



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

30 May 2022, Raeburn Room, Old College

Web Version

Minute

Present: Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member (Convener)
Douglas Alexander, General Council Assessor (by videocall)
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
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
James Smith, Vice-Principal International (for Item 8)
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian
to the University (for Item 10)

Apologies: Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Sarah Cooper, Senate Assessor
Gary Jebb, Director of Place

1 Minute

Paper A1

Members and attendees were welcomed to the meeting and apologies noted. Ellen MacRae, Jonathan Seckl, Sarah Smith and Sarah Cooper (in absentia) were thanked on the occasion of their last meeting for their many contributions to the work of the Committee.

The Minute of the meeting held on 4 April 2022 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

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

- The University's highly positive performance in the Research Excellence Framework 2021 (covered in more detail under Item 7 below);

- Staff morale and industrial relations continues to be a key concern for the senior management, with the potential for further industrial action in the next academic year; and,
- Recent visits, both internationally and to the rest of the UK, have shown the continuing high regard the University is held in. Drawing attention to this might be helpful in showing the contribution the University makes as an asset for Scotland.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Finance

• Director of Finance's Report

Paper B1

The Director of Finance's Report was reviewed, including an update on additional in-year investment, a revised Quarter Two Forecast 2021-22, a draft (unaudited) Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure 2021-22, half-year results at subsidiary companies and proposed parameters for an agreement between the University and the Trustee of the Staff Benefits Scheme (SBS) to conclude the latest triennial valuation.

It was noted that the draft Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure includes a significant balance sheet provision for the University's share of the deficit recovery plan for the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). This is broadly in line with expectations, is a non-cash accounting entry and will be replicated proportionally in other UK universities that are USS members.

The proposed parameters for an agreement on the SBS triennial valuation were discussed and agreed, with a finalised proposal to be submitted to the next Court meeting for approval.

• Long-Term Debt Review

Paper B2

An update on work completed to review the University's long-term debt arrangements and to develop a formal repayment strategy was considered.

5 Planning and Budgeting: 2022-23 Proposals

Paper C

Proposed budgets for 2022-23, developed within a 5-year context to enable delivery of plans and priorities aligned with Strategy 2030, were reviewed.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- The approach taken to budget setting was discussed, noting the move towards a more strategic, University-wide approach, informed by Strategy 2030 and its key performance indicators;
- The limited references to commercialisation in the executive summaries produced by budget areas;
- Forecasting staffing requirements to deliver the plans, connections between staffing levels and staff morale and current difficulties in recruiting to some professional services areas in particular;

- Inflation assumptions, which have been revised upwards in the final version of the plans from earlier drafts. Inflation levels will be considered on an ongoing basis as part of the quarterly financial reviews of each budget area and assumptions can be adjusted following these if required;

It was agreed to endorse the proposed Group level budget as set out in the paper for approval by Court.

6 Edinburgh Futures Institute

Paper D

An update on the construction of the Edinburgh Futures Institute building at the Quartermile site was considered. The additional funding request, including a risk allowance, was endorsed and recommended to Court for approval.

7 REF2021: the results

Paper E

The outcome of the UK-wide Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 exercise was reported. The exercise peer reviewed research quality, environment and impact at UK universities from 2014-2020 to inform the future annual allocation of c£2bn in public funding. The University emerged in a stronger fourth position in the UK for research power (quantity multiplied by quality – the measure most closely related to funding outcomes), closer to third (Cambridge) and further ahead of fifth (Manchester) than in the previous exercise. As a result, the University will receive an increase in its Research Excellence Grant allocation from the Scottish Funding Council. 21 of the University's 28 submissions by research area were ranked in the top 5 in the UK, including 5 in first place: Computer Science and Informatics; Sociology; Anthropology and Development Studies; Chemistry; and, Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Sciences.

The following points were discussed:

- The results were warmly welcomed and all those involved in the University's submission thanked for their contributions;
- The importance of size as an increasingly important factor in positive performance was highlighted. The University submitted five joint submissions (three with Heriot-Watt, one with St Andrews and one with SRUC), more than any other university, and all joint submissions were ranked in the top 5 in the UK to the benefit of the University and the partner institutions involved;
- The benefits to Scottish society and the economy that the University of Edinburgh delivers as a global centre of research excellence and the importance of continued communication of this to policymakers and more widely was agreed upon.

8 Update on Current and Pipeline Partnerships in China

Paper F

An annual status update on existing and pipeline strategic partnerships with Chinese institutions was received.

The report was reviewed and an update given on the decision of the local branch of the University & College Union (UCU) to suspend a planned marking and assessment boycott at the University. It was noted that there is ongoing constructive engagement with the local UCU branch on topics such as fixed term contracts and guaranteed hours contracts. Nationally, pay negotiations are continuing, with the current employer position offering a greater uplift for staff in lower grades. For the Universities Superannuation Scheme, attention is shifting to focus on the next valuation, which begins in March 2023. It was noted that expectations are rising that the March 2023 valuation will deliver a positive outcome that could allow for improvements to member benefits and/or contribution rates but this is dependent on the position of financial markets and caution was expressed given the current global economic outlook.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

10 Digital Estate

- **Procurement and Implementation of New Timetabling Systems** **Paper H1**
- **Data Resilience: Recoverability of University Data** **Paper H2**

It was agreed to recommend for approval by Court:

- Procurement and Implementation of New Timetabling Systems: the total project budget over 5 years, noting that the revenue element is already included in the Information Services Group's budget and the capital element has been approved by Estates Committee; and,
- Data Resilience: Recoverability of University Data: the total budget, noting that the revenue element is already included in the Information Services Group's budget and the capital element has been approved by Estates Committee.

It was noted that the timetabling project will be delivered in three stages timed to take account of other ongoing change projects to aid implementation. Two other digital estate proposals, one to enable multi-factor authentication and one to establish a new identity and access management system are progressing and will be reviewed by Estates Committee.

11 Elsevier Journals Licence Renewal

Paper I

It was agreed to recommend for approval by Court expenditure for a multi-year renewal agreement for Elsevier academic journals. It was noted that this translates to a significant discount on the current fees for journal access and publishing, negotiated collectively by the UK higher education sector.

12 People & Money System Update

Paper J

An update on the implementation of the People & Money System was reviewed. It was noted that the second monthly payroll since the implementation of the payroll component has concluded successfully.

13 Delegated Authority Schedule – Review and Update

Paper K

Proposed minor updates to the Delegated Authority Schedule to clarify how delegation will be implemented in the People & Money System and reflect recent role changes were recommended to Court for approval.

14 Repurpose of Blackie Memorial Prize Endowment

Paper L

It was agreed to recommend for approval by Court a request to exercise its power under Ordinance 209 to repurpose the Blackie Memorial Prize Endowment to allow for the funding of a Senior Lectureship in Celtic Linguistics for five years.

15 Estates Committee Report

Paper I

The report was noted.

16 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

17 Proposed Meeting Dates 2022/23

Meeting dates for the 2022/23 academic year were approved as follows:

- Monday 5 September 2022, 2.30-5pm
- Monday 14 November 2022, 2.30-5pm
- Monday 6 February 2023, 2.30-5pm
- Monday 27 March 2023, 2.30-5pm
- Monday 5 June 2023, 2.30-5pm