

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 7 NOVEMBER 2019

Present: Anne Minto (Chair), Nuala Booth, George Boyne, Karl Leydecker, Gary McRae, Lyndsay Menzies (by telephone), Neil Vargesson, Cecilia Wallback and David Watts; with David Beattie, Debbie Dyker and Ruth MacLure (Clerk).

Esther Robertson, Senior Governor, was in attendance.

The following were in attendance for specific agenda items:

Emma Forster (Minute 23), Richard Wells (Minute 26) and Angus Donaldson (Minute 27).

19 DECLARATION AND FORMAL BUSINESS

19.1 There were no declarations of interest.

19.2 The Chair welcomed Gary McRae and Neil Vargesson to their first meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee (PaRC) and welcomed Esther Robertson who would be in attendance as an observer.

20 MINUTES

20.1 The Minutes of the Meeting of the Operating Board held on 10 September 2019 were approved, subject to one minor amendment: at Minute 11.2.4, David Watts requested that the appendix be checked for completion, as he saw no reference to the Masters in Land Economy, accredited through the Royal Institution (not Institute) of Chartered Surveyors.

21 MATTERS ARISING

21.1 MATTERS ARISING ACTION LOG

It was noted that all outstanding items in the Action Log were covered within the agenda.

22 PRINCIPAL'S INTRODUCTION

22.1 EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE (PARC)

The Committee noted that an extraordinary meeting of PaRC had been arranged for Monday 18 November, to consider proposals for the development of the King's Campus. This was noted to be an opportunity for the Committee to provide input to the University's decision-making process in respect of the repurposing of Johnson Halls for the Business School and redevelopment of the King's Quad area. The Committee noted that papers for this meeting were to be issued on Thursday 14 November. The Chair thanked committee members for making themselves available for the additional meeting.

22.2 FINANCIAL POSITION

The Committee noted that revenue from teaching was rising faster than baseline costs. However, there would be increased staffing costs in the approach to the REF, as well as increased pension liabilities. The Committee noted that the University held sufficient funds set aside in the budget, to meet these costs.

22.3 QATAR GRADUATIONS

22.3.1 The Committee noted that the University had held its first graduation ceremony in Qatar. Over 70 students had graduated; this number was expected to double in the following year. Elements of governance and contractual matters had been addressed by the senior team during their time

in Doha. The Committee agreed the need for the University as a whole to view the Qatar Campus as the thirteenth School, recognising that it is fundamental to the University's future ambitions.

22.3.2 The Committee noted that the Qatari partners were interested in developing a Medical School and teaching hospital on the campus. Such a development would necessarily be subject to regulatory processes and was therefore a longer-term aspiration. In the short term, the revised governance structures would enable matters to be progressed regarding the development of Phase 2 of the Doha Campus.

22.4 UCU INDUSTRIAL ACTION

22.4.1 The Committee noted that the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) nationally had announced industrial action over eight days from Monday 25 November to Wednesday 4 December. This was partly during the examination period, and mitigations were in place to ensure minimal disruption to students.

[Note by Clerk: Esther Robertson joined the meeting at this point.]

22.4.2 The Committee noted that there had been a cultural change since the previous round of strikes, with improved relationships between University management and the trades unions. The Committee noted that, historically a small number of staff had participated in industrial action and it was anticipated that a similar pattern of support for the industrial action would follow.

[Note by Clerk: Emma Forster, Acting Deputy Director of External Relations and Marketing, joined the meeting at this point.]

23 STUDENT RECRUITMENT

23.1 ADMISSIONS STATISTICS AND TARGET SETTING

23.1.1 The Committee received a paper on admission statistics for:

- Postgraduate taught January 2020 entry, broken down by fee status and School;
- Undergraduate September 2020 entry, broken down by fee status;
- Postgraduate taught September 2020 entry, broken down by fee status and School;
- Postgraduate research for the full academic year of 2019/20 and for 2020/21 entry, broken down by fee status and School.

