



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

14 November 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
Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member (by videocall)
Kim Graham, Provost
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
Niamh Roberts, President, Students' Association

In attendance: Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students
Gary Jebb, Director of Place
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
Rachael Robertson, Deputy Director of Finance
Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning
Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services
Jamie Tait, Governance Manager

Apologies: Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
James Saville, Director of Human Resources

1 Minute

Paper A1

Janet Legrand, Convener, noted apologies and welcomed members and attendees to the meeting.

The minute of the meeting held on 5 September 2022 was approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

There were no matters arising. The action log was reviewed, noting that an updated student residential accommodation strategy is planned for consideration at the next meeting of the Estates, Digital & Infrastructure Committee.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

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

- People and Money: the recent implementation of the third phase, the new financial system, has led to significant disquiet from many staff and affected students and led to media interest. The transfer from the previous system to the new system had necessitated a shutdown in the previous system before

the new system became operational and this has generated a backlog, which is taking longer to reduce than anticipated. In addition, some staff have expressed a sense of disempowerment due to not being able to complete tasks on the new system as they could previously. Disruption has been caused and requests for compensation have been received from those who have not yet received expected payments, including some in financially vulnerable positions. The visibility of the senior leadership and the Court on the topic has been questioned and it is recognised that communications on the new system could have been improved.

- Staff morale: the University & College Union has called a continuous period of action short of a strike from 23 November onwards, with three days of strike action scheduled later this month;
- An All Staff Town Hall event held earlier in the day: the main topic raised was the People & Money system and there was also interest in ensuring that the implementation of other strategic change projects, such as curriculum transformation, learn from the experience of the People & Money implementation – the Provost and the Vice-Principal Corporate Services will lead a group to consider this. The effect of the growth in student numbers on student experience was also raised;
- International league tables: the University has placed 15th in the QS World University Rankings, 29th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 29th in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (assessed against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals) and 4th in the QS Sustainability Rankings;
- The University's success in the Research Excellence Framework 2021 was celebrated at a recent internal event held at the McEwan Hall and at an external event held at the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament event was hosted by Edinburgh Southern MSP Daniel Johnson and attended by Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training and Mike Cantlay, Chair of the Scottish Funding Council, amongst many others; and,
- Student applications in the recently completed cycle were the University's highest ever, with particularly strong application levels from prospective international students.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

7 People and Money System Update

Paper E

The Convener proposed that Item 7 be taken as the first substantive item.

An update on the implementation of the People & Money system was considered. Efforts are being concentrated on reducing a backlog of overdue payments to students, suppliers and other non-trade suppliers, improving research grants finance processes, and on budgeting and forecasting work. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Whether the situation is now improving and how this can be demonstrated and assurances given – upcoming milestones will show the extent of progress. Success with these will help restore confidence and be a clear

indication of progress. Importantly, the new payroll system has continued to operate successfully since implementation earlier in the year;

- Whether the system governance and support in place is sufficient – the Enactment Group has been extended until the end of the calendar year having been originally scheduled to wind down and transition to a new ‘business as usual’ model at the end of October. There is support for a swift approach to resolve major issues;
- An independent review with Court involvement in determining the terms of reference should take place at the appropriate time. The present focus should be on rapid resolution of the immediate issues before turning to wider reflections, lessons learned and implications for other projects;
- The extent to which issues had been known prior to launch and if interventions could have been made at earlier points – the system was procured prior to the pandemic and the Committee is aware from previous discussions and papers of the disruption from the pandemic on the system’s development. However, the system launched without critical defects. Some system issues have emerged post-launch and are being addressed. Other issues relate to changed processes as a result of the finance transformation programme rather than the system itself and these are being considered;
- The level of concern from many staff, which has led to an open letter from many elected members of Senate and communications to Court members and the media – this is very unusual and should be taken as an indication of the high level of concern; and,
- The scale of the challenge of implementing a major new HR and Finance system in a large and devolved organisation was recognised and that a system of this type tends to realise benefits at an organisational-wide level over time rather than provide tangible immediate benefits to most users.

