



UNIVERSITY COURT

29 November 2021, Playfair Hall, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

**Web Version**

**Minute**

- Members Present:** Debora Kayembe, Rector (in Chair)  
Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member  
Douglas Alexander, General Council Assessor  
Joyce Anderson, Trade Union Professional Services Staff Member  
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member  
Sarah Cooper, Senatus Assessor  
Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor  
Perdita Fraser, Co-opted Member  
Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member  
David Law, Co-opted Member (by videocall)  
Fiona Mackay, Senatus Assessor & Academic Staff Member  
Ellen MacRae, Students' Association President  
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor  
Sarah McAllister, Professional Services Staff Member  
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor  
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member  
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member  
Claire Phillips, Senatus Assessor  
Frank Ross, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor  
Réka Siró, Students' Association Vice-President Activities & Services  
Alistair Smith, Co-opted Member  
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor
- Apologies:** None
- In attendance:** Sabira Akram, Governance Apprentice Programme 2021/22  
Sophia Lycouris, Rector's Assessor  
Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance; and  
University Secretary
- Presenters & Observers:** Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services  
Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary Student Experience  
Lee Hamill, Director of Finance  
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students  
Gary Jebb, Director of Place  
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services  
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian to  
the University  
Theresa Merrick, Director of Communications & Marketing  
James Saville, Director of Human Resources  
Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal  
Rona Smith, Director of Strategic Planning & Insight  
Moirá Whyte, Vice-Principal & Head of College  
Rachael Robertson, Deputy Director of Finance (for Item 10)  
Chris Cox, Vice-Principal Philanthropy & Advancement (for Item 12)

## OPENING ITEMS

### 1 Minute

Papers A1-A2

Debora Kayembe, Rector, welcomed members and attendees. Court member Fiona Mackay (Academic Staff Member & Senate Assessor) and Court attendee Gavin Douglas (Deputy Secretary Student Experience) were thanked for their service to Court on the occasion of their last meeting and wished well for the future.

The minute of the meeting and note of the seminar held on 6 October 2021 were approved.

### 2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A3

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

### 3 Principal's Report

Paper B

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, supplemented the written report with the following points:

- University & College Union members will enter a period of industrial action later this week regarding planned changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and pay and conditions. While this is part of a sector-wide dispute, progress has been made at a local level on issues such as casualisation and the gender pay gap. Mitigating the impact of the industrial action on students will be a key focus for the University's leadership;
- The Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus is expected to become the dominant strain in the UK shortly. While the effect on the University and wider society is unknown at the moment, home working where possible is being encouraged; and,
- Graduation ceremonies are taking place in-person in the McEwan Hall for the first time since the pandemic began, with public health mitigations in place, and have been enjoyed by all involved.

Members discussed the impact of the University's involvement in the UN COP26 climate change conference, including hosting a number of high-level events on campus with prominent political figures, including a 'Because the Ocean' declaration, a United States climate action event and a UK-Africa Partnership event.

### 4 Senior Leadership Recruitment

Paper C

*Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance; and University Secretary, absented the meeting for this item.*

The intention of the Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance and University Secretary, to demit office on 31 July 2022 in order to undertake a part-time role as Vice-Principal Leadership Development from 1 August 2022 and an update on the ongoing recruitment to four Senior Leadership Team posts was considered.

The Principal outlined initial thoughts on how best to appoint to the post of University Secretary, taking account of the significant changes in the senior leadership of the University already planned from summer 2022. Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, noted that initial thoughts had been considered by Nominations Committee, with the more detailed process for making the appointment to be agreed in the New Year.

It was noted that the Vice-Principal Leadership Development position is a new role envisaged for a two year term. The role was welcomed and it was agreed to appoint Sarah Smith as Vice-Principal Leadership Development for a two year term on a 0.4 Full-Time Equivalent basis from 1 August 2022.

## **5 Committee Business**

### **• Senior Lay Member's Overview**

The Senior Lay Member provided an update on activity since the last meeting, including: a meeting between Scottish Chairs and Jamie Hepburn MSP, Scottish Minister for Higher Education; attending the UK Committee of University Chairs autumn plenary; launching a Higher Education Board Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit; and, involvement in the recruitment of new members of the Senior Leadership Team. Court members were thanked for their attendance at the meeting, noting that a number of those travelling had suffered significant disruption to their journeys as a result of Storm Arwen.

### **• Exception Committee**

**Paper D1**

Exception Committee's approval of additional funding to enable the award of the contract for construction services for the Institute of Genetics & Cancer Expansion Project was noted.

### **• Policy & Resources Committee**

**Paper D2**

The report was noted, with key items considered featuring later in the agenda.

### **• Nominations Committee**

**Paper D3**

The report was noted.

### **• Audit & Risk Committee**

**Paper D4**

The report was noted and the Modern Slavery Statement (Appendix 1) was approved.

### **• Remuneration Committee**

#### **○ Remuneration Committee Annual Report**

**Paper D5**

The Remuneration Committee's annual report was noted.

