



**UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE**

**17 December 2019**

**Minute**

- Present:** Sarah Smith (Convener)  
David Argyle, Leigh Chalmers, Chris Cox, Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Gavin Douglas, Hugh Edmiston, David Gray, Lee Hamill, Colm Harmon, Gary Jebb, Richard Kenway, Wendy Loretto, Gavin McLachlan, Dorothy Miell, Theresa Merrick, James Saville, Jonathan Seckl, Tracey Slaven, James Smith, Andrew Wilson and Moira Whyte.
- In attendance:** Ashley Shannon (for Hugh Edmiston), Hannah Jones (for Paper B3), Fiona Boyd and Kirstie Graham.
- Apologies:** Hugh Edmiston, Peter Mathieson, Andrew Morris, Sandy Tudhope and Dave Robertson.

**1 Minute Paper A1**

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

**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 University Secretary reported:

- The outcome of the recent election and the timescale for Brexit, with continuing uncertainty over the implications for the sector as a whole and potentially additional complexity for Scottish institutions;
- The recent industrial action and the ongoing issues around pensions, noting the Joint Expert Panel on the University Superannuation Scheme had recently issued its phase 2 report;
- The current visit from representatives Shanghai Jiao Tong University, to consolidate work on the Low Carbon College and explore scope for future collaborations.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**4 Student Experience**

**• Annual and Periodic Quality Reviews – Areas for Development Paper B1**

The Executive considered a summary of items emerging from annual quality assurance reviews, noting that the issue identified were in line with areas where

there was already work to take these forward. The issues around space and timetabling were being considered by Space Strategy Group; assessment and feedback issues would be considered by the Senate Education Committee; in relation to the student voice, the Executive had asked for a full review of the course evaluation questionnaire system, to return to a future meeting; affordability and finance issues would be considered further by the Executive's Standing Committee on Student Experience.

The Executive was content that there were ongoing actions addressing the issues raised and noted the paper was useful in ensuring an overview of the different workstreams engaged on the student experience.

- **Annual December Examination Venue Requirements from 2020** **Paper B2**

The Executive had previously agreed that core academic activity should take preference over commercial activity in terms of room allocations. Members were updated on the ongoing challenge of delivering suitable space to accommodate University examinations in December. There was discussion of the underlying issue of the volume of assessment taking place in December and it was agreed this was a longer term issue to be addressed as part of curriculum review. In the meantime, it was noted that Space Strategy Group had reviewed the options for exam space for the December exam period from 2020 to 2023, with the assumption that Adam House would then be available as a single exam venue for 500+ seats. It was noted that the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) provided a single, accessible location that the student officers consulted found preferable to using a range of different University buildings that may be less accessible and potentially impact on other student activities. Accordingly, the Executive approved continued use of EICC for the December exam diet, and asked that this decision was clearly communicated as being based on the student experience and not financial or commercial considerations.

- **English Language Education** **Paper B3**

The Executive considered English language provision offered by ELE (English Language Education), a subject area within the Centre for Open Learning (COL) and discussed how to address risks to the consistency and parity of the student experience. Points for discussion included commercial opportunities to offset costs and the impact of space and timetabling on these; a focus on English language at the pre-entry and entry stage to move from a remedial approach; and the need to consider this in the context of recent discussions around size and shape.

There was agreement that there was a need to address the quality and consistency of English language provision and to reconsider commercial opportunities, to be developed into fully costed options to take forward through the planning round.

## **5 Implementation of the University Brand (What makes us Edinburgh)** **Paper C**

The Executive considered an update on work undertaken to develop the University brand with a view to providing a stronger foundation to all our communications, marketing and stakeholder relations. The paper outlined a corporate and a devolved approach. As part of the corporate approach, a short life Brand Governance Group

(BGG) had been established to address the lack of consistency of approach and drive responsible use of the brand.

In discussion it was noted that Strategy 2030 was people and value focused but research indicated this was not reflected in perceptions of the brand; there needed to be a balance between the corporate and the grassroots in changing perceptions; the reputational risk of poor brand management; and the need to work collaboratively with partners whilst maintaining our brand. Future steps would be to look at the value of the brand and undertake a brand tracking exercise. The Executive gave endorsement and support to the proposed approach set out in the paper.

