



UNIVERSITY COURT

22 February 2021 (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
Ellen MacRae, Students' Association President
Rachel Irwin, Students' Association Vice-President Activities & Services
- Apologies:** Frank Ross, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
- 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 Estates
Pauline Manchester, Interim Director of Strategic Planning
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal (Interim) Corporate Services
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
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal
Moira Whyte, Vice-Principal & Head of College
Barry Neilson, Director of Strategic Change (for Item 5)

The Rector welcomed members and attendees to the meeting, held by videoconference and thanked Evelyn Dunton, Court Services Officer, for her 16 years' of service to the Court ahead of her retirement later this month. Court members, staff members and honorary fellows recognised in the New Year's Honours were congratulated on their awards:

- Caroline Gardner, Court member, CBE for services to the Scottish public sector;
- Professor Wendy Bickmore, Director, MRC Human Genetics Unit, CBE for services to Biomedical Sciences and to Women in Science;
- Dr Heather Bacon, Animal Welfare and Veterinary Outreach Manager, Jeanne Marchig International Centre for Animal Welfare Education, OBE for services to Veterinary Education, to Animal Welfare and to Charity in the UK and Abroad; and,
- Professor Bashabi Fraser, Honorary Fellow, Centre for South Asian Studies, CBE for services to Education, to Culture and to Integration in Scotland.

The Minute of the meeting held on 30 November 2020 was approved subject to minor amendment.

Secretary's note: it was subsequently established that the amendment related to the minute of the meeting held on 28 September 2020 and has been incorporated.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

The Principal raised a matter arising: Court approved Phase 1 of the DiRAC High Performance Computer purchase at its last meeting (30 November 2020, Item 17, Paper P), with Phase 2 potentially to follow in the subsequent financial year for the funder, the UK Science & Technology Facilities Council. It was noted that funds may now be available for Phase 2 before the end of the funder's current financial year, in late March, and it was agreed to approve the Phase 2 purchase and delegation of signing authority to the Head of College of Science & Engineering subject to confirmation of the funding and agreement by relevant staff that any conditions attached to the award can be met.

The action log was reviewed and the following actions discussed:

- The impact of the pandemic on the University's Strategy 2030 – timescales and means of delivery of some objectives may be impacted but there is confidence that the high level principles and major strategic aims remain fit-for-purpose;
- Transport Strategy: a working group including Students' Association membership is considering the King's Buildings Shuttle Bus, which is not currently operating given the impact of public health restrictions on capacity. Resources have been redeployed into other means of active travel;
- Student Residential Accommodation Strategy: the strategy is not currently undergoing the usual annual review given the pandemic. The main development of note since the last review is that the Peffermill Sports Village proposals have not received planning permission at present, with the University appealing the decision. Regarding couples/family accommodation,

125 properties are operated by the University, mainly near the Pollock Halls site.

3 Principal's Report

Paper B

The Principal thanked the Rector, and Evelyn Dunton, Court Services Officer, on the occasion of their last Court meeting and wished them well for the future. Court noted the contents of the report and additional information on on-going discussions between the Scottish Funding Council and the Principals of all Scottish universities regarding potential additional funding given the financial impact of the pandemic. Any additional funding will be welcomed but is unlikely to address the full financial impact of the current period and the long-term need to increase the unit of resource for higher education.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Research Excellence Framework 2021 Briefing

Verbal

The Senior Vice-Principal delivered a presentation on the upcoming Research Excellence Framework, a UK-wide assessment of research quality and impact used in the allocation of future public funding for research and to evidence the benefits of previous public funding. The University was ranked 4th in the UK and 1st in Scotland in the previous exercise held in 2014 under the measure of research power (quality of research multiplied by volume). For the 2021 exercise, the University intends to submit to 28 of the 34 Units of Assessment (broad subject areas). Five of the units are joint submissions with other institutions given research collaborations in these areas.

The following points were discussed:

- How assessments of research quality are made and if appeals are allowed – assessments are by peer review using panels mainly comprised of senior UK-based academics, with some international panel members and some from industry also. Appeals can be made on process but not on a panel's judgements;
- The importance of assessing research impact and how well the sector was prepared for this in the previous exercise – research impact was introduced in 2014 at 20% of the overall score (and is now 25% of the overall score), with some institutions better prepared for this new element than others. Significant effort is being made at the University to ensure that the impact case studies submitted in 2021 are of the highest quality given that they can be a key differentiator; and,
- The extent to which lessons learned from the previous exercise can be applied. As there are important changes in assessment criteria and other rules between each exercise learning applicable lessons can be difficult. However, continuities do exist and colleagues have learned both from personal experience of previous submissions and from sector wide learning.

5 Adaptation & Renewal Report

Paper C

An update on the work of the Adaptation and Renewal Team from December 2020 to mid-February 2021 was reviewed. Efforts have focused on responding to the increased public health restrictions announced in December and January, with teaching moving to a digital-only rather than hybrid model for the majority of students. Following Government advice, students who vacated accommodation over the Christmas period have been encouraged not to return to their accommodation in Edinburgh at the present time and more flexible rent breaks for University accommodation have been introduced to assist with this. Working from home remains the default for most staff, with exceptions for some research and teaching activities (e.g. in-person teaching in medicine and veterinary medicine).

The following points were discussed:

- Expectations for the period after Easter and for the first semester of the next academic year – Government guidance is awaited but if restrictions allow, access will be prioritised after Easter for specialist teaching spaces and for the supervision of dissertations. For the first semester of the next academic year a cautious approach to planning is currently being taken in the absence of Government guidance;
- The message that staff should make ‘best endeavours’ in the current circumstances in managing their work when most workloads have not been reduced and most recruitment of new staff is being paused – this is being discussed by the Staff Experience Committee and the next ‘pulse’ staff survey will focus on home and hybrid working. The phased return of nursery and school provision should help many staff with childcare responsibilities;
- Engagement with equality and diversity impact assessments of measures taken as result of the pandemic – this is presently being reviewed by Professor Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion within the Adaptation & Renewal Team structure;
- The extent to which enhanced cleaning measures has added to the workload of cleaning staff – as many buildings are closed and fewer students are resident in University accommodation the overall requirement for cleaning services is reduced at present; and,
- Childcare provision and whether a partnership approach could be taken with other agencies in the city – the University has continued to engage externally, including on the issue of including university staff as key workers in respect of childcare provision, as has occurred in England.

6 EUSA President’s Report

Paper D

The Students’ Association President reported on activities since the last meeting, including: the work of the Sports Union; the ‘Green During Covid-19’ campaign; high levels of nominations for the Teaching Awards and candidate nominations for the forthcoming student elections; and, noted concerns over the cost for international students of recently announced Government quarantining measures, including costs for those required to return to the UK for visa applications. It was noted that Government quarantining measures have yet to be finalised for higher education students and it is hoped that University-owned accommodation can be used for quarantining purposes. Members discussed which areas the Students’ Association

would suggest the University prioritise to most benefit the student experience in the present circumstances – more pro-active engagement in offering additional support to those experiencing difficulties and clear communications on the likely arrangements for teaching and student services for the next academic year were suggested.

7 Finance

• Director of Finance's Report

Paper E1

The Director of Finance reported on the quarter one forecast for the current year, scenario modelling to 2024/25, the latest financial outlook for the Accommodation, Catering and Events subsidiary and an update on financial discussions with the Students' Association. Members discussed the following points:

- Scenario modelling – the agreed strategy of delivering a 3-5% surplus for reinvestment remains and the scenarios are intended to aid decision-making to achieve this. The methodology used has been to input best assumptions to build the scenarios rather than seeking to build wholly divergent scenarios;
- Agreeing how expenditure should be reduced should have wide discussion and meaningful consultation;
- The potential for a review of the estates capital plan to generate longer term savings – the senior team is currently taking a longer term examination of the capital plan and affordability will be a key element; and,
- The impact of the voluntary severance scheme on institutional knowledge and staff workloads – the assessment of applications for voluntary severance included consideration of workloads in each area and this will be monitored by managers should there be unforeseen consequences or changing demands over time.

• Covid-19 Short and Medium-term Financial Funding Update

Paper E2

An update on short-term and medium-term borrowing facilities to provide access to funds should financial circumstances significantly deteriorate was reviewed. It was noted that the short-term facility previously agreed will not be used. Medium term facilities were agreed, with the intention that these will also not be used unless there is a significant financial deterioration over and above the present circumstances.

