



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

3 February 2025
Online meeting, by MS Teams

Minutes

- 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
Dora Herndon, President, Students' Association
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
- In attendance:** Lewis Allan, Senior Governance Advisor to the Vice-Principal & University Secretary
Nirmal Borkhataria, Interim Director of Finance
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning
Damien Toner, Director of Estates Services
Daniel Wedgwood, Head of Court Services (clerk)
- Apologies:** None received

Welcome

The Convener welcomed members and attendees.

1 Minute

Paper A

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2024 were approved.

2 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The Action Log was noted. There had been no changes since the previous meeting.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, reported on the following matters:

- The funeral had taken place of Professor Fraser Stoddart, a Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry and a PhD graduate of the University, who had passed away in December 2024. The Principal paid tribute to his achievements and noted his lasting connection to the University and the city of Edinburgh, despite his international career.
- Financial challenges facing Scottish and other UK universities had attracted media attention. In some cases, universities had announced significant reform packages in order to address these challenges.
- The University's voluntary severance scheme was open and had attracted a number of applications. All applications would be assessed carefully. Further measures to control expenditure were under discussion.
- The Principal had recently visited Gujarat, India, where different opportunities for collaboration were under consideration or, in some cases, well developed and showing positive results. These included Gujarat Biotechnology University, a partnership in which Edinburgh provided academic input and support, which had produced its first cohorts of graduates and was expanding.
- The Principal was to attend an event at 10 Downing Street celebrating the UK's Artificial Intelligence infrastructure.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Finance Update Report

Papers B1, B2

The Finance Update Report was reviewed and a verbal update provided. It was noted that the 2023-24 Annual Report & Accounts (ARA) had been submitted to the Scottish Funding Council ahead of its deadline.

The forecast position for Quarter 1 was outlined, noting that this included assumptions regarding management savings that were to be achieved. The forecast outcomes would result in a reduction of the University's cash reserves but these would remain within Court-agreed target levels.

The University's TRAC Report was also reviewed.

The University was developing a plan to reduce expenditure and enable a return to the levels of cash generation necessary to support current needs and investment in the University's future. Given the wider financial situation, and the trends noted in relation to cash generation, the University's debt covenant position was being monitored carefully and Court would be kept informed about this as part of regular finance reporting.

The following points were made in discussion:

- Communications in relation to the financial situation would be crucial. There remained significant misapprehensions in some parts of the wider community. However, some recent press reporting on the higher education sector and on the University's position had appropriately recognised current financial issues.

- Recent staff recruitment restraint had had a notable impact in preventing further growth in expenditure.
- Appropriate controls would be required to ensure that savings generated at this point would be retained for the longer term and to prevent any counterproductive unintended consequences.

PRC authorised the Principal, as the University's Accountable Officer, to sign the University's 2023-24 TRAC return.

5 People Report

Paper C

James Saville, Director of Human Resources, introduced the paper, noting that it included a draft of the Annual People Report covering the academic year 2023-24.

It was noted that a Staff Engagement Survey had recently been launched, in line with the establish practice of conducting such a survey every two years.

PRC received an indication of the number of applications to date for the voluntary severance scheme, noting the likelihood that not all of these applications would meet the criteria for the scheme.

It was noted that two new policies had recently been approved by the Staff Experience Committee and University Executive, the Reasonable Adjustments Policy and the Trans Policy (Staff).

In discussion, the current provision of leadership and talent development programmes was welcomed and the development of relevant measures of success in these areas encouraged. There was also discussion of the Annual People Report, noting a wealth of positive action but also seeking adjustments to the text to contextualise planned work in the current financial environment.

6 Edinburgh Innovations Strategy Update and Knowledge Exchange & Innovation Fund

Paper D

The Committee received an initial draft of the University's Knowledge Exchange Innovation Fund (KEIF) strategy document, which was intended for presentation to the next meeting of Court. It was noted that Court approval of such a strategy was required of recipients of KEIF funding by the Scottish Funding Council.

The majority of relevant work would be delivered through Edinburgh Innovations (EI) and so the opportunity was being taken to update PRC and Court on EI's strategy. This had been refreshed to align with and support the University of Edinburgh Research & Innovation Strategy 2030.

PRC endorsed the KEIF strategy document for transmission to Court.

7 BioQuarter – Scottish Power Energy Network Upgrade

Paper E

Damien Toner, Director of Estates Services, outlined the proposal to contribute to the construction and connection of a new primary sub-station to provide power to the BioQuarter.

While PRC recognised the importance of the proposed works, it was requested that Court be provided with further information on the scope and prioritisation of current and planned capital expenditure when considering this proposal. As additional context, it was also noted that Estates Committee had recommended approval on the basis of its regular consideration of the affordability of proposed works.

Subject to the provision of additional contextual data, PRC recommended to Court approval of the University's contribution for the power upgrade.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

8 Estates Committee Report

Paper F

PRC noted the report. It was noted that the current financial context had led to further consideration of projected capital expenditure, that further clarification of this was expected and that, in line with the previous discussion, relevant information would be shared with Court.

9 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 31 March 2025