



UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE

23 April 2019

Minute

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

1 Minute Paper A1

Prior to the start of the meeting the convener welcomed Rachael Robertson, recently appointed Deputy Director of Finance and noted this was the final meeting for Vice Principal Jane Norman, with thanks for all her work for the University on equality and diversity, union relations and other matters.

The Minute of the meeting held on 19 March 2019 was approved as a correct record.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log Paper A2

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

3 Principal's Communications Verbal

The Senior Vice-Principal reported that the UK government had extended the 'in principle' guarantee for ERASMUS+ to December 2020 and the Scottish Government had provided confirmation of funding and fee status for the duration of their studies for new EU UG and PGT entrants in 2020-21; the Senior Leadership Team had recently held a full day's discussion on identifying headroom to fund priority areas and this would be discussed later in the meeting under the Planning Round; and finally warm congratulations to the team who won University Challenge, the first Edinburgh University win and first win by a Scottish team since 1984.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4 The Student Experience Action Plan: Update Paper B

The Executive considered an update on the holistic, multi-strand programme of work to address the student experience, noting this had been reviewed by the Student Experience Standing Committee of the Executive and the Senior Leadership Team at its recent planning awayday. The Action Plan set out the six priority areas underpinned by 70 individual strands of work, with a programme management

methodology used to plan, cost, evaluate and prioritise these, to take the most important work forward over the next three years. To deliver all of the currently unfunded elements would require additional funding of approximately £15.3m over three years

The Executive discussed the proposed plan, noting the following:

Delivery will largely take place at a School level and it was essential to ensure clear communication of expectations and accountability to Heads of School. There was discussion of the interface between Schools, Colleges and Professional Services and the importance of alignment, recognising there was an institutional culture of creating additional layers of complexity that needed to be guarded against.

The proposed plan had a strong focus on student support, and also laid the foundations for work on curriculum reform, while allowing sufficient flexibility to accommodate the new Vice Principal Students, who may wish to develop this area.

There were concerns about affordability, although the Senior Leadership Team had identified this as a priority area. It would be necessary to continuously track and monitor the individual strands to ensure the intended benefits were being realised and value for money delivered. Linked to this, there needed to be a distinction between funding transformational projects and funding for essential services which fell under the category of 'business as usual'. Costs that are part of business as usual should be covered in standard budgeting and should not be included as part of the cost of the project.

The importance of effective communication to students was agreed, which should not focus on the financial investment but rather the human elements, and it was noted that this area of the plan required further work.

5 Strategic Finance and Planning

- **Director of Finance's Report**

Paper C1

The Director of Finance reported on the management accounts up to the end of February 2019 (period seven) and provided an update on period eight. The end of February position was £17m, £4m favourable to the Quarter One year to date forecast position and £1m favourable to the full year budgeted University operating surplus of £16m.

The Quarter Two forecast reported a University Group surplus position of £18m, £2m adverse to June 2018 Court approved plan surplus of £20m, partly due to additional interest costs resulting from new debt raised in 2018 that was not anticipated in the June 2018 budget. Once City Deal capital funding and incremental City Deal income and expenditure was added, forecast surplus before other gains and losses rose to £51m, however the very narrow margins for the University, without City Deal, reflected a worrying trend.

The University was required to hold provision on its balance sheet for its share of the USS Deficit Recovery Plan and following the adoption of the new UK Financial

Reporting Standard (FRS 102), is required to publish financial results in a prescribed format. Updated modelling assumptions now reflect rule 76.4-8 which has come into operation and provide for Deficit Recovery Contributions of 5%, up from 2% previously. A large movement in USS Provision does not represent cash moving out of the University and does not impact on cash inflow from operating activities, but has the potential to distort published financial statements. This was a sector wide issue that may mean every Scottish University shows an 'on paper' deficit this year and will require careful consideration of communicating the underlying reason for this.

