



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

31 March 2025
Raeburn Room, Old College

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:** 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
- Apologies:** None received

Welcome

The Convener welcomed members and attendees.

1 Minute

Paper A

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2025 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:

- There had been a session of the Education, Children and Young People Committee of the Scottish Parliament dedicated to the financial and

governance position at the University of Dundee. In addition, an investigation into this situation had been launched.

- The Principal and senior colleagues would continue to engage with the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government to clarify the University of Edinburgh's financial position and measures to be taken.
- A student had recently been injured by a member of the public during a protest that had taken place outside the Main Library. While this was a police matter, it had led to discussion of the proper role of University security staff, members of whom had been present, and the potential advantages and disadvantages of a police presence on campus. These matters would be reviewed. The Principal commended the work of the security team.
- The University was carefully monitoring relevant changes in government policy in the USA, and any response from the UK government, with a view to potential impacts on our applicants and students, and the University more generally.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Finance

Finance Update Report

Paper B1

The Finance Update Report was reviewed and a verbal update provided.

PRC approved the University's membership of Scottish University Press (SUP) as the latter transitioned to a Community Interest Company (CIC) governance structure. It was noted that SUP fulfilled a distinct and complementary role from that of the Edinburgh University Press.

Utilising endowment capital

Paper B2

Kim Graham, Provost, introduced the request for PRC to recommend the use of expendable endowment capital to pay the committed annual expenditure of the Edinburgh Dental Institute from 1 August 2024.

It was noted that:

- liquidating the endowment capital would enable it to be spent on its intended use, in supporting activity relating to dentistry, before the planned cessation of University involvement in the relevant activity; and
- the management of the University's endowments was governed by the University's Ordinances and the present proposal was in line with these and with the relevant Finance policy.

PRC recommended that Court approve the requested use of expendable endowment capital.

Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning, introduced these papers, noting that they were brought before PRC and Court for approval, in line with the Delegated Authority Schedule, because they proposed structural changes to tuition fees. Proposals regarding fee levels more generally were subject to annual processes overseen by the University Executive.

PRC discussed the apparent complexity of the University's fee structures overall and it was noted that some of this complexity was attributable to regulatory constraints and so unavoidable. Efforts were made to ensure that fee levels were as clear as possible to prospective students. Some of the complexity in the system was to the benefit of students, as fee waivers were used to make courses accessible or attractive to certain groups of potential applicants.

In the context of discussing PGR fees, it was noted that the level of PGR fees and maintenance costs could be challenging for some students. It was noted that fee waivers were used in certain circumstances and also that widening participation at postgraduate level had been a focus of recent work, resulting in new scholarships. A PGR strategy was in development and matters of access and support would be considered in this context.

PRC recommended the structural changes as detailed in the two papers for approval by Court.

5 Performance Measures to Support Strategy 2030: 2024-25 Mid-Year Report **Paper C**

Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning, outlined the nature of the report, as one of two updates provided to PRC and Court each year on the Strategy 2030 key performance indicators (KPIs).

PRC discussed potential enhancements to the summary reporting. In addition, progress with assessment and feedback and other elements of the student experience were discussed, although not part of the top-level Strategy 2030 KPIs.

6 People

People Report

Paper D1

James Saville, Director of Human Resources, introduced the report. The University's staff survey had closed and results were being analysed. The survey's response rate had improved. The University Executive was to receive and discuss the results and then the results would be released to the wider community.

Applications for the University's voluntary severance scheme had been received and were under review. Recent improvements in the provision and presentation of staff data were proving very helpful in such contexts and the teams involved in this were commended.

**Equality Outcomes 2025-2029 and Equality Outcomes and
Mainstreaming Progress Report 2025
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Data Report 2025**

Paper D2

Paper D3

James Saville, Director of Human Resources, introduced the reports. There was discussion of possible interactions between the current work on financial sustainability and work relevant to EDI and/or the staff experience. It was observed that financial sustainability was required in order to deliver all of the University's ambitions in such areas, which remained priorities.

**7 Responsible Investment Advisory Group: Draft Terms of Reference
8 University of Edinburgh Revised Responsible Investment Policy**

Paper E

Paper F

Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary, introduced the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Responsible Investment Advisory Group (RIAG), noting that this was proposed as the 'ethical and due diligence group' whose establishment had been agreed by Court in October 2024. It was noted that the group's name and the draft ToR had been discussed by Investment Committee. It was intended that the group would report to PRC and so would work alongside Investment Committee.

Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility & Sustainability, introduced the revised Responsible Investment Policy, which followed from an extensive consultation exercise. This revision brought the policy up to date and would assist in demonstrating the University's commitments in this area in ranking exercises and other contexts. The present revision did not address current calls for divestment from specific stocks or discussions concerning the definition of controversial armaments. These matters were to be referred to the new group, RIAG, and a subsequent further revision of the policy was expected to follow.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- Before presentation to Court, previous comments of Investment Committee should be revisited and reflected carefully in the paper, including with regard to the notion of active ownership.
- RIAG, as an advisory group, should not carry out executive tasks. It was noted that, in composing the ToR, care had been taken not to erode the responsibilities or powers of PRC or the University Executive; however, the wording of the ToR could be re-examined with this concern in mind.
- The creation of the group and its ToR represented important progress, providing crucial assistance in the relevant areas for Investment Committee and PRC. Appropriate connections had been drawn between RIAG and Investment Committee and these were welcomed, as was the retention of accountability at the level of PRC.
- There was a perception among many members of the student and staff community that decisions on current relevant controversies had been delayed and there was a concern that this perception would be reinforced by the nature of the revised policy and referral of key questions to RIAG. While this perception and the strength of feeling in parts of the community were recognised, it was also noted that the current proposals aimed to ensure that these issues, and future questions relating to investments, were afforded due

attention and consideration by an appropriate body. It was observed, conversely, that there would be risks in decision-making under pressure and without access to appropriate evidence or expertise.

- While RIAG worked further on these controversial issues, the University would continue to hold to widely adopted, independently determined definitions and principles of responsible investment.

PRC supported transmission of the draft RIAG ToR to Court for approval, subject to further consideration of relevant points as noted above.

PRC recommend the proposed updates to the Responsible Investment Policy for approval by the University Court and subsequent public launch by summer 2025.

9 Beyond Sustainability: Our Pathway to a Regenerative University **Paper G**

Iain Gordon, Head of the College of Science & Engineering, outlined the nature of 'Beyond Sustainability: Our pathway to a regenerative university', the successor to the University's current (2016) climate strategy, noting in particular that this encompassed action relating to biodiversity and resources, in addition to carbon emissions targets. The inclusion of interim targets towards achieving the University's net zero ambitions was also a key part of the successor strategy. It was recognised that innovation would be required in order to achieve the 2030 interim target.

The benefits to the University of adopting such a strategy, above and beyond making a meaningful contribution to global efforts to minimise and mitigate climate change, were outlined. These included positive reputational impact, addressing a key concern of present and prospective students, aligning with Scottish Government ambitions and helping the University to meet both statutory obligations and the requirements of external bodies including some research funding bodies.

There was discussion of the interaction of this strategy with the University's current financial restraint. It was recognised that investment would be required to achieve all of the targets in the strategy, although some elements of it would also generate savings. It was observed that clarity around realistic ambitions and financial implications could be valuable to members of the staff community. It was also observed that the University's net zero and other ambitions under the strategy had a longer-term timescale than the current programme of financial rebalancing.

In further discussion, it was proposed that the strategy should recognise the risks of unintended consequences in relevant actions. The importance of good communications in this area was also emphasised, to ensure that the University's achievements and level of ambition were widely recognised.

Subject to consideration of points made in this discussion, PRC recommended to Court approval of the climate strategy successor, 'Beyond Sustainability: Our pathway to a regenerative university'.

10 Estates

Capital Plan, Category C Uncommitted Projects

Paper H1

Damien Toner, Director of Estates Services, summarised the review of uncommitted Category C capital projects (i.e. those with approval through University governance but without main contract commitment) that had been undertaken in the context of the University's current financial situation and the results of this exercise.

The committee noted that, as set out in Paper L, Estates Committee had engaged in robust discussion of the capital plan and the affordability of existing projects and had subsequently supported the decisions made regarding the pausing of certain projects.

It was noted that the relationship between capital expenditure and the current need to rebalance income and expenditure was indirect. While the scale of proposed capital expenditure did affect the required level of surplus generation in the longer term, and the proposed project pauses would relieve some immediate financial pressure, the required adjustments to achieve a sustainable financial position could not be made through non-recurrent capital expenditure.

Replacement of Switchgear

Paper H2

Damien Toner, Director of Estates Services, summarised the proposal to replace high voltage infrastructure assets in University buildings, as a result of safety concerns raised at the national level. It was noted that the intention was to seek approval on behalf of Court by Exception Committee, to avoid any unnecessary delay.

Small Works Programme and Statutory Compliance Budget Allocation

Paper H3

Damien Toner, Director of Estates Services, outlined the proposed budget allocations. It was noted that

- the normal Small Works programme had been reduced, in the current financial context, to deal only with projects that were either essential building fabric repairs, health and safety related, compliance related, part of a larger funded project or would return direct and measurable income with relatively low investment; and
- all projects deemed discretionary had been removed from the 2025/26 programme.

PRC recommended to Court approval of the Small Works and Statutory Compliance Programme 2025/26 allocation.

11 Learning and Teaching Strategy

Paper I

Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students, introduced the new Learning & Teaching Strategy, which had been approved by Senate Education Committee.

It was noted that the strategy had been subject to extensive consultation. It was associated with a substantial implementation plan and implementation would be carried out in conjunction with the Learning & Teaching workstream of the University's current programme of financial rebalancing.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

12 Edinburgh University Students' Association Annual Budget

Paper J

PRC approved the budget on behalf of Court.

13 Research and Commercialisation Statistics: Annual Report 2023/24

Paper K

PRC noted the report.

14 Estates Committee Report

Paper L

PRC noted the report.

15 Investment Committee Report

Paper M

PRC noted the report.

16 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

17 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 2 June 2025