



UNIVERSITY COURT

27 February 2023, John McIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls

Web Version

Minute

- Members Present:** Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
Robert Aldridge, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
Douglas Alexander, General Council Assessor
Joyce Anderson, Trade Union Professional Services Staff Member
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Shereen Benjamin, Senatus Assessor
Richard Blythe, Senatus Assessor
Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor
Perdita Fraser, Co-opted Member
Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member
Tobias Kelly, Academic Staff Member
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Sarah McAllister, Professional Services Staff Member
Douglas Millican, Co-opted Member
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
Niamh Roberts, Students' Association President
Isi Williams, Students' Association Vice-President Community
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor
- Member Apologies:** Debora Kayembe, Rector
Alistair Smith, Co-opted Member
- In Attendance:** Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
Kate Huang, Governance Apprentice
Sophia Lycouris, Rector's Assessor
- Presenters & Observers:** Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services
David Argyle, Interim Head of College
Christina Boswell, Vice-Principal Research & Enterprise
Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students
Iain Gordon, Vice-Principal & Head of College
Kim Graham, Provost
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
Theresa Merrick, Director of Communications & Marketing
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning
Paul McGinty, Head of Internal Audit (for Paper D2)
Chris Cox, Vice-Principal Philanthropy and Advancement (for Paper I)

1 Minute

Paper A1

Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, welcomed members and attendees to the meeting and recorded Court's congratulations to all staff and visiting staff members recognised in the 2023 New Year Honours:

- Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, Knighthood, for services to higher education;
- Ewen Harrison, Professor of Surgery and Data Science, OBE for services to the Covid-19 response; and,
- Gillian Wright, Visiting Professor at the Institute for Astronomy, CBE for services to Astronomy through International Missions.

The minute of the meeting held on 5 December 2022 was approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

There were no matters arising and the action log was noted.

3 Principal's Report

Paper B

A summary of the Principal's main activities since the last meeting was noted, with the Principal commenting on the following:

- People & Money System – the appointment of a Special Advisor to the Principal on People & Money, who will provide an initial assessment of the new system to the Principal in the next month. It was confirmed that this is separate to the external review of the People & Money System's implementation to be commissioned by Court (see Agenda item 5, Paper D2);
- The recommendation that Professor Tina Harrison be appointed as Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement), in a change of title from Professor Harrison's current appointment as Assistant Principal for Academic Standards and Quality Assurance;
- The UK Government's appointment of George Freeman MP as Minister of State in the new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has been welcomed by the sector. It is hoped that the recent Windsor Framework regarding trade in Northern Ireland can help enable the UK to re-join the EU's Horizon Europe research funding scheme and that the return of £1.6bn to HM Treasury from the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy of unspent funds earmarked for EU collaborations can be reversed; and,
- A reception held earlier this month to celebrate and recognise staff members with 25 or 40 years or more of service. Those invited had achieved a cumulative 1,920 years of service to date, including a staff member with 60 years of service and two partners each with 40 years of service.

Members raised the following points:

- The recent announcement that a pay award would be made and whether this is a breach of sector-wide negotiations – the Director of Human Resources clarified that sector-wide talks held with Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) had concluded, with an impasse reached. The Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (UCEA) subsequently advised that

institutions implement the pay award for 2023-24, which includes a partial uplift for the remainder of the current year, which the University will do in March, ahead of the new financial year; and,

- The cancellation of the planned screening of the film 'Adult Human Female', plans for a future screening, the Code of Student Conduct in relation to behaviours displayed by attendees/protestors at the event and more widely, the University's commitment to freedom of expression, the views of the Students' Association, comparison with other events and the experiences of some of those present. The University Secretary confirmed the intention to reschedule the screening, reiterated the University's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression and noted the establishment of a working group on this topic, which Court will be updated upon, and that a Resolution containing an updated version of the Code of Student Conduct was approved by Court at its last meeting but as with all similar documents can be reviewed and further updated as appropriate.

The appointment of Professor Tina Harrison as Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement) was approved.

4 Committee Business

- **Senior Lay Member's Overview**

Given the meeting timings, the Senior Lay Member moved discussion to the committee reports below.

- **Policy & Resources Committee**

Paper C1

It was noted that key topics considered by the Committee which feature later in the Court agenda include People & Money, the Director of Finance's Report and the Engineering Hub funding request.

- **Nominations Committee**

Paper C2

The report was noted and the recommended appointment of Professor David Argyle as a Curator of Patronage from 1 April 2023 for an initial term of three years was approved. Congratulations were recorded on the appointment of Professor David Argyle as Vice-Principal and Head of College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine and the Chancellor's reappointment of Alastair Dunlop KC as Chancellor's Assessor for a second term of four years from 1 August 2023. It was noted that executive search agency Korn Ferry has been appointed to assist with upcoming recruitment exercise for new Court members.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

Paper C3

The report was noted and recent developments in artificial intelligence and potential implications for the University arising from these were discussed, including in student assessments and use by software developers. It was agreed to make available emerging guidance for student use of generative artificial intelligence (such as ChatGPT) when finalised.

