



UNIVERSITY COURT

30 November 2020 (Videoconference)

Web Version

Minute

- Members Present:** Ann Henderson, Rector (in Chair)
Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
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
Sarah Cooper, Senatus Assessor
Fiona Mackay, Senatus Assessor & Academic Staff Member
Claire Phillips, Senatus Assessor
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
Sarah McAllister, Professional Services Staff Member
Joyce Anderson, Trade Union Professional Services Staff Member
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
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Clare Reid, Co-opted Member
Frank Ross, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
Ellen MacRae, Students' Association President
Rachel Irwin, Students' Association Vice-President Activities & Services
- Apologies:** None
- In attendance:** 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 Place
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal (Interim) Corporate Services
Theresa Merrick, Director of Communications & Marketing
Dorothy Miell, Vice-Principal & Head of College
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian to
the University
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal
Tracey Slaven, Deputy Secretary Strategic Planning
Moira Whyte, Vice-Principal & Head of College

1 Minute

Papers A1-A2

On behalf of Court, the Rector thanked Tracey Slaven, Deputy Secretary Strategic Planning, for her advice and service to Court and wished her well in her new role at the University of Aberdeen from January 2021.

The Minute of the meeting and note of the seminar held on 28 September 2020 were approved.

The Rector suggested that informal online events could be arranged to help Court members and executive staff keep in touch outwith formal meetings given that in-person events are not being held at present.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A3

There were no matters arising. The action log was reviewed, with the following requests made:

- Inclusion of an expected action completion date in future versions; and,
- Provision of interim updates on the transport strategy and student residential accommodation strategy for the next meeting, noting that these are paused at present given the pandemic.

3 Principal's Report

Paper B

The Principal recorded his thanks to Tracey Slaven for her advice and work for the University and wished her well in her new role.

Court noted the contents of the report and additional information on:

- Brexit: UK-EU negotiations are continuing and it is hoped that agreement can be reached before 31 December. The UK position is to seek continued access to EU research funding programmes but alternative arrangements including a 'Discovery Fund' are being considered if continued access is not secured. A UK alternative to the Erasmus+ student and staff mobility programme is also being considered;
- Covid-19 cases and testing: current case numbers in the University community are lower than in the wider population within the region. Asymptomatic testing for students intending to travel over the Christmas vacation begins today, with capacity in place for all those who opt to be tested;
- Covid-19 wider impact: the implementation of new finance and payroll elements within the People & Money system may be delayed and any revised 'go-live' date will avoid peak periods such as the finance year-end. More broadly, while priorities and timescales of some projects may shift as a result of the pandemic, the University's Strategy 2030 remains fit-for-purpose, including projections for the future student population;
- Covid-19 points of reflection: the world is learning to control and defeat a novel virus and the University is making an important contribution to this. The speed of adaptation to the new circumstances by the University community has been admirable. The present period has shown that internationalisation without physical travel is possible. The pace of change has accelerated and

there is an opportunity to choose which changes to keep permanently and which to discard and a light has been shone on pre-existing inequalities and universities have a role in addressing these as tools of social mobility.

Members discussed the following points:

- Media coverage of student Covid transmission has been greatly disproportionate to the actual number of cases and should be countered by the data and the government;
- Staff workload and preparations for the second semester – additional respite days over the Christmas period have been granted in recognition of the unique challenges of this year. A staggered restart of teaching and arrival dates have been agreed between the four universities in Edinburgh to aid with a safe resumption in January;
- Potential additional costs for some students who may need to pay for Covid testing if they wish to return to their home country over the winter vacation given requirements in some countries or any new immigration costs for affected students by the end of the EU transitional period on 31 December. More international students are expected to stay in Edinburgh over the winter vacation than usual given travel restrictions and for those who do wish to travel free lateral flow testing is in place but any requirements for other forms of testing will need to be met by private provision. Government advice is being sought on any new immigration costs related to the end of the EU transitional period.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Adaptation & Renewal Report