○ **Senior Leadership Team Remuneration Review 2022:  
Proposed Approach**

**Paper D6**

*The Principal and all attendees, presenters and observers aside from the University Secretary, Director of Human Services and the Head of Court Services absented the meeting for this item.*

Court reviewed and endorsed the proposed approach of the Remuneration Committee to the review of the remuneration of senior management, including the Principal, to be presented for approval by the Remuneration Committee in January 2022.

● **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

**Paper D7**

The report was noted and the following points were discussed:

- Increasing the completion rate for the information security essentials training course for staff was encouraged as a priority – an awareness raising campaign for staff and managers is planned as a first step; and,
- Progress on the implementation of the People & Money System – the new governance structure is in place, recent work has included the launch of a number of staff development modules and testing of the new payroll system, which is progressing as planned. Resourcing for implementation at a local level was discussed – there is single budget to implement the system University-wide and the Enactment Group is working to ensure that future phases will be simpler to implement at a local level.

● **Senate**

**Paper D8**

The report was noted.

**KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION**

**6 Student Experience Update**

**Paper E**

An update on student experience initiatives was reviewed. It was noted that recent student survey findings have shown marked increases in positive responses as greater in-person activity has taken place. Current plans are for 9 Schools/Deaneries to move to a new model of student support, including a new Personal Tutor system, from September 2022, with the remainder to follow in September 2023. Other areas of focus include work to improve student mental health support services, which is continuing to experience high levels of demand, progressing the Curriculum Transformation Programme and preparing to support a larger cohort of students expected to remain in Edinburgh over the Christmas period given travel restrictions. Members discussed the following points:

- The level of confidence in the implementation of the new student support model within the planned timelines – it was noted that much of the preparatory work had been completed prior to the pandemic;
- Establishing career pathways for those recruited to the new student support positions – creating more opportunities for professional services staff to build a career in the area of student support has been a key design commitment;

- The focus on implementation work in the update was welcomed;
- Whether the Assessment & Feedback Task Group will consult with teaching fellows and the expected timescales for completion and accountability for the Task Group's work – the Task Group will consult with all relevant categories of staff and is expected to produce recommendations by the end of the first quarter of 2022. It will report to the Curriculum Transformation Board convened by the Vice-Principal Students, with the senior team as a whole taking responsibility for work to improve the student experience;
- Timescales for the development of a new student experience strategy and likely time needed for improvements – work is presently underway on the priority areas of assessment and feedback, the new student support model and on student mental health and wellbeing. The strategy will likely cover a 3 to 5 year period with outcomes specified at staging points within this;
- The importance of improving the sense of community was highlighted, acknowledging that this requires a longer-term cultural shift;
- Whether there is a student preference for recorded or live online lectures – preferences vary but more choice in delivery method and timing is generally welcomed. Satisfaction levels for lectures that have been specially designed for online delivery, e.g. for distance learners, have been high; and,
- Resourcing for Schools to implement student experience projects – College Registrars and the programme implementation board have been asked to consider whether additional resource might be required beyond that already budgeted.

## **7 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports**

**Papers F1-F2**

Reports from the Students' Association and the Sports Union were presented and the following areas highlighted: a lack of suitable and affordable private accommodation continues to be a key concern for many students; capacity constraints given ventilation in many meeting rooms are hindering student societies and groups; and, a Student Council motion has called for the re-opening of Students' Association services at the King's Building campus but the Association is not in a sufficiently strong financial position to be able to do so at present. The Association's current financial position was discussed, noting that performance is above forecast but a deficit is still expected over the course of the year. Service provision has been reduced or withdrawn in some areas following prioritisation given the Association's financial position.

## **8 Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report**

**Paper G**

The Committee's annual report was presented and all staff involved in the production of the University's Annual Report and Accounts (Item 10, Paper I2), which the Committee has recommended to Court for approval, were thanked. It was noted that the restatement of the Annual Report and Accounts in the US accounting format will be submitted to Exception Committee for approval once complete and that the following year's Annual Report and Accounts is expected to feature a significant negative balance sheet provision for the University's share of the Universities Superannuation Scheme's deficit recovery plan.

## **9 Risk Management Post Year End Assurance Statement**

**Paper H**

The risk management post year end assurance statement was reviewed. It was noted that no significant new events or material issues since the year end that could impact on the ability of Court to approve the Annual Report and Accounts have been reported.

## **10 Finance**

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

**Paper I1**

The report was presented and it was noted that the quarter 1 forecast for the current year is in line with the Court approved budget. The proposed contract award for a travel management supplier for business and student group travel and its relation to the sustainable travel policy was discussed, with the contract award to Diversity Travel approved.

