



UNIVERSITY COURT

21 February 2022 (Videoconference)

Web Version

Minute

- Members Present:** Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member (in Chair)
Douglas Alexander, General Council Assessor
Sarah Cooper, Senatus Assessor
Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor
Perdita Fraser, Co-opted Member
Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member
David Law, Co-opted Member
Ellen MacRae, Students' Association President
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Sarah McAllister, Professional Services Staff Member
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
Claire Phillips, Senatus Assessor
Frank Ross, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
Réka Siró, Students' Association Vice-President Activities & Services
Alistair Smith, Co-opted Member
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor
- Member Apologies:** Joyce Anderson, Trade Union Professional Services Staff Member
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Debora Kayembe, Rector
- In Attendance:** Sabira Akram, Governance Apprentice Programme 2021/22
Sophia Lycouris, Rector's Assessor
Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance; and
University Secretary
- Presenters & Observers:** Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services
David Argyle, Interim Head of College of Medicine & Veterinary
Medicine
Lisa Dawson, Interim Deputy Secretary Students
Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students
Gary Jebb, Director of Place
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian to
the University
Dorothy Miell, Vice-Principal & Head of College
Dave Robertson, Vice-Principal & Head of College
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal
Rona Smith, Director of Strategic Planning & Insight
Jarmo Eskelinen, Director, Data-Driven Innovation (for Item 10)

OPENING ITEMS

1 Minute

Paper A1

Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, welcomed members and attendees. It was noted that as the Rector is not able to attend the meeting, Sophia Lycouris, the Rector's Assessor, can vote on any items, as per the Standing Orders.

The minute of the previous meeting was approved subject to a minor amendment.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

There were no matters arising and the action log was reviewed. It was noted that the Action Log will have a more thorough review before the next meeting with a view to closing off outdated actions.

3 Principal's Report

Paper B

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, commented on the report's recommendation to extend the term of office for Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students, noting the benefit of continuity of leadership for the Curriculum Transformation Programme that this will provide and the proposal's support from the Nominations Committee. A five year extension of the term from the current end date, to 31 July 2029, was approved.

Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students, was then invited to join the meeting having absented himself prior to this point.

The Principal provided an update on ongoing industrial action with regard to planned changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and on pay and conditions. A contingency group is meeting regularly and, as was done previously, pay foregone by those taking strike action will be earmarked for a Learning Opportunity fund for students affected by the action. An alternative proposal for changes to USS has been submitted by the University & College Union (UCU), with the Joint Negotiating Committee expected to reach a decision on the changes proposed by Universities UK before the end of the month. While the University has not supported the UCU proposal, it has welcomed the engagement and supports further dialogue to seek collective agreement to a sustainable and affordable scheme for members.

A summary of slides initially delivered as a part of the annual report to the General Council were then presented, including information on: staff and student numbers; student entry numbers by College and domicile and other admissions statistics; level of study by College; top 20 non-UK domicile on entry from students; financial, research and data-driven innovation statistics; and, reflections on the positive elements from the year past and ongoing challenges.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Responding to a message submitted from the UCU branch regarding the industrial action – Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, will respond on behalf

of Court. This will refer to the University response to the UCU's proposals regarding USS and the response will be circulated to Court members;

- Progress with the People & Money System and, more generally, staff resourcing given the workload impact on many staff of major strategic change projects in addition to 'business as usual' activities – recent progress on the People & Money System has been encouraging and all involved are working to mitigate additional impacts on workloads and maintain cost control as key objectives. More widely, it is recognised that with a number of strategic change projects ongoing there are additional workload impacts in the transition periods and this needs to be carefully considered, while aiming to deliver projects that will improve the University and the working environment in the longer term;
- A more detailed discussion on international student recruitment was suggested as a future topic for a Court seminar or meeting;
- The approaching end February 2022 deadline for a decision on any changes to the USS pension scheme – it was noted that the deadline relates to the completion of the March 2020 valuation and wider discussions will likely continue beyond this. If no changes are agreed by the end February deadline greatly increased contribution rates for both members and employees will be activated; and,
- The extent to which the University engages with a broad range of secondary schools and applications and admissions statistics for state and independent school applicants from Scotland and the Rest of the UK – the University engages with a wide diversity of secondary schools and works to encourage applications from students from less privileged backgrounds. The statistics will be collated and circulated to Court members after the meeting.

