



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

5 September 2022, Raeburn Room, Old College

Web Version

Minute

Present: Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member (Convener)
Douglas Alexander, General Council Assessor
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member
Kim Graham, Provost
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member (by videocall)
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
Niamh Roberts, President, Students' Association

In attendance: 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
Jamie Tait, Governance Manager
Christina Boswell, Vice-Principal Research & Enterprise (for Items 7 and 8)
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian to the University (for Item 11)

Apologies: None

1 Minute

Papers A1-A3

Janet Legrand, Convener, noted apologies and welcomed new members Ruth Girardet, Kathryn Nash, Niamh Roberts, Kim Graham and Leigh Chalmers (in the new role of Vice-Principal and University Secretary) to their first meeting.

The minute of the meeting held on 30 May 2022 and the minutes of the meetings by correspondence concluded on 6 July 2022 and 23 August 2022 were approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A4

There were no matters arising and the action log was reviewed. It was noted that a draft of the new Student Residential Accommodation Strategy is planned for submission to the December meeting of the Estates, Digital & Infrastructure Committee and it was agreed to remove an outdated action relating to the People & Money System.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

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

- Preparations for the new semester, with Welcome Week beginning on Monday 12 September and an update on the expected student intake covered in Item 4 below. Student accommodation, particularly private rented accommodation for returning students, is an area of concern, with the supply of private rental accommodation in the city having fallen, with an associated increase in private rental prices, coupled with a large cohort of returning students increasing demand. More encouragingly, the accommodation guarantee for the provision of University accommodation for most new students will be met, with many students not in the scope of the accommodation guarantee also being housed in University accommodation. It was noted that there is a fixed annual fee for utility charges in University housing, which will protect against forecast increases in energy prices over the course of the year;
- The University opted to implement the annual sector-wide pay award for higher education staff with immediate effect from 1 August. All three recognised unions have rejected the offer and the University & College Union will shortly begin a new ballot on pay, casualisation, workloads, gender and ethnicity pay equality and pensions, with an existing mandate for strike action and action short of a strike in place until 7 October;
- The University's allocation within the Scottish Funding Council's Research Excellence Grant will see a significant uplift (covered in Item 7 below) owing to the strong performance in the Research Excellence Framework 2021.;
- The appointment of a new UK Prime Minister, with appointments to Cabinet positions of particular interest to the higher education sector of Education Secretary and Business Secretary (responsible for UK research funding policy) awaited at present; and,
- New members of the Senior Leadership Team, including the Vice-Principal & University Secretary, were welcomed and the Principal recorded his gratitude to members who had completed their terms since the last meeting.

The Students' Association President highlighted the urgency of the current student accommodation situation in the city and welcomed engagement from the senior team on this, with a meeting scheduled for the following day. Underlying factors were discussed, noting that the supply of affordable private student accommodation in the city has been deteriorating for a number of years, with a competing growth in short-term holiday lets and regulatory changes that have disincentivised landlords, coupled with larger student intakes in 2020 and 2021 that have led to greater demand from returning students for private accommodation this autumn. In response, some University accommodation has been made available on a temporary basis to returning students while they seek private accommodation for the new academic year, as well as increasing the number of returning students housed in University accommodation for the duration of the academic year. In the longer term, the University will continue to seek to expand the number of rooms that can be offered. Increasing accommodation while meeting the net zero by 2040 carbon target was raised along with potential wider impacts of accommodation problems on mental health and academic performance.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Student Recruitment – 2022/23 entry

Paper B

An overview of the likely outturn of the student recruitment cycle for 2022/23 entry was reviewed. It was noted that the main priorities for the cycle were to meet the planned intake targets having, in common with peer institutions, exceeded these in the previous two years, and to increase the number and proportion of students from widening access backgrounds. While the finalised figures will not be available until October, initial indications are that the planned intake targets will be met very closely, along with a significant increase in students from the least advantaged 20% of Scottish postcodes and from care experienced backgrounds. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Improving timeliness of offer making in future years and the potential impact of delayed offer making on future applicant behaviour; and,
- Political interest in university admissions – this continues to be of high political interest and major changes, such as post-qualification admissions, have been mooted but have not progressed to date.

