

Heriot-Watt University

THE UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE

Minutes: 7 March 2016

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- In the Chair: Professor Richard A Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor
- Present Also: Professor Robert Craik, Vice-Principal (Malaysia)*
Ms Ann Marie Dalton, Secretary of the University
Professor Gavin Gibson, Interim Head (Mathematics and Computer Sciences)
Professor Duncan Hand, Interim Deputy Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange)
Professor Gill Hogg, Deputy Principal (External Relations)
Professor Ammar Kaka, Vice-Principal (Dubai)*
Mr Alick Kitchin, Acting Head (Edinburgh Business School)*
Professor Stephen McLaughlin, Head (Engineering and Physical Sciences)
Mr Andrew Menzies, Director of Finance
Dr Peter Morris, Interim Head (Life Sciences)
Professor Gareth Pender, Head (Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure, and Society)
Professor John Sawkins, Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching)
Professor Fiona Waldron, Head (Textiles and Design)
- In Attendance: Mr Richard McGookin, Director of Planning
Mr John McDermott, Clerk for the meeting
Ms Nuala Boyle (Assistant Principal, Development)(see item M16/084 & 085)
Mr Mike Roch (Director of Information Services)(see item M16/086)
- Apologies: Professor Julian Jones, Vice-Principal
Professor Robert MacIntosh, Head (Management and Languages)
Mr Brett Dodgson, Clerk

* Indicates member participating remotely

MINUTE REF
M16/082

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Principal welcomed to the meeting the members of the UE and those colleagues who were in attendance. Best wishes were extended to the Clerk for a full and swift recovery.

M16/083 **REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

- a) In a verbal report the Principal informed the UE that the Court discussion led by Professor Sawkins last week regarding investment in Learning and Teaching had been well received. Court members had also enjoyed and learnt from their visits to the Business School and to the ORIAM facility. It was agreed that the momentum of such events should be maintained in order to further enhance the appreciation of Court members of the work of the University.
- b) The Principal reported that the Court had supported the proposed approach to continue to fulfil its mandate regarding the funding of widening access initiatives, despite noting that the tight financial implications of the Funding Council Outcome Agreement had inhibited the intention of other institutions to continue to do so.
- c) It was further reported that all HE institutions in Scotland were united in calling for the reintroduction (by the UK Government) of a post study work scheme to enable non-European Economic Area (EEA) students to stay and work in Scotland for a defined period of time after graduation. A [Report](#) had been published to support the case, but it was recognised that this issue would take some time to resolve.

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- d) The Principal reminded UE of the expectation that all members were expected to participate in all meetings, and that it would be especially valuable to have a full turnout at the next meeting. There would be two important discussion items on 14 March: i) Leadership, where an open discussion would be helpful towards ensuring that the UE was an effective team in leading the University; and ii) Orkney, where Dr Kerr, of the International Centre for Island Technology, would join the meeting to discuss developments on that campus. The Principal would write to staff after the 14 March meeting with a briefing on what had been discussed.
- e) The Principal reported that he would shortly announce a programme of open staff meetings regarding the Vision and ambition of the University, and would particularly seek colleagues' contributions as to how Heriot-Watt could become even more distinctive in its research and teaching activities. Possible outcomes might centre around such topics as the use of learning technologies, the shape of the academic year, teaching methodologies, and/or the curriculum portfolio. It was noted that this process would be able to be informed by the work currently being undertaken regarding the Postgraduate Portfolio and on technological enhancements to support the learning environment. The themes emerging from the staff discussions would be reported to the Senate to inform future considerations, and it would likely be necessary to hold an additional meeting of the Senate to facilitate this. A diary 'trawl' would be conducted shortly. Thoughts from members of the UE on the foregoing activity were invited.
- f) The Principal informed UE that the report to the Senate regarding its Effectiveness Review would now be submitted in May 2016 in order to permit him to chair the meeting (he unavoidably would miss the March Senate). The extension to the timescale would also permit the UE to have a full discussion on the outcomes of the review, and for some misconceptions to be resolved. The Principal stated that in order to provide leadership on the matter, the UE would take time to consider the proposals and then take ownership of them. This would greatly assist the implementation of any changes.
- g) It was reported that the UK Government has announced a new Student Loan of up to £10,000 for English-domiciled PG Students. The Student Loans Company had subsequently confirmed that the loan would be available for English-domiciled applicants to Scottish universities. Steps were therefore underway to ensure that Heriot-Watt could take advantage as appropriate.
- h) The Principal reported that the former Joint Head of the Business School, Professor Lumsden, had retired with effect from 29 February 2016, and had taken on the role of 'Master of Panmure House' from 1 March. The structure of this arrangement would be considered later this month.
- i) The Principal informed UE that the briefing notes encapsulating UE discussions would be available as soon as possible after meetings in order that members could, in turn, brief their leadership teams, and the information cascaded accordingly.

M16/084 UTILISING UNRESTRICTED FUNDS FROM THE ENDOWMENT FUND: UPDATE [Paper UEP/16/058]

Ms Boyle joined the meeting for this and the subsequent item.

[Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30 and s.33]

In further discussion, it was noted that a proposal would be brought to a future UE meeting regarding support for refugees. UE was informed that some other universities had used their Endowment Funds as sources of support for such initiatives.

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M16/085 ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE: EXTENSION OF REMIT AND MEMBERSHIP [Paper UEP/16/065]

The UE noted that the Endowment Committee currently was responsible for the stewardship of the funds under its charge, and had no responsibility for the disbursement of funds. A proposal would be put to the Endowment Board meeting on 16 March to extend its remit and membership so as to take on responsibility for disbursement.

