



UNIVERSITY COURT

26 February 2024, Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, High School Yards

Minutes

- Members Present:** Debora Kayembe, Rector
Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
Douglas Alexander, General Council Assessor
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Sharan Atwal, Students' Association President
Shereen Benjamin, Senatus Assessor
Richard Blythe, Senatus Assessor
Lauren Byrne, Students' Association Vice-President Welfare
Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor
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
Mark Patrizio, Trade Union Professional Services Staff Member
Kavi Thakrar, Co-opted Member
- Member Apologies:** Rushad Abadan, Co-opted Member
Robert Aldridge, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
Alistair Smith, Co-opted Member
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor
Imran Khan, Governance Apprentice
- In Attendance:** Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
Sophia Lycouris, Rector's Assessor
- Presenters & Observers:** Lewis Allan, Senior Governance Advisor to the Vice-Principal & University Secretary
David Argyle, Vice-Principal & 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
Louise Kelso, General Counsel & Director of Legal Services
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
Theresa Merrick, Director of Communications & Marketing
Sarah Prescott, Vice-Principal & Head of College
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning
Daniel Wedgwood, Head of Court Services

OPENING ITEMS

1 Minute

Paper A1

Debora Kayembe, Rector, noted apologies and welcomed members and attendees.

The minute of the meeting held on 4 December 2023 was approved, with amendment to the minute of item 10, Grade Scale Review, to add the following sentence, which reflected commitments made in the relevant paper:

“Recognising the budgetary impact of the proposals, the Senior Leadership Team reaffirmed their collective commitment to plan and deliver performance against budgets (income and expenditure) that would collectively deliver annual EBITDA outcomes in the Court-agreed range of 7-9%.”

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

The Senior Lay Member, as Convener of Exception Committee, noted that Exception Committee had completed formal approval of the University’s Annual Report & Accounts following the last meeting of Court and that these had been submitted to the Scottish Funding Council before its 31 December deadline. In addition, the University’s return under the US Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) had been separately approved by Exception Committee and completed in January. Exception Committee minutes for each of these approvals had been made available to Court as background documents for this meeting.

The Action Log was noted.

3 Principal’s Report

Paper B

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, emphasised a number of recent successes for the University that were noted in his written report, including:

- record levels of philanthropic support received in the previous academic year;
- the award of Educational Partnership of the Year to The University’s Zhejiang University partnership at the recent China-British Business Council awards;
- the founding of Scotland Beyond Net Zero (SBNZ), initially by the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, which would bring together world-class expertise from institutions across Scotland;
- the award of the Tam Dalyell Prize for Excellence in Engaging the Public with Science to Dr James Cook;
- the announcement by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) of the new £14.25m Engineered Genetic Control Systems for Advanced Therapeutics Hub, bringing together a multidisciplinary team from the Universities of Edinburgh and Oxford, Imperial College London and the CRUK Scotland Institute, as part of a £100m UK-wide investment by UKRI in engineering biology;
- Edinburgh’s lead role or involvement in more than half of the nine centres announced as part of the £80m UK-wide investment in applying AI to real-

world data and research by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

The Principal & Vice-Chancellor also commented on trends in student applications and university finances in the Scottish and UK higher education sectors, noting that the University was in a strong position relative to many peer institutions, but aware of financial risks under certain projections of potential future trends and actively engaged in scenario planning for these.

In discussion, it was noted that demand from potential students remained high and that careful management of the process conversion from applications to acceptances, while complex, could provide for maintenance of student recruitment levels even under conditions of falling application numbers.

4 Committee Business

- **Senior Lay Member's Overview**

Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, noted this was Debora Kayembe's final meeting as Rector and thanked her for her service in this role, noting that there would be a further opportunity to express Court's gratitude at the Court dinner in June.

The incoming Rector, Simon Fanshawe, had been elected unopposed, his being the only valid nomination received. It was noted that two letters commenting on this process, expressing opposing points of view, had recently been received. These had not been circulated to Court, on the grounds that the appointment of the Rector was not in itself a matter for Court and that it was recognised by all parties that the Court-approved election regulations had been followed correctly.

It was noted that Imran Khan had been appointed from a high-quality field of applicants as Court's Governance Apprentice for 2024. He would attend Court for the first time at Court's April meeting.

- **Policy & Resources Committee**

Paper C1

The report was noted. The Senior Lay Member, speaking as Convener of Policy & Resources Committee (PRC), noted that a detailed update had been received on work relating to the presence of Reinforced Aerated Autoclaved Concrete in some University buildings and that the committee had taken assurance from this that this issue was being handled appropriately. PRC had also thoroughly reviewed requests for allocation of funds within the Capital Plan for the small works programme and the proposed multi-year energy efficiency programme, both of which appeared later in the Court agenda, and recommended these for approval by Court.

- **Nominations Committee**

Paper C2

Court noted the report and approved the following re-appointments of Trustees of the Staff Benefits Scheme: Julia Miller for a two-year term to 31 July 2026, Doreen Davidson for a four-year term to 31 July 2028 and Ashley Shannon for a four-year term to 31 July 2028.

- **Contingency Deputising Arrangements for the Principal.** Court approved the revised document and agreed that the paper could be designated open upon approval.
- **Handling Correspondence Addressed to Court.** Court approved the proposed framework for handling correspondence. It was noted that Court might find it useful to receive an annual summary of the volume of correspondence received and topics covered.

