



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

8 November 2021 (Videoconference)

Web Version

Minute

Present: Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member (Convener)
Douglas Alexander, General Council Assessor
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Sarah Cooper, Senate Assessor
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: Leigh Chalmers, Deputy Secretary Governance & Legal
Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students
Gary Jebb, Director of Place
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Rona Smith, Director of Strategic Planning & Insight
Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services
Sabira Akram, Governance Apprentice Programme 2021/22
Dave Robertson, Vice-Principal and Head of College of Science &
Engineering (for Item 6)

Apologies: None

1 Minute

Paper A1

Members and attendees were welcomed to the meeting. The Minute of the meeting held on 17 September 2021 was approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Papers A2-A3

• Institute of Genetics & Cancer Expansion Project

The action log was reviewed and two matters arising were noted:

- A follow-up briefing will be offered in the New Year on the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) data discussed at the previous meeting; and,
- An additional funding request to allow the appointment of a main contractor for the expansion of the Institute of Genetics & Cancer facility will be submitted to Exception Committee shortly.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, reported on:

- Industrial action – ballots by the University & College Union have given a mandate for strike action and action short of a strike. This is in relation to proposed changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and on pay and other conditions. The University is one of 37 UK institutions where a ballot on USS has given a mandate for industrial action. Action could be taken from the end of November, with notification from the union awaited;
- UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review – this contained some encouraging elements on potential research and innovation spending. While it did not include an announcement on the response to the Augar review of post-18 education and funding in England, there are suggestions that a White Paper may be published by the end of November;
- Arrangements for Semester 2 teaching – the phased return to campus this semester has not been associated with any impact on Covid-19 cases, which gives encouragement for a greater level of in-person teaching next semester and this will be discussed further with the Scottish Government;
- Senior Leadership Team recruitment – on-going recruitment for four positions is progressing well and members serving on the recruitment panels were thanked for their contributions to date;
- Capital prioritisation working group – the group has met over the past year and is now nearing the conclusion of its work on prioritisation for major physical and digital estate projects. The intention is to prioritise a balanced portfolio of projects, including those that are student-facing, research-facing and other projects.

In discussion, a short paper was requested setting out the prioritised projects by category when this has been finalised, noting that any prioritised project remains subject to the development and approval of a business case as well as funding approval. Uncertainty over continued access to EU research funding was raised – it was noted that a UK-only scheme has been mooted by the UK Government should EU access not continue but the continued preference of the University and the sector more widely is for access to EU research programmes to continue.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Director of Finance's Report

Paper B

The Director of Finance's Report was reviewed, including the draft Annual Report & Accounts 2020/21 and the latest five-year financial scenario modelling. On the draft Annual Report & Accounts, the requirement to include non-cash accounting adjustments and one-off capital grants within the operating surplus figures was noted, with a more accurate gauge of financial performance being the underlying operating surplus, which excludes these elements.

The following points on the draft Annual Report & Accounts were raised in discussion:

- The clear layout and presentation was welcomed;

- Whether longer term performance trends within the strategy section could be developed to aid analysis in this area;
- Gender balance in the photographs used; and,
- The distribution and use of the document following approval. Publication on the University website is planned for January along with communication of the highlights and key messages. The document is also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council and circulated to lenders and key stakeholders. A small number of printed versions will be made available for use by the Principal and Development & Alumni Office in meetings with supporters and potential supporters of the University.

Members discussed the financial scenario modelling, noting that the capital prioritisation outcome will be incorporated when agreed but is not expected to impact cash flow metrics or other metrics as assumptions on capital expenditure have been built in. Updated assumptions on research income following the UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review announcement could be developed.

5 Outcome Agreement 2021-22

Paper C

A draft Outcome Agreement 2021-22 and Self-Evaluation Report for 2020-21 were reviewed prior to submission to Court and then to the Scottish Funding Council. It was noted that the intention is to return to a medium term approach rather than the shorter in-year approach necessitated by the pandemic. The section relating to the student experience action plan was discussed and it was agreed that revisions will be made to further reference the student experience strategy currently under development. It was agreed that some additional comments of detail on other areas would be circulated to the authors following the meeting.

6 People & Money System Update

Paper D

An update on the implementation of the People & Money System (the programme delivering the core IT system for HR, Finance, Payroll and Procurement) was reviewed. The revised approach approved at the most recent Court meeting is underway, with the Enactment Group established and meeting weekly. A new internal staff secondment has been made to review risk management arrangements and advice has been received on this topic from the external adviser, Professor Anthony Finkelstein and is being followed up. Work is also underway to review benefits realisation for the programme, a subject of previous discussion by the committee. The following points were discussed:

- The initial reception to the revised approach to the programme – engagement with the Enactment Group has been positive, as has wider recognition of the importance of delivering the programme;
- Whether there are any concerns at this stage on the 2022 implementation dates – risks remain, particularly on the final phase and further prioritisation of elements within the final phase will be made if necessary. Issues emerging at this stage on data reporting should be resolvable and the early milestones have been reached on time;
- Continuing to set a high threshold for the acceptance of any new enhancements to the system was encouraged; and,

- Views from Professor Finkelstein – comments have been received and are being worked on at present. A lessons learned exercise drawing on some of the wider comments on managing programmes of this type could be considered at a later point in the programme. It was agreed that Professor Finkelstein's comments would be shared with the Committee's People & Money Sub-Group following consideration by the Enactment Group.

7 Queen's Medical Research Institute & Chancellor's Building Co-location and Bioresearch & Veterinary Services Estates Strategy **Paper E**

An overview of the joint College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine and Bioresearch & Veterinary Services Estates Strategy for the relocation of the Centre for Discovery Brain Sciences at the Queen's Medical Research Institute and the linked Chancellor's Building located at the BioQuarter campus was considered. It was noted that the projects form part of an overarching strategy to co-locate medical research and teaching at the BioQuarter site to create a "medicine plus" site with all biomedical sciences co-located with teaching hospitals and related commercialisation activity, with only the Addenbrooke's site in Cambridge potentially comparable in the UK. A recent award of external funding from the Simons Foundation has enabled the projects to be recommended for "unlocking" from the list of deferred capital projects, with approval for internal funding sought. The external funding award was welcomed and the projects recommended to Court for overall funding approval.

8 People Report **Paper F**

The report was noted and the development of a people strategy welcomed. With regard to industrial action, it was noted that re-balloting of other institutions where a mandate for industrial action has not been reached may take place. Separately, Unison, one of the three recognised staff unions, are seeking an improved pay offer for their members in the higher education sector and may ballot for action.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

9 Estates Committee Report **Paper G**

The report was noted.

10 PRC People & Money Sub-Group Report **Paper H**

The report was noted.

11 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 7 February 2021, 2.30pm-5pm