### **• Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21**

**Paper I2**

The draft Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2021 were presented. It was noted that the document follows the best practice integrated reporting approach used in the previous four years to give a wider overview than solely financial performance. The positive outcome for the year was welcomed and the following points were discussed:

- Readership of the document and its use in communication of the University's work – funders and lenders to the University take a particular interest in the document, as do many prospective donors and supporters of the University. The Principal and Vice-Principal Philanthropy & Advancement receive copies for use in meetings with prospective donors for this reason;
- The expected large negative balance sheet provision to be included in next year's accounts for the University's share of the Universities Superannuation Scheme's deficit recovery plan – the University is committed to membership of the Scheme and in advocating for structural reform;
- Communication of the financial position to staff – to assist with communications to staff the Director of Finance now presents a financial update to the Academic Strategy Group and to Trade Union representatives on a regular basis; and,
- Considering resource allocation to Schools given the increased student intake and the overall positive financial position – if increased student numbers bring additional resource demands in some areas this can be supported, with monthly and quarterly reviews of the financial position where resource needs across the University can be considered and assessed against affordability

The Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21 were approved.

### **• Letter of Representation**

**Paper I3**

Court noted the back to back letter of representation provided by the Director of Finance to Court and approved the letter of representation and its signing by the Principal and Senior Lay Member.

## • Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21 – US GAAP

Paper I4

It was noted that the special purpose US GAAP accounts, required by the US Department of Education as a condition of their student loan scheme, require a restatement of the prior year numbers. As a consequence of this, the revised accounts will now be submitted to Exception Committee for approval when finalised. There are no implications for the UK Annual Report and Accounts.

## 11 Outcome Agreement

Paper J

The draft Outcome Agreement for 2021-22 and Self-evaluation Report for 2020-21 were reviewed prior to submission to the Scottish Funding Council. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Statistics on the proportion of Scottish-domiciled entrants from the 20% least advantaged postcodes. It was noted that the absolute numbers and proportion of entrants in this category have both increased in the current year. The measure features in the strategic performance measurement framework for Strategy 2030 with the ambition to continue to grow entrant numbers in this category; and,
- Opportunities to use the statistics in the reports in making the wider case for investment in universities, e.g. to the UK government – the Principal and Senior Vice-Principal are regularly engaged in communicating the value of investing in universities to the UK and Scottish governments. Other forums such as the Industrial Strategy Council have also helped present data to the UK Government on the economic benefits from research in UK universities and have shown a disproportionate contribution by Scottish universities.

The Outcome Agreement 2021-22 and Self-evaluation Report 2020-21 and associated documentation were approved and authority delegated to the Director of Strategic Planning & Insight to make final amendments and to submit these to the Scottish Funding Council.

## 12 Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement across Campus

Paper K

An annual update on philanthropic and alumni engagement was considered. A five year plan with the aim of doubling annual philanthropic income concluded successfully in 2020/21, with encouraging indications from the current year to date that higher income levels can be sustained. Donors have engaged with fundraising campaigns that have enabled larger scholarships for widening participation students and to support world-class research in many areas. Members welcomed the report and discussed next steps in growing philanthropic income and future benchmarking, noting that globally relevant benchmarking data is being developed and that philanthropic giving and alumni engagement in the UK university sector as a whole continues to have potential for significant growth in the coming years. Future engagement in Africa and Asia such as the Edinburgh Earth Initiative and the Hong Kong Foundation was discussed, along with the establishment of an Income Due Diligence Group that will undertake due diligence on all relevant income, including relevant research income, as appropriate.

**13 Queen’s Medical Research Institute & Chancellor’s Building Co-location and Bioresearch and Veterinary Services Estates Strategy**

**Paper L**

The joint College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine and Bioresearch & Veterinary Services Estates Strategy for the relocation of the Centre for Discovery Brain Sciences to the Queen’s Medical Research Institute and the Chancellor’s Building at the BioQuarter campus was reviewed. It was noted that the project forms part of an overarching strategy to co-locate medical research and teaching at the BioQuarter site to create a “medicine plus” site with all biomedical sciences co-located with teaching hospitals and related commercialisation activity and to release space on the Central Area campus. Staff involved in achieving a significant external funding award from the Simons Foundation to “unlock” the project from the list of deferred capital projects were congratulated. Recent cost increases in the construction sector were discussed and it was noted that the forecast costs have been calculated with this in mind but will depend on the tender responses received.

Court approved funding to deliver the Queen’s Medical Research Institute Biomedical Research Centre for Discovery Brain Sciences co-location project and associated essential works within the Chancellor’s Building Biomedical Research Facility.

**ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL**

**14 Court Internal Effectiveness Review**

**Paper M**

The annual internal effectiveness review for 2020/21 and a minor update to Court’s Standing Orders to reflect a new Ordinance and new Resolution regarding the process for removal of Court members was approved.

**15 General Council Membership & Registration**

**Paper N**

The initiation of a process of review of Ordinance No. 186 (General Council Membership & Registration) with a view to amending the criteria for General Council membership to resolve identified issues set out in the paper was approved.

**16 Donations and Legacies; Alumni Events**

**Paper O**

Court noted legacies and donations received since the last meeting and an update on current alumni relations activities.

**17 Any Other Business**

There was no other business. The Rector closed the meeting and thanked those attending and wished them well for the New Year.

**18 Date of Next Meeting**

Monday, 21 February 2022