



UNIVERSITY COURT

25 April 2022, John McIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls

Web Version

Minute

- Members Present:** Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member (in Chair)  
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  
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  
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor
- Member Apologies:** Debora Kayembe, Rector  
David Law, Co-opted Member  
Alistair Smith, Co-opted Member
- In Attendance:** Sophia Lycouris, Rector's Assessor  
Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance; and  
University Secretary
- Presenters & Observers:** Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services  
Leigh Chalmers, Deputy Secretary Governance & Legal  
Lisa Dawson, Interim Deputy Secretary Students  
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  
Dorothy Miell, Vice-Principal & Head of College  
Niamh Roberts, Students' Association President-elect  
Dave Robertson, Vice-Principal & Head of College  
James Saville, Director of Human Resources  
Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal  
Rona Smith, Director of Strategic Planning & Insight  
Alan Mackay, Deputy Vice-Principal International (for Item 10)

## OPENING ITEMS

### 1 Minute

Paper A1

Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, welcomed members and attendees and noted apologies. Ellen MacRae, Students' Association President, Réka Siró, Students' Association Vice-President Activities & Services, and Frank Ross, Lord Provost and City of Edinburgh Council Assessor were thanked for their services to the Court and the wider University community on the occasion of their last meeting and wished well for the future.

The minute of the previous meeting was approved.

### 2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

The action log was noted.

*Attendees/observers aside from the: Rector's Assessor; Vice-Principal Strategic Change & Governance and University Secretary; Deputy Secretary Governance & Legal; and, Head of Court Services were absent for discussion of the following matter arising.*

Court agreed to consider an urgent matter of business that had arisen since the agenda had issued. Court noted that the Rector had recently published two messages on a social media platform containing allegations regarding responsibility for the genocide against the Tutsi.

It was agreed that:

- Court endorsed an updated version of the University's public statement;
- The Rector's Assessor would seek to engage in informal dialogue and that Court's Intermediary Member (position similar to Senior Independent Director), would seek to hold a formal meeting with the Rector, with Court members to provide any further comments in advance; and,
- The issue would be referred to Nominations Committee by Court.

### 3 Principal's Report

Paper B

A summary of the Principal's main activities since the last Court meeting was noted, with following points discussed:

- The latest position on potential industrial action with regard to planned changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and on pay and conditions – the sector is awaiting an announcement from the University & College Union on potential further action. In the meantime, sector-wide pay negotiations are ongoing against a backdrop of rising inflation and its impact on costs for both employees and employers. With regard to USS, the 2020 valuation has now closed, with the next valuation due in March 2023;
- The rapid response of the University and the sector in support of Ukraine following the Russian Government's invasion was welcomed;
- The impact of the large number of strategic change projects on staff, as raised in a recent 'Town Hall' meeting, and ensuring sufficient resourcing at School

level to manage implementation was highlighted – the impact on staff and the risk of ‘change fatigue’ was acknowledged, as well as the benefits the projects should bring to staff once fully implemented. As discussed at Knowledge Strategy Committee, improving the visibility and understanding of current projects and their expected impacts across the University to enable better coordination and planning is under active consideration and business cases for future change projects will include estimates of staff resourcing impacts across the University, including on ‘business as usual’ activities in local areas. In addition, building capacity for change and better integrating change projects within the overall five year planning cycle to aid prioritisation and resourcing decisions is also under active consideration;

- How the £500 exceptional payment to staff will apply to those on guaranteed hours contracts – the preceding 12 month period will be used to generate an average for a pro-rata payment, with further information on this now added to the University website; and,
- Space pressures on campus as the return to more in-person activities accelerates – the need for more student study space in particular is recognised and opportunities to repurpose existing spaces that may be less well used post-pandemic will be explored.

#### **4 Committee Business**

- **Senior Lay Member’s Overview**

Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, provided an update on activity since the last meeting, noting that interviews to fill a current vacancy for a lay member of Court are scheduled for the next day.

