



**UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE**

**28 August 2018**

**Minute**

- Present:** Peter Mathieson (Convener)  
David Argyle, Eleri Connick Leigh Chalmers, Chris Cox, Gavin Douglas, Hugh Edmiston, Charlie Jeffery, Richard Kenway, Wendy Loretto, Gavin McLachlan, Phil McNaull, Theresa Merrick, Dorothy Miell, Jane Norman, David Robertson, James Saville, Jonathan Seckl, Tracey Slaven, James Smith and Sarah Smith.
- In attendance:** Catherine Elliott for Moira Whyte, Jane Johnston for Gary Jebb, Lee Hamill (for item 7), Dave Gorman (for item 10), Fiona Boyd and Kirstie Graham.
- Apologies:** David Gray, Gary Jebb, Andrew Morris and Moira Whyte

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Principal welcomed Eleri Connick, EUSA President and Wendy Loretto, Head of the Business School to their first meeting.

**1 Minute Paper A**

The Minute of the meeting held on 11 June 2018 was approved.

**2 Principal's Communications**

The Principal reported on the following: the University was developing its values as part of the refresh of the Strategic Plan and an initial draft was tabled; the City Deal had now been signed, congratulations to all involved; there were further opportunities to be explored with the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe; reiteration that the Executive is the main forum for discussion, debate and approval of University business.

**STRATEGIC ITEM**

**3 Student Experience Paper B**

Detailed analysis of the National Student Survey results had been circulated prior to the meeting which indicated an enduring problem that impacted on reputation externally and morale internally. The Senior Vice-Principal provided a brief presentation setting out possible responses to the issue to stimulate discussion.

During a full and open discussion there was consensus that student experience was a University wide priority that was informed, but not driven by, the results of the National Student Survey.

The discussion included:

- The sense that the student experience was inconsistent due to organisational complexity and a sense of 'optionality' in implementing some recommendations at a local level.
- There was an embedded culture of high expectation around research and it was not generally perceived that this was the case for students and teaching.
- The highly selective nature of admissions could mean students did not feel prized or valued in their initial interactions with the University and it was necessary to create a sense of community throughout the student journey and beyond.
- It was important that staff felt valued and empowered to support students and the planned staff survey could provide useful data to facilitate this.
- There was a suggestion that there was a mechanism to report directly where things had worked particularly well, or not well and a culture of rewarding good practice, possibly by a monthly award
- Student transport continued as an important issue that needed to be addressed
- The Personal Tutor system required to be revisited.

It was agreed that if the University is to improve student experience in a sustainable way, it must engage in cultural change more broadly, resulting in an environment where students feel cherished and staff feel that they own the quality of the student experience. The themes from the discussion would be developed into an action plan, which would return to the next meeting of the Executive before being taken forward to Court on 1 October and Senate on 3 October.

## **OPERATIONAL ITEMS**

### **4 Graduate Destinations**

**Paper C**

The Executive considered analysis of the 2016/17 Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education and noted that although this showed improvement compared to last year, performance is still below where it should be both against Russell Group and Scottish comparators.

There was discussion of the culture and curriculum issues with the importance of raised awareness amongst staff and students of the need to develop employability from an early point. It was noted that not all staff and students were aware of the services available and how to use them, and this linked back to the role of Personal Tutors as discussed in relation to student experience. There was discussion of developing a system of mentorship and guidance and it was agreed that this should be considered in alignment with the action plan being developed to address the student experience.

**5 Review of Undergraduate Scholarships** **Paper D**

The Executive noted the review of undergraduate scholarships (the Edinburgh Scholarship, the Scotland Scholarship, and Access Bursaries) and that the scholarships contribute positively to an improved experience for students while studying, by reducing financial pressures. The University had consistently marketed its scholarship packages as one of the most generous in the UK, however overall awareness of eligibility and amounts prior to application was low. There was discussion of how to best target funding to support the University's widening participation aims, with a view that it may be a better use of funds to focus on larger sums for the lowest income households, alongside a campaign to increase awareness. It was agreed to develop this proposal as an option in taking the paper forward to Policy and Resources Committee.

