



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

4 April 2022 (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
Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change & Governance; and
University Secretary

In attendance: Leigh Chalmers, Deputy Secretary Governance & Legal
Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
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

Apologies: Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students
Gary Jebb, Director of Place

1 Minute

Paper A1

Members and attendees were welcomed to the meeting and apologies noted. The Minute of the meeting held on 7 February 2022 was approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

There were no matters arising. The action log was reviewed, with one outdated action to be removed with the Convener's agreement.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

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

- The recruitment process for a new University Secretary, which has attracted a diverse field of applicants from within and outwith the sector and domestically and internationally;
- Recruitment for a wide number of Heads of School position is also ongoing at present, with the incoming Provost and Heads of College involved as appropriate;
- Feedback from an all staff 'Town Hall' event held earlier that day. Topics raised included:

- The Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) – with questioning over whether changes are required given a recent positive monthly report on the scheme’s position and if the valuation could be re-run. The monthly report included calculations based on the changes and a starting a new valuation at this point is not expected to make a material difference, with the next valuation due in March 2023;
- The impact of the long-running USS dispute on management-staff goodwill – this was acknowledged as a cause for concern and features on the risk register;
- Hybrid and remote working – with some staff wishing to work remotely on a permanent basis, with working patterns being a local decision for managers depending on business needs;
- Fatigue with workload impacts of strategic change projects and workload levels more generally – given the relatively early stage of many of the projects benefits are not evident to many as yet but this will improve in time; and,
- Help for those affected by the invasion of Ukraine – scholarships and fee waivers have been provided to students in need, although difficulties accessing visas has limited the amount of assistance that can provided. The University also offers up to the 10 academic staff positions for scholars fleeing conflict in any country, working with the Council for At-Risk Academics

Members discussed the topics raised at the Town Hall meeting, including assistance for those affected by the invasion of Ukraine, with indications that access to visas may improve rapidly and ensuring that the University is prepared to assist should this occur. It was noted that the University is also working with partner institutions to offer support, such as the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, that is teaching displaced Ukrainian medical students. Regarding staff feedback from the Town Hall meeting more broadly, it was noted that concerns raised are broadly similar to those seen at peer institutions, with some topics such as an increased desire for remote working seen across all sectors.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Director of Finance’s Report

Paper B

The Director of Finance’s Report was reviewed, including an update on additional in-year investment, the second quarter forecast, an update on the Universities Superannuation Scheme and the results of a Russell Group financial benchmarking exercise.

The strong financial performance in the context of staff and student experience was discussed and the importance of communicating the benefits for the whole university community of a financially resilient university. On the Russell Group financial benchmarking exercise, the potential for more detailed benchmarking on costs was discussed, with comparable data not available at present but other approaches could be taken to illuminate this. The positive reception by staff to the additional respite days offered last year in recognition of the impacts of the pandemic on staff

workloads was noted and the impact of industrial action on those staff not participating in the industrial action.

5 Investment Opportunity: Project Dolly Proceeds

Paper C

Members involved in existing commercialisation activity declared these as set out in the Register of Interests for Court members and published on the University [website](#).

A proposal for reinvestment in early stage commercialisation projects utilising a portion of the proceeds from a Roslin Institute spinout company was reviewed. It was noted that the transaction provides a unique opportunity to improve the University's activities in this area with the ambition to match the leading institutions in the UK in generating impact from the expertise of staff and students for the benefit of all. The success of the transaction was welcomed and the proposal to create an investment fund that would grow from reinvestment was supported. Members commented on the high quality of the proposals, which could be used as an exemplar. Those involved in the transaction were thanked, as well as the Court members involved in the Commercialisation Sub-Group for their input to the proposals. The broader subject of commercialisation was suggested as a topic for a future Court Seminar.

6 Usher Institute – Reallocation of City Deal Funding

Paper D

It was agreed to recommend to Court for approval the reallocation of City Deal funding from the Edinburgh BioQuarter Enabling Infrastructure project to the Usher Institute project budget in order to enable the fit out of the five shelled neighbourhoods within the Usher Institute currently under construction at the BioQuarter site.

7 EUSA Budget 2022/23

Paper E

A narrative summary of the Students' Association budget for financial year 2022/23 (1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 in the case of the Association) was reviewed. It was noted that the budget had been reviewed and approved by the Association's separate Board of Trustees, the body responsible for the finances of the Association and was being presented to the Committee given a legislative responsibility for UK university governing bodies to have financial oversight of student unions, with oversight of the annual budget having been delegated by Court to Policy & Resources Committee. It was noted that the financial priority of the Association is to return to the pre-pandemic levels of financial strength with a seven year recovery plan in place for this, which the Trustee Board may opt to shorten. Noting the prior approval by the Trustee Board, the Association's budget was approved by the Committee.

8 Staff Benefits Scheme Trustee Structure

Paper F

A proposal to change the trusteeship structure of the University of Edinburgh Staff Benefits Scheme (SBS) (the University's in-house pension scheme for professional services staff in Grades 1-5) was considered. It was noted that the trustees have requested a structure change from an individual trustee model to a single corporate trustee model, with the current individual trustees to act as trustee-directors in the

new model, with no change in the number or method of appointment for these. Subject to incorporating a point on member communications, the proposal was supported for approval by Court.

9 People Report

Paper G

The report was reviewed, noting that the University & College Union are currently re-balloting institutions to seek a mandate for strike action and action short of strike beyond the end of the current mandate on 3 May 2022. Two ballots are being held: one relating to the 'four fights' (pay, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, precarious contracts, and workload); and, one relating to pensions. The impact of the continued industrial action on staff morale and the potential to implement beneficial initiatives locally separate from the national negotiations on pay and pensions was discussed and encouraged where possible.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

10 People & Money System Update

Paper H

It was noted that the Phase 2 element of the system had been activated on schedule earlier that day, with additional helpline support in place should any problems with the April payroll be encountered by individual staff. External advisor Professor Anthony Finkelstein will visit the University in late May to consider any additional actions for the Phase 3 implementation scheduled for August and to consider learning points for any future programmes of a similar nature.

11 Estates Committee Report

Paper I

The report was noted.

12 Investment Committee Report

Paper J

The report was noted.

13 PRC Commercialisation Sub-Group Report

Paper K

The report was noted.

14 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

15 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 30 May 2022, 2.30pm-5pm