



UNIVERSITY COURT

27 April 2020 (Videoconference)

Web Version

Minute

Members Present:	Anne Richards, Vice-Convener (in chair) Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor Doreen Davidson, General Council Assessor Jock Millican, General Council Assessor Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor Elizabeth Bomberg, Senate Assessor Sarah Cooper, Senate Assessor Claire Phillips, Senate Assessor Alexander Tudhope, Senate Assessor Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member Perdita Fraser, Co-opted Member Caroline Gardner, Co-opted Member Alan Johnston, Co-opted Member David Law, Co-opted Member Clare Reid, Co-opted Member Susan Rice, Co-opted Member Frank Ross, Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh Jo Craiglee, Non-Teaching Staff Assessor Andrew Wilson, President, Students' Association Oona Miller, Vice-President Welfare, Students' Association
Apologies:	Ann Henderson, Rector
In attendance:	Angi Lamb, Rector's Assessor Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance; and University Secretary
Presenters & Observers:	Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services Leigh Chalmers, Director of Legal Services Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary Student Experience Lee Hamill, Director of Finance Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students Gary Jebb, Director of Estates Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian to the University Theresa Merrick, Director of Communications & Marketing Dorothy Miell, Vice-Principal & Head of College Dave Robertson, Vice-Principal & Head of College Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal Tracey Slaven, Deputy Secretary Strategic Planning Janet Legrand, Senioir Lay Member-elect Ellen MacRae, President-elect, Students' Association Rachel Irwin, Vice-President-elect Activities & Services, Students' Association

1 Minute

Papers A1-2

The Vice-Convenor welcomed members and attendees to the meeting, held by videoconference. Andrew Wilson and Oona Miller, Students' Association President and Vice-President Welfare respectively, were thanked for their service to the student body and the University over the past year and wished well for the future. Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member-elect and Ellen MacRae and Rachel Irwin, Students' Association President-elect and Vice-President-elect Activities & Services respectively, were welcomed as observers to the meeting.

The Minute of the meeting and the note of the seminar held on 17 February 2020 were approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A3

There were no matters arising and the action log was reviewed, noting that actions allocated to the outgoing Director of Corporate Services will be re-allocated prior to the next meeting.

3 Principal's Report

Paper B

Court noted the contents of the report and additional information on the approach taken in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, prioritising health and safety considerations for students and staff. Future planning work is for 'adaptation and renewal' rather than 'recovery' given the need for new approaches as the virus and its impact persist. Similar to other research-intensive universities, research is not fully-funded and is supported by income from other activities, particularly from international student tuition fees and accommodation, catering and events. Reductions in these areas will therefore impact on research sustainability unless the model of research funding shifts to full funding and this is being articulated in sector discussions with research funders.

Preparations for hybrid online/in-person teaching next semester were discussed and the varying impact of remote working and studying on different groups, particularly staff and students with caring responsibilities who are more likely to be female.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Covid-19: Mitigation and Renewal – Prioritisation and Management

Paper C

The approach to co-ordination and governance of the institutional response to the Covid-19 outbreak was reviewed. The University's pandemic plan was refreshed following the emergence of the virus and a co-ordination team established alongside specialist academic contingency and admissions mitigations groups. The University moved to remote teaching and assessment from 23 March and transitioned from immediate contingency planning to a short-term operating model, now mostly complete. Work on the next phase, adaptation and renewal, is underway and is led

by a group convened by the Principal with supporting workstreams led by identified senior leaders. The following points were raised in discussion:

- integrating staff views into the workstreams – with Staff Experience Committee providing a forum which many workstream leaders attend, additional meetings with Trade Unions are taking place and the intention to host virtual ‘Town Hall’ meetings or other similar means of seeking staff views;
- assessing the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) impacts of the pandemic on students and staff and reporting findings to Court – the EDI Committee chaired by Sarah Cunningham-Burley will consider this and can report appropriately;
- procedures to enable rapid decision-making as required – all relevant committees will have processes for rapid decision-making incorporated into their terms of reference and workstream leads have delegated responsibilities in their areas; and,
- the regular email updates provided to Court members over this period were welcomed and it was requested that these continue.

5 Covid-19 Communications Reporting & Evaluation

Paper D

A report on the University’s media coverage and communications with external and internal audiences regarding the Covid-19 pandemic was considered. The importance of communicating with prospective students was noted, with a ‘see you soon’ video message receiving high levels of engagement. Future communications with prospective students could include messages from current students to help with student community building. Appropriate internal and external communication of the challenges facing the University was discussed and is being considered by the Director of Communications & Marketing in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team.

6 Finance

• Director of Finance’s Report

Paper E1

The Director of Finance provided an update on key financial matters in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, including the anticipated impact on the 2019/20 financial results, current cash reserves and liquidity and initial modelling of scenarios of significant income reductions in the 2020/21 year. It was noted that a deficit position in 2020/21 is a realistic assumption. Mitigating actions were discussed, including the deferral of a number of major estates projects planned for 2020/21 and a pause in staff recruitment aside from externally funded posts or those that are deemed ‘mission critical’. It was confirmed that estates projects delivering accessibility improvements are intended to proceed as planned and there is active consideration of accessing the UK Government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for some posts where remote working is not possible. Members supported access of the Job Retention Scheme where appropriate and the importance of early action to preserve cash more generally, discussed involving stakeholders in early discussions of future reprioritisation of estate projects, considering social distancing guidance when planning office space layouts and potential impacts on higher education pension schemes and the strength of employer covenants.

