

UHI Foundation

Thu 18 November 2021, 13:00 - 16:00

By VC (Microsoft Teams)

Attendees

Board members

Fiona McLean (Rector - Chair of Foundation), Todd Walker (Principal and Vice Chancellor), Roger Sendall (Acting University Secretary & Director of Corporate Governance), Kyle Gee (HISA VPFE), Tom Inglis (VC Foundation), Anton Edwards, Duncan Martin, Thomas Prag, Cllr Dr Stephen Clackson, Evelyn Johnston, Cllr Claire Feaver, Michael Smith, Willie Printie, Christine Shaw (Clerk)

Meeting minutes

1. WELCOME, APOLOGIES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Rector opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to her first meeting in post.

Apologies were received from Allan Bransbury, Rev Sarah Murray, John Ferguson, Angus G. MacLeod, Eric McVicar, Lord MacKay of Clashfern, David Gauld, Yvonne Mcneilly, Andrew Rae, Alastair MacColl, Florence Jansen, Roy Templeton; Liz Ashworth

 Agenda - Foundation 18 November 2021.pdf

1.1. Declarations of Interest

None

1.2. Notification of any other competent business

None

2. MINUTES

2.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2021

The minutes of the above meeting were reviewed and approved as an accurate record.

 FN20-21-06 Draft Minutes_UHI Foundation_120521.pdf

2.2. Matters Arising

Foundation considered the actions and matters arising from the previous meeting and noted that all actions are now complete.

Verbal

2.3. Review of Any Delegated Decisions

None

3. UPDATE FROM THE RECTOR

The Rector began by thanking her predecessor, Anton Edwards, and the Acting University Secretary, Roger Sendall, for providing knowledge, guidance, and support in relation to the role of rector.

Following her appointment on the 1st August 2021, the Rector has been speaking to university staff to get a feel for their impressions of Foundation and what they believe the role of Foundation should be in order to generate some new ideas for the future. The Rector intends to continue these conversations with other stakeholders of the university and plans to speak to Foundation members and Court members in due course.

The Rector received some very positive feedback from people who attended the virtual Foundation Conference last month. She thanked Roger Sendall (AUS) and Alison Wilson (Head of Development). From these discussions the Rector reported that feedback from the Foundation survey would be most beneficial for future conferences and public meetings. The Rector plans to triangulate this with feedback from university staff and stakeholders to bring back the results of the survey and other input to the next meeting.

The Rector spoke about the importance of communicating with Foundation to keep everyone informed about what is going on at UHI. She invited members to contact her by email or via the clerk with any feedback/comments on how we can improve matters.

4. HIGHLAND & ISLANDS STUDENT'S ASSOCIATION

Kyle Gee, HISA Vice President (FE) provided the Foundation with a verbal report in support of paper (FN21/22-01). The following key points were noted:

- The new HISA officers were appointed on 1 July 2021.
- The summer training schedule included NUS, sparqs and internal training that involved two days in-person at Inverness College and two days online. HISA/UHI partnered Student Voice Representatives at the 'Train the Trainer workshop.'
- External Trustee recruitment (November 2021) – The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for the affairs of the Highlands & Islands Association (HISA). In line with Charity Law, they ensure that HISA conducts its affairs in line with its charitable objects and delivers for its members. External Trustees are appointed for a term of four years and may serve a maximum of two terms which may be consecutive or non-consecutive. The Role description provides the full details.

Following a discussion with James Lindsey (HISA Chief Executive) the Acting University Secretary reported that it would be sensible to promote the External Trustee vacancy through Foundation. James Lindsey is very keen that we do. Candidates do not necessarily need to be Foundation members they could be part of the Foundation network. The recruitment drive, which is now open, also includes three student trustee vacancies. The Rector and the Acting University Secretary commented that this would be a good opportunity for Foundation to potentially get engaged and both encouraged members to pass the details on to their contacts.

 FN21-22-01 HISA Update UHI Foundation November 21.pdf

 FN21-22-01a External Trustee Recruitment Pack - 11.2021.pdf

5. REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

The Foundation noted paper (FN21/22-02) received from the Principal and Vice Chancellor.

The P&VC highlighted two addendums to his report:

2. SFC Review Final Report (p16/59) – final report called, *Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research* – at the time of writing the Scottish Government had not responded to that report. Jamie Hepburn, Minister for HE and FE, has now responded to that final report, and by and large has supported all the starting principles and seven key recommendations for consistent change. It will support a new national impact framework and there is also recognition from the SFC to support international education connections and global research which is very important.

The Rural and Islands Merger - three colleges (West Highland College, Lews Castle College, and North Highland College). have agreed in principle to merge in the next year or so, and the process is progressing well. Michael Foxley (Chair) is following the prescribed guidance from the Scottish Funding Council. The Partnership Board meets regularly and has a representative from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). It is in the process of creating sub-committees i.e., teaching, research, governance, funding, and others. There is an ambitious target to see this new college investiture take place in January 2023. Foundation will be kept informed of the progress going forward.

