



UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE

23 September 2019

Minute

Present: Peter Mathieson (Convener)
David Argyle, Leigh Chalmers, Chris Cox, Sarah Cunningham-Burley,
Gavin Douglas, Hugh Edmiston, David Gray, Lee Hamill, Wendy Loretto,
Gavin McLachlan, Dorothy Miell, Dave Robertson, James Saville,
Jonathan Seckl, James Smith, Tracey Slaven (to item 6), Sarah Smith and
Andrew Wilson

In attendance: Fiona Boyd and Kirstie Graham

Apologies: Gary Jebb, Richard Kenway, Theresa Merrick, Andrew Morris,
Sandy Tudhope and Moira Whyte

1 Minute

Paper A1

Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was welcomed to her first meeting.

The Minute of the meeting held on 29 August 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 on:

- a £15.3 million donation from J K Rowling to help create new facilities and support research at the University's Anne Rowling Regenerative Neurology Clinic;
- the publication of the new Strategy 2030, with members encouraged to engage with the strategy and disseminate to their teams;
- the recent Climate Day of Action, when the University encouraged staff and students to visit a number of events and stalls about the climate crisis;
- the continued uncertainty over Brexit with a further communication planned to staff and students to reiterate the information currently available and assure continued support;
- the outcome of the ballots on industrial action on pay and pensions were awaited with contingency groups in place;
- the annual Universities UK conference, including a talk from the new Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson and presentations on Generation Z (late-1990s to early 2000s birth cohorts), who are typically more motivated by

work with wider benefit to society and value work-life balance to a larger degree than earlier generations and are more likely to report mental health conditions.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4 Student and Staff Experience

- **Student Support and Personal Tutor Project - Update**

Paper B1

The Executive was updated on the on the review of Student Support and Personal Tutoring, with the intention to provide regular updates before presenting the final business case for approval.

It was noted that three models of future ways of working had been developed to provoke discussion as part of a wide ranging consultation with students and staff. The themes emerging to date include: lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities; how we reward, recognise and develop our colleagues; expectations and understanding of how we deliver student support and what it is; the most effective balance between the support provided by academic and by professional services staff.

The work to date was acknowledged and there was a wide ranging discussion which included the following points:

- the expectations on academic staff and whether it this should be seen as a core academic function;
- the implicit gender issue in the unrecognised and unrewarded additional work frequently taken on by female and more junior staff to support students, that should be explicit in the consultation;
- the terminology of 'personal tutor' and whether this raised unrealistic expectations and the ability on non-specialised staff to meet these;
- the current significant variation in practice, with the need for a single University model to be developed;
- the importance of administrative infrastructure to support the role and the role of the Service Excellence Programme in this.

In summing up, it was noted that the issues identified around the role of professional services, standardisation and consistency of provision were long standing. The Executive supported bringing further iterations to future meetings as opinion coalesces, but recognised the scale of the challenge and were content it was more important to get this right than to meet a hard deadline.

- **Student Emergency Contact Information**

Paper B2

The Executive noted the guidance for University staff on contacting students' nominated "emergency contacts" and approved the proposal to require students to provide up to date details of their term-time address and their nominated emergency contact, to include email and mobile phone contact details. There was discussion of the "opt in" scheme adopted at the University of Bristol, with broad support for this approach to be given further consideration.

- **Suggestion Box update**

Paper B3

This Executive noted the pilot 'Have Your Say' suggestion box had been in operation for six months so it was timely to review and consider next steps.

The key suggestion topics from staff and students were considered and it was noted that the department or area that a suggestion was most relevant to was asked to consider how the suggestion could be taken forward and to provide a response. There was considerable variation in the local response to suggestions with a lack of engagement and resistance in some areas. The anonymity of the scheme also made it challenging at times to fully engage with and respond appropriately to suggestions.

The Executive agreed to continue with the suggestion box and discussion focussed on how to make it more effective. This included better guidance on the scheme, what it can be used for and what to expect; and exploring technological solutions to address routine questions and to enable a more iterative response whilst maintaining anonymity, if requested. It was agreed that ownership sat with the University Executive and the Executive should therefore continue to receive reports on its operation.

5 Research

- **2018/19 End of Year Research Performance Summary**

Paper C1

The Executive considered a summary of research applications and awards performance for 2018/19, noting that overall the numbers are similar to typical University performance, which generally follows a 5-year cycle. However, although there were a number of positive results, overall there may be an early warning of some areas of cause of concern in numbers of applications being submitted.

There was broad ranging discussion on what may sit behind the numbers, noting that strong research performance was a core reputational issue, with organisational culture, academic leadership, research infrastructure and support and a volatile external environment raised as areas for consideration. It was agreed this issue would merit further discussion at College and School level.

- **Improving Research Performance at the University**

Paper C2

The Executive considered a paper providing the background to the UK's 'reproducibility crisis' in scientific research and approved the proposal to join the UK Reproducibility Network.

6 Approach to the 2020-2023 Planning Round Cycle

Paper D

The Executive noted there would be a roll forward of the 2019-22 years 2 and 3 plan, as approved by Court, as years 1 and 2. There was discussion of the required savings and of the roll forward, recognising there may need to be some further work on the new years 1 and 2, to take into account the discussions on size and shape. It was noted that the quarterly review meetings would assist with this. Taking this into

account, the Executive approved the 2020-23 planning cycle timetable for reporting to Policy and Resources Committee.

7 Finance

- **Director of Finance's Report**

Paper E1

The Executive noted the draft University Group financial results for 2018-19 showed an underlying operating surplus ahead of budget. However, the budget had not been ambitious and there would need to be a greater surplus going forward to support the University's plans. The Executive also noted an update on the annual insurance renewal exercise for 2019-20 and a brief note on our 2017-18 Institutional Efficiency Return to Scottish Funding Council.

- **Gifts & Hospitality Policy**

Paper E2

The Executive approved the updated Policy on the Receipt and Provision of Gifts, Hospitality and Other Benefits for progression to Court, noting there would be an annual report to Risk Management Committee on the implementation of the Policy.

8 Information Security Essentials & Data Protection User Awareness Training Course – Completion Rates

Paper F

The Executive approved the Information Security Policy in October 2017, which included the mandatory completion of information security awareness training. Members considered an update on completion rates for the Information Security Essentials user awareness training courses as at the end of July 2019, noting that this was low in many areas. Members agreed to complete the training, where they had not done so and encourage their teams to do so. It was requested that Heads of School and Professional Service areas receive notification of take up in their area and that the training was easier for individuals to access and check their completion.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

9 People Report

Paper G

The Executive noted the People Report and the first meeting of the Staff Experience Committee and the establishment of two task and finish groups.

10 Joint PhD programme with the University of Glasgow – Recruiting the Second Cohort of Students

Paper H

The University Executive noted the observations from Round 1 of recruitment to the joint studentship programme and approved the format and focus for Round 2.

11 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 22 October 2019 at 10 am in the Raeburn Room.