



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

16 November 2020 (Videoconference)

Web Version

Minute

Present: Alan Johnston, Co-opted Member (Convener)
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Sarah Cooper, Senate Assessor
Doreen Davidson, General Council Assessor
David Law, Co-opted Member
Ellen MacRae, President, Students' Association
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal
Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change & Governance; and
University Secretary

In attendance: Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
Gary Jebb, Director of Place
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal (Interim) Corporate Services
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Tracey Slaven, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning
Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services
Leigh Chalmers, Director of Legal Services
Pauline Manchester, Head of Strategic Performance & Research Policy
Barry Neilson, Director, Adaptation & Renewal (for Items 4 and 17)
David Gray, Head of School of Biological Sciences (for Item 11)
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian
to the University, (for Items 15 and 16).

1 Minute

Paper A1

On behalf of the Committee, the Convener welcomed Hugh Mitchell to his first meeting as a member, thanked Tracey Slaven for her advice and service to the Committee and wished her well in her new role from January, and welcomed Leigh Chalmers, observing the meeting before taking up a new role as Deputy Secretary Governance & Legal from 1 December.

The Minute of the meeting held on 10 September 2020 was approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

There were no matters arising and the action log was noted.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

The Principal reported on:

- The delivery of the hybrid teaching model, which has generally been successful to date, acknowledging that the proportion of in-person teaching varies across the University and that some students who have received less in-person teaching than they had expected have expressed disappointment at this. It was noted that no evidence of Covid-19 transmission resulting from in-person teaching at the University has been found to date;
- The strenuous efforts taken to implement public health guidance for the benefit of students and staff. Where there has been concern that some student behaviour has not followed public health guidance this has been taken seriously, including disciplinary action where appropriate;
- Re-iterating that drivers for change existed before the pandemic, with the present circumstances bringing these to the forefront. The University is facing a significant period of change and maintaining staff morale and readiness to adapt to new challenges will be critical;
- The City Deal Data-Driven Innovation programme is performing extremely well and is currently over-delivering on ambitious Key Performance Indicators and is regarded as a positive example for other City Deal programmes in the UK; and,
- Research successes: success rates for grant applications remain high and 4 UK Research & Innovation future leaders awards have recently been made to University staff, along with 7 prestigious European Research Council starter grants.

Members discussed plans for Covid-19 testing for students intending to travel to home addresses over the Christmas vacation, noting the significant scale of the logistical operation required, with the testing to be conducted on University premises.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Adaptation & Renewal Team Report

Paper B

A report on the work of the Adaptation and Renewal Team was reviewed. Looking at challenges ahead, as well as Covid-19 testing of students intending to travel over the Christmas period, support for students planning to stay in Edinburgh over the period is also being planned. A greater number of students than usual are expected to stay in Edinburgh given international travel restrictions and other factors. The importance of support for students staying in Edinburgh to include emotional support and entertainment/community building was highlighted. The overall feeling in the student community given present circumstances was discussed, with an indication that continuing students had generally found the adaptation more manageable than first year students and that while the pattern of the current semester had become established, there was a sense of fatigue and that this would likely grow over time if current public health restrictions continue. Staff fatigue was also evident but reports from staff teaching in-person had been positive on the response from students and there was a sense that the safety measures on-campus were working well and providing reassurance.

5 Finance

• Director of Finance's Report

Paper C1

A draft of the audited University Group Annual Report and Accounts for 2019-20 and a new proposed approach for managing the short term investment of donations was considered. Communicating the results to those unfamiliar with the accounting conventions used was discussed, with the importance noted of highlighting the operating surplus after exceptional items rather than other measures that include non-cash movements and exceptional items. It was suggested that additional text be included on the impact on the pandemic and its likely long term effect on the University's finances in years to come, with only the initial effects emerging in the latter part of 2019-20. All colleagues involved in the draft annual report and accounts were thanked for their work in producing a high quality document. An update on discussions regarding financial support for the Students' Association was also received.

• Interim Financial Update

Paper C2

The interim financial update circulated on 29 October was noted, with a second update planned for week commencing 25 January welcomed. The importance of early identification of savings was highlighted and addressing weaknesses in underlying financial performance that were present prior to the pandemic.

6 Planning Round Cycle 2021-22 & Student Number Planning

Paper D

A confirmation of 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. It was noted that the intention is to develop a one year plan for 2021-22 for submission in the April cycle of Policy & Resources Committee and Court meetings.

