



**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**5 June 2023, Videoconference**

**Web Version**

**Minute**

**Present:** Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member (Convener)  
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  
Douglas Alexander, 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  
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  
Kirstie Graham, Deputy Head of Court Services  
John Scott, DDI Programme Head of Delivery (for Item 8)

**1 Minute**

**Paper A1**

Members and attendees were welcomed to the meeting. Niamh Roberts was thanked for their service to the committee and to Court on the occasion of their last meeting.

The minute of the meeting held on 27 March 2023 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:

- Industrial relations: the triennial valuation of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) is being finalised and is expected to show a greatly improved position. With attention centring on pay and other non-pension aspects, the University & College Union (UCU) holds a mandate for industrial action until the end of September 2023 and is encouraging members to undertake action short of a strike in the form of a marking and assessment boycott. This is

leading to concern from students and their families, particularly students expecting to graduate this summer and who may have visas and/or employment contracts dependent on their graduation. In light of the situation, the Principal has proposed that if staff otherwise participating in the boycott assess the work of students expecting to graduate this summer, no salary deductions will be made. As participation levels in the boycott vary widely across the University, many students will likely be unaffected and reassurance is being offered to students where possible. However, the extent of the impact will not be known until marks are due to be submitted. In addition, the local branch have announced a day of strike action later this month and further days in September during Welcome Week at the start of the new semester;

- Edinburgh Futures Institute: the building is approaching completion, with a soft opening planned in September ahead of a full opening in Spring 2024. The First Minister of Scotland recently visited the site and Court members are encouraged to visit upon opening;
- Artificial Intelligence: this continues to be a topic of huge interest in both wider society and higher education worldwide. The University is recognised within the sector as both an early pioneer in the field and as a continued centre of excellence and there is a desire to make this reputation more widely known outside of higher education. Professor Shannon Vallor, Baillie Gifford Chair in the Ethics of Data and Artificial Intelligence, has been invited to present to the next Court meeting on this topic and share insights from this rapidly developing area.

The marking and assessment boycott was discussed. The impact on students expected to graduate this summer was raised, noting the disruption experienced by the present cohort of final year undergraduate students from repeated industrial action over the course of their studies.

The Principal reiterated his concerns for any affected students, with the sector-wide nature of the dispute not permitting an institutional-level solution and the importance of the University's mission in teaching and disseminating knowledge. The continued support from trade unions for sector-wide collective pay bargaining was noted. It was commented that the collective employer offer reflects the varied financial health of the sector, with many institutions experiencing a high degree of financial constraint, reflected in the offer.

## **SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS**

### **4 Director of Finance's Report Paper B**

The Director of Finance's Report was reviewed.

### **5 Planning and Budgeting: 2023-24 Proposals Paper C**

A proposed University Group-level budget for 2023-24 developed within a 5-year context to enable delivery of plans and priorities aligned with Strategy 2030 was considered.

It was agreed to recommend the University Group level budget and its submission to Court for approval.

## **6 Edinburgh University Students' Association Budget 2023/24**

**Paper D**

A narrative summary of the Students' Association budget for financial year 2023/24 (1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 for 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 given a legislative responsibility for university governing bodies to do so, with Court having delegated this responsibility to Policy & Resources Committee.

Noting the prior approval by the Trustee Board, the Association's budget was approved.

## **7 Student Accommodation Acquisition**

**Paper E**

An opportunity to acquire a student accommodation development was reviewed. It was noted the Residential Accommodation Strategy considered at the previous meeting identified a need for additional student accommodation and the student accommodation market within Edinburgh has changed rapidly since the development of the Capital Plan in 2021.

The Committee:

- Noted the ongoing legal discussions and due diligence required;
- Noted that approval is being sought from Estates Committee by electronic correspondence to approve the Full Business Case;
- Recommended to Court that funding is approved for the acquisition subject to approval of the Full Business Case from Estates Committee; and,
- Recommended to Court that authority is delegated to the Vice-Principal Corporate Services, in consultation with the University Secretary, to conclude the transaction following conclusion of due diligence, subject to the final acquisition price being in the approved range.

## **8 Data-Driven Innovation Initiative Progress Report, 2022/23**

**Paper F**

An annual progress report for the fifth year and mid-point of the Data-Driven Innovation initiative was presented prior to submission to Court. Progress to date in exceeding the programme's key performance indicators and in strengthening civic relationships was welcomed and the following points discussed:

- The extent to which data-related jobs have been created in the City Region as a direct or indirect result of the initiative – reviews by Scottish Enterprise of some of the specific projects connected to the initiative have shown encouraging levels of job creation, as well as considerable growth in the 'fintech' ecosystem in the City Region, with the University hosting umbrella body FinTech Scotland. Notable social and health benefits from influential projects such as the Usher Institute's EAVE II project to track Covid-19 and vaccine effectiveness have also been recognised; and,
- Raising the profile at a UK level of the success of the initiative was encouraged.

**9 People & Money System Update**

**Paper G**

An update on the implementation of the People and Money system and processes was reviewed.

**10 People Report**

**Paper H**

The regular update on people-related matters was considered.

**ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL**

**11 Estates Committee Report**

**Paper I**

The report was noted.

**12 Investment Committee Report**

**Paper J**

The report was noted.

**13 Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**14 Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 12 September 2023, 14.30-17.00