



UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE

8 September 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, Ellen MacRae, Dorothy Miell, Theresa Merrick, Andrew Morris, Dave Robertson, James Saville, Jonathan Seckl, Aziz Sheikh, Tracey Slaven, Sarah Smith, Sandy Tudhope and Moira Whyte.

Apologies: Gavin McLachlan, James Smith

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

1 Minute Paper A1

The Minute of the meeting held on 18 August 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 that:

- Following the last meeting, there had not been an announcement from the Scottish Government reducing social distancing on campus from 2 metres. Detailed guidance for Higher Education opening campuses had been published and the University would continue with the planned hybrid delivery model for semester one;
- The University was preparing for the start of the semester and staff were commended for their efforts in preparation, noting there were health and safety assessments and mitigations in place for staff and students and response plans for any outbreaks;
- The SEU and RUK undergraduate student numbers were higher than anticipated, however uncertainty remained over the final international student numbers and the financial situation remained challenging, due to the loss of income over the summer and the ongoing uncertainty as a result of the pandemic.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4 Adaptation and Renewal Team - Report Paper B

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

5 Finance

- **Director of Finance's Report**

Paper C1

The Director of Finance provided an update on the draft University Group financial results for 2019-20, which despite the challenges of Covid19 still showed an underlying surplus, however removing the City Deal component would mean the surplus would be 1.1% of income, against a target surplus range of 3% - 5% to remain sustainable.

Members noted updates on the annual insurance renewal and the timeline for the USS Technical Provisions consultation as part of the 2020 valuation. Members considered a proposal to pay an additional grant to EUSA on 1 March 2021, subject to conditions set out in the paper and potentially a further additional grant, to be reviewed for agreement in February, assuming appropriate progress on the conditions. There was discussion on both the conditions and the timescale, with EUSA concerned both that additional funding may be required before 1 March and that meeting the conditions required buy-in from a separate organisation (Accommodation, Catering and Events (ACE)). Taking this into account, the Executive agreed to approve the proposal as set out in the paper, with the caveat that the timescale for the payment of the grant could be brought forward if necessary. The Executive also requested a future progress update on building a constructive relationship between EUSA and ACE and noted this was intended to be a one off additional payment, in recognition of the impact of Covid, to support reshaping to a sustainable operating model and not a recurrent increase of grant funding. This would progress to Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

- **Review of Finance Operating Model and Recommendation**

Paper C2

The Executive considered the proposal that professional and line management reporting for all University Finance staff should be consolidated within the professional structure and ultimately be to the Director of Finance beginning from 1 October 2020.

The Director of Finance reminded members that in October 2018 the Finance Transformation Programme Board considered the FTP Target Operating Model (TOM) Blueprint and Business Case which proposed that professional and line management reporting for all University Finance staff be consolidated within the professional structure and ultimately be to the Director of Finance. At the time, a 'dual accountability' compromise model was agreed for the Heads of Finance roles. With the planned implementation of the new People and Money system, industry experience indicated that policy, process and structural changes should be made in advance of system implementation. The current federated model for Finance across the organisation risked the effective roll out of the major system change and delivering the agreed cost saving initiatives. He confirmed that this related to reporting lines only and the budget autonomy of the six main Budget Holders and their individual areas would be unaffected.

Concerns were raised by some members about implications at School and College level and the Finance Director addressed these in his further comments. Taking these into account, the proposal was approved, subject to review post implementation.

• **Value for Money** **Paper C3**

The Executive approved the Value for Money report for 2019/20, to be forwarded to Audit and Risk Committee as part of the mandatory requirements from SFC.

6 People Report **Paper D**

The Executive noted the update on people related matters and considered a proposal to increase the carry-over allowance for annual leave from 5 to 10 days for full-time staff, pro rata for staff who work part-time. Following discussion, the Executive approved the increase in carry-over to 10 days for the 2021 calendar year only, to revert to the usual carry-over allowance of 5 days in 2022.

7 Freedom of Expression **Paper E**

The Executive had previously considered a statement on freedom of expression and supported the development of the statement and made a number of suggestions. Following further discussion and iterations, the proposed statement had been revised and was presented for consideration. Subject to a minor amendment, the proposed statement was approved, to be subject to a twelve month review.

8 External Communications

• **Community Plan** **Paper F1**

The Executive considered and approved the University's new Community Plan. The challenges around space and engagement during the pandemic were noted but it was agreed that its focus on Social and Civic Responsibility remained a key strategic priority.

• **The Edinburgh Futures Conversations: An Outline Proposal** **Paper F2**

The Executive considered a proposed series of events for late 2020/2021 exploring the role of global co-operation in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. The timescale was considered to be unrealistically optimistic but the proposal and approach was warmly supported. In discussion, it was agreed that this should not just focus on the Covid19 pandemic but address other major challenges. The Executive commended the outline proposal and supported its further development.

9 Global Open Finance Centre of Excellence (GOCFE) **Paper G**

In September 2019 the University submitted a successful bid to the Strength in Places Fund (SiPF) in partnership with FDATA (the Financial Data and Trade Association, a Fintech trade organisation) and Fintech Scotland for 5 year funding to establish a Global Open Finance Centre of Excellence (GOCFE). This aims to

deliver focussed economic development in the financial services and fintech sectors across Central Scotland reflecting regional economic strengths. The intention was to 'spin-out' GOFCoE as a separate legal entity with its own governance and the Executive considered a progress update on the timing for incorporation as a company limited by guarantee and management of key risks. In discussion, the Executive was strongly supportive, but noted a potential conflict of interest between partners in generating income and the commitment to social good. To that end, it was agreed the stated purpose of the organisation, as set out in the Article of Association, needed to be clearly articulated around delivering public good.

ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL/NOTING

10 Authorising International Data Transfer

Paper H

The Executive noted the European Court of Justice decision that invalidated the so-called Privacy Shield safeguard for transferring personal data to the US, and limiting the use of the Standard Contractual Clauses (SCCs) for use outwith the EEA. The Executive approved the interim solution of a risk assessment to be conducted and approved and transfer authorised at highest level while waiting for guidance from the European Data Protection Board and the UK Information Commissioner.

11 People and Money System and Financial/Transformation Update

Paper I

The Executive noted the update on the HR and Finance Transformation Programmes and the People and Money system implementation.

12 Creation of Research Data Scotland

Paper J

The Executive noted the proposed creation by the Scottish Government of an arms-length (from Scottish Government) charitable organisation to manage access to research data from across the public sector in Scotland, to be called Research Data Scotland. The Executive warmly supported the proposal that the University be one of four founding partners in Research Data Scotland.

13 University Executive Communications

Verbal

The Executive agreed there would be communication on: the start of the semester; the carry-over of annual leave; Freedom of Expression; the Community Plan and the Edinburgh Futures Conversations.

14 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 6 October 2020 at 10 am.