## **6 Edinburgh BioQuarter Update**

**Paper D**

The Executive noted the update on formalising arrangements amongst the University, Scottish Enterprise, the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian. This covered: development of the Strategic Business Case; design of an OJEU compliant procurement process; principles of governance arrangements; and progress with infrastructure consultancy. The need to integrate equality and diversity considerations and the student experience into this work was noted. This would return to the Executive in the new year with more developed proposals for consideration and if appropriate recommendation through to Court.

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

**Paper E**

The Executive noted the University management accounts position up to the end of October (period three). The update on the USS 2019 Interim Valuation was noted alongside the recent publication of the Joint Expert Panel Phase 2 report and the ongoing challenging picture. Progress towards divesting from all fossil fuels by 31 December 2020 was noted and welcomed.

## **8 EDMARC Report**

**Paper H**

The Executive considered the Equality, Diversity Monitoring and Research Committee (EDMARC) reports on staff and student data for 2018/19, which looks at the demographics by protected equality characteristics for undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate students and for academic and professional services staff. Members welcomed the opportunity to discuss this report, noted the University's diversity and drew attention to: differential attainment for Black and Minority Ethnic students; gender issues in terms of career progression; support for older students; and disability support. These were identified as important areas worthy of further discussion and it was noted that at the next Executive meeting it was planned to consider some of these areas in more depth.

## **ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL**

### **9 Information Security Guidance for Business Travel to High Risk Countries**

**Paper F**

The Executive noted the information security risk of travel to high risk countries and discussion focussed on how best to operationalise the guidance to maximise

compliance. It was noted that it was intended to provide a bank of clean laptops available for staff to borrow in the new year. It was agreed that the guidance should be incorporated into a broader communication of the support available for implementation, when this was available.

## **10 Gaelic Language Plan**

**Paper G**

The Executive noted that elements of the plan required additional funding that had not been secured. The Executive was content to approve the new Gaelic Language Plan, subject to revising it to remove the need for resource where this was not available.

## **11 The Armed Forces Covenant**

**Paper I**

The Executive approved the planned work to identify the required actions across the University to assist veterans and service families, with a view to the Principal signing the Armed Forces Covenant.

## **12 Postgraduate Research Student Fees and Edinburgh PhD Scholarships**

**Paper J**

The Executive approved the principles for the assigning and charging of fees for doctoral degrees and a rationalisation of University funded PhD scholarships and noted there would be further work required to take this forward through the planning round.

## **13 University Collections Facility Rainwater Ingress - Report**

**Paper K**

The Executive noted the damage to University Collections caused by rainwater ingress over the period 8 to 9 August 2019 and the response in line with the Library & University Collections Disaster Response and Recovery plan, with thanks to the work of internal staff and local support from the National Museum of Scotland.

## **ITEMS FOR NOTING**

## **14 Information Security Essentials & Data Protection User Awareness Training Course – Completion Rates**

**Paper L**

The Executive noted members' completion of the Information Security Essentials and Data Protection User Awareness training courses. It was noted not all members had completed both courses and members were reminded there had been agreement at a previous meeting to do so, in order to lead by example alongside encouraging their teams to complete the training.

## **15 People Report**

**Paper M**

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

## **16 Network Replacement – Information Security Control Improvements Paper N**

The update on changes and enhancements to information security controls that will be introduced as part of the Network Replacement Project was noted.

## **17 University Executive Communications**

The Executive agreed to communicate the following: Areas for Development from Quality Reviews; English Language Education; implementation of the University Brand; the Armed Forces Covenant; and the People Report.

## **18 Any Other Business**

There was a brief update on the Gujarat Biotechnology initiative, with a paper to come to a future meeting.

There was an update on Health and Safety, in particular: reporting of near misses; local health and safety committees; and compliance with protective equipment. The Executive noted the shared responsibility for health and safety, including within individual buildings, with further work to be done in this area.

## **19 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 21 January 2020 at 10am in the Raeburn Room.

There will be a Strategic Away Day on Friday 31 January in St Trinneans Room, St Leonards Hall.