The Strategic Plan was given approval by Court at the last meeting. The PVC gave a summary of each of the major strategic themes that would require focus and resources over the next few years are, as follows:

1. **Leadership** – developing the leadership team. We are currently recruiting for a number of senior executive posts including Vice Principal of Operations. Announcements should be made in the next couple of weeks. We are doing a restructure of Executive Office and developing a new senior management team.
2. **Partnership Model** – maturing and enhancing the partnership model, includes some mergers. We are currently working behind the scenes on this.
3. **Curriculum** – creating a high-quality curriculum that is purpose driven. Further to our update on the curriculum at the last meeting, steady progress is being made.
4. **Research Excellence** – taking our research to the next level – slow moving process. We have received some grant applications recently. Research partnerships have been developed. * Professor Donna Hedde is also doing some realignment work around our research themes. We await the outcome of our recent REF submission next year. We will then position ourselves for collecting data for the next round of research excellence.

* The PVC agreed to circulate further information after the meeting on our grant success.

Action: PVC

5. **Income Diversification** – diversifying UHI's income base. To be discussed at Court next week, particularly around international education. We are seeing a decline in our applications for both HE and FE this academic year and into the next. We are losing some market share to other universities. The position we held as being the premier online university for the Highlands and Islands and for Scotland has been eroded with the rapid shift of other institutions, that are moving to online provisions. We have some work to do on this.

6. **Positioning** – enhancing our national and international position. Lydia Rohmer and Margaret Antonson have been engaged in a widespread consultation over the last eighteen months to change and improve our branding for a more consistent visual identity across the partnership. The implementation plan is going to Court next week, and Foundation will be kept informed once further announcements are made.

The PVC and Acting University Secretary provided Foundation with an update on our progress with operating and managing four of the residences. It was noted that the University has taken on, and will be managing, four residences that were previously managed by third parties: Elgin, Dornoch, Fort William and Inverness. In June 2021 the University purchased the residences at Elgin and Dornoch. The residences at Fort William and Inverness are still owned by Aviva; the University is currently paying a head lease for both. In June 2021 the University bought out City Heart Ltd. which has given us more control and flexibility in terms of managing occupancy levels and has enabled us to put a new strategy in place which we are working through.

 FN21-22-02 P&VC Report to Foundation 18 November 2021.pdf

5.1. UHI Quarterly Status Report

Foundation noted the quarterly status reports provided by Executive Office senior managers and academic partner principals. A copy of the presentation slides is appended to and forms part of this minute.

Foundation welcomed the branding initiative with its commonality for bringing the partnership together. The Rector and several members praised the 'good news' stories and successes within the report. The PVC agreed to feedback their appreciation of the contributions.

Action: P&VC

The PVC discussed the steps he has taken over the last ten months that include building a professional and personal relationship with each of the colleges—built on trust, and to put in place a strategic plan (based on four pillars) approved by Court, that can be developed and adopted by each partner. The PVC is hopeful that in time all the colleges will have their own reporting mechanism.

 FN21-22-03 Foundation - Quarterly Status Reports.pdf

5.2. 2021 Vice Chair Election

The Foundation is required to elect a new Vice Chair in accordance with Article 21 of the University's Articles of Association.

Foundation noted paper (FN21/22-04) that set out to provide the previously agreed Vice Chair election process and associated key dates. The paper gave a brief outline of the election process. An electronic poll will be open from 23 November until the 16 December. The Acting University Secretary reported that the appointments were extended in 2020 because of the Covid19 pandemic. He thanked Tom Inglis for doing an extra year in post, and encouraged members to consider the election, to either nominate themselves or someone else.

Tom Inglis proposed that a role description document is prepared for the new post holder clarifying what the expectation is. He emphasized that the Vice Chair needs more engagement to fully understand how the Rector's role is developing in relation to Foundation. The Rector and Acting University Secretary agreed to put together a role descriptor prior to progressing the Vice Chair Election.

Action: Rector/Acting University Secretary

A further proposal was made for a Terms of Reference for Foundation members, to clarify what the remit/purpose is, and what the expectations are for each member.

Action: Rector/Acting University Secretary

Anton Edwards (former Rector) acknowledged Tom's proposal and thanked him for his services and support over the years.

The Rector asked members to give some consideration to the Vice Chair election. Anyone who wishes to speak to the Rector or Acting University Secretary would be welcome to contact them.

 FN21-22-04 Foundation Vice Chair Election.pdf

5.3. Foundation Conference

Foundation noted paper (FN21/22-05). The Acting University Secretary reported that the paper provided an overview of the conference with some feedback. He opened the item for discussion and welcomed further feedback from Foundation.

Foundation broadly agreed that the conference and public meeting went very well. It was agreed that we need to keep it relevant, topical, and digestible with less jargon. We have an opportunity to broaden the audience more widely in terms of what we want to talk about, suggestions included the new brand, logo, and more input from staff in terms of the curriculum, all of which may generate more interest in the public arena. It was agreed by some that Microsoft Teams worked well, as it has good functionality and people were able to engage more. It was noted that going forward we need to think about our audience and how we advertise it through social media.

The Acting University Secretary reported that we have a duty to hold a public meeting every year in accordance with the governance code, for which members of Court are invited to attend. Whilst it is beneficial, and can be seen as a positive thing, it is not essential that we hold the conference and the public meeting on the same day. We could hold them on separate dates. This is something that Foundation can decide upon.

Foundation members were asked to put their thoughts/feedback into the survey.

 FN21-22-05 Foundation Conference and Public Meeting 2021.pdf

5.4. Online Survey of Foundation Members

Following on from the discussion in 5.2) *What is Foundation's role?* the Rector reiterated that she will speak to university staff and stakeholders to get their input into what they feel the role of Foundation is, and how we can effectively act as a conduit between the University and the communities that it serves.

Action: Rector

Acting University Secretary - Context to question 5.4)

In terms of Foundation's role, the Acting University Secretary reported that there is the overarching role that is described in the Articles. Foundation has the potential to be extremely powerful. It was set up to represent and be the key stakeholder and engagement link to the University. There is an opportunity to rebrand Foundation and build it up again. It has evolved over the years and predates the University. We do need to make some adjustments in terms of the way we represent it, but we are on the right path. We are running the conferences again, inviting people from the Honorary Awards to join. There is a core of well-connected people who are behind the University mission who have important voices that we need to connect with. Members consist of alumni and public bodies right across the region, the health sector and local authorities that can be linked up. Going forward Foundation is in a good place, and we have an opportunity to engage with it under Chapter 3 'Daring to be Different.' The conference was excellent. There is an opportunity to help grow Foundation and keep the momentum going. Whilst there is work to do the survey will help us provide the clarity so that members will know why they are part of Foundation – which is to add value.

1) **Thomas Prag** - commented that the survey is about *what Foundation should be*. Members come from a variety of backgrounds—which is the way it should be. It is about connections into the community and the partners that exist. Unfortunately, the business meetings are not exciting to attend. The attendance today is disappointing. It needs to be interesting enough for people to want to attend. Whilst the conference succeeded in that, the business meetings struggle. If you want people to be involved, you must give them a good reason to be involved. **The Rector asked for this point to be added to the questionnaire.**

2) The **PVC** asked for a question in the multiple-choice section on the 'Principal.' Foundation could be improved by interactions with Court. Do Foundation members want the PVC to go off script a bit more? How could the PVC add value to these meetings? Do Foundation members want more senior executives or senior managers to attend meetings?

3) **Evelyn Johnston** – regarding the survey asking for an email address. The survey should capture the basic demographics: age/gender/geographical location. It is important that the survey captures the profile of people who have responded. In relation to Q4) it would be helpful to include a hyperlink to the Strategic Vision and Plan so that when people are considering the question, they can take the time to look at the documents. Q6) is more of an open question about the evolving role. There is a list of suggestions about what the conference might do, to what degree we can make some suggestions rather than leave it open. This was a general comment. Q11) How can we improve Foundation? Willie Printie and Thomas Prag picked up on this—there isn't sufficient clarity and that is a real challenge. A lot of what is listed here creates a further burden on the University, in terms of the asks for more reports, interaction etc. For added value, what is Foundation putting back in? if we are not careful, we will become a burden to the University, rather than an asset and this goes back to lack of clarity concerning our role. Leading into getting university status and awarding powers there was greater clarity about what Foundation was back then. It has been more of a challenge since then to make it interesting. It is not about attending meeting; it is about finding ways to contribute.

ACTION: Acting University Secretary - to add the above comments to the questionnaire

The Acting University Secretary commented that we are hoping to find ways to improve Foundation. Suggestions include the practicalities around meetings – the timing of meetings may not suit everyone. Would it be more practical to hold the meetings between 5 and 7pm? Should we always do it by Microsoft Teams or do it physically? Is there a better way of planning meetings? We can build these types of questions into the survey?

The Acting University Secretary is keen to get this done by Christmas and is happy to receive comments and work with Nicholas Oakley. A deadline will be set for when comments come in by the end of November, with the survey to follow in December. The survey could be put out to other channels to try to seek wider views.

ACTION: Acting University Secretary/Nicholas Oakley

ACTION: ALL – to send comments on the draft questionnaire by the end of November to enable us to revise the questionnaire and get it out by December. And think of a way to do a survey for people who are not Foundation members.

 FN21-22-06 Foundation Survey.pdf

5.5. Plenary Session: Questions and Discussion on items 5.1 - 5.4

The Rector hosted a plenary discussion and question and answer session to agenda items 5.1 – 5.4.

No further questions. The Rector thanked everyone for a very illuminating meeting.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS - as notified above

None.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

7.1. Foundation Business meeting - 11 May 2022

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