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

5 People and Money

• People and Money Systems Update

Paper D1

An update on the implementation of the People and Money systems and processes was reviewed. Work since the previous meeting has concentrated on operational improvements, including reducing the volume of outstanding payments and bolstering resources in central Finance and Information Services areas to allow College finance leads to resume usual duties. Meetings have been held with College leadership teams to help inform areas of future focus, with comments on: improving the visibility of information in the system; a sense from regular users of a dilution of autonomy and difficulty in being able to complete tasks; and, a need to support resourcing at a local level. Near term priorities for further improvement work include research finance elements and reviewing purchase to pay processes, to be informed by the work of the Special Advisor to the Principal on People & Money.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- School-level experience of the new system continuing to impact on time and resources available for other activities – it was acknowledged that some staff continue to be diverted from their usual roles and will return to these as soon as possible but timing will vary. There has been a budgetary impact in many local areas and this can be considered within the Planning Round process;
- Training on the new system for relevant staff – this was a key issue raised in feedback as an area to improve and has been challenging given the need to follow system and process improvements that continue to be made, as well as difficulties in recruiting staff who can lead training on the system;
- The role of the Special Advisor to the Principal on People & Money and the Special Advisor's interaction with stakeholders – the Special Advisor has been encouraged to meet any individuals or groups that may assist in providing an initial assessment of the new system. Findings and recommendations will be submitted to the Principal, who will share these as appropriate with the Senior Leadership Team and Enactment Group;
- Resourcing any permanent changes made and assessing workload implications of the new system before other strategic change projects are progressed – changes will continue to be made over the coming months so it is not yet possible to finalise the number of permanent changes and any workload implications but this will be considered and will inform other projects, as shown in the 'Recommendations for Future Provision of Strategic Change and Continuous Improvement Support' University Executive paper shared at the previous meeting. Resourcing needs will continue to be monitored and can be considered within the Planning Round;
- Process changes should be in order to optimise the working and benefits of the new system rather than a return to previous processes that will not realise benefits from the new system;
- What an improved position would look like – a successful system will be one that is not regularly raised as an issue of concern and provides staff with the agency and capacity to complete necessary system tasks; and,
- Colleagues involved in progressing work in this area were recognised and thanked.

A proposal for an external review of the implementation of the People & Money System was considered. It was noted that this has been developed by the Head of Internal Audit following agreement at the previous meeting that a proposal covering the commissioning, scope and timescale of an external review should be submitted for approval to this meeting. The outcomes of the external review should help inform future decision-making and oversight for major change projects and system procurement and implementation.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Scope and coverage: the scope as drafted is broad and could be tightened to focus predominantly on the implementation of the finance aspects; the review could compare examples of the implementation of similar systems in other organisations to identify issues that are generic and those that are specific to this implementation; considering the escalation of any concerns raised during the implementation, responses to these and stakeholder engagement was suggested – noting that these can be encompassed within the existing text included within the aims and objectives section; consultation with Senate – it was noted that the Head of Internal Audit will update Senate and seek input at the next meeting; how lessons learned can be applied to ongoing strategic change projects – the Provost and Vice-Principal Corporate Services are presently considering the approach to strategic change projects and lessons from the external review can be incorporated within this, while continuing to progress change projects and other continuous improvement work to help achieve the University's ambitions;
- Selection panel: options for the Court membership of the selection panel involved in final interviews/presentations from bidders along with procurement and Internal Audit staff and the University Secretary or delegate – noting that this is to conduct a technical review of bids and not a review of the scope or other aspects, which is being agreed at this juncture;
- Timing: the timeframe for the review will influence the costs given that costs will accrue on a daily rate basis; the timing should be balanced against the current priority of completing stabilisation work on the system; a deadline of producing a report to the December 2023 Court meeting was proposed;
- Reporting: it was noted that most advisory/consultancy firms work on the premise that their reports are for internal management and organisational purposes and not for broader dissemination and any alternative approach should be reflected in the procurement process from the outset;

It was agreed that:

- The review's scope and coverage is with the intention of learning lessons to inform future projects of this ilk and should focus predominantly on the implementation of the finance aspects;
- The selection panel should include the Senior Lay Member and the Convener of Audit & Risk Committee given relevant experience, with the option of a Senate Assessor;
- The review should produce a final report for the December 2023 Court meeting; and,

- It should be specified within the procurement process that the report is for the use of the Court and management in the first instance but that Court will likely wish to share the key findings, recommendations or actions arising (or a summary of these) more widely as it considers appropriate.

The proposal was approved with the incorporation of the four points agreed above.

6 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports

Papers E1-E2

Regular reports from the Students' Association and Sports Union were presented. The extension of the student participation fund into the second semester was welcomed, noting the continuing difficulties faced by many students given increased costs of living and that this remains a key campaigning priority for the Association, particularly accommodation costs. Engagement levels in student elections was discussed, noting that the upcoming elections will be well contested, with the current sabbatical officers focused on communications to improve turnout. It was commented that being able to demonstrate ways in which the Association has helped deliver improvements for students would be beneficial in building engagement. It was noted that, unlike some other institutions, the Association continues to have an active Student Council, demonstrating a continued level of student engagement.