Paper C

An update on the work of the Adaptation and Renewal Team from mid-September to November was reviewed. Current efforts are focused on: asymptomatic testing for students intending to travel over the Christmas vacation, with over 14,000 tests booked to date (with two bookings per student as two tests are taken); access to services for those remaining in Edinburgh over the winter vacation; and, preparations for the second semester. Government advice for the beginning of the second semester is awaited but is expected to include testing and a staggered return. Longer term planning within the reshaping workstream is considering reshaping within the context of Strategy 2030, with an initial discussion later this week at a University Executive virtual 'away day'. Members discussed the provision of temporary student villages that increase the amount of physically distanced indoor space for students and the level of staff consultation planned for the reshaping workstream and accounting for greater staff workloads with hybrid teaching. It was noted that the reshaping workstream is still at an early stage but consultation and engagement will be central to its development and will include an opportunity to consider the longer term implications of hybrid teaching and teaching and research careers more broadly.

5 Student Experience Update

Paper D

A regular update on student experience activities and a presentation on curriculum transformation was reviewed. Reflecting on the current semester, there has been a

greater emphasis on engagement with students in halls of residence, including regular 'Town Hall' meetings, but there has been an undoubted negative impact on student experience from public health restrictions on social interactions outside of households.

Regarding curriculum transformation, the intention is to build a consensus around improving the current complex offering, including the transition to the University and generating a lifelong affiliation after study. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Building a better understanding of current strengths and weaknesses from an external perspective and testing any changes with prospective students and other stakeholders;
- The current level of academic staff engagement with curriculum transformation – feedback has indicated a clear appetite for reforming the current curriculum, recognising that it is overly complex;
- Considering whether a new curriculum needs improved models of contracts for teaching staff to deliver this;
- Ensuring that a new curriculum is based on the University's values; and,
- Potential for community gardens or allotments to help with social interaction and mental health.

6 EUSA President's Report

Paper E

The Students' Association President reported on activities since the last meeting, including greater use of Association venues as the semester has progressed and encouraging levels of participation in intramural sports. It was noted that public health measures have made the transition to university life more difficult for many new students. The experience to date has been markedly different to expectations for many students and as such there is a desire from many students for financial recognition for this. The importance of active outreach and communication with students remaining in Edinburgh over the winter vacation period was emphasised and the provision of asymptomatic testing for those returning to home addresses welcomed, although students may choose to travel outside of the recommended period and may not opt-in for testing. On behalf of Court, the Rector thanked the student sabbatical officers for their work on behalf of the student community.

7 Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report

Paper F

A summary of Audit & Risk Committee's activities and opinions in 2019/20 was reviewed. The Committee Convener congratulated Paul McGinty on his appointment as Head of Internal Audit and noted that the current co-sourcing approach for internal audit services will be reviewed in the New Year. The Committee intends to hold a joint workshop with the Risk Management Committee, with both committees considering the topic of improving risk appetite reporting. It was noted that the external audit of the Annual Report & Accounts has concluded, with an unqualified opinion issued. It was agreed that the report provides reasonable assurance that the University's internal control environment during 2019/20 was sufficiently adequate for Court to approve the Annual Report and Accounts.

8 Risk Management Post Year End Assurance Statement

Paper G

It was noted that no significant new events or material issues since the year end of 31 July 2020 that could impact on the ability of Court to approve the Annual Report and Accounts had been reported.

9 Finance

• Director of Finance's Report

Paper H1

The Director of Finance reported on: a new proposed approach for managing the short term investment of donations; on-going discussions with the Students' Association regarding potential additional financial support; the expected completion by the Investment Committee of a transition out of fossil fuel investments by the year end; and, the planned investment of endowment funds in a new fund tied to the University's Strategy 2030 and sustainability objectives.

• Interim Financial Update

Paper H2

An interim financial update including financial scenario modelling and a five year forecast was reviewed. It was noted that a further update is intended for the end of January, with financial reporting using the standard format to return at a later date. The additional financial briefings offered to Court members were welcomed.

• Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20

Paper H3

Following scrutiny by the Audit & Risk Committee and the Policy & Resources Committee, the draft Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2020 were presented for approval. It was noted that while the operating surplus reported is a positive result given the impact of the early stages of the pandemic from March to July 2020, this has been bolstered by City Deal funding and two significant philanthropic donations, with the underlying operating performance not including restricted income in a deficit position. The distortion in the total comprehensive income figure resulting from large non-cash movements in pension provisions was discussed and the need for accompanying communications to explain the results for stakeholders unfamiliar with the accounting conventions used, with a Frequently Asked Questions document suggested. It was confirmed that lenders with covenants in place are familiar with the UK accounting conventions used in respect of non-cash movements such as pension provisions and are content. The importance of maintaining an operating surplus to allow for reinvestment was noted and the Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20 approved.

• Letter of Representation

Paper H4

The letter of representation, to provide the external auditors with a written declaration that the Annual Report and Accounts are sufficient and appropriate and without omission of material facts, and its signing by the Principal and by the Senior Lay Member, was approved. It was noted that, following a suggestion at Audit & Risk Committee, a 'back-to-back' letter of representation from the Director of Finance to Court members had been included to help with providing assurance to Court.

- **Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20 – US GAAP**

Paper H5

The US GAAP Management Commentary and Financial Statements 2019/20, a restatement of the UK figures in the US accounting format, was approved.

10 Planning Round Cycle 2021-22 & Student Number Planning

Paper I

The timetable for the 2021-22 planning round, the proposed approach to managing uncertainty in relation to student number planning for 2021-22 and an update on the student intake for 2020-21 was considered. The positive application figures for 2021-22 to date were welcomed and the rate of offer making in comparison to other Russell Group universities discussed. Given the policy environment and uncertainty over withdrawal rates for the cohort admitted in the current year, offer making by universities is expected to take place at a slower rate than in more typical years. The importance of communicating likely timescales for decision-making to applicants was noted.

11 4D Cellular Medicine at the Institute of Genetics & Molecular Medicine

Paper J

A request for capital funding to accommodate a 4D cellular medicine hub for the Medical Research Council (MRC) Human Genetics Unit at the Western General Hospital site was reviewed. The MRC's agreement to match fund the project cost conditional on specific assurances was welcomed. It was noted that the unit is a flagship centre of research excellence but is constrained by the quantity and quality of its accommodation, which this project will help address. Members discussed liability in the event of any over-spending on the build, noting that a net underspend has been achieved for estates capital projects in recent years and discussed conditions in the MRC grant award. Court agreed to approve funding to complete the project.

Separately, it was noted that Estates Committee will consider requests at its next meeting in relation to three capital projects that are currently deferred in order to undertake some essential compliance work within two of the projects and to provide some research facilities required as a result of a deferral of a third project.

12 Development & Alumni Office Annual Report

Paper K

An annual report and progress update for the Development & Alumni Office for academic year 2019-20 was reviewed. The Principal congratulated all those involved in contributing towards a highly successful year and noted the challenges ahead that could impact upon philanthropic giving. How Court members can best support development and alumni activities was discussed, with members thanked for their interest and engagement to date and information on forthcoming online events such as the Edinburgh Conversations to be circulated.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

13 Hong Kong Foundation Bank Account **Paper L**

To support the activities of the University of Edinburgh Hong Kong Foundation the opening of a bank account with HSBC in the name of 'University of Edinburgh Hong Kong Foundation Limited' was approved, to be operated as set out in the paper.

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

Legacies and donations received since the last meeting and an update on current alumni relations activities were noted.

15 Integrating Climate Emergency and Strategy 2030 commitments in University Committee papers **Paper N**

The inclusion of a new section and accompanying guidance in Court and committee paper templates to integrate consideration of the Climate Emergency, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Strategy 2030 outcomes was approved.