- **Exception Committee**

**Paper C1**

The following matters approved by Exception Committee on behalf of Court were noted:

- Approval for the disinvestment of any indirectly held Russian stocks and financial instruments as soon as practicable; and,
- The membership of a short-life Court External Debt Review Sub-Group, as discussed at the previous meeting.

- **Policy & Resources Committee**

**Paper C2**

The report was noted.

- **Audit & Risk Committee**

**Paper C3**

The report was noted.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

**Paper C4**

The report was noted.

The report was noted.

## **KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION**

### **5 Student Experience Update**

**Paper D**

An update on the development of a framework to help structure, prioritise and support the implementation of work to enhance the student experience was reviewed. It was noted that interviews for new student support and wellbeing advisers are underway and further investment is being made to enhance student mental health and wellbeing support services. An external consultancy firm has completed a project to assist in developing the framework and to identify areas where positive impacts can be realised in short timeframes. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Examples of quick impact actions that have been identified – drawing on existing good practice in the approach to creating a sense of belonging and in peer support activities and applying these more widely across the institution;
- Accountabilities and leadership at a strategic level – this flows from the Vice-Principal Students to the Heads of College to the Heads of School;
- Progress towards milestones set out earlier this year – these relate to the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review follow-up action plan and are on track;
- Differences between current approaches and previous approaches to enhance the student experience – the scale and sense of collective ownership and coherence is greater, as shown by the new student support model and the curriculum transformation programme;
- Building in more opportunities for student input to help shape the work;
- Making more data available to Court – the most recent Pulse survey data can be circulated along with a message to students on actions taken in response;
- Providing benchmarking information in relation to peer institutions was encouraged, along with considering the packaging and communication of changes planned or made to increase impact;
- Considering whether existing structures may need changes and other options that might benefit the student experience, e.g. if improved pay for marking would encourage the provision of more detailed feedback; and,
- Areas outside of the University's control that impact on student experience, such as the provision of private sector accommodation in the city and NHS funding for mental health.

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

**Papers E1-E2**

The regular reports from the Students' Association and Sports Union were noted. The City Council's consideration of potential rent control zones within Edinburgh was raised, with the Association keen to be engaged on the topic and a key concern of the Association being the reduction in suitable student rental properties in the city.

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

**Paper F**

An update on additional in-year investment, the Quarter Two 2021-22 forecast, the outcome of the 2020 Universities Superannuation Scheme valuation, and University treasury funds was noted.

## **8 Investment Opportunity: Project Dolly Proceeds**

**Paper G**

*Members involved in existing commercialisation activity declared these as set out in the Register of Interests for Court members published on the University [website](#).*

A proposal for reinvestment in early stage commercialisation projects utilising a portion of the proceeds from a Roslin Institute spinout company in which the University was a shareholder, was reviewed. It was noted that the transaction provides a unique opportunity to improve the University's activities in this area, with the ambition to match the UK's leading institutions in generating impact from the expertise of staff and students for the benefit of all. Four initiatives were proposed: innovation engines (translating research expertise into intellectual property assets); pre-seed funding through an enterprise fund; increased seed funding through an expansion of the University's in-house venture investment fund, Old College Capital; and, later stage/flexible funding that would, for example, allow the University to take up follow-on (pre-emption) rights in certain circumstances, further support existing programmes or consider wholly new opportunities. The fundamental goal is enhanced impact – the proposal is intended to support efforts to get the University's ideas, technology and expertise into the world to make a difference.

Members welcomed the proposals and commented on the importance of access to initial funding and support for projects at an early stage, as well as continuing to invest in spin-outs as they mature, which can give confidence to potential external investors and avoid poorly timed dilution of the University's position. Support was also expressed for the innovation engines initiative. It was noted that around 15% of the University's principal investigators are currently involved in translational research, with great potential for this to increase with further support and funding. The proposals were endorsed.

## **9 Communications & Marketing Update Report**

**Paper H**

A second annual update on the work on the Department of Communications & Marketing, its strategic direction and next steps for future development was considered. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Resource allocation for communication and marketing activity across the University and the extent to which this is a centrally provided or locally provided resource – there is a mixed economy at present with a central Department and locally provided resource. The Department is seeking to better align existing resource distributed across different areas of the University, including through training and developing professional standards;
- Student and staff engagement levels with internal communications – it was agreed that there is scope for improvement in this area, such as improving the personalisation/tailoring of messaging; and,

- Developing benchmarked metrics was encouraged, with some benchmarking work on brand awareness having been completed.

## **10 International Partnerships**

- **Security and Risks in International Partnerships Annual Update** **Paper I1**
- **Partnerships with Russia** **Paper I2**

A first annual update report on the management and mitigation of security and risk aspects across international activity, partnerships and collaboration was reviewed, alongside an overview of partnerships and collaborative activities in Russia. It was noted that the University supports the Universities UK statement on [Ukraine](#), with its condemnation of the Russian Government's decision to invade Ukraine, expression of support for Ukrainian universities, staff and students and opposition to a blanket suspension of academic links, noting that many Russian students and academics have criticised the invasion at great personal risk. The University does not have any institutional-level partnerships with Russian universities or government, with some undergraduate student exchange agreements in place, currently suspended, and a small number of research collaboration projects supported by external funders rather than by the Russian universities involved.

Members discussed the following points:

- The establishment of a UK Government Research Collaboration Advice Team was welcomed in creating a single connection point with the UK Government on security matters in research;
- The extent to which the response of the University and the sector to the invasion of the Ukraine might be drawn upon should a similar event occur elsewhere in the world – while unlikely to be replicable given the unique nature of such events, it has illustrated the need to be prepared to respond to unexpected geopolitical events and to continue to scenario plan for these; and,
- Ensuring a consistency of response to conflicts in other countries – the intention is to take a humanitarian approach, including working closely with the Council for At Risk Academics (CARA) and communicating the University's principles of global engagement to support a free exchange of ideas regardless of nationality or location.

## **ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL**

### **11 Usher Institute – Reallocation of City Deal Funding**

**Paper J**

Proposals to reallocate City Deal funding from the Edinburgh BioQuarter Enabling Infrastructure project to the Usher Institute project budget in order to enable the fit out of the five shelled neighbourhoods within the Usher Institute were approved.

### **12 Staff Benefits Scheme Trustee Structure**

**Paper K**

A proposal to amend the Trust Deed of the Staff Benefits Scheme to enable the substitution of the current individual trustee structure with the incorporation of an entity to create a single corporate trustee structure was approved. A delegation of authority was granted to the Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance and

University Secretary, in consultation with the Director of Legal Services, to finalise and sign the associated legal documentation for the new entity and any associated amendments required to the Scheme Trust Deed to support the creation of the revised Trustee structure, in line with the proposals set out in the paper.

**13 Awards of University Benefactor** **Paper L**

Court approved the bestowal of the distinction of University Benefactor as per the recommendations set out in the paper.

**14 Cross & Salmon Trust – Re-appointment of Continuing Trustee** **Paper M**

The re-appointment of a continuing Trustee of the Cross & Salmon Trust for a further period of five years with effect from 1 December 2021 was approved.

**15 Donations, Legacies, Alumni Events** **Paper N**

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

**16 Resolutions** **Paper O**

The following Resolutions were approved:

- No. 5/2022: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Translational Cognitive Neuroscience; and,
- No. 6/2022: Alteration of the title of the Chair of Accounting,

The following draft Resolutions were referred to Senate and the General Council for observations:

- No. 13/2022: Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations; and,
- No. 14/2022: Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations.

**17 Meeting Date Change – November/December 2022** **Paper P**

A meeting date change from 21 November 2022 to 5 December 2022 was approved.

**18 Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**19 Date of Next Meeting**

Monday, 13 June 2022