



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

12 September 2023, Raeburn Room, Old College

Web Version

Minute

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

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
Jamie Tait, Governance Manager

Apologies: Kim Graham, Provost

1 Minute

Paper A

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

The minute of the meeting held on 5 June 2023 was approved.

2 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

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

- Welcome week activities and the positivity generated at the start of the new academic year evident at the many events for new students;
- Student admissions (considered further under Item 4) are highly encouraging, with the University continuing to attract many well qualified applicants;
- The recent National Student Survey results shared with Court earlier in the summer are deeply disappointing. There is a clear recognition and determination that, while there are areas of work such as the student support

model and the curriculum transformation programme that should be beneficial in the coming years, there is also an immediate need to make improvements in other areas such as assessment and feedback;

- Industrial action, with the University & College Union's marking and assessment boycott having concluded at present and work continuing to ensure that all students affected can progress. National strike action has also been called by the University & College Union for week commencing 25 September 2023, along with a ballot for potential further action from late November; and,
- The welcome announcement that UK universities will be able to participate again in the European Union's Horizon Europe research funding scheme. This follows a prolonged and damaging period of uncertainty for UK universities over participation in the scheme and staff will be encouraged to make new applications and rebuild research partnerships that had not been possible outside of the scheme. However, the UK continues to remain outside of the EU's Erasmus student and staff mobility programme and alternatives offered or planned by the UK and Scottish governments are less attractive.

The Director of Human Resources confirmed that the University & College Union ballot for potential further industrial action encompasses both strike action and action short of a strike, which could include a new marking and assessment boycott.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Undergraduate Student Recruitment 2023/24 Entry

Paper B

An early overview of the forecast outturn of the undergraduate student recruitment cycle for 2023/24, actions taken to mitigate risks of under- or over-recruitment, and implications for the 2024/25 cycle, was presented.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- The setting of widening access targets – a sector entrant target of 20% of Scottish entrants from SIMD20 by 2030 has been set by the Scottish Government; and,
- Implications of a demographic decline in Scottish applicants and any policy proposals that may emerge in this area – seeking to increase the unit of resource provided for Scottish entrants remains the key area of concern for the sector and an ongoing subject of discussion.

5 Director of Finance's Report

Paper C

The Director of Finance's Report was reviewed. It was agreed to recommend to Court that the updated Finance Strategy be approved.

6 People

• Grade Scale Review

Paper D1

Findings and proposals resulting from a review of the University's grade scales were presented. The Convener thanked members for their contributions and requested that a revised paper, drawing on the comments made, be drawn up by the relevant

executive staff and submitted to the Committee's next meeting. Committee members with relevant expertise offered to provide advice on how to address the points raised prior to submission of the revised paper.

- **Staff Engagement Survey**

Paper D2

A report on the University-level results of the 2023 Staff Engagement Survey was reviewed, covering key themes, lessons learned and next steps for future surveys. The report will be remitted to Staff Experience Committee to lead and sponsor next steps and will also be discussed with staff unions. It was noted that some areas have expressed interest in receiving more data and analysis to better understand the survey's findings.

- **People Report**

Paper D3

The regular report on People-related activities was noted, including updates on industrial action, an increase in the annual leave allowance for staff in grades 1-5, an update on academic promotions and the University's renewal of its commitment to the Scottish Government's Young Person's Guarantee, providing support as an employer to those aged 16-24.

7 New Darwin Estates Project

Paper E

An update, including a revised anticipated budget, for the New Darwin project for the School of Biological Sciences was considered. The project's complex history was outlined, along with the benefits the project can bring to the School. The sustainability of the new design, which will be 'net zero carbon ready', was noted.

The Committee agreed to:

- Note that Estates Committee approved the Outline Business Case on 6 September 2023;
- Recommend to Court that the budget allocated in the prioritised Capital Plan for the project is increased, in line with the recent adjustments to the Capital Plan reported separately in the Estates Committee Report (Paper J below);
- Recommend to Court that funding for fees is approved in order to develop the design to RIBA Stage 3 (Developed Design) in support of preparation of a Full Business Case; and,
- Note that feasibility study fees have been spent on the project to date against 'Building a New Biology' funding.

8 Strategic Partnerships in China

Paper F

An annual update on the status of existing and pipeline strategic partnerships in China was presented. It was noted that future annual updates will cover major international partnerships in all countries and not solely China.

9 Outcome Agreement 2023-24

Paper G

Working drafts of the University's Self-evaluation Report 2022-23 and Outcome Agreement for 2023-24 to be submitted to the Scottish Funding Council were

reviewed. The Principal noted his membership of the Scottish Funding Council's board, with a role to provide input from the higher education sector as a whole rather than from the University of Edinburgh. The drafts were noted, with authority delegated to the Deputy Secretary, Governance and Strategic Planning, to develop the documents further in advance of submission to Court for approval.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

10 Updated Subsidiary Companies Policy Paper H

An updated Subsidiary Companies Policy was noted.

11 Research and Commercialisation Statistics Annual Report 2022/23 Paper I

Research and commercialisation statistics for academic year 2022/23 were reviewed, with the performance in research awards congratulated. It was noted that the research awards reflected in part the multi-year renewals of funding for some long-established research centres and that award levels for next year would likely return to closer to the recent average. A strong year recorded for commercialisation activity was also welcomed, with the upcoming Court Seminar to include a session on commercialisation and an opportunity to discuss these figures further.

12 Estates Committee Report Paper J

The report was noted. It was noted that the Estates Committee intends to hold a meeting at the Edinburgh Futures Institute, with a Court meeting at the site to be arranged as soon as practicable.

13 Investment Committee Report Paper K

The report was noted.

14 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

15 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 13 November 2023, 09.30-12.00 (in-person meeting)