**6 REF Joint Submissions** **Paper E**

The Executive agreed that joint submissions to REF2021 should be made in: Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Sciences (SRUC); Chemistry (St Andrews); and Mathematical Sciences, Engineering, and Architecture, Built Environment and Planning (Heriot-Watt) and approved the criteria for evaluation of success for REF2021 joint submissions.

**7 Finance Director's Update** **Paper F**

The Finance Director updated the Executive on the management accounts and the new external debt, which had been raised to refinance expensive debt and to support the capital plan including through financing student residences. The Deputy Director of Finance provided a verbal update on Project Acorn, a University wide financial controls and assurance project, which was on track to minimise fraud risk and drive continuous improvement of the internal control environment.

**8 Capital Prioritisation** **Paper G**

The Executive noted that capital prioritisation is necessary as demand for projects has exceeded affordability and considered a rationale and model for robust and transparent prioritisation of capital expenditure. There was support for the need for a capital prioritisation methodology, however there was agreement that more work needed to be done on the model to ensure strategic alignment and a joined up approach. It was agreed that there should be a workshop dedicated to prioritising capital expenditure, building on the work put into the model.

**9 Value for Money Report 2017/18** **Paper H**

The Executive endorsed the Value for Money report for 2017/18, to be forwarded to Audit and Risk Committee as part of the mandatory requirements from SFC.

**10 Delivering our Low Carbon Vision – Update on RELCO** **Paper I**

The University recognises climate change as one of the most pressing issues facing humanity in the twenty-first century and has committed to become a carbon neutral by 2040. On that basis, the Executive considered a proposed investment in a windfarm project. Whilst entirely supportive of investment to support the University’s ‘Zero by 2040’ carbon goal, it was noted that this had to be considered in the light of the previous discussion on capital prioritisation and therefore decisions should not be made on capital investment until the full work on capital prioritisation had taken place.

**11 Waste Strategy** **Paper J**

The Executive approved the University of Edinburgh Waste Strategy 2018/19 – 2022/23, noting this would be reported to Estates Committee for information.

**12 Web Estate Review** **Paper K**

The Executive received an update on the University’s Web Estate and action being taken to better manage websites and mitigate associated risks. The Executive approved the actions, including the nomination of owners at Professional Services Group and College level for orphan websites and supported communicating the importance of this task to colleagues across the institution.

**13 Reimbursement of Immigration Fees** **Paper L**

The Executive considered enhancements to the University’s policy on the reimbursement of visa fees, to reimburse Tier 1 visa fees; indefinite leave to remain fees for non-EEU staff, irrespective of their visa route and the (soon to be introduced) settled status fee for all EEU staff. In line with the existing policy, it was also proposed to reimburse the fees incurred by the staff member’s dependants. The proposal was supported, subject to further discussion with the University Secretary and Director of Finance around the resource implications.

**14 Disclosure of Intimate Relationships Policy** **Paper M**

The Executive considered the proposed policy requiring staff members to disclose if they are, or have been, in an intimate relationship with a current student or other staff member with whom they have a line management/connection. In discussion, it was noted that the proposed policy had been developed through a consultative process and was informed by peer University policies and sector best practice. The Executive was content to approve the proposed policy, noting that there would be minor updates before the final version was promulgated and that the policy would also be reported to Court.

**15 Health and Safety Quarter 3 Report**

**Paper N**

The Executive noted the summary of health and safety related incidents that took place during the period 1 March 2018 to 31 May 2018, as well as relevant health and safety issues and developments.

**ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL:**

**16 Reorganisation of Endowments in the College of Science and Engineering**

**Paper O**

The Executive approved the proposal that Court exercise its power under Ordinance 209 to reform the application of endowment funds which have been held in excess of 25 years.

**17 Honorary Degree Committee Guidance**

**Paper P**

The Executive noted the approach to awarding Honorary Degrees agreed by the Honorary Degree Committee on 4 May 2018.

**18 Date of next meeting**

The University Executive will next meet on Tuesday 25 September 2018 at 10.00am in the Raeburn Room, Old College.