7 Strategy 2030 Strategic Performance Framework

Paper E

An initial basket of performance measurements to assess the University's performance against Strategy 2030 was reviewed. It was noted that the performance measures used in the draft 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts are a hybrid of measures from the previous strategy with some new proposed measures for Strategy 2030. The 2020-21 Annual Report and Accounts will use a full set of Strategy 2030 measures when agreed. The extent to which the measures are intended for an internal or external audience and the extent to which the measures are outcomes or enablers of outcomes was discussed – with the measures intended mainly for an internal audience and for the Court level measures intended to show outcomes, with the University Executive level measures intended to show enablers. Developing milestones for the Court level measures to aid with tracking progress year-by-year was suggested.

8 Enterprise & Innovation Strategy

Paper F

A proposed strategic approach to enterprise and innovation was reviewed. It was noted that, following endorsement, work to develop a more detailed innovation

masterplan will begin and will be submitted to Court for approval when complete. The strong focus on equality, diversity and inclusion was welcomed, along with a collaborative cross-University approach to encourage greater engagement in enterprise and innovation work. Considering the involvement of external stakeholders and experts was suggested, along with engaging the Commercialisation Sub-Group on the topics of patent protection and Court member involvement in the oversight of the strategy's implementation. It was agreed to:

- Endorse the Enterprise and Innovation Strategy;
- Note that the Senior Vice-Principal, Professor Jonathan Seckl, will be the strategy's sponsor;
- Note the formation of a new University Innovation Leadership Group to implement the strategy;
- Note the formation of an Innovation Working Group to design and deliver SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) objectives, to be inclusive and focused on the breadth of the academic community and needs of external stakeholders and partners.
- Note the intention to ensure broad academic engagement through the establishment of an Innovation Forum, comprising up to 5 nominees per College, which will meet five times per year and feed in, via its Convener, to the University Innovation Leadership Group.

9 4D Cellular Medicine at the Institute of Genetics & Molecular Medicine

Paper G

A funding request was reviewed for a University investment to match a Medical Research Council (MRC) capital commitment to build an expansion of the Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine to accommodate a new 4D cellular medicine hub for the MRC Human Genetics Unit. It was noted that Court had agreed in June 2018 to underwrite the provision of matched funding subject to approval of a business case by Estates Committee, which had now been achieved. The world-leading research of the Human Genetics Unit was noted and the expansion project welcomed, with further ambitious thinking for the site in future encouraged.

The Committee:

- noted that the contribution to the project from MRC is conditional on specific assurance by the University;
- recommended to Court approval of funding; and,
- noted that the remaining project cost is over and above the previously approved funding of £1.3m to complete the design to the end of RIBA Stage 3.

10 People Report

Paper H

An update on people related matters being taken forward by Human Resources and other University departments was noted, including Covid-19 related staff matters and updates on the launch of an all-staff survey and leadership and coaching programmes. The voluntary severance scheme has met its annual sustainable savings target and all applicants were made aware of outcomes by 6 November 2020. Implementing a robust procedure to ensure that staff who leave under the voluntary severance scheme are not subsequently re-employed either directly or through an agency was encouraged. The provision of training courses for staff with

line management responsibilities for managing remotely given current circumstances was welcomed.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

11 Gujarat Biotechnology University Update Paper I

An amended approach to the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) for Stage 1, including an extension to the duration of the MoA was approved as set out in the paper.

12 Global Open Finance Centre of Excellence Update Paper J

An update on work to establish a Global Open Finance Centre of Excellence (GOFCoE) was noted, including ensuring that research is core to GOFCoE's plan to become self-sustaining and assessing insurance options and cover in respect of potential contingent contractual claims under data sharing agreements.

13 Integrating Climate Emergency and Strategy 2030 commitments in University Committee papers Paper K

It was agreed to recommend for approval by Court a proposed addition to the template for University committee papers to integrate Climate Emergency and Strategy 2030 commitments.

14 Staff Benefits Scheme: Proposal to switch standard security asset Paper L

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

It was recommended that Court agree to the proposed switch of asset as standard security granted to the Staff Benefits Scheme (SBS), subject to the endorsement of the SBS Trustees.

15 Enterprise IT Investment Paper M

It was agreed to recommend for approval by Court Option B for the investment in central on-premises IT services with a total purchase capital cost in 2020/21 of £4.350m and an annual cost of £0.158m. It was noted that the investment is for hardware to replace current virtualised servers that run core University applications.

16 DiRAC3 High Performance Computer Purchase Paper N

It was agreed to recommend for approval by Court the purchase of the facility, externally funded by the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council, with signing authority delegated to Professor Dave Robertson, Head of College of Science & Engineering.

17 People & Money Financial Update

Paper O

The update was noted.

18 Estates Committee Report

Paper P

The report was noted.

19 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

20 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 1 February 2021, 2.30pm-5pm.