There was discussion of the issues raised in the Finance Director's report, particularly the need to strip costs and grow income, which may require hard decisions to be made. This set the scene for the following agenda item on the Planning Round.

- **Planning Round 2019-22 Update**

Paper C2

The Executive had received the Planning Round update that had been considered by Policy and Resources Committee. Excluding the City Region Deal capital inflows this showed surpluses of £12.5m (1.09%) in 2019-20, £26.9m (2.23%) and £45.9m (3.63%), assuming investment in the Student Experience Action Plan and City Deal revenue projects and a series of management actions (including post appointment controls) to address short term cost pressures while the Service Excellence Programme supports improvement in service delivery and sustainable release of resource through improved process design.

The Planning Round paper also included scenarios based on possible outcomes of Brexit and the Augar review and taking into account the impact of ongoing discussions on size and shape within the strategic plan refresh, testing the sustainability of maintaining the University undergraduate population at broadly the size anticipated in the current planning round while responding to both Brexit and Augar. This demonstrated the considerable challenges could be managed over the course of the ten year forecast and allowed for targeted reshaping of the undergraduate student community to reflect academic aspirations in various disciplines.

The Executive noted the very narrow surpluses and the dependency on delivering against management assumptions to achieve these and agreed the importance of a collective commitment to challenging unnecessary costs/processes and growing surplus generating opportunities, to be developed and understood across the University at every level.

6 Internal Audit – Follow Up Actions

Paper E

The Executive noted that the University had appointed Paul McGinty, KPMG as Head of Internal Audit in a co-sourced model. The new Head of Internal Audit had provided an update on outstanding management actions and requested the support of the Executive on clearing outstanding actions. Members welcomed the proposed quarterly report and new format for reports as providing an essential bridge between

the internal audit reports received by Audit and Risk Committee and management. The paper was accordingly noted and approved.

7 Reviews of Senate Governance

Paper F

The Executive considered two separate reviews which the University had commissioned: an internal review by a Task Group on Senate Committee Structures and an externally-facilitated review of Senate and its committees, which was a requirement of the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance 2017, and had been conducted by Dr Jennifer Barnes of Saxton Bampfylde.

The main issues emerging from the external review of Senate were whether the University wished a more vigorous and engaged Senate, and if so how to achieve this and whether Senate should have a role in relation to research as well as learning and teaching. The Task Group's review of the Senate Committee structure had been through a number of iterations and had identified favoured options, set out in the paper for further discussion and consultation.

There followed a wide ranging discussion, in which the following points were raised:

It would be challenging for Senate to develop a stronger, more decision based role, given the newly constituted Senate would comprise 300 members. Although this was a considerable reduction in size, it would still limit its ability to meet frequently with a continuity of members in attendance to enable it to be a discussion and decision making body. Its role would therefore be more consultative and communicative and within that context it would seem appropriate that, as the University's supreme academic body, it also considered matters relating to research.

It was clarified for members that Court is the University's governing body and the legal persona of the University. Senate provides academic leadership, but Court is the final decision making authority on all matters. There were therefore not two parallel approval structures, but different decision making routes, through Senate Committees and/or through the University Executive and Court committees depending on the nature of the issue. The University Executive is the main operational decision making body, with matters progressing, where appropriate, through the Court Committee structure.

There was consideration of the option that the Senate Researcher Experience Committee be dissolved and transfer its responsibilities for strategic postgraduate research student matters to Learning and Teaching Committee, and its responsibilities for early career researchers to Research Policy Group, with some concern about PhD students, who could be considered both students and early career researchers.

There was discussion of the proposal that the Research Policy Group, currently a sub-committee of the University Executive, have a reporting line to Senate rather than (or as well as), reporting to the University Executive. There were concerns about the value of dual reporting, as leading to inefficiency and doubling up, particularly in the light of a Senate of 300 members that would not be able to meet as frequently or have consistency of attendance to support discussion and decision

making. There was an alternative view that dual reporting can be effective as it would enable larger policy issues emerging from RPG to be voiced at Senate.