- **Audit & Risk Committee**

Paper C3

Court noted the report. The Convener of Audit & Risk Committee noted that published results contained in the Annual Report & Accounts and the US GAAP accounts, as formally approved by Exception Committee (see item 2, above), were consistent with those presented to Court at its meeting on 4 December 2023.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

Paper C4

Court noted the report.

- **Senate**

Paper C5

Court noted the report. Richard Blythe, Senate Assessor, commended the Clerk to Senate, Olivia Hayes, for preparatory work that had facilitated highly constructive outcomes from the most recent meeting of Senate, in particular from discussions of the Curriculum Transformation Project, which had in turn informed Court members' understanding of this area.

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

5 Student Experience

- **Student Experience Update**
- **Quality Enhancement and Standards Review**

Paper D1

Paper D2

Court received an overview of recent work in relation to enhancement of the student experience, including the recommendations of the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland and how the University was responding to these recommendations.

Overall, significant progress had been made, with work led by Heads of College feeding into a newly-established Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Oversight Board, which helped to ensure consistency and to share best practice across the Colleges. Court received a more detailed overview of work within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to exemplify these points.

Within the overall focus on the Student Experience, the handling of assessment and feedback was the highest priority. Progress had been made both in implementing the norm of a three-week limit on receipt of feedback and in monitoring compliance with

this norm across the University. It was recognised that there was significant complexity in gathering and interpreting figures: the intention was that a focus on the normal three-week limit should help to illuminate any barriers to feedback within this limit, not impose an overly simplistic or punitive approach.

In discussion of this point, Court members encouraged consideration of other aspects of assessment, in addition to the timeliness of feedback, including the amount and types of assessment that students might face. It was noted that an exercise was underway to audit these and other aspects of assessment and that external feedback from the QESR was a helpful point of reference in this work. The Curriculum Transformation Project also provided a useful framework for consideration of these matters.

It was noted that the Student Support Model (SSM) had had a very positive impact, with input from all parts of the University. Evaluation of the SSM was on-going but the intention was to move relevant work from a project model to a business-as-usual footing. Discussion of the SSM focused on the 'cohort lead' role, which had been implemented in different ways, and with mixed success, across the University. It was noted that this had intentionally been an area in which Schools had been given flexibility to develop locally appropriate practices and that it was now an appropriate time to assess the success of different models and provide support where needed.

In further discussion, it was noted that work continued on training of postgraduate tutors and demonstrators and that significant progress was expected in this area as a result of recent recruitment to relevant leadership positions.

6 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports

6.1 Students' Association Report

Paper E1

The President of the Students' Association introduced the report, noting that, in addition to updates on the sabbatical officers' recent activities, it contained extended presentation of the Association's concerns regarding the impacts on students of the raised cost of living, increases in rents charged for University-owned accommodation and the handling of alleged cases of gender-based violence. It was noted that these matters were also the topic of a letter addressed to Court that was appended to the report and had been the foci of a demonstration organised by the Students' Association earlier in the day. The Association was keen to raise these matters to Court's attention, reflecting the strength of the Association's concerns, while recognising that it was not Court's role to engage in decision-making at an operational level.

Court noted the concerns raised in the report. The following points were made in discussion:

- There had been previous engagement between the University's senior management and the Students' Association on the matters raised, although disagreements remained.
- The Senior Lay Member had met recently with the President of the Students' Association to discuss these issues.

- In some cases, available support for students was not being taken up by those who would qualify for it, suggesting a need to re-assess relevant communications and potential barriers to uptake.
- The context for increases in rents included the need for the University to invest in both maintaining and expanding its residences. Both the demand for University accommodation and the overall supply of suitable accommodation in the city had changed significantly in recent years, creating new pressures.
- The Student Experience as a whole was foremost among the University's priorities and, within this, the importance of the matters raised in the report was recognised by both Court and the University's senior management.
- It was suggested that joint work might be undertaken between the University and the Students' Association on the nature of student life in Edinburgh, now and as it might evolve in the future.

Recognising that significant disagreements remained, Court encouraged further engagement between the University's executive leadership and the Students' Association. It was also agreed that there should be further consideration of the wider student experience, beyond educational aspects, at a future Court meeting or seminar.

Court agreed that Court should provide a response to the Student Association's letter, noting Court's consideration of the matters raised, and noted that the University's senior management would provide a substantive response.

6.2 Sports Union Report

Paper E2

The report was noted. Court noted in particular the significant sporting and professional achievements of students and staff that were reported in the paper.

7 Finance

7.1 Director of Finance's Report

Paper F1

The Director of Finance summarised the report. Budget holders were seeking opportunities to reduce expenditure, including through workforce planning and efficiencies arising through new applications of technology. The University was continuing to track its debt covenants.

Court noted the report.

7.2 Revolving Credit Facilities Renewal

Paper F2

Court granted approvals and delegated authority as requested, to facilitate renewal of revolving credit facilities.

8 People and Money System and Roadmap

Paper G

Court received an update on work relating to the People & Money system. Priority areas had been identified and a roadmap for further improvements had been developed. This took into account user feedback and the findings of the external

review that Court had discussed at its previous meeting, The roadmap was shortly to be discussed by the University Executive and would be shared with Court at its next meeting.

Court was also informed of new governance arrangements for the People & Money project, which would henceforth report to the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB), the Enactment Group having concluded its work. The UIPB had met twