

**Minutes of the International Standing Committee held at 4pm  
Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020  
Online via Zoom**

**Present:** Ann Smyth, Secretary of the General Council  
Philip Mawer, Convener of the Business Committee  
Krystyna Szumelukowa, Convener of ISC  
John Clifford (ISC)  
Frances Dow (ISC)  
Andrew Miller (ISC)  
Graeme Reid (ISC)

**In attendance:** James Smith, Vice-Principal International  
Alison MacLeary, Assistant to the Secretary of the General Council

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Convener welcomed those present to the first meeting of the session to discuss the priority issues for the University's international agenda.

**2. Presentation from Professor James Smith, Vice-Principal International**

Professor Smith began with a short verbal update on the current recruitment situation before providing an account of the University's approach in Europe. The second part of the presentation focused on Asia. Questions were taken throughout the meeting.

The following points from the discussion were noted:

- Professor Smith reported that he had recently received updated recruitment data which showed that the majority of international students were re-engaging with their studies;
- More than 50% of international students studying online; Chinese students in particular had issues with restricted flights and were unable to travel to study on campus immediately;
- PGT and UG Student numbers were strong, far above our Covid worst-case scenario modelling. This is to an extent due to our strong brand and we saw in 2008 when an uncertain job market was a likely contributor to the decision to undertake further study as well as the inability to travel currently;
- PhD research student numbers were slightly reduced, possibly due to those cohorts being unable to travel as part of their studies during this period;
- A large number of applications were dealt with via the current recruitment process through Schools and Colleges, colleagues have worked extraordinarily hard;
- Covid has reiterated the requirement for a more co-ordinated, multi-faceted and efficient recruitment function;
- ART team reviewing the development of a more coordinated and integrated approach; looking ahead to the future global shift and targeting students from e.g. East Asia and North America;
- The revised international plan post 2020 takes the values inherent in Strategy 2030 in a new direction;
- The University is sector leading in supporting the delivery of teaching/research internationally - building regional capacity in 8 hubs based around the world; a different approach to engagement/activity is needed in these different areas;
- Post Covid/Brexit – dynamic shift in the internationalisation agenda to focus on a smaller number of regions to recognise a changing world i.e. North America, China, India and Europe.

## Europe

- This is the final academic year to recruit International EU students under the current fee scheme where these students study free of charge;
- Strong cohorts of UG European students, particularly from Eastern Europe, are STEM focused and e.g. mathematics taught to a high standard at school;
- Push for active recruitment of high quality applicants from Europe who are able to pay international fees; regional approach to engage across Europe with a focus on specific city regions and University partnerships;
- Funding gap post Brexit; high level lobbying mechanisms in place to gain access to EU funding schemes e.g. Horizon Europe to replace lost research income;
- Erasmus Plus is the main funding instrument to support student/staff mobility and the University is the number one in the UK to secure this funding – 24% of all Erasmus UK income went to University;
- University no. 1 in hosting incoming European students and sending home students to European countries: 2000 sent overseas per annum – 90% receive EU support;
- University is developing a series of strategic research partnerships with universities e.g. Amsterdam, Helsinki, Dublin, Berlin, to support postgraduate students overseas and potentially access funding through indirect means;
- UNA Europa - University has a relationship with several other European universities e.g. Krakow, Bologna, Madrid; alliance enables new flexible pathways for European students e.g. can study in their home university for the first two years free of charge and complete their degree in Edinburgh and receive a joint award thus the benefit of an education at Edinburgh for half the cost;
- Global mobility changing rapidly - currently language students study abroad at a wide range of universities via Erasmus Plus but post Brexit there will be a more strategic approach i.e. building a close relationship with a smaller number of European partners that will endure through crises such as Brexit/Covid;
- Virtual mobility is increasingly important- digital tools have been developed so that existing schemes such as those for Widening Participation students who receive work based placements/volunteering projects overseas can interact virtually to gain experience of inter-cultural communication; a more flexible approach of this kind is needed e.g. students with caring responsibilities and the increasing demand from students who want to spend less time abroad i.e. a semester instead of a full year;
- During semester one all Go Abroad activity was suspended (unless exceptional circumstances e.g. an industrial placement that was essential to a student completing their degree); there was a reciprocal arrangement for incoming students re risk/safety;
- Semester two – similar arrangement but more support for research field work;
- A new immigration policy will impact EU staff; 50% of international academic staff are from the EU – from January 2021 can apply for a visa through the Global Talent Scheme which is a points based system; there is a minimum salary threshold for EU Professional Services staff;
- Challenges attracting EU staff post Brexit – University offers a package of support, including covering NHS surcharges, and an in-house visa and immigration advisor, but does not deal with Indefinite Leave to Remain applications

## ***Action – Professor Smith will send more information re immigration schemes, which begin in January 2021***

- Horizon funding likely to end after Brexit; economic and political cost for the UK not felt to be viable; proposal to second academics to some research institutions e.g. CERN to gain access to some sources of funding.

## Asia

- Regional universities e.g. Singapore, China are rising in world rankings leading to an increasing number of international students from Asia choosing to study locally; a shrinking population will further reduce the demand for places at the University; Covid accelerated change;
- Transnational approach – use partnerships to deliver education locally in a devolved and more structured way; flexibility regarding fees; where there is a reluctance to travel internationally during this period students can still can the benefits of an Edinburgh University education part virtually/part in-situ in partnership hubs in e.g. India and China;
- Chinese students at the University are engaging mostly online during this period; some challenges with internet access; the University keen for students to return in semester 2 where possible;
- University collaborating with key partnerships e.g. Jiao Tong University in Shanghai to build engagement in China.
- Professor Smith concluded by highlighting that the University is adopting a Transnational approach – a different model is needed to attract the brightest and best students from different parts of the world;
- Deepen relationships with smaller European countries and assess which part of the student community aggregates in different subjects e.g. informatics and mathematics;
- There are 170 different nationalities among the University's student community; a significant proportion of this diverse student population is made up of smaller countries, often overlooked, and which can make a potent contribution;
- There is broad engagement with the Consular Corps and this has been affected by lockdown; VP International acknowledged that a more systematic approach could improve this relationship.

### **Convener's closing remarks**

Krystyna Szumelukowa queried how alumni across the globe could assist with developing the international strategy, for example by making better use of community partnerships e.g. Edinburgh and Krakow, and utilise alumni hubs more effectively e.g. Toronto.

Professor Smith acknowledged that alumni are important in raising the profile of the University and highlighted the use of virtual tools in the recruitment process.

The Convener thanked the Vice-Principal International for his informative presentation.

### **3. Apologies**

No apologies had been received.

### **4. Notes of the meeting held on 24 June 2020**

The notes had been previously circulated and were approved.

### **5. Work Plan for ISC 2020-21**

1. The Convener of ISC proposed that for the second meeting this semester the committee would review the University's partnership arrangements and suggested meeting with Alan Mackay, Director of Edinburgh Global or Derek MacLeod, Head of Global Partnerships. This was endorsed by members and it was decided that Derek MacLeod would be the most appropriate person to speak to the committee.

***Action – The Secretary will invite Derek MacLeod, Head of Global Partnerships, to a meeting this semester.***

2. The Convener proposed a further meeting with Drew Scott, International Dean for Europe and Helen McMillan, Regional Director for Europe, to discuss matters relating to Brexit. The Secretary is in the process of exploring this and reported that D & A had recently met with Drew Scott and Helen McMillan and had set up a small working group with specific proposals of how alumni could help to mitigate the impact of Brexit and support recruitment.

***Action - The committee agreed that input from the D & A working group should be included in a meeting for semester 2.***

3. It was agreed that Alan Mackay, Director of Edinburgh Global, should be invited to a future meeting this session to discuss the emerging shape of the post 2020 international strategy.

***Action – the Secretary reported that international alumni groups including London and Brussels will be invited to join the February 2021 HYM via MS Teams Live Events***

**6. Any other competent business**

There was no other business.