23.1.2 The Committee noted a further update to figures since the paper had been prepared, with International recruitment statistics remaining ahead of the previous year. The Committee discussed progress in recruiting an increased percentage of students from areas of multiple deprivation, noting that more was to be done in this area, although 2019 entrant numbers had been a step change from 2018. It noted that it was too early in the cycle to report on September 2020 statistics for multiple deprivation applicants.

23.1.3 The Committee noted that the University was investigating a drop in applications to study medicine and whether this was a sector trend, but that the figure following the 15 October deadline for Medical applications was a 4% decrease in applications, which was an improvement on the 19% that had been the case when the paper was written.

23.1.4 The Committee discussed the challenge of EU student recruitment within the continued uncertain political environment. A further area of challenge was noted to be Scottish Government targets for the recruitment of students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects). The Committee noted that the University's investment in the Science Teaching Hub was a clear sign of its commitment in this area.

24 FINANCE

24.1 STUDENT POPULATION AND BUDGETARY IMPACT

24.1.1 The Committee received a paper from the Director of Finance and the Vice Principal for Student Recruitment on the Student Population and Budgetary Impact. Further context was provided for new members on Scottish Government controls on the student population for medicine and education, with penalties for over- and under-recruitment. Provision was made in the accounts for clawback by the Scottish Funding Council.

24.1.2 The first snapshot of income for 2019/20 showed an increase of £7.2 million from the equivalent point in last financial year, an increase of 11.4%. The Committee noted that positive population growth was driven by international postgraduate taught (PGT) recruitment and that international fee income projections showed a £7 million increase on last year. Detailed information was provided at School level, within the appendices.

24.1.3 The Committee noted that overall growth was projected to be 2.7% short of target. This translated into a budget shortfall of £1.6M. The senior management team was working with Schools to mitigate against the shortfall, without negatively impacting upon staffing levels or the student experience.

24.1.4 The Committee noted that the University had a target to reduce student numbers in the “fees only” category i.e. the number of students in excess of SFC fully-funded places.

[Note by Clerk: Lyndsay Menzies and Emma Forster left the meeting at this point.]

25 STRATEGIC PLANNING

25.1 THE ANNUAL PLANNING PROCESS

25.1.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Senior Vice-Principal on the Annual Planning Process. School-level planning reviews were currently underway, and positive feedback had been received from Heads of School on the evolving culture and improved processes. Schools were being asked to highlight areas in which Professional Services might provide further support, prior to planning meetings with Directors early in the new year. School Administration Officers (SAOs) were now members of the Professional Services’ Leads Group and a Lead SAO had been appointed to coordinate activities.

25.1.2 It was agreed to circulate the presentation to the Committee, for information.

Action: Clerk

25.1.3 The Committee noted the provision to Schools of the data underpinning league table performance, which was being used as a tool for improvement.

25.1.4 The Committee noted that further information on the work being done in the School of Education to increase recruitment to teacher training courses was included at paragraph 6.4 of the Admissions Update (*Minute 23 refers*).

25.2 OUTCOME AGREEMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

25.2.1 The Committee received the University’s self-evaluation of institutional performance in 2018/19 against the Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council. The Committee noted that the document had been submitted to the SFC on 31 October 2019 in anticipation of PaRC approval.

25.2.2 The Committee noted that the University had made good progress against widening access targets in the recruitment of students from the 20% most deprived postcodes in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) but that the SIMD40 targets remained challenging.

25.2.3 The Policy and Resources Committee granted retrospective approval to the report.

26 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

26.1 KOREA UPDATE

26.1.1 The Committee received and discussed an update on the latest position in respect of the Korea Campus.

26.1.2 The Committee noted that an independent review of lessons learned from the Korea project was to be conducted and would be brought back to the Committee prior to the report going to Court in March 2020.