The UE agreed to support the proposal to extend the remit and membership of the Endowment Committee.

M16/086 BRIEFING ON USE OF IT TO SUPPORT COMMITTEES AND OTHER MEETINGS

Mr Roch joined the meeting for this verbal item. The UE was informed that all staff had now been transferred to the Office 365 environment and that this would assist the use of Skype for Business as the principal tool for ensuring remote participation in committees and other meetings. It was clear, however, that logistical difficulties still hampered inter-campus real time communication, and to help alleviate that, Information Services technicians would always be on hand to assist with the preparations for and conduct of meetings with remote participants. The use of the public internet would always, however, have its limitations, and the greater the number of persons joining via Skype, the greater chance there was for difficulties occurring

It was noted that as a multi-campus, multi-national institution, Heriot-Watt conducted a great many conversations that required remote participation. It was therefore requested that Mr Roch should scope the costs of providing a more robust solution to support inter-campus real-time participation in meetings.

M16/087 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING [Paper UEP/16/056]

The UE considered the minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2016 and **approved** them as an accurate record.

M16/088 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS LOG [Paper UEP/16/057]

It was noted that the Principal, in conjunction with the Clerk, had yet to liaise with action owners to set deadlines on actions that remained open. The UE noted that a four-week forward agenda plan for the UE had been developed by the Clerk and that this would be circulated electronically to members.

It was further noted that not all UE members had yet confirmed their deputising arrangements with the Secretary of the University. They were requested to do so at their earliest opportunity.

Arising from minute **M16/073**, the UE noted that appropriate monitoring of the staff composition should be undertaken as part of the continuing fulfilment of the requirements of Athena Swan.

The UE **noted** the Actions Log.

M16/089 FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICY AND PROCEDURES [Paper UEP/16/059]

The UE considered the draft Policy and Procedures on Flexible Working. The principle was accepted that all eligible colleagues should be able to apply for flexible working arrangements – whether on academic or professional service contracts – and subject to any specific contractual terms.

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During the course of discussion, it was noted that it was important to emphasise the need for transparency and consistency in considering requests. It was also incumbent on the approving manager to take into account business needs prior to any approval and proposed arrangements might need to be modified accordingly. An important step in the process would therefore be a discussion between the staff member and their manager prior to a request being submitted. It was also noted to be important to permit any arrangement to be reviewed after a set period of time and/or when personal circumstances changed where this was under a non-statutory arrangement.

It was noted that to assist the implementation of the policy, and to gain appreciation of the current extent of flexible working, an audit of historical arrangements was underway.

UE **agreed** that the Secretary of the University would make changes to the proposed Policy and Procedures to reflect the discussion, and to circulate to UE members for any further comment and then approval.

M16/090 STUDENT APPLICATIONS AND CONVERSION [Paper UEP/16/60]

The UE considered the paper, which was presented by the Director of Planning.

[Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30 and s.33]

The UE **noted** the information.

M16/091 RETENTION / PROGRESSION PERFORMANCE DATA REPORT [Paper UEP/16/061]

The UE considered the paper, which was presented by the Director of Planning.

[Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30 and s.33]

The UE **noted** the information.

M16/092 DRAFT AGENDA FOR THE SENATE MEETING ON 23 MARCH 2016 [Paper UEP/16/063]

The UE considered the draft agenda for the forthcoming meeting of the Senate. It was noted that the main discussion item would be a presentation on the topic of REF Preparedness. This would recognise that there are different aspects of staff concern over the REF, and would seek to focus debate on research, and maximising the outcome of the exercise. The tone of discussion would be important.

M16/093 UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE FORWARD AGENDA PLAN [Paper UEP/16/064]

The Principal introduced a forward agenda plan that laid out some future agenda topics as well as establishing some principles of operation of the UE. It was agreed that in order to facilitate timely issuing of papers and thus to ensure members have sufficient time to prepare for meetings, that all papers should be submitted to the Clerk no later than six working days before a meeting. Certain papers – at the discretion of the Principal – could be circulated early to facilitate detailed consideration.

It was further intended that each paper should be short – and should contain a concise summary (the format of the recent papers submitted to the Court by the Director of Finance were held as an exemplar). Each paper and agenda item should also be ‘sponsored’ by a UE member.

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In discussion, it was emphasised that the forward agenda plan was not exhaustive and that all members could contribute further items. The order of certain topics was discussed, and some alterations were made to the schedule. It was agreed that the Secretary would scrutinise the respective deadlines and modify the plan accordingly ahead of its next issue.

M16/094 SCHOOL OF LIFE SCIENCES UPDATE

The UE received an oral update. It was noted that a working group had helped to plan the redistribution of professional services staff across the 'receiving schools', and that this work had been informed by estimates made by the School Directors of Administration of the staffing requirements to fulfil the on-going business requirements. More work would be undertaken to further assess the requirements, but the matter was hoped to be concluded in the very near future in order to alleviate the uncertainty being experienced by all the colleagues concerned.

It was therefore **agreed** that further discussions would be held as soon as practicable at a senior level to seek resolution, and that the UE would be circulated with a firm proposal, with the intention that approval would be sought by correspondence at the earliest opportunity.

M16/095 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Principal informed UE that items of 'Any Other Business' would be welcomed from members at any UE meeting, as long as they had been notified to the Clerk by close of the Friday before the meeting. This route should, though, augment, rather than circumvent, the arrangements detailed in paper **UEP/16/064**.

M16/096 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of UE shall be held on 14 March 2016.

Members were reminded that this shall be a paperless meeting with two discussion items.

Signed by Chair

Date