

University of the Highlands and Islands

Regional Strategy Committee (RSC)

05 May 2020, 11:00 to 14:30

Webex Teams 143378345@uhi.webex.com

Present


Garry Coutts (Chair), Beverly Clubley (Vice Chair), Michael Foxley (Vice Chair), Willie Printie, Crichton Lang (Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor), Alan Simpson (HISA President), David Sandison (Chair), Brian Crichton (Chair Perth College UHI), Fiona McLean, Andrew Campbell (Chair Argyll College UHI), Sarah Burton (Chair Inverness College UHI), Bruce Robertson, Blair Sandison, Diana Murray (Chair), Fiona Larg (Chief Operating Officer & Secretary), Gary Campbell, John Kemp, Lydia Rohmer, Neil Simco, Niall McArthur (Director of Corporate Resources), Roger Sendall (Director of Corporate Governance)

Meeting minutes

1. Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and noted that a quorum was present.

The Chair extended the committees gratitude to partnership staff for the significant amount of additional work that they were currently progressing to ensure that learners and staff were well supported during the current coronavirus pandemic.

 Agenda .pdf

1.1. *Apologies

Apologies were received from Diane Rawlinson.

1.2. *Declaration of Interest

None.

1.3. *Notification of Other Business

None.

1.4. *Starring

The Chair explained the starring system that would be used for future meetings. It was noted that all agenda items were starred for this meeting.

2. Governance

2.1. *Matters Arising - following FERB final meeting

Garry Coutts

The committee considered a paper providing a summary of actions and matters arising from the Further Education Regional Board. It was noted that the Regional Strategy Committee would monitor completion of outstanding items resulting from FERB meetings.

The following points were noted:

- RSC agreed to continue the good practice established by FERB by holding regular briefing sessions for non-executive members on relevant topics to inform decision making. It was noted that the Chair and Vice Chairs would discuss and identify an appropriate plan and schedule of topics. Topics to include strategic investment projects/growth deals, Brexit challenges and collective mitigation of key risks.
- Draft minutes of the final FERB meeting had been submitted to Court on 18th March. It was noted that the minutes would also be circulated to members of FERB for comments to ensure that the members were satisfied that the minute accurately reflected discussion at the final meeting and any decisions.

2.2. Review of Delegated Decisions

None.

2.3. *Induction

The chair thanked members for attending the induction session on 28th April 2020. Members noted the induction pack provided by the university's governance team including links to relevant key documents, guidance and legislation.

 Induction pack April 2020.pdf

2.4. *Remit & Membership

The committee noted the terms of reference and membership of the committee as approved by Court on 18th March 2020. The committee ratified the appointment of the two Vice Chairs identified within the document.

 RSC-004 Regional Strategy Committee Terms of Reference.pdf

2.5. *Commitment to Respectful dialogue

The committee formally recorded its support and commitment to pursuing meetings in accordance with the defined respectful dialogue principles.

 RSC-005 Support for Respectful Dialogue Commitment.pdf

3. Covid19 Adapting the Business

The committee discussed a paper prepared by the Principal and Vice Chancellor in relation to identifying strategic priorities and adapting the university partnership's activities in order to meet financial and other imminent challenges affecting the further and higher education sectors. The committee noted that the current coronavirus pandemic was unprecedented and had significantly increased key risks. The committee agreed there was now an urgent need to implement changes and to increase the pace of operational integration activities.

The following key points were noted:

- There was clear message from Scottish Government that future funding for higher and further education provision would be severely limited and that the government would not be willing to fund inefficient colleges or universities. Significant reduction and rationalisation of the education sector was highly likely.
- It was extremely important for the university to position itself confidently as an anchor institution within the region with the capacity to add value to the community and to assist economic recovery through providing access to appropriate vocational training, education, research and knowledge exchange.
- The committee agreed that pro-active measures needed to be implemented rapidly in order to increase efficiency across the partnership and it was agreed that all AP Chairs would work to encourage and require their college principals to engage proactively with partnership initiatives and to deliver agreed actions.
- Chair to write to all AP Chairs (copied to Court and Partnership Council) to set out the new committees expectations that all partners will actively participate and cooperate to deliver agreed strategies.
- There was a need to develop an action plan/summary document to provide non-executives with clear sight of performance and progress against identified priorities and key milestones.
- There was a clear need for the University to focus on developing clear and confident positive messages in relation to what the partnership could offer prospective learners.

 RSC-006 Covid 19 Adapting the Business.pdf

 RSC-006 Supplementary notes from VPs.pdf

3.1. LUNCH BREAK at 12:30

Committee members held a private closed session immediately prior to the identified lunch break. Members who are "in attendance" rejoined the meeting at 13:10.

Closed Session: Because of potential HR sensitivities RSC members discussed with the Interim Vice Chancellor, in closed session, the lack of progress with the Common Finance Service work which FERB had requested be taken forward under his name by the Director of Corporate Resources and Academic Partner Finance Directors. The iVC apologised for this lack of progress and for the quality of the paper being presented later in the meeting outlining the work that was now proposed. The iVC further assured the RSC members that he was engaging fully with the Director of Corporate Resources and would make the necessary changes and supports to leadership for this project to ensure that it now progressed to a deliverable proposal by July 2021. On that basis he asked, with the support of the Chair, that the substantive paper could be discussed in open committee as a positive step towards that goal.