4 Committee Business

- **Senior Lay Member's Overview**

The Senior Lay Member provided an update on activity since the last meeting, noting the University responses to Universities UK and UCU proposals for the USS pension scheme discussed earlier in the agenda.

- **Exception Committee**

Paper C1

The following matters approved by Exception Committee on behalf of Court were noted:

- Senior Leadership Team appointments, all for an initial five year term alongside open-ended professorial appointments:
 - Provost: Professor Kim Graham;
 - Vice-Principal Research & Enterprise: Professor Christina Boswell;
 - Vice-Principal and Head of College of Science & Engineering: Professor Iain Gordon;
 - Vice-Principal and Head of College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences: Professor: Professor Sarah Prescott;
- The United States Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (US GAAP) Management Commentary and Financial Statements to 31 July 2021;

- Finalisation of Heads of Terms, Agreement to Lease documentation for entering into a 20 year Full Repairing and Insuring lease for a 230 bed accommodation development at 41-45 Gilmore Place; and,
- Finalisation of Heads of Terms, Agreement to Lease Documentation for entering into a 20 year Full Repairing and Insuring lease for a 612 bed accommodation development at Baltic Street.

- **Policy & Resources Committee**

Paper C2

The report was noted, with key items considered featuring later in the agenda. Catherine Martin, Chair of the People & Money Enactment Group, was invited to give a verbal update on the People & Money System and commented on protections added for the implementation of the new payroll and pensions elements in April, including additional training and resources for Payroll and Human Resources teams and the establishment of a dedicated staff helpline.

- **Nominations Committee**

Paper C3

The report was noted and the following reappointments and extensions of terms were approved on the recommendation of Nominations Committee:

- Audit & Risk Committee – external member Grant Macrae reappointed for a second three year term to 31 May 2025;
- Policy & Resources Committee – Jock Millican’s first term extended to 31 July 2023;
- Knowledge Strategy Committee – external member Sue Currie reappointed for a second three year term to 31 July 2025;
- Trustees of the Staff Benefits Scheme – Julia Miller reappointed as the independent professional chair of the Scheme for a second two year term to 31 July 2024; and,
- Curators of Patronage – the terms of the three current Heads of College as Curators of Patronage extended to match their existing terms as Heads of College.

The Committee’s approval of the reappointment of Richard Davidson as Convener of the Investment Committee for a two year term to 31 July 2024 was noted.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

Paper C4

The report was noted, including the Committee’s discussion of recognising the staff workload impacts of major change projects and considering this within the resource implications for relevant projects, which will be taken forward.

- **Senate**

Paper C5

The report was noted, with the outcome of the election for two Senate Assessors to join Court from 1 August 2022 to be reported to the next meeting.

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

5 Student Experience Update

Paper D

An update on student experience initiatives was reviewed, noting that curriculum transformation will feature within the seminar scheduled on the morning of the next meeting, 25 April 2022. Members discussed the following points:

- The work of consultancy firm Nous in helping refresh student experience priorities and the extent of student involvement and engagement in the work;
- Communicating the work the University is undertaking on tackling gender-based violence with students and other stakeholders and to avoid any misperceptions of the process followed for cases reported;
- Recruitment for new professional services student support roles ahead of the next academic year – the intention is to recruit for the new roles as quickly as possible ahead of the new academic year, acknowledging that the labour market may prove challenging;
- The extent to which the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review’s follow-up action plan is being recognised as key priority by all concerned – there is a clear focus on delivery in the implementation groups and it is being emphasised with both current and incoming Heads of School;
- Create a feeling of belonging and community across the varied University estate – this has been a theme of capital plan prioritisation work, including considering new student-centred spaces for informal and formal learning; and,
- The use of pulse surveys and whether there is capacity to respond immediately to findings – making learning environment changes mid-year is often difficult but the surveys provide a useful opportunity to engage with the cohort in-year and are used to communicate that the University is aware of emerging issues. They are also used to generate an evidence base for planning for the new academic year.

6 Students’ Association and Sports Union Reports

Papers E1-E2

The regular reports from the Students’ Association and Sports Union were reviewed and noted.