7 Director of Finance's Report

Paper F

The Director of Finance's Report was reviewed, including updates on the full year financial forecast and the external audit tender process. The forecast information was welcomed and a request made for future iterations to also include in-year income and expenditure figures to date. It was confirmed that summary University-only monthly management accounts can be provided in future reports, with financial information on subsidiaries recorded quarterly.

8 Engineering Hub

Paper G

A revised funding request for the Engineering Hub project was considered. It was noted that the project's funding had been previously approved by Court in September 2019 but had been deferred in 2020 along with other non-contractually committed capital projects as part of the initial response to the pandemic. The project has now been updated to reflect recent cost increases in the construction sector and seeks funding approval. Construction sector inflation was discussed and its likely impact on the capital plan more widely and whether the contingency allocated in the project budget is sufficient – noting that this will be more accurately forecasted when the tender is finalised shortly. It was noted that the building design remains unchanged and that the urgency and importance of the project has led to its prioritisation. The Hub's focus on interdisciplinary research in climate and sustainability, particularly in energy, was highlighted.

Court:

- Noted the revised Full Business Case, approved by Estates Committee;
- Approved funding to progress the project to completion; and,
- Noted that this is in addition to previously approved funding for Design Team fees and enabling works.

9 Update on Research Excellence Framework (REF) Planning

Paper H

An update on planning for the next Research Excellence Framework exercise was presented. More information on the shape and timing of the next exercise should be known from June 2023, when the Future Research Assessment Programme is expected to report. Research output quality was discussed, including ensuring consistent messaging on its importance, including in appointment and promotion assessments – acknowledging variances by discipline, seniority and in different research cultures in different countries in the weighting of quality and volume of research. Other peer institutions with strong performances in the previous exercise were discussed, with work to analyse these in greater depth to identify points of comparison and learning.

10 Development & Alumni Annual Report; Donations and Legacies; Alumni Activities

Paper I

An overview of work led by the Development & Alumni Office in the 2021/22 academic year was presented along with a regular update on donations and legacies and alumni activities. It was noted that philanthropic giving continued during the pandemic period owing to strong relationships with existing donors who made repeat donations. As restrictions have receded new donor relationships have been able to be established in addition to existing relationships. Donors have been attracted by areas within the University's Strategy 2030 relating to inclusive excellence and the research themes of climate, health and data/Artificial Intelligence and it was noted that these are expected to be growth areas for future philanthropic giving.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

11 Student Pulse Survey Update

Paper J

A report on the recent Student Pulse Survey undertaken in December 2022 was considered. Improving the response rate was discussed and difficulties in making year on year comparisons. It was noted that the survey has moved from a classroom-based evaluation to an online survey, which has reduced the response rate. A response to the survey has now been circulated to students and may aid future engagement. An alternative approach of following a selected cohort over time was also suggested.

12 Update on arrangements for Senate and Senate Standing Committee Elections, and proposed amendment to Senate Election Regulations

Paper K

Arrangements for forthcoming Senate and Senate Standing Committee Elections were noted and a proposed amendment to the Senate Election Regulations relating to the treatment of Senate Assessor positions within the overall count of elected Senate staff members considered. Advice from the University's Legal Services department and from external solicitors that the proposed amendment would be in breach of University Ordinance 212 (Composition of the Senatus Academicus) was reviewed. It was noted that further commentary from the author of the proposed amendment had been circulated and that the legal advice had been reviewed in light

of this and remained unchanged. Recording the abstention of the Senate Assessors from voting on this item, Court resolved that the proposed amendment should not be approved and agreed that the treatment of the Senate Assessor positions within the Senate Election Regulations should be considered further to identify any alternative approaches to improve upon the current drafting.

13 Laigh Year Regulations

Paper L

It was noted that the Laigh Year Regulations (which allow student sabbatical officers to matriculate as students of the University without, during the academic year concerned, having to fulfil the normal academic requirement of their programme of study in order to undertake their full-time sabbatical officer duties) are reviewed on a quinquennial basis, with no changes proposed following the current review, then submitted to Senate and Court for dual approval. Recording the abstention of the Students' Association President and Students' Association Vice-President Community on this item, Court approved the Laigh Year Regulations as presented.

14 Resolutions

Paper M

The following Resolutions were approved:

- No. 1/2023: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Hepatobiliary Cancer
- No. 2/2023: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Digital Health and Data Science
- No. 3/2023: Foundation of a Chair of Robot Systems
- No. 4/2023: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Engineering Biology
- No. 5/2023: Alteration of the Title of the Chair of Health in Social Science
- No. 6/2023: Foundation of a Chair of Statistical Learning
- No. 7/2023: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Plant Engineering Biology

15 Court Meeting Dates 2023/24

Paper N

Meeting dates for the 2023/24 academic year were approved as follows:

- Monday 9 October 2023 (Seminar and Meeting)
- Monday 4 December 2023 (Meeting)
- Monday 26 February 2024 (Seminar and Meeting)
- Monday 22 April 2024 (Meeting)
- Monday 17 June 2024 (Meeting)

16 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

17 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 17 April 2023, 2-5pm