- **Covid-19 Short and Medium-term Funding Options**

Paper E2

Options to further strengthen cash reserves given the uncertain but likely significant detrimental financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic were reviewed.

7 Student Experience Update

Verbal

The Vice-Principal Students provided a verbal update on the University's move to remote teaching from 23 March and planning for the coming academic year. It is expected that a hybrid model of teaching will be developed for the next semester, blending online and in-person teaching with social distancing measures. Building an *esprit de corps* for all members of the student community, whether on campus or online will be a key component.

The Students' Association President thanked University staff for the collaborative approach taken in responding to the pandemic's impact on the student community and noted the continued importance of activity to improve the student experience, including in attracting prospective students. Members discussed seeking student input in redesigning courses for Semester 1 of the next academic year and recognising this with academic credits plus the likely flexibility for Schools to operate fully online or hybrid models of teaching next Semester. Hybrid models of teaching are expected to be offered next semester that are more closely matched to expectations set in student prospectuses than online-only provision.

8 EUSA President's Report

Paper F

The Students' Association President reported on recent developments including the serious financial impact anticipated from the Covid-19 pandemic on the Association given the cancellation of the Edinburgh Festivals and generally reduced commercial trading activities. Mitigating actions planned or underway include utilising the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and discussions with University staff are ongoing regarding future financial planning.

9 Gujarat Biotechnology University

Paper G

Court confirmed its continued support for the proposal and approved the next steps as set out in the paper.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

10 Outcome Agreement 2020/21

Paper H

A proposed single year Outcome Agreement for 2020/21 was approved and authority delegated to the Deputy Secretary Strategic Planning to refine the detail of the document prior to submission to the Scottish Funding Council.

11 Delegated Authority Schedule – Review & Update

Paper I

Proposed updates to the Delegated Authority Schedule were approved with immediate effect.

12 Awards of University Benefactor **Paper J**

On the recommendation of the Principal, Court approved the bestowal of the distinction of University Benefactor on the organisations set out in the paper.

13 Committee Reports

- **Exception Committee** **Paper K1**

The following matters approved on behalf of Court by Exception Committee were noted:

- Core IT Systems for HR & Finance Programme: additional costs were approved and authority was delegated to the Principal to approve use of a time contingency of circa two months if unavoidable; and,
- Vice-Principal (Interim) Corporate Services: the appointment of Dr Catherine Martin for a two year period effective from 4 May 2020 was endorsed.

- **Policy & Resources Committee** **Paper K2**

Key points from the report were noted and it was agreed to approve:

- the Edinburgh University Students' Association core grant at £3,044,000 for each of years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23;
- the Edinburgh University Sports Union core grant at £678,000 for each of years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23; and,
- the extension of the lease at Argyle House for an additional 7 years to May 2033 subject to the conditions set out in the paper.

- **Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) Sub-Group** **Paper K3**

The report was noted.

- **Core IT Systems for HR & Finance Sub-Group** **Paper K4**

The report was noted.

- **Audit & Risk Committee** **Paper K5**

The report was noted and a verbal update noted on the approval by the Committee of an appointment to the Head of Internal Audit.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee** **Paper K6**

The report was noted.

14 Donations and Legacies; Global Alumni Events **Paper L**

Donations and legacies received were noted along with information regarding the postponement of planned global alumni events given the Covid-19 outbreak.

15 Resolutions

Paper M

The following draft resolutions were referred to the General Council and to Senate for observations:

Draft Resolution No. 9/2020: Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations

Draft Resolution No. 10/2020: Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations

16 Any Other Business

The Principal and all attendees, presenters and observers aside from the University Secretary left the meeting.

Noting that the deputising arrangements in the absence of the Principal were last reviewed and updated in 2014 and were mainly envisaged for periods when the Principal was temporarily absent from the University overseas, it was agreed to review the deputising arrangements, including to take account of more potentially serious and prolonged periods of absence.

Court agreed the concept of a three stage process in the case of the Principal being permanently unable to continue in role. First, the Senior Vice-Principal should temporarily take on the responsibilities and accountabilities of the Principal, subject to mechanisms for enhanced assurance and support from Court; second, at the same time as the Senior Vice-Principal takes on these duties, Nominations Committee would progress immediately a search for an interim Principal using an abbreviated version of the agreed process for appointing a permanent Principal, including consideration of both internal and external candidates through a Selection Panel chaired by the Senior Lay Member; and third, the University would start a search to find the new permanent Principal.

Court agreed that if the Principal were temporarily unable to continue in role for a period of more than a few days or weeks but with the confident expectation that he would be able to resume duties in the foreseeable future, the first stage arrangements outlined above would apply.

Court agreed to delegate to Nominations Committee the responsibility for agreeing a fuller description of the proposed arrangements, to be subsequently submitted to Exception Committee for formal agreement prior to the next Court meeting.

17 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 15 June 2020.