



**UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE**

**15 January 2019**

**Minute**

**Present:** Peter Mathieson (Convener)  
David Argyle, Leigh Chalmers, Eleri Connick, Chris Cox, Gavin Douglas, Hugh Edmiston, David Gray, Lee Hamill, Gary Jebb, Charlie Jeffery, Richard Kenway, Gavin McLachlan, Wendy Loretto, Theresa Merrick, Dorothy Miell, Jane Norman, Tracey Slaven, James Smith, Sarah Smith and Moira Whyte.

**In attendance:** Melissa Highton (for item 4), Fiona Boyd and Kirstie Graham.

**Apologies:** Andrew Morris, Dave Robertson, James Saville and Jonathan Seckl.

**1 Minute**

**Paper A1**

The Minute of the meeting held on 17 December 2018 was approved as a correct record.

The Principal welcomed Lee Hamill and congratulated Jane Norman on her new appointment at the University of Bristol.

**2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log**

**Paper A2**

There were no matters arising and the action log was noted.

**3 Principal's Communications**

**Verbal**

The Principal reported on the ongoing Brexit uncertainty and the varied financial situation across the UK sector, with Edinburgh University in a strong position, but with shared sector concerns around pay, pensions and the economy that underlined the importance of growing a surplus to invest in strategic priorities.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**4 Distance Learning at Scale**

**Verbal**

Gavin McLachlan, Chief Information Officer and Librarian, provided a presentation on the current pilot online masters in the Business School. The University has a contract with EdX to provide a platform for online programmes, which has the advantage of being scalable and providing high quality and consistent production values that enable modules to be used across different programmes, both on line and on campus. Members welcomed the insight into the opportunities and requested further information on the planned evaluation of the pilot programme, to inform future decisions on scale and approach to online learning.

## **5 Student Experience Action Plan**

**Paper B**

The Executive considered a brief update on the Student Experience Action Plan since the last meeting, noting that although staff experience was a key pillar in this, it should be considered as a separate action plan, as there were other aspects to the staff survey that would be addressed through a separate staff experience project.

It was noted that there were two outstanding issues: the costings for the various elements, which was moving forward in tandem with planning round discussions; and logic modelling to test whether the proposed actions would lead to the desired outcome. Given the strategic priority attached to this work, and the importance of maintaining momentum, it was requested that the Executive delegated consideration and approval of the revised plan, project plan and costings to the Senior Leadership Team (at its meeting on 6 February) in order that it can be presented to Court at its meeting on 18 February. The Executive would receive an update on the discussion at Court and give guidance on follow-up actions, at its meeting of 19 February. It was noted that the Student Experience Standing Committee would hold its first meeting at the end of January and this would also inform the paper to Court. The requested delegation was approved.

## **6 Business Plan Cycle 2019-2022**

**Paper C**

The Executive noted an overview of the current financial position, external pressures on the planning round and the expectation that Main Budget Holder plans should collectively deliver 5% surplus over the cycle to allow reinvestment in key pan-University priorities as well as enabling the prioritised capital programme.

In discussion it was noted that this was consistent with the current financial strategy to achieve a 3-5% surplus. There was a history of discrepancy between planning and delivery as a consequence of lack of confidence in predicting income leading to pessimistic forecasts, which reduced the ability to plan effectively at the start of the year. Members recognised that this had to be addressed through the provision of good finance and HR information and effective leadership in Schools. The importance of clear messaging and a common understanding as one University was reiterated – increased contribution is expected as a result of a combination of better forecasting of income associated with planned expenditure, prioritisation and efficiencies. The expectation that Main Budget Holder plans should collectively contribute the equivalent of a 5% surplus over the cycle was agreed.

## **7 Director of Finance's Report**

**Paper D**

The Executive noted the latest University management accounts (excluding subsidiaries) position up to the end of November 2018 (period four) and initial analysis on how our financial position reported for 2017/18 compares to other Russell Group institutions, with further benchmarking information to come to a future meeting as it becomes available. The disconnect between the reported accounts and quarterly forecasts was reinforced, with the anticipation that new core systems would provide more robust data to support financial planning. The updated Expenses Policy was approved and the importance of effective communication of this to support implementation was agreed.

## **ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL**

### **8 Proposed Change to the Moray House School of Education Paper E**

The proposal to rename the Moray House School of Education as 'The Moray House School of Education and Sport' was approved.

### **9 Space Strategy Group Report Paper F**

The key points from the Space Strategy Group meeting on 14 November 2018 were noted.

### **10 Health and Safety Quarterly Report: Quarter 1 Paper G**

This summary of health and safety related incidents during the period 1 September 2018 to 30 November 2018 was noted.

### **11 University Executive Communications Verbal**

Communications on Distance Learning at Scale, the Student Experience Plan, Strategic Plan development and approval of the Expenses Policy were agreed.

### **12 Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday, 19 February 2019 at 10.00am in the Raeburn Room.