4. Regional Strategy and Planning

Crichton Lang

4.1. *Common Finance Service

The committee discussed a paper prepared by the university's Director of Corporate Resources providing a proposal to develop an aligned common finance service.

The committee agreed to support the development identified within the paper and encouraged management to direct appropriate resource to ensure that capacity was made available to establish the new service as quickly as was reasonably possible.

The following points were noted during the discussion of this item:

- There was an identified need to better articulate the benefits of progressing with service alignment and operational integration. This would assist with motivating staff to actively progress agreed initiatives.
- Members noted that the paper provided limited sight of the implications and challenges associated with systems convergence. Further detail would be required in due course.
- Noted that non-executives from across the partnership all wanted progress with development of a common finance service and that many were becoming frustrated by the slow pace of change. It was agreed that there was a need to provide management with clear direction and instruction in relation to what was expected.

 RSC-007 Updated paper for RSC PC - 5 May 2020 v3.pdf

4.2. *Partnership and Service Level Agreements

Fiona Larg

The committee discussed the draft new Partnership and Service Level Agreement as presented by the Chief Operating Officer and University Secretary. The following points were noted:

- The new agreement had been developed in consultation with Principals through Partnership Council to replace the three current academic partnership agreements which were currently in place but which were now significantly out of date, having been developed over 20 years ago before the University had achieved title and prior to establishment of new obligations and responsibilities arising from the Post 16 (Scotland) Education Act.
- The University Court and the University Audit committee had identified some major risks resulting from current agreements not being up to date and had requested swift action to remedy this situation.
- Following due consideration the committee offered support for the progression of the new agreements and encouraged managers to seek to finalise the documents and circulate them to academic partner boards of management for formal approval.

 RSC-008 AP Agreements.pdf


4.3. *RAM and Curriculum Review

The committee discussed two papers prepared by the Vice Principal Strategic Developments and the Senior Advisor: Change Implementation in relation to proposals to amend the current methodology for determining resource allocation and distribution of core funding and a review of the existing curriculum offer.

It was noted that the committee was broadly supportive of the direction of travel indicated within the papers presented and that the committee supported further progression and development of the proposed initiatives through the Partnership Council and the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The following key points were noted from the discussion:

- There is an urgent need to develop a more efficient curriculum offer. Approximately 80% of current students are enrolled on 30% of offered courses.
- Work is progressing currently to identify which courses can be run effectively next academic year in the context of anticipated continuing social distancing requirements.
- Significant focus and effort is needed to attract and retain students in an increasingly competitive and challenging context.
- A radical change to the current Resource Allocation Methodology (RAM) is necessary to enable a more strategic and better coordinated tertiary regional curriculum and core offer to be appropriately funded and resourced.

 RSC-009 RAM and Curriculum Review paper on RAM060520.pdf

5. Monitoring Performance & Coordinated Risk Management

5.1. *Format of Future Dashboard Reporting


The committee approved the proposed approach and format for future performance and compliance monitoring as proposed by the Chief Operating Officer and Secretary within paper RSC20-010. It was noted that the format of reports would be reviewed after one year.

 RSC-010 Format of Future Dashboard reporting.pdf

5.2. *2020/21 SFC FE & HE Final Grants

The committee noted the paper provided by the Director of Corporate Resources providing a summary of the 2020/21 Scottish Funding Council HE and FE final funding announcement.

The committee was disappointed to note that the regions FE credit target had been increased by 2000 FTE without any additional allocation of funding. This matter was currently being pursued with SFC.

 RSC-011 SFC FE and HE Final grants 2020-21.pdf

5.3. *AP Mid-Year Summary Report

Niall McArthur

The Director of Corporate Resources presented the mid year Financial Forecast Return (FFR) summary report for the year 2019/20 as prepared for submission to the Scottish Funding Council. A number of variances from the original FFR forecasts were highlighted including:

- Significant financial challenges including increased deficit positions at Inverness, Lews Castle, Moray, North Highland, Orkney, Perth, Shetland, NAFC, SAMS, SMO and the University's Executive Office.
- A consolidated deficit position for the five incorporated colleges at 31st March 2020 with an associated potential risk on future funding (circa £1.3M).

The committee requested sight of enhanced summary data and reporting via the dashboard in future including information to highlight and to facilitate partnership discussion around developing mitigating actions.

 RSC-012 AP MYR 1920.pdf

5.4. AP Financial Monitoring

The committee noted the report provided by the Director of Corporate Resources containing a summary of academic partner management accounts for quarter 2 and quarter 3 and associated cash flow to march 2020 for the five incorporated colleges.

The committee noted that the provided RAG status for each partner did not always reflect the data presented and called for a more consistent approach to classifying and presenting information in future reports.

 RSC-013 AP Financial monitoring.pdf

5.5. *Corporate Risk Register

The committee discussed the corporate risk register provided by the Director of Corporate Governance. The committee agreed that the Regional Strategy Committee provided a useful forum for discussing common risks with a particular focus on discussing opportunities to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks through collective action.

The committee agreed that there would be a benefit in holding a seminar event on risk at a future date.

 RSC-014 Risk Management.pdf

6. Items for Next Meeting

6.1. Risk Management Information Security: Incident/Breach Management

Noted.

7. *Any Other Business


None.

8. Date of Next Meeting:

1 September 2020

9. Actions Summary - Appended.

The attached document provides a summary of agreed actions and decisions.

 RSC Actions and decisions summary 5th May 2020.pdf