8 Communications and Marketing Update Report

Paper F

A report on the work of the Department of Communications & Marketing including highlights and data from engagement channels was considered. The report was welcomed and the following points raised in discussion:

- Understanding how the University of Edinburgh is perceived externally and the work of the Department in reputation building and encouraging media engagement across the University to contribute to this – a brand governance group exists to help ensure consistency and the University Executive will shortly be considering a more strategic approach to brand communications;
- Building a future set of metrics to try and understand the return on investment of different communications activity, e.g. impact on student applications;
- The extent of relationship management with the media – good relationships exist and the pandemic has led to greatly increased media interest in expert

commentary that many University staff can provide, with organisations such as the Science Media Centre assisting as a trusted intermediary;

- Internal communications – the extent of staff and student engagement with internal communications and how communications and awareness can be improved, e.g. communicating the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism, University values and freedom of expression more generally. It was noted that the recent focus of the Bulletin staff magazine on Covid communications has worked well, that the ‘open rates’ for all staff and all student emails are at an expected level but other forms of communication may be more effective and this will be explored, e.g. disseminating information locally using devolved structures provided this is done strategically and links local and central communications. Feedback from the communication sub-group of the Staff Experience Committee has echoed that there is interest in more communication of policy decisions and other initiatives;
- Media training for staff likely to be approached for media appearances – a range of training including for broadcast media has been offered to Vice-Principal and other frequently approached staff; and,
- Communications to and from Court – improving the press cuttings service to highlight key articles and improving communication of the work of the Court to stakeholders.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

9 Strategic Partnership with Edinburgh International Book Festival Paper G

Initial agreement of Heads of Terms for a strategic partnership with the Edinburgh International Book Festival (EIBF) and the intention to negotiate and agree a Framework Agreement were reviewed. It was agreed to consider further how the partnership can contribute to tackling the climate emergency. Court agreed to delegate to the Principal acting in consultation with the Director of Place and the Director of Legal Services the negotiation, approval and signing of the terms of the proposed Framework Agreement for the strategic partnership with EIBF and the Annex for the 2021 event.

10 Committee Reports

- **Exception Committee Paper H1**

The report was noted.

- **Policy & Resources Committee Paper H2**

The report was noted.

- **Nominations Committee**

Paper H3

Doreen Davidson abstained from discussion and decision-making on the item.

The report was noted and the appointment of Doreen Davidson as an external member of the Trustees of the Staff Benefits Scheme for a three year term of office with effect from 1 August 2021 approved.

- **Remuneration Committee**

Verbal

The Convener of Remuneration Committee:

- reported on the outcome of the review of Senior Management Team remuneration, with the outcome matching that of all other staff categories; and,
- noted that, as a governance improvement, the Committee intends in future to submit its annual report to Court on an academic year basis rather than a calendar year basis, aligning with the Annual Report and Accounts and the Audit & Risk Committee's annual review that are submitted to the November meeting.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

Paper H4

The report was noted and the increased prioritisation for upgrading the data network in the University halls of residence welcomed. It was noted that a further update on the project to replace the current Space and Facilities Management programme will be given at the next meeting of Estates Committee.

11 Development Trust Update

Paper I

An update on progress in implementing previously agreed changes to the future management of gift income across the University was noted.

12 Donations and Legacies; Alumni Events

Paper J

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

13 Staff Benefits Scheme Contingent Asset Address Amendment

Paper K

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

Court agreed to the proposed switch of asset under the amended address set out in the paper.

14 Resolutions

Paper L

The following resolution was approved: Resolution No. 1/2021: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Security Engineering

15 Any Other Business

The approach to interpreting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism and the level of consultation prior to adopting the definition, including with academic specialists on the topic, was raised. It was noted that the decision to adopt the definition was made by the University Executive, including academic staff members who serve on the University Executive. Interpretation and application is currently being discussed, with a case-by-case approach to be taken.

The Rector thanked all Court members for their contributions and closed the meeting with some reflections on her period of office on the occasion of her last meeting. The Rector paid tribute to her Assessor, Angi Lamb, and thanked the former Vice-Convener of Court, Anne Richards, for presiding at meetings when she was not able to attend.

The Rector commented on:

- Encouraging Court to consider further the governance changes brought about by the 2016 legislation to best impact positively on the Court, e.g. the interaction between the Senior Lay Member and the Rector, assisting the trade union nominated positions and new elected positions in all facets of their roles;
- Considering the interaction between the different policies and requirements relating to equality and diversity, noting the Rector's personal experience of the University's complaints process, the importance of protecting freedom of expression and providing clarity for any Court member involved in the complaints process;
- When public health restrictions allow, the importance of in-person events, both formal and informal, for connecting Court members and the wider University community and the benefits to good governance of these; and,
- Welcoming the Rector-elect, Debora Kayembe. The Rector will meet with Debora Kayembe shortly and will facilitate introductions with student and staff contacts, having discussed with the Students' Association how to engage with the Rector across the Association's wide range of activities.

On behalf of Court, the Senior Lay Member thanked the Rector for her service to the University and for her reflections on her period of office, to be considered further, and wished her well for the future.

16 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 26 April 2021.