5 Director of Finance’s Report

Paper B

The Director of Finance’s Report was reviewed, including a draft of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2021-22, an update on Asset Backed Security funds, a proposed investment strategy from the Trustees of the Staff Benefits Scheme and a Transparent Approach to Costing benchmarking exercise. Colleagues were thanked for their work in preparing the draft Annual Report and Accounts, with any comments on the draft to be submitted by email following the meeting.

6 Performance measures to support Strategy 2030: 2021-22 year-end report

Paper C

The year-end report for the Strategy 2030 Key Performance Indicators was presented. Recognising that some elements remain to be finalised, the mixture of quantitative and qualitative measures and the visual representation used was welcomed. The indicators can be viewed in an interactive dashboard format but it was noted that, given the nature of higher education, many indicators update on an annual basis and are well suited to a year-end report format. Considering whether internal indicators of social impact can be developed was suggested, along with a brief ‘elevator pitch’ summary that could be used by senior staff to communicate progress.

7 Size and Shape: Update

Paper D

An update on work to determine a framework for size and shape planning for the student population was considered. The work has been split into two phases, with Phase 1 the subject of the current report. Phase 1 has focused on full-time on-campus undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, which comprises the great majority of the student population, with Phase 2 ongoing and encompassing other student categories. Members discussed:

- The update has given a helpful and clear overview of the size and shape work and was supported;
- Whether there is an aspiration for the University to be a certain size – the focus is on ensuring any growth is planned and strategic, and on the mix of the student population and helping the student experience; and,
- The importance of Phase 2 and in giving institutional level consideration of the effects of local decision-making over time.

8 People Report

Paper F

The standing update on staff-related matters, including an update on the development of a People Strategy, was presented. Planned and potential industrial action from a number of unions with staff membership at the University and the impact of continued industrial action on students and staff was discussed. Industrial action has become more common in the sector in recent years and risks to long-term student experience from this should be carefully considered. Pay and non-financial recognition for staff was also discussed, noting that work is underway to consider the grading scales to address pay scale compression and to help enhance recruitment and retention. Encouraging staff take-up of a new anti-racism online learning course was discussed. Ongoing work of the Staff Experience Committee in considering change management and identifying areas for improvement for staff benefit was noted.

9 Pollock Halls District Heating Pipework Replacement

Paper G

A loan from the University to subsidiary company the University of Edinburgh Estates Services Company Limited to urgently renew the district heating pipework network on the Pollock Halls Campus was approved, with the loan to be repaid by income from the subsidiary's commercial activity. It was agreed that a contingency plan will be developed for accommodating students should there be a pipeline failure prior to or during the replacement work, with the intention that the new pipework will be operational for the next academic year.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

10 Intentions for Planning and Budgeting for 2023-28

Paper H

Intentions for the approach to planning and budget-setting to be undertaken during 2022-23 for the financial years 2023-2028 were noted.

11 Outcome Agreement 2022-23

Paper I

A developed draft of the University's Outcome Agreement 2022-23 with the Scottish Funding Council was reviewed prior to further work to develop a final draft for submission to Court for approval.

12 Estates, Digital and Infrastructure Committee Report

Paper J

The report was noted.

13 Estates, Digital and Infrastructure Committee – Name Amendment

Paper K

An amendment to the name of the Estates, Digital and Infrastructure Committee was considered. Feedback that the Committee's acronym duplicated the pre-existing Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee and some confusion had been caused as both were being commonly referred to by their acronyms was noted. To resolve this and to simplify matters, it was agreed that the name should be changed to Estates Committee with immediate effect, with Estates taken to mean physical estate, digital estate and all infrastructure.

14 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

15 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 6 February 2023, 2.30-5pm (online meeting)