay members of Council. It was Chaired by the Chair of the Council EDI Committee with the University Secretary and Head of Governance in attendance.

Council tasked the Sub-Group with overseeing the development and scrutiny of EIAs for each of the options for changes to Senate's membership proposed by Advance HE. The four EIAs reviewed were on the new template launched by the University earlier in this calendar year.

Each EIA assessed potential positive and negative impacts of the proposed changes to Senate's membership across a range of diversity characteristics and identified actions to mitigate any potential negative impacts or to realise potential benefits. Each EIA also explained how the Governance Team would oversee any mitigating actions and also how future impacts would be monitored by the Senate Nominations Committee.

The Sub-Group had provided feedback on the EIAs, which was incorporated in the papers submitted to Council. Of the options proposed by Advance HE, three were assessed to result in no overall impact. The assessment of no overall impact took into account the relatively small reduction in total membership envisaged by those options, and also the fact that those proposals would result in potential negative and positive impacts, but where the negative impacts could be managed and offset by the positive impacts.

In sum, the Sub-Group concluded that the EIAs were comprehensive and provided a robust basis for assuring Council that the diversity dimensions to the proposed changes had been fully and appropriately considered. The option favoured was one of those assessed to result in no overall impact. Council fully considered the report from the Sub-Group and accepted the advice from Senate and approved option 2b. All four EIAs and the report from the Sub-Group considered at Council would be shared with members of Senate. **[Action By: JS]**

- c) It was previously agreed at Senate that the membership from the Advanced Manufacturing Group (AMG) would require further consideration. After discussions with different parties including the Vice-President and Head of the Advanced Manufacturing Group, it was agreed that in addition to the Vice-President, a head nominated by the VP AMG and an elected member from AMG would be an appropriate member on Senate from that area of the University. This was approved by Council.
- d) Council also approved that the changes in respect of Senate membership would take place with effect from academic year 2025-26. However, the 2 Heads of School who were currently not members of Senate in the membership of Senate would be included with immediate effect.
- e) In response to a question about any potential impact on the terms of appointment of current members, it was noted that this would be clarified in due course as Council's decision was implemented. **[Action by: JS]**

15.1.2 Minute 5.1 – As previously agreed a Task and Finish Group had been established to review the proposed semester dates covering 2028/2029 through to 2031/2032. It was noted that the membership of the Group had been agreed but unfortunately, due to diary availability, it had not been possible to convene a meeting before the present meeting of Senate. The

Group was now expected to meet in the new year with a view to reporting back to the March meeting.