There was discussion of a joint Court/Senate Committee to oversee the Student Experience Project, rather than the current sub-committee of the University Executive. It was noted that there was an existing joint Court/Senate Committee, Knowledge Strategy Committee. There were a range of views expressed on how effective this was, but it was noted that it required considerable effort and there was always a risk of duplication. The view was that the new Vice-Principal Students should have the opportunity to shape the Student Experience project and structures to support it so it was inappropriate to suggest structural changes in this area at this time.

It was noted that these views were not necessarily consistent with one another, so it was agreed that the full range of views would be noted and fed into the consultation process for Senate to consider the outcomes of the two reviews at its meeting on 29 May 2019. Any changes which impacted on the University Executive and committees which reported to it would need further approval.

8 Reputational Due Diligence of Income Sources

Paper D

The Executive considered a process to ensure a more consistent approach to reputational due diligence relating to a range of income sources across the University, noting that due diligence procedures of one kind or another are already in place for different types of income. However these are often more thorough in terms of financial and auditing assessment of funders than for any potential reputational or ethical risk associated with the source of funding. Accordingly it was proposed to establish a short term 'Task and Finish' Group to undertake a light touch review to develop recommendations, using existing structures wherever possible, and avoiding unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles to developing funder relationships. Members welcomed the proposed approach, and approved the terms of reference and membership of the 'Task and Finish' Group, to be convened by the Vice Principal, Philanthropy & Advancement.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

9 REF 20201 Code of Practice

Paper G

The Executive commended the REF2021 Code of Practice and approved its submission to the funding bodies, noting that it may be used to inform decisions within the University.

10 Report from Fee Strategy Group

Paper H

The Executive approved unregulated tuition fee inflation and rate proposals outlined in the paper and noted routine fee approvals taken by the Chair of the Fee Strategy Group. There was brief discussion on the importance of joined up decision making in setting fees and it was noted that it was planned that Fee Strategy Group would

merge with the Student Recruitment Strategy Group to provide an overview of fees, scholarships and recruitment to assist with this. A formal proposal would be presented to University Executive in June 2019.

11 Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence and Gender-Based Violence: Update **Paper I**

The Executive considered an update on activity by the University in respect of preventing and responding to sexual violence and gender-based violence; and the work of the University taskforce, established following approval from the University Executive in April 2018 with the remit of reviewing and refreshing the University's strategic approach to tackling this across the whole University community. The Executive noted thanks to Vice Principal Jane Norman for her excellent leadership of the Taskforce, and welcomed the Director of Legal Services, Leigh Chalmers (a current member of the Taskforce) as the new chair.

The Executive commended the work of the Taskforce, reiterated its commitment to the importance of its work and noted with regret recent press coverage of highly inappropriate language used by a staff member in the University's Centre for Sport and Exercise.

12 People Report **Paper J**

The Executive noted the update on people related matters being taken forward by Human Resources and other University departments.

13 Health and Safety Quarterly Report: Quarter 2 **Paper K**

The Executive noted the summary of health and safety related incidents that took place during the period 1 December 2018 to 28 February 2019.

14 Email Autoforwarding: Change to Service **Paper L**

The Executive noted the service change to staff and postgraduate research student email to prevent the automatic forwarding from University email accounts to external email accounts, to mitigate the information security and GDPR risk of disclosure of confidential or personal data.

15 Orphan Website Suspensions Report **Paper M**

The Executive noted an update on activity to manage orphan websites across the University's Web Estate and commended the reduction in the number of no longer active websites.

16 Resource Lists Framework **Paper N**

The Executive noted a revised version of the Resource Lists Framework produced following consultation with Schools, Colleges and EUSA as a route to increasing adoption of the Resource Lists service.

17 University Executive Communications

Verbal

Communication on the Student Experience Action Plan, REF2021 Code of Practice and Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence and Gender-Based Violence was agreed.

18 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 14 May 2019 at 10 am in the Raeburn Room.