5 Director of Finance’s Report

Paper C

The Director of Finance’s Report was reviewed, including a revised draft (unaudited) Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure (COSI) for 2021-22 and updates on the annual insurance renewal and on the long term debt position, including a recommendation to establish a long-term debt repayment vehicle.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- The impact of inflation, and energy prices in particular, on the University’s finances and on the University community – this is being witnessed in many areas. Provision for University scholarships and hardship funds is being reviewed at present in light of current inflation levels and noting that UK Research & Innovation have announced an increase of 10% in their stipend for funded doctoral students;
- The Investment Committee are supportive of the proposed approach to managing a long-term debt repayment vehicle and have experience of managing funds on behalf of the University in addition to the endowment fund; and,
- The rationale for establishment of a long-term debt repayment vehicle given other competing priorities – this provides a plan to meet payments due to be repaid from the mid-2030s through to the late 2040s and will give assurance to Court members that their responsibility, and the responsibility of their successors, for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the University is being discharged in this respect.

It was agreed to recommend to Court the establishment of a long-term debt repayment vehicle.

6 People Report

Paper D

The report was reviewed, including an update on potential industrial action and statistical information on academic promotions, salary increment contribution awards, lump sum awards and a gender pay analysis following the contribution awards. The gender pay analysis was discussed, noting the improving position in Grades 3-8 in particular as a result of the contribution awards and factors affecting the Grade 10 staff profile.

7 Scottish Funding Council Research Excellence Grant uplift: Proposed Approach

Paper E

An overview of the proposed approach to the deployment of the expected Research Excellence Grant (REG) uplift over 2022-23 to 2026-27 was considered. The intention is to continue with the main 'core' allocation to Schools that will, from 2023-24 and beyond, reflect changes in performance between the Research Excellence Framework 2014 and 2021 exercises and consequently Scottish Funding Council formulaically-driven attribution figures. This is to be accompanied by investment in strategic priorities. These strategic investments will allow for more funding for collaborative, interdisciplinary activities, new initiatives and investment in research talent such as the Chancellor's Fellows scheme.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Continued pressure on government budgets and the importance of demonstrating to government and the Scottish Funding Council the impact of the funding;
- Linkages to Strategy 2030, considering the appropriate level of investment in higher risk/higher impact areas and balancing top-down/bottom-up approaches, innovation funding for commercialisation broadly defined; and,
- The intention to increase the proportion of female and ethnic minority Chancellor's Fellows in future recruitment rounds.

Noting that fuller papers will be considered by the University Executive and then by Court, the high-level approach as set out in the paper was supported.

8 Research and Commercialisation Statistics Annual Report

Paper F

The annual report detailing research and commercialisation statistics in the 2021-22 academic year was presented. It was noted that the commercialisation statistics were broadly encouraging and the committee's Commercialisation Sub-Group intends to consider intellectual property matters and a spinout company in its future meetings.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

9 People & Money Systems Update

Paper G

An update on the implementation of the People & Money System was reviewed. It was noted that the final phase, phase 3, launched as planned on 31 August and work will continue over the next two months to resolve remaining known issues and

other issues that might arise following user feedback. All those involved in the successful launch and for ensuring that programme remained within its contingency were thanked for their work.

10 Investment Committee Report

Paper H

The report was noted.

11 Microsoft Agreement

Paper I

A new three year contract for the University-wide use of Microsoft services and software was recommended to Court for approval, with a delegation of authority to be sought for:

- i) the Principal to approve the contract when the finalised value has been determined; and,
- ii) the Chief Information Officer and Librarian to the University to sign the contract.

12 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 14 November 2022, 2.30-5pm (in-person meeting)