



**UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE**

**16 June 2020**

**Minute**

- Present:** Peter Mathieson (Convener)  
David Argyle, Leigh Chalmers, Chris Cox, Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Gavin Douglas, David Gray, Lee Hamill, Colm Harmon, Gary Jebb, Richard Kenway, Wendy Loretto, Catherine Martin, Gavin McLachlan, Ellen MacRae, Dorothy Miell, Theresa Merrick, Dave Robertson, James Saville, Jonathan Seckl, Aziz Sheikh, Tracey Slaven, James Smith, Sarah Smith and Sandy Tudhope.
- Apologies:** Andrew Morris and Moira Whyte
- In attendance:** Dave Gorman (for item 7), Barry Neilson (for items 5 and 8), Fiona Boyd and Kirstie Graham.

**1 Minute Paper A1**

The Minute of the meeting held on 19 May 2020 was approved.

**2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log Paper A2**

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Principal welcomed Ellen MacRae, President of EUSA, to her first meeting of the Executive.

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

**3 Principal's Communications Verbal**

The Principal reported on recent development in relation to the Covid19 pandemic focussing on research support: the UK Government Research Sustainability Task Force was looking into research sustainability, but no new funding was expected; the Scottish Government had provided £75m new money to the sector for 2020/21 only, specifically to support early career researchers and coronavirus research and the University had received a proportionate share of this. The Principal had contributed to a document on University research commissioned by Sir Patrick Vallance on behalf of the UK Government.

The recent Black Lives Matter protests had highlighted the inequalities in health and education and work the University was already undertaking had been accelerated, led by Sarah Cunningham-Burley and Rowena Arshad with the University committed to taking meaningful and coherent action.

The Principal set the context for the meeting, noting the Covid19 pandemic was not over and the University will be operating in a climate of uncertainty over the immediate, short and medium term and within that context the Executive would have

to make hard decisions on costs savings and what to prioritise in order to ensure the University remained strong and sustainable for the future.

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

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

**Paper B**

The Director of Finance outlined the material changes to the University Group Forecast Operating Surplus since his last report. There had been generous donations that improved the previous operating surplus, however as these were restricted they could not contribute to the surplus available for strategic re-investment, which continued to be insufficient for long term sustainability. There was a layer of complexity in that the statutory requirements for external presentation of the accounts required the inclusion of a number of non cash adjustments, including pension liability. These could lead to large swings that did not reflect the actual financial position and would mean the external reported outcome would not reflect underlying financial performance. He reported that the USS Trustee elected to continue with the scheduled valuation date of 31 March 2020. The economic turmoil resulting from the Covid19 pandemic will result in a significant increase in the deficit of the Scheme and could lead to increased pressure on employer and employee contribution rates.

This challenging financial picture set the context for the next item of Adaption and Renewal and highlighted the need for cost savings, as set out in the Reshaping paper.

### **5 Adaption and Renewal Team Update**

**Paper C**

The Executive noted the update on the Adaptation and Renewal Team and the work of the Research and Innovation, Students, and Estates and Digital Infrastructure work streams and considered the recommended approach to cost savings developed by the Re-shaping workstream.

The Re-shaping work stream had considered a range of scenario analyses and financial models on the financial impact of the Covid19 pandemic, which was expected to be sustained, meaning it was critical to rapidly secure the cost savings required in financial year 2020/21, recognising that many of these are unsustainable or one off financial benefits. This was essential to provide the space needed to work through medium to longer term sustainable options alongside the critical work required on re-shaping for the future.

There was extensive discussion which included the following: the need for the immediate short term savings and then longer term sustainable reduction in the cost base; that the measures identified were aimed at preserving jobs as much as possible; all measures would be implemented with equality and diversity at the forefront to ensure fairness for all protected characteristics; it was important to be mindful of the University's values; due to the ongoing uncertainty, an element of flexibility and review would require to be built into the implementation to ensure there were not unintended consequences; there needed to be a clear communication of

the decisions made and the reasons for these recognising the challenging period for all staff as a result of the pandemic.

Taking the issues raised through the discussion into account, the Executive approved the recommended cost saving options (non-staffing and staffing) set out in the paper and for the Adaptation and Renewal Reshaping group to develop subsequent implementation plans, guidance and appropriate processes.

## **6 People Report**

**Paper D**

The Executive noted the update on people related matters.

## **7 Climate Emergency**

The Principal set the context for the following papers on the agenda, noting that they involved an expenditure ask. The Executive was reminded that one of the reasons for cost savings was to create liquidity to enable the University to fulfil its strategic priorities. The Executive was not a financial decision making body, but did set strategic prioritisation to inform the relative priorities to support during budget setting and planning discussions.

### **• Report of the Transport and Aviation Working Group**

**Paper E1**

The Executive noted climate change remained a serious threat with the Covid19 pandemic demonstrating our vulnerability to a systemic shock. In August 2019 the University Executive agreed to establish a cross-university working group, the Travel and Aviation Working Group (TAWG) to examine and report back on how to deliver a vision for 'climate conscious travel'.

The Group, convened by Sandy Tudhope, had met 5 times, and undertaken a major internal survey of staff and students, as well as a review of best practice across UK universities and a targeted review of corporate best practice. Based on this, a series of key proposals have been developed including: a presumption against flights within Great Britain; a commitment to preparing information on the climate impacts of travel for bookers, administrators, travellers and managers; a required contribution to be introduced, aimed at influencing travel choices and funding our carbon sequestration. There was also a range of proposals to secure 'lock in not snap back' in terms of climate positive behaviours as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, such as the use of virtual collaboration and remote working.

The Executive approved the key recommendations set out in the paper.