7 Finance

• Director of Finance’s Report

Paper F1

Updates on the Quarter One forecast for the current year, five-year scenario modelling, a summary of the financial performance of subsidiary companies in 2020-21 and a financial benchmarking exercise with Russell Group peer institutions for the previous year were reviewed. Including an additional metric on student numbers in the scenario modelling was suggested and this can be included in future iterations. The impact of the larger intake of domestic undergraduate students on the EBITA (Earnings Before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation) figure was discussed. Whether the positive in-year financial performance can enable further investment was raised, with additional in-year investment being actively considered.

- **Long-Term Debt Review Proposal**

Paper F2

An update on the University's long-term debt arrangements and a proposal for a detailed review of the arrangements with oversight from a specialist Court Sub-Group was considered. The proposal to undertake a more detailed review with the objective to produce options and recommendations for optimising long-term debt arrangements was agreed, with the membership of a Court External Debt Review Sub-Group to be approved by Exception Committee when finalised.

8 Development of a New Capital Plan

Paper G

Following development by the Capital Plan Working Group and initial review by Estates Committee and Policy & Resources Committee, a proposed capital plan for the period to 2027 was considered. It was noted that the Working Group was established to identify priority projects for a revised and affordable Capital Plan in the changed circumstances following the deferral of previously approved but not started projects at the outset of the pandemic. The intention is to create a balanced portfolio of projects that meet strategic needs but with each project remaining subject to business case approval and funding approval before proceeding. It was noted that challenges remain with the provision of student accommodation and study spaces, which will continue to be worked on, and that the plan will be adapted as new priorities or opportunities emerge. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Maintaining flexibility in the plan to adapt to new circumstances was encouraged;
- Proposals for the Main Library and a new postgraduate study centre have not been prioritised but these would be welcomed by students – it was acknowledged that a number of difficult decisions on prioritisation had to be made but improving the provision of study spaces is recognised as a priority and will be undertaken using other approaches, e.g. through adapting existing spaces; and,
- The contribution that high quality spaces on campus can make towards establishing thriving academic communities that attract staff and students was highlighted and should be considered within any future space usage planning.

The proposed Capital Plan was approved, noting that approval for individual projects will be sought subject to the development of full business cases in due course.

9 Performance Measures to Support Strategy 2030 – Mid-Year Report

Paper H

A mid-year update on the Strategy 2030 performance measures was reviewed. It was noted that the measures have incorporated feedback from Policy & Resources Committee and will be embedded into the planning round process.

10 Data-Driven Innovation Initiative Progress Report, year 2021

Paper I

A progress report on key results and new developments in the Data-Driven Innovation (DDI) initiative in calendar year 2021 was considered. The initiative has been enabled by the largest innovation grant ever received by a UK university and is now in year 4 of a 15 year programme. The key performance indicators are either matching targets or are ahead of target, with a detailed Government review

scheduled for the end of year 5. An updated vision looks to the intended legacy of the programme – to upgrade the data knowledge of University, to deliver inclusive growth regionally, to establish the City Region as the leading data research centre in the UK and to be global location of choice for organisations using data science. The success of the initiative to date was welcomed and promoting the initiative more widely was encouraged, including to Government departments outside of the sponsoring areas with similar policy objectives.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

11 Academic Staff Member Election Regulations 2022 Paper J

Regulations for an Academic Staff Member Election were approved, with a four year term of office for the post agreed.

12 Donations and Legacies; Alumni Activities Paper K

Court noted legacies and donations received since the last meeting and an update on current alumni relations activities.

13 Resolutions Paper L

The following Resolutions were approved:

- No. 1/2022: Foundation of a Chair of Ocean Fluid Dynamics
- No. 2/2022: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Experimental Medicine
- No. 3/2022: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Aging, Health and Methods
- No. 4/2022: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Geometry and Physics

14 Court Meeting Dates 2022-23 Paper M

The following meeting dates for the 2022-23 academic year were approved:

- Tuesday 4 October 2022 (Seminar and Meeting)
- Monday 21 November 2022 (Meeting) *Secretary's Note: it is proposed to amend this to Monday 5 December 2022, to be submitted to the 25 April 2022 meeting*
- Monday 27 February 2023 (Seminar and Meeting)
- Monday 17 April 2023 (Meet the Court event and Meeting)
- Monday 19 June 2023 (Meeting)

15 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

16 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 25 April 2022