



UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE

18 August 2020

Minute

Present: Peter Mathieson (Convener)
David Argyle, Leigh Chalmers, Chris Cox, Sarah Cunningham-Burley,
Gavin Douglas, David Gray, Colm Harmon, Gary Jebb,
Richard Kenway, Wendy Loretto, Catherine Martin, Gavin McLachlan,
Ellen MacRae, Dorothy Miell, Theresa Merrick, Andrew Morris,
Dave Robertson, James Saville, Jonathan Seckl, Aziz Sheikh, Tracey Slaven,
James Smith, Sarah Smith, Sandy Tudhope and Moira Whyte.

Apologies: Lee Hamill.

In attendance: Barry Neilson, Rachael Robertson, Fiona Boyd and Kirstie Graham.

1 Minute Paper A1

The Minute of the meeting held on 21 July 2020 was approved.

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 Principal updated members on:

- the renaming of the David Hume Tower, noting that as it would be temporarily used as a study space, it would be given an address-based name for this purpose while the broader process of considering naming, engaging with a range of stakeholders, continued;
- there had not been an announcement from the Scottish Government reducing social distancing on campus from 2 metres, so the teaching day would need to be extended to 8pm to accommodate the hybrid delivery model (no staff would be expected to work more than their agreed hours within this model);
- the announcement by the UK government on A level results, following on from a similar decision on Higher results and the potential impact on admissions. A range of approaches to this issue were considered and following discussion the Executive agreed the University should honour all original offers made. Where there were capacity constraints, applicants would be offered entry this year on a different course or deferral to next year.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4 Adaptation and Renewal Report Paper B

The Executive noted the update on the work of the Adaptation and Renewal Team.

5 Adaptation and Renewal – Staff Related

• Staff Survey

Verbal

The Executive received a presentation on the staff survey on homeworking from Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal and Chief Information officer and Librarian. It was noted that there had been a good response rate and staff members had variable experiences of home working. Within the extremes of response, many staff had expressed an interest in a more hybrid or flexible model of working in the longer term. There was discussion and the following points were raised: the need for training and support for managers on managing staff working from home; the need for clarity on how and when it is expected to transition back to campus based working; ensuring consideration of both organisational requirements and personal choice; the need to consider equality and diversity in any approach to home working.

It was noted that further surveys could be carried out (proposals for a series of pulse surveys to be considered by the staff experience committee) and there would be a thought paper on longer term home and hybrid working to be considered by the reshaping group.

• People Report

Paper C1

The Executive noted the update on people related matters and particularly the launch of three leadership and management programmes.

• Voluntary Severance Programme

Paper C2

The Executive considered the proposed operation of a voluntary severance programme to be run in the first half of financial year 2020/21. Members supported the overall approach whilst recognising the challenge of implementation to ensure long term and meaningful costs savings. There was discussion on eligibility and approval criteria, proposed timelines and duration of each stage, cross university budget management and the equity of the financial package across all grades. The scheme was approved, subject to these suggestions, to be discussed with the Trades Unions prior to implementation.

• Support For Early Career Researchers During and After Covid19

Paper C3

The Executive welcomed the update on ongoing and new measures designed to address the challenges faced by early-career researchers created by Covid-19, particularly relating to sustaining research activity and building research careers.

6 Director of Finance's Report

Paper D

The Executive noted the University position to the end of June and the expectation the year end result would be higher than previously forecast, due to the longstanding challenges in forecasting accurately. It was critical to improve financial forecasting to ensure effective and sustainable local and strategic decisions can be made, noting the surplus generated would still be insufficient to ensure long term sustainability without implementing the previously agreed cost saving measures.

The impact of Covid19 was noted in increasing the uncertainty in both the short and medium to long term. As part of the initial response, it was decided to defer projects in the Estates Capital Plan at the pre-construction stage by 12 months. The Estates Committee was expected to recommend to Policy and Resources Committee, and subsequently University Court a further 12 months deferral. The impact of Covid19 on the University and the higher education landscape would be far reaching and this deferral would ensure time was available to re-think the Estates Capital Plan in the light of this. Members were supportive of this approach.

7 Student Survey Results July 2020

Paper E

The Executive considered the findings from the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) in 2020. Members noted the disappointing results compared to our peers, noting that overall satisfaction has decreased by one percentage point from 79% to 78% between 2019 and 2020. Although the longer term trend is of decreased levels of satisfaction across the sector, the University's satisfaction scores are declining at a greater rate than the sector.

In discussion members agreed that this was reflective of a long standing and systemic issue that would require a long term, strategic response to resolve. Although disappointing, improving student satisfaction remained a strategic priority. Further analysis and an action plan would return to the Executive for consideration.

8 Policy and Procedure Updates

• Counter Fraud Group Report

Paper F1

The Executive reviewed the updated Fraud Policy and Procedures and were content to recommend to Audit and Risk Committee and then Court for approval.

• Report on Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures

Paper F2

The Executive reviewed the new Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures and were content to recommend to Audit and Risk Committee and then Court for approval.

ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL/NOTING

9 Revised Complaint Handling Procedure

Paper G

The University Executive approved a revised Complaint Handling Procedure, in line with the requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

10 Revisions to Fee Collection - Recovery Process

Paper H

The Executive approve the principles and intended approach to revise the debt management process to ensure that students do not lose IT access mid-semester, in response to the hybrid teaching model.

11 REF 2021 update and route to submission

Paper I

The Executive noted the changes to the REF2021 exercise, including the new submission deadline. It was advised that consideration should be given to ensuring that staff involved in delivering our REF submission have secondments or fixed terms contracts extended as a result of this.

12 Guidance on Recommended Student Technology

Paper J

The Executive noted an update on the type of technology students might need, to ensure the best possible teaching experience, in line with the necessary move to hybrid teaching. It was noted that the Scottish Funding Council had provided additional funding to address digital poverty and that Development and Alumni were exploring philanthropic support as well.

13 People and Money System and Finance/HR Transformation Update

Paper K

The Executive considered the People and Money Systems and HR/Finance Transformation Programme Update and noted concern that there may be further delay to the implementation of the HR and finance structures. Members were assured the delay would be a matter of weeks and would not have resource implications.

14 University Executive Communications

Verbal

The Executive agreed there would be communication on early career researchers, complaint handling, the National Student Survey and revised policy and procedures.

15 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 8 September 2020 at 10 am.