16 Enterprise IT Investment **Paper O**

A proposed investment in Enterprise Infrastructure to provide a consolidated platform for central on-premises IT services aside from high performance research computing was approved.

17 DiRAC3 High Performance Computer Purchase **Paper P**

The purchase of a high performance computing facility for particle physics theory researchers across the UK, to be hosted at the University and funded by the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council, was reviewed. The funding award was welcomed and the impact of high performance computing on the 'zero by 2040' carbon target discussed. It was noted that the facility is relatively small in size and will be located alongside other high performance computers at the Advanced Computing Facility, where specialised cooling measures are taken to reduce energy usage. Further innovative carbon reducing ideas are being explored for the Advanced Computing Facility, although carbon offsetting will also be required to meet the zero by 2040 target. It was requested that sustainability analysis be included in future high performance computing proposals similar to that included within estates capital project proposals. The purchase of the facility was approved and signing authority delegated to Professor Dave Robertson, Head of College of Science & Engineering.

18 Staff Benefits Scheme: Proposal to switch standard security asset **Paper Q**

Doreen Davidson declared an interest as a Trustee of the Staff Benefits Scheme and absented from decision-making on the item.

A proposal to switch an existing standard security granted to the Staff Benefits Scheme in order to appropriately reflect the overall intended and agreed value of

assets being assigned for this purpose was reviewed. Noting that the intention is to switch the security from one University property to another of similar value, the proposed switch was agreed subject to the endorsement of the Trustees of the Staff Benefits Scheme.

19 Committee Reports

- **Exception Committee**

Paper R1

The Rector absented the meeting for this item and for the Nominations Committee Report (Paper R4), with the Senior Lay Member presiding.

The following matters relating to the Rector Election 2021 approved on behalf of Court by Exception Committee were noted:

- The election dates, with voting to take place from Tuesday, 23 February 2021 until Friday, 26 February 2021;
- Appointment of the Chancellor's Assessor, Sheriff Principal Alastair Dunlop QC, as the Returning Officer, with a Deputy Returning Officer to be nominated by the University Secretary; and,
- Rector Election Regulations 2021 (without the inclusion of an option to re-open nominations, maintaining the status quo position given the differing views of the two representative bodies for the student and staff electorates).

- **Court Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) Sub-Group**

Paper R2

The report was noted.

- **Policy & Resources Committee**

Paper R3

The report was noted.

- **Nominations Committee**

Paper R4

The report was noted and the following appointments were approved:

- Sarah Wolffe QC as the Court nominee to the Scrutinising Committee for the 2021 Rector election; and,
- Ross Millar, Chief Risk Officer at Artemis Investment Management LLP, as an external member of Audit & Risk Committee for a three year term of office from 1 January 2021.

- **Audit & Risk Committee**

Paper R5

The report was noted and the Annual Strategic Risk Report and Modern Slavery Statement 2019-20 were approved.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

Paper R6

The report was noted.

- **Senate**

Paper R7

The report was noted.

20 Resolutions

Paper S

The following Resolutions were approved:

- Resolution No. 74/2020: Removal of Members of the University Court
- Resolution No. 75/2020: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Organic Synthesis
- Resolution No. 76/2020: Foundation of a Personal Industrial Chair of Data-Driven Manufacturing
- Resolution No. 77/2020: Alteration of the title of the Chair of Chemical Reaction/Catalysis Engineering

21 Court Meeting Dates 2021-22

Paper T

Meeting dates for the academic year 2021-22 were approved as follows:

- Wednesday 6 October 2021 (Seminar and Meeting)
- Monday 29 November 2021 (Meeting)
- Monday 21 February 2022 (Seminar and Meeting)
- Monday 25 April 2022 (Meet the Court event and Meeting)
- Monday 13 June 2022 (Meeting)

22 Any Other Business

On behalf of Court, the Senior Lay Member thanked all staff for their work over the semester in challenging circumstances and recorded its congratulations to undergraduate student Peter Sawkins, winner of The Great British Bake Off 2020.

23 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 22 February 2021.