



**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**6 February 2023, Videoconference**

**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  
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member  
Niamh Roberts, President, Students' Association

**In attendance:** Lee Hamill, Director of Finance  
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students  
Kate Huang, Governance Apprentice  
Gary Jebb, Director of Place  
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services  
James Saville, Director of Human Resources  
Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning  
Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services  
Jamie Tait, Governance Manager  
Iain Gordon, Vice-Principal and Head of College of Science & Engineering (for Item 6)

**Apologies:** None

**1 Minute Paper A1**

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

The minute of the meeting held on 14 November 2022 was approved.

**2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log Paper A2**

There were no matters arising. The action log was reviewed.

**3 Principal's Communications Verbal**

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

- The People and Money System and industrial relations have been two topics of focus since the last meeting and are covered separately later in the agenda (Items 4 and 8 respectively);

- Funding for a greatly expanded Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has been agreed, offering support up to 2030, twice the duration of the previous agreement;
- The Chancellor's recent engagements with the University, including: a visit to the FastBlade facility in Rosyth; hosting the Chancellor's Dinner and presenting the Chancellor's Awards made in the four categories of: outstanding contribution, research, teaching, rising star; and, a reception with Nursing colleagues from the School of Health in Social Science; and,
- The Universities Scotland annual parliamentary reception at the Scottish Parliament. 36 MSPs attended, including guest speaker Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Each institution presented a case study on the theme of the sector's role in economic transformation, with the University of Edinburgh case study focusing on recent graduate Ishani Malhotra, who has established a company in the field of cancer diagnostics.

## **SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS**

### **4 People and Money System Update**

**Paper B**

An update on the implementation of the People & Money system was presented. It was noted that, as the half-year point since the implementation of the finance component approaches, while the system is stable it is not in the position it was envisaged as being at this stage, with a greater level of manual checks being undertaken. The backlog of overdue payments has reduced, excepting an anticipated small increase over the Christmas/New Year closure period, with a present focus on reducing overdue one-off payments (e.g. to those providing exam invigilation services), research grant administration and in responding to helpdesk queries. Additional staff have been recruited to assist with various elements of the system.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Developing indicators of success as mentioned at the previous meeting and whether these can include School level information – indicators of success include reducing the number of overdue payments and the impact of these for all involved;
- Providing further information and reports from the Committee's People & Money Sub-Group and making information on People & Money developments more widely available, including updating Senate;
- Whether staff are becoming more comfortable using the system over time – staff are becoming more familiar with the system but more training is required and recruiting those who can provide training has also been challenging;
- It was confirmed that utilising the current external auditors will not affect the current tender exercise to appoint new external auditors;
- Communications with trade suppliers and communications overall – trade suppliers were contacted prior to the switch-over period and communications have continued on an individual basis since then. Internally, in-person open meetings with staff and postgraduate research students were held in November and present feedback is that staff are seeking more detail on

specific aspects and when certain changes will be made and the team is working with the Communications & Marketing department on this;

- The software purchased is a variant of similar software used by many other large organisations and is well established;
- Encouragement was given to achieve the functionality intended and the long term aims of the overall programme – the benefits need to be realised over the longer term on what is a major programme with significant expense both financially and in staff time and resources more broadly;
- The reference to developing a new chart of accounts in the new system – this is the complete list of financial accounts for an organisation, which had previously developed organically at the University. The new system will modernise this approach to what is now standard practice;
- Work to improve the position as set out in the paper was welcomed and it was noted that a further update would be submitted to Court.

## **5 Finance**

### **• Director of Finance's Report**

**Paper C1**

The Director of Finance's Report was reviewed, including updates on: the full year forecast for 2022-23; the ongoing external audit tender process; and, the summary financial performance of Russell Group institutions in 2021-22, ahead of a more detailed benchmarking exercise to be submitted to the next meeting.

### **• Annual TRAC Return 2021-22**

**Paper C2**

The University's Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) return for 2021-22 and full Economic Cost (fEC) rates to be applied to research grants from 1 February 2023 was presented.

## **6 Engineering Hub**

**Paper D**

A revised funding request and Full Business Case for the Engineering Hub was considered. It was noted that funding for the project had originally been approved by Court in September 2019 but was deferred in 2020 alongside other capital projects that were not contractually committed given the financial uncertainties in the early stages of the pandemic. Subsequently, Court approved in February 2022 a new capital plan that included the Engineering Hub, subject to approval by Estates Committee of a revised business case and subsequent approval by Court of the associated funding request. The following points were raised in discussion:

- The project and the benefits it can bring to the School, College and wider University was welcomed;
- Using the project to enhance student experience and noting the importance, in this respect, of recruiting students in line with the levels envisaged in the business case, which were aligned with student number plans; and,
- Funding sources for capital project and prioritisation of projects more generally – capital projects are funded through a mixture of funds generated internally (operating surplus/EBITDA), external borrowing and philanthropic donations.

The project was supported and it was agreed to recommend to Court approval for funding to progress the project to completion.

## **7 Advanced Computing Facility and Mary Somerville Data Centre Expansion**

**Paper E**

The Estates Committee approved a capital investment to create additional capacity in the Mary Somerville Data Centre at the King's Buildings campus that can accommodate the equipment to be relocated and also to provide additional data centre capacity to support further growth in central and School hosted IT services and support the Green Data Centre initiative by creating additional space to relocate other equipment to the Mary Somerville Data Centre from less efficient spaces across the University.

Key issues for the migration to the Mary Somerville Data Centre were discussed, including when to commit the funding. Ensuring that disruption to researchers using the equipment is minimised with a short two week shutdown that is well notified in advance was also discussed. Clear communications with affected researchers was encouraged, along with considering particular impacts on PhD students or researchers on fixed term contracts and whether any extensions or other support in mitigation can be offered, noting that an interim service is planned for the shutdown period, with access to be prioritised according to need.

## **8 People Report**

**Paper F**

The regular update on staff-related matters was presented. It was noted that the first day of planned strike action by the University & College Union had taken place on 1 February and, while full details are not yet available, initial indications are that this followed a similar pattern to previous industrial action at the University. The two other recognised trade unions at the University are not currently taking action, although one is re-balloting its members. While there is sector-wide industrial action ongoing, positive local activity is taking place with trade unions to consider fixed term contracts and review sections of the pay scales where there are particular recruitment and retention issues. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Progress on reviewing the use of fixed term contracts – work is concentrating on areas where the use of fixed term contracts can be reduced while acknowledging that there will not be a single approach that covers all situations where fixed term contracts are used across a large and devolved University; and,
- The impact on students of the industrial action – this will be highly variable across the University depending on the number of staff taking action. As in previous years, a Learning Opportunity Fund has been established to help affected students using pay foregone by staff taking industrial action.

### **ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL**

## **9 Research and Commercialisation Statistics Update**

**Paper G**

An update on research and commercialisation statistics at the mid-point of the academic and financial year was noted.

**10 Estates Committee Report**

**Paper H**

The report was noted.

**11 Investment Committee Report**

**Paper I**

The report was noted and the benchmarked performance of funds invested in discussed.

**12 Commercialisation Sub-Group Report**

**Paper J**

The report was noted, with an update to Court on commercialisation activities planned for a future Court seminar.

**13 Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**14 Date of Next Meeting**

Monday, 27 March 2023, 2.30-5pm (online meeting)