



UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE

29 August 2019

Minute

Present: Peter Mathieson (Convener)
David Argyle, Leigh Chalmers, Chris Cox, Gavin Douglas, Hugh Edmiston,
David Gray, Lee Hamill, Gary Jebb, Wendy Loretto,
Gavin McLachlan, Theresa Merrick, Dorothy Miell, James Saville,
James Smith, Sarah Smith, Andrew Wilson and Moira Whyte.

In attendance: Dave Gorman (for item 4), Steven Poliri (for item 5), Fiona Boyd and
Kirstie Graham.

Apologies: Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Richard Kenway, Andrew Morris, Dave
Robertson, Jonathan Seckl, Tracey Slaven and Sandy Tudhope.

1 Minute

Paper A1

Prior to the start of the meeting, the University Executive was informed of two new members: Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Sandy Tudhope, University Lead on Climate Responsibility and Sustainability.

The Minute of the meeting held on 30 July 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 Principal reported that he would shortly be circulating a 'welcome' message to new and returning staff and students; there would be a climate day of action on 20 September which the University was supporting, there had been discussion with student representatives and staff and students would be encouraged to take 30mins to engage in a range of events; the strategic plan was approaching its launch date and there was discussion on how committees and groups could engage with the new plan; work was ongoing on staff experience, with one of the strands emerging from the staff survey around bullying and harassment, where the University already had rigorous processes but was looking to continuously improve; finally Brexit, where the risk of 'no deal' had increased and staff were encouraged to revisit the earlier contingency planning for this, with the Business Continuity Officer and team available to provide advice and support.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4 Responding to the Climate Emergency – Next Steps

Paper B

Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability, spoke to his paper, which moved forward the discussions and actions agreed at the Strategic Away Day in the areas of: climate conscious travel; carbon offsetting; developing a planetary resilience/post carbon institute; working with the City of Edinburgh Council; and reducing carbon use through behavioural change. The Executive had previously agreed these as areas to develop actions and in discussion the following points emerged:

- Any proposed levy on aviation would need to be carefully planned and communicated, in order that it was seen as a constructive contribution to work on addressing the climate emergency. It was important not to underestimate potential resistance to this, as evidenced by responses to the proposed sustainable IT policy.
- It had been agreed that we should look for ways to offset carbon through tree planting, but this did not necessarily require land purchase, there could be work with landowners in this area, being clear this is part of a climate strategy and was not instead of, but was alongside, behavioural change and carbon reduction.
- Although it was important to work constructively with the City of Edinburgh Council, this was separate to the ongoing City Deal work and it would be important to manage expectations in the light of current Council resource pressures.
- We need to think strategically, considering alignment with other priority areas, ensuring we understand and are content with the balance of cost and sustainability on all our projects. There would be a challenge in marrying our desire to move the climate agenda forward with the need to ensure a joined up approach across all our activities so that a compelling vision was communicated and understood.

The overall direction of travel was approved, with a further update to return to a future meeting.

5 Student Residential Accommodation Strategy 2018-2028 Annual Update

Paper C

The Executive was informed of the context for the Strategy update, which was based on a detailed analysis of future demand and bed requirements aligned with ongoing discussions around size and shape. There was a walk through of the growth projections and anticipated stock movement which showed the scale of additional bed requirements based on the current accommodation guarantee. There was agreement that the University should seek to own and manage student accommodation as far as is possible, this was the preferred model for students and provided greater resilience, so opportunities to further increase stock should be pursued. The importance of labour intensive community engagement and effective communication was noted. The Executive was content to approve the Student Residential Accommodation Strategy 2018-2028 Annual Update, noting this would

progress to Policy and Resources Committee and Court. It was further noted that the size and shape discussions had not concluded, so whilst it had been necessary to use the current data in shaping the strategy, the document itself should be communicated carefully as the numbers on which projections were based were not final.

6 Global Open Finance Centre of Excellence Corporate Structure Paper D

The Executive considered a planned bid to the Strength in Excellence Fund, a competitive funding stream led by UK Research and Innovation, in respect of establishment of a Global Open Finance Centre of Excellence. Members were informed that this was a cornerstone project for Data Driven Innovation. If the bid is successful, it will require the incorporation of a company limited by guarantee and it was noted there were a number of areas that it was not possible to firm up until the outcome of the bid was known. There was discussion about the role of other parties in creating and agreeing the structure and the ownership of any research.

The Executive was content to support the submission of the bid, noting that if it was successful a firm proposal would return for consideration and progression through Policy and Resources Committee to Court.

7 Edinburgh BioQuarter Update Paper E

The Executive considered a progress update on the present informal collaborative partnership with Scottish Enterprise, the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian. The proposal will now progress through Policy and Resources Committee to Court.

8 Director of Finance's Report Paper F

The Director of Finance reported on the updated draft unaudited Group Statement of Comprehensive Income as at July 2019, noting the underlying operating surplus was favourable to budget, however the USS pension movement would lead to an on-paper deficit for the year, in common with the rest of the sector. He provided a brief update on the latest position in relation to the USS pension scheme and it was noted that the Unions planned to ballot for industrial action on both pensions and pay. The University had been holding a series of pension seminars for staff that had been well attended and received. The update on procurement savings and special focus update on surplus and cash were noted.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

9 Service Excellence Programme Update Paper G

The Executive noted the update on the Service Excellence Programme following the most recent SEP Board in June 2019 and the completion of an independent external assurance gateway review.

10 People Report **Paper H**

The Executive noted the People Report and the first meeting of the Staff Experience Committee.

11 Space Strategy Group Report **Paper I**

The Executive noted the report, including the request to approve the hire of Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) for exams in December 2019. In discussion, members raised concerns about using non-University buildings; agreed core University business should be prioritised over commercial activity; and noted the issue of the volume of examinations would be addressed longer term through curriculum review. With those caveats noted, the request was approved. The Executive noted the issue of teaching on Wednesday afternoons was a subject that would merit further consideration.

12 Closure of Agreed Management Actions from Internal Audit **Paper J**

The Executive noted the current status of closure of agreed management actions arising from Internal Audit reviews. Although this was progressing the right direction, members were encouraged to engage with the internal audit service on outstanding management actions to ensure these were still appropriate and to agree the process for closing these.

13 China Merchants Group Partnership Opportunity – July 2019 **Paper K**

The Executive noted the update on the proposed development of a strategic partnership between the University and the China Merchants Group.

14 Confirmation of Committee Chairs **Paper L**

The Executive noted the leadership of various University wide Committees and Groups at the start of Academic Year 2019/2020 following changes to the Vice-Principals of the University.

15 Proposal for the Establishment of a Chair **Paper M**

The Executive approved the creation of a Chair of Behavioural Sciences in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.

16 University Executive Communications **Verbal**

The Executive agreed there would be communication on the strategic plan and sustainability initiatives; Brexit; Service Excellence Programme; the Staff Experience Committee and the new Chair.

17 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 23 September 2019 at 10 am in the Raeburn Room.