

Heriot-Watt University

**THE UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE**

Minutes: 22 February 2016

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- In the Chair: Professor Richard A Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor
- Present Also: Professor Julian Jones, Vice-Principal  
Professor Robert Craik, Vice-Principal (Malaysia)\*  
Professor Ammar Kaka, Vice-Principal (Dubai)\*  
Professor Duncan Hand, Interim Deputy Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange)  
Professor Gill Hogg, Deputy Principal (External Relations)  
Professor John Sawkins, Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching)  
Professor Gavin Gibson, Interim Head (Mathematics and Computer Sciences)  
Mr Alick Kitchin, Acting Head (Edinburgh Business School)  
Professor Robert MacIntosh, Head (Management and Languages)  
Professor Stephen McLaughlin, Head (Engineering and Physical Sciences)  
Dr Peter Morris, Interim Head (Life Sciences)  
Professor Gareth Pender, Head (Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure, and Society)  
Ms Ann Marie Dalton, Secretary of the University  
Mr Andrew Menzies, Director of Finance
- In Attendance: Mr Richard McGookin, Director of Planning  
Mr Brett Dodgson, Clerk
- Apologies: Professor Fiona Waldron, Head (Textiles and Design)

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\* Indicates member participating remotely

**MINUTE REF**

**M16/058 WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed to the meeting the members of the UE and those colleagues who were in attendance.

**M16/059 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The UE considered the minutes of the meeting held 15 February 2015 and approved them as a correct record.

**M16/060 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS LOG [Paper UEP/16/043]**

Arising from minute 16/048, the UE noted that a group had been convened to consider the academic strategy of the Edinburgh Business School and its connectivity with the University. The group's membership would include the Acting Head of the School, the School's Director of Learning and Teaching, and the School's Director of Quality and Standards, as well as the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Head of the School of Management and Languages, and another senior colleague to be confirmed.

The UE received and noted the actions log.

**M16/061      REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

In a verbal report the Principal and Chair noted that he, along with the leaders of more than 100 other UK universities, had signed an open letter highlighting the benefits to universities of the UK remaining a member of the European Union. The letter had been published in the Sunday Times newspaper (21 February 2016).

The Principal noted that he had recently completed a visit to the Dubai campus in the course of which he had had the opportunity to meet with staff, students, and alumni. The Principal thanked the Vice-Principal (Dubai) for arranging the visit. The UE noted that the Principal had invited the Assistant Principal (International Development) to lead a new group which would review the University's current academic infrastructure partnership at the Dubai campus; it was expected that the group would report to the UE before the end of 2016.

The Principal noted that a report on research performance and reporting would now be presented to the UE in March 2016. It was intended that the report would address three areas for enhancement: reporting format and frequency; ownership of targets and ongoing monitoring of performance; and data quality. The Principal also drew attention to the paper on research culture and the Research Excellence Framework [UEP/16/041] which had been circulated to members; members were invited to submit any feedback to the Head of the School of Mathematics and Computer Sciences.

The Deputy Principal (External Relations) was invited to comment on the reorganisation of the School of Life Sciences and noted that in March 2016 the Court would be invited to approve the recommendations of the Senate with respect to the reorganisation of the School. The UE noted that the project board overseeing the reorganisation was meeting fortnightly and that progress was being made across all of the defined work streams. Discussions were also taking place with respect to the reallocation of the School's professional services staff.

**M16/062      MALAYSIA CAMPUS: DRAFT STATEMENT TO THE COURT [Paper UEP/16/044]**

The UE considered a draft of a statement which the Principal intended to present to the Court in March 2016 on the development of the Malaysia campus and the work of the Malaysia Campus Development Group.

It was noted that the statement was intended as an initial, qualitative report designed to provide contextual information on the development of the Malaysia campus to date and the work that was being undertaken to support its future development. It was intended that the Court would in May 2016 be presented with a further report which would be focus on the University's strategic objectives in relation to the Malaysia campus and which would be more quantitative in content.

It was noted that in due course some of the academic-related issues referred to in the statement would be considered by the relevant Senate committees and that some of these issues would form part of a broader discussion by the Senate on the University's vision.

The UE endorsed the draft statement and its presentation to the Court. It was agreed that the Acting Head of the Edinburgh Business School should prepare for inclusion in the statement additional content on the School's operations in Malaysia. It was further agreed that references to research activity and the higher education market in Malaysia should be added to the statement.

**M16/063 OUTCOME AGREEMENT FUNDING – INDICATIVE ALLOCATIONS FOR 2016-17 [Paper UEP/16/045]**

The UE considered a paper on the Scottish Funding Council's initial decisions on funding Outcome Agreements for the 2016-17 academic year. It was noted that the allocations were indicative only and would not be confirmed until the Scottish Parliament had passed the Budget (Scotland) (No. 5) Bill and the Scottish Funding Council had agreed institutional Outcome Agreements. It was expected that the final Outcome Agreement allocations would be announced in April 2016.

It was noted that across the sector funding for teaching, research, and related activities in 2016-17 had been reduced by 3.1% compared with 2015-16. The University's funding for teaching, research, and related activities had been reduced by 0.8% and this had been the least unfavourable of the Scottish universities excepting Scotland's Rural College and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

It was noted that the University's performance was largely owing to an increase in its main research grant allocation of 15.6%; the average increase across the sector had been 0.5% and the University's allocation had seen one of the largest proportional gains among the Scottish pre-1992 universities.

With regards to teaching, it was noted that the University's main grant had been reduced by 3.7% compared with a reduction of 4.1% across the sector as a whole. The University's performance reflected the additional Scottish Funding Council support embedded in the funding formula for strategically important STEM subjects. The Scottish funding Council had confirmed that the fourth and final tranche of funding for additional funded undergraduate places for widening access and college articulation schemes had been cancelled but that universities were expected to continue to set aspirational targets with respect to such schemes. It was expected that universities would need to use their core resource to continue to offer these places.

With regards to capital funding, it was noted that £15.3 million had been allocated for capital maintenance and that the University would receive 4.4% of these funds. A further £11.7 million had been allocated for use as a matched-funding contribution towards future research infrastructure investment which might be provided by the UK Government.

It was noted that the announcement by the Scottish Funding Council had not addressed the allocation of strategic funds which could be subject to larger reductions. It was noted that the University had relatively limited exposure to Scottish Funding Council strategic funds and that any reductions in that area were not likely to change the University's position as being among the least unfavourable.

It was noted that the allocations were broadly in line with expectations and with the assumptions underpinning the current planning round. The UE agreed that there was no need to adjust the budget envelopes that had been agreed by the UE in January 2015. The UE agreed that targets with respect to widening access should remain unchanged for the 2016-17 academic year.

**M16/064 FINANCIAL TASK AND FINISH GROUP: INTERIM REPORT**

The UE considered a presentation on the interim report of the task and finish group which had been convened by the Principal to consider options to support ongoing investment in the University's development [minute 15/238].

It was noted that the group had considered three potential funding routes: borrowing; bond issues; and the sale of assets. It was noted that 30- and 40-year bond issues were likely to present a more attractive option than borrowing or asset sales in terms of annual cash flow and net present value.

The UE agreed that the group should continue its due diligence work and present a final report to the UE in March 2016 and to the Finance Committee in April 2016.

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### **M16/065 LEARNING AND TEACHING ACADEMY**

The UE considered a presentation on supporting innovation in teaching practice and learner support.

It was noted that there were a number of external and internal drivers for reviewing the University's approach and structures for supporting innovation in teaching practice and learner support. The Academy concept had been developed to provide a focus for enhancement activities with respect to learning and teaching and the development of the University's learning and teaching strategy – in particular, by driving innovation in teaching practice, promoting excellence in the development of learning and teaching skills, and supporting the delivery of the University's global ambitions.

The UE endorsed the proposed approach and agreed that the Academy concept could bring greater coherency and a raising of standards in relation to teaching practice and learner support. The UE agreed that, with respect to teaching practice, the Academy should enable individual creativity and facilitate the sharing of innovation rather than focus on the delivery of teaching qualifications or research into teaching practice.

The UE agreed that the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) should further develop the concept in accordance with the feedback received and present this at a future meeting.

### **M16/066 APPLICATION HANDLING TURNAROUND TARGETS AND APPLICANT CONVERSION UPDATE [Paper UEP/16/046]**

The UE noted a paper on the numbers of applications for admission to undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes at the Scottish campuses where a decision was pending at 19 February 2016.

It was noted that the proportion of applications where a decision was pending stood at 22% for taught postgraduate programmes and 33% for undergraduate programmes.

It was noted that the applicant conversion group had proposed that a decision should be reached within five working days on all applications across all programmes types but that it had been recognised that there were specific programmes where a more flexible approach would be appropriate. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Board had separately considered an appropriate target with respect to research degree programmes but that further work was needed to understand the issues that could arise specifically in the handling of research degree applications.

The UE agreed that the proposed targets for taught and research degree programmes should be incorporated within a revised admissions policy and presented to the UE for approval.

The UE agreed that work being undertaken as part of the Student Administration Revitalisation Project [minute 15/197] would support improvements in application turnaround times and that the Academic Registrar should be invited to present a further report on that work.

The UE noted the popularity among prospective applicants of The Student Room, a UK-based online forum where users could post questions and seek advice. The UE agreed that relevant colleagues should actively engage with this site and respond to questions regarding the University and its degree programmes.

### **M16/067 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The UE noted that its next meeting would be held 29 February 2016.

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Signed by Chair .....

Date .....