### **• Forests and Peatlands Proposals**

**Paper E2**

The Executive considered a proposal for investment in forests and peatlands projects to deliver the estimated carbon sequestration required for all travel emissions to meet our commitment to be Zero by 2040 in Strategy 2030. It was noted that without carbon sequestration in addition to carbon reduction, the University would not be on track to achieve its carbon neutral target. The Executive

was supportive of the principles and requested further work on identifying external sources of funding as part of taking this forward through the planning round.

## **8 People and Money System and Finance/HR Transformation Update** **Paper F**

The Director of Finance provided an update on the finance transformation programme and the Executive noted the approval of the service design for both Procurement and Finance Operations and the decision in principle to move into people consultation process to establish the new teams and structures, subject to the completion of impact assessments.

The Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer/Librarian to the University reported on the challenges in delivering the People and Money System due to the impact of Covid19 and reduced capacity across the team. The Executive noted the revised implementation plan dates, with 'HR and finance structures' moved from June 2020 to September 2020; 'Payroll and Timesheet recording' moved from August 2020 to November 2020; and 'Finance and the final element of HR' moved from November 2020 to February 2021. The Executive further noted the Principal's approval for use of a two month time contingency, estimated at an additional cost in 2020/21 that had been budgeted as part of the contingency arrangements.

## **9 Student Experience**

### **• Student Experience Action Plan** **Paper G1**

The Executive noted that the financial shocks caused by Covid19 required re-evaluation of the scope of the previously approved £50m investment in improving the student experience. The Student Experience Standing Committee had reviewed progress, considered to what extent existing, funded projects could or should be reshaped or reduced in light of the Covid19 situation and also identified projects which should be prioritised by the University subject to available funding. These projects were: student mental health & wellbeing; enhanced peer support; sub-titling; and EdHelp (student support hubs). In addition, there was already a contractual commitment to continue work on a number of projects including sexual violence on campus; British Sign Language; interdisciplinary shared courses.

There was discussion on ensuring the mechanisms were in place to align the University's funding priorities with the ongoing Adaption and Renewal work in order to have a complete picture to inform planning decisions. Noting this, the Executive agreed that this was a priority area of work to be taken forward for funding.

### **• Student Emergency Contact Procedure** **Paper G2**

The Executive considered the follow up to a report considered in September 2019 on the implications, benefits and risks of the University adopting an 'opt in' Student Emergency Contact Procedure similar to that introduced by the University of Bristol. Members note the feedback gathered on the introduction of a "Bristol" model opt-in scheme and agreed the current University system was robust, compliant, student centred and proportionate. Accordingly, the Executive approved maintaining the current approach.

- **Course Evaluation Questionnaires Review update**

**Paper G3**

The Executive noted there had been a fundamental review of the Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ) process which identified that the data collected hasn't provided meaningful insight at a University level, inconsistent levels of engagement and response rates have given rise to the criticism that CEQs aren't representative of student views at a course level and colleagues have fed back that comparisons of course level feedback between courses and Schools lack validity.

The CEQ Project Board therefore recommended that from 2021/22, centrally managed CEQs were replaced by locally managed end of course feedback that follows the mid-course feedback model. A new support model will be developed during the 2020/21 academic year to ensure Schools are supported in collecting and responding to student feedback. In addition, a longitudinal survey for undergraduate students focused on enhancement particularly around critical transition points, progression and student well-being will be developed over 2020/21 be launched in 2021/22. In order to ease the administrative burden in Schools it was recommended that there was a change to the CEQ policy to make questions on individual teaching staff optional for all courses during the 2020/21 academic year.

Noting the value of a longitudinal survey in strengthening the feedback loop to students, the Executive approved the recommendations set out in the paper.

## **10 EDMARC Ethnicity Report – Preliminary Findings**

**Paper H**

The Executive received the data from the annual report from the Equality, Diversity Monitoring and Research Committee (EDMARC) at its December meeting. There had been a more detailed examination of the data and further work as part of the University's Race Charter application to understand the effects of ethnicity on the student journey.

There had to be careful analysis of the data, as top level trends can mask subject specific or BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) sub-group differences at any point along the student journey. In addition there are a constellation of factors to be considered, including the intersection with economic circumstances and the age profile of students. The issues emerging included: the offer rates for BAME candidates; the acceptance rate from BAME applicants; the attainment gap in degree classification. While identifying these University wide issues, actions would be required at a School level and the Academic Strategy Group would be discussing this report.

The Executive confirmed a University wide commitment to listen and engage and take action and it was noted that the first stages of an action plan was being developed for consideration by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and would come to the next meeting for discussion.

## **11 Any Other Business**

**Verbal**

The Vice-Principal (interim) Corporate Services updated the Executive of a transaction pending in Roslin Technologies Ltd and informed members there would

be a further paper at a future meeting with a broader paper on commercialisation later in the year.

## **ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL/NOTING**

### **12 Foreign Interference in UK Higher Education Paper I**

The Executive noted there would be forthcoming UK sector guidance relating to foreign interference in UK higher education and the University's risk mitigation in this area.

### **13 Major International Collaborations Update Paper J**

The Executive noted an update on the University's current portfolio of major international collaborations and the ongoing work on considering what constitutes a strategic partnership and how to provide constructive support in developing these.

### **14 Prevent Duty Paper K**

The Executive noted the annual report on the implementation of the Prevent duty from July 2019 to June 2020.

### **15 Education Act 1994 Compliance Paper L**

The Executive noted the Certificate of Assurance supplied by the Edinburgh University Students' Association to demonstrate University compliance with the requirements of The Education Act 1994 (the Act).

### **16 University Executive Communications Verbal**

The Executive agreed there would be communication on equality and diversity; the adaptation and renewal work, climate and the student experience.

### **17 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 21 July 2020 at 10 am.