26.2 SRI LANKA UPDATE

26.2.1 The Committee received and noted an update on the latest position in respect of the University's transnational education project in Sri Lanka.

26.2.2 The Committee noted that the General Medical Council had undertaken a virtual visit and were also to conduct an in-country review of facilities prior to granting approval to a transnational arm of the University's existing MBChB.

26.3 QATAR UPDATE

26.3.1 The Committee received and discussed an update on the latest position in respect of the University's transnational education project in Qatar.

26.3.2 The Committee noted that the first round of graduations had taken place in Qatar (*Minute 22.3 refers*).

26.3.3 The Committee noted that the University was working with the Qatar partners to ensure that appropriate due diligence around the sources of funding and human rights issues in Qatar, heading into Phase 2 of the campus development was undertaken. The Committee noted that, in line with the partnership agreement with AFG that, the University had requested a copy of the annual accounts for AFG. In addition, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) had been instructed to review the tax status of the project prior to Phase 2.

26.3.4 The Committee noted that the University had reviewed the governance structure in respect of the Qatar Campus, and amendments made to the composition of the Strategic Partnership Board, which was to be co-Chaired by Sheikha Aisha Bint Al Thani, Chairperson of AFG Group and the Senior Vice Principal.

26.4 BREXIT UPDATE

26.4.1 The Committee received and noted a report from Richard Wells on the University's preparations for the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. The Committee noted that the report focussed on a "no deal" scenario. The Committee noted that support was in place for staff and students affected by the EU Settlement Scheme.

[Note by Clerk: Richard Wells left and Angus Donaldson, Director of Estates, joined the meeting at this point.]

27 ESTATES AND FACILITIES

27.1 STUDENT ACCOMMODATION UPDATE

27.1.1 The Committee received a paper which provided an update on student accommodation uptake for 2019/20, and presented a forward look to 2020/21 and beyond.

27.1.2 The Committee noted that the University had seen a steady increase in the number of students choosing to stay in University-owned accommodation, with the void rate dropping from 910 in 2017/18 to 376 in 2018/19, and a projected figure of 225 in 2019/20. This occupational increase was reported to be largely attributable to a strong marketing campaign.

27.1.3 The Chair recommended that new members of the Committee arrange to visit Hillhead to view the improved facilities for students at the site.

27.2 HILLHEAD CENTRAL HEATING PLANT

27.2.1 The Committee received and discussed a paper which outlined a proposed application for financial support from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for the redevelopment of the heating infrastructure at Hillhead. It also detailed an emerging preferred model for delivery of the project with Aberdeen Heat and Power (a district heating model).

27.2.2 The Committee approved the approach being proposed and noted that a next stage application was submitted on the SFC's deadline of 1 November in anticipation of such approval.

27.2.3 The Committee noted that future updates would be received through the Estates Committee (CPMC) Report (*Minute 27.4 refers*).

27.3 ASV JOINT PARTNERSHIP

27.3.1 The Committee received and noted a paper which provided an update on the relationship between Aberdeen Sports Village and the University, noting the issues discussed at recent meetings of the ASV Monitoring Group (ASV and UoA) and the ASV Joint Partnership (ASV, UOA and Aberdeen City Council). The Committee noted (1) the work being undertaken to improve and simplify relations between the AUSA Sports Union and ASV; and (2) to note ongoing work to nominate University representatives for the ASV Board.

27.3.2 The Committee encouraged the University to continue to work with the Councils, to promote common interests in the City and Shire.

27.4 CAPITAL PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (CPMC) REPORT

27.4.1 The Committee received and discussed a report from the meetings of the Capital Programme Management Committee (CPMC), on 16 September and 11 October 2019. An updated remit and composition for the Committee, proposing it be renamed the Estates Committee, was attached for approval.

27.4.2 The Committee noted that the University had strengthened reporting processes for the Science Teaching Hub Project, to better manage the University's relationship with the main contractor.

27.4.3 The Committee approved the proposed changes to the Committee remit and composition, including the change of name to Estates Committee, subject to noting that: (1) the membership should include "elected" members of Senate; and (2) the levels of approval for Capital Projects should be included within the document.

Action: KL

[Note by Clerk: Angus Donaldson left the meeting at this point.]

28 PEOPLE

28.1 SEVERANCE POLICY

28.1.1 The Committee received a Severance Policy paper outlining the guidance, approval and governance arrangements for compensation packages paid to departing staff in particular circumstances. The Committee noted that the campus Trades Unions had been consulted on this policy and had provided comment, while declining to approve it, as a point of principle.

28.1.2 The Committee agreed the need to ensure that the Policy was compliant with the Financial Memorandum. It was also agreed to improve the clarity of wording around (1) any future voluntary severance schemes and (2) disciplinary proceedings.

28.1.3 It was agreed to review and circulate a "tracked change" version to PaRC for approval, including the relevant section from the Financial Memorandum, prior to the Policy proceeding to Court.

Action: DD / DB

28.2 RESEARCH LEAVE POLICY

28.2.1 The Committee received a revision to the current University policy on Research Leave for Academic Staff, for approval.

28.2.2 The Committee noted that normally, the maximum period of research leave would be one year. However the draft policy introduced the opportunity to apply for 'mini research breaks' designed to support specific activities e.g. completion of a research grant application. Such breaks would be for two weeks or, on occasion, up to four weeks and approved on the basis that the quality of the teaching experience for UG and PGT students was maintained, with appropriate cover arrangements in place where necessary. Additionally, staff would only be able to apply for one mini research break (of four weeks) or two mini research breaks (of two weeks each) in a year.

28.2.3 PaRC approved the updated Research Leave Policy.

29 COMMITTEE REPORTS

29.1 DIGITAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE REPORT

29.1.1 The Committee received an update on the outcomes from the last meeting of the Digital Strategy Committee (DSC), which took place on the 9th October 2019, and a request for approval of the Terms of Reference for the new DSC and Digital Strategy Operational Committee (DSOC).

29.1.2 The Committee approved the proposed changes to the Committee remit and composition, subject to noting that: (1) the membership should include "elected" members of Senate; and (2) the addition of the word "strategy" into the penultimate line of paragraph one.

Action: KL

29.2 INVESTMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

29.2.1 PaRC received a quarterly report from the Investment Committee, which included a request for approval to amend the composition of the Committee.

29.2.2 The Committee noted that approval was sought for the appointment of Norman Hutchison to the Committee in addition to commencing the recruitment of an external member with investment experience. It was also proposed to include the AUSA representative as a full Investment Committee member, in line with other University Committees.

29.2.3 The Committee approved the report and recommendations.

The Board received and noted the following items:

30 PEOPLE

30.1 PAY NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE

30.2 STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT UPDATE

30.3 HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SAFETY REPORT

30.3.1 It was agreed to consider holding wellbeing drop-in sessions at Foresterhill, as part of the roll-out of activities by the recently-established Health, Wellbeing and Safety team.

Action: DD

31 FINANCE

31.1 ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

32 COMMITTEE REPORTS

32.1 JNCC / SSLC REPORT

32.2 STUDENT RECRUITMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

32.3 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

33 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

33.1 The Committee noted that an extraordinary meeting had been arranged for Monday 18 November from 9.00am to 10.00am in Powis Gate Boardroom, with the option to dial in if required (*Minute 22.1 refers*).

33.2 The Committee noted that the schedule of meetings for 2019-20 had been set as follows:

Tuesday, 4 February 2020

Tuesday, 3 March 2020

Tuesday, 9 June 2020

All meetings would be held in the Court Room, University Office, from 10.00 am – 1.00 pm.

33.3 The Committee noted that dates for 2020-21 had yet to be confirmed, but would be circulated for approval as soon as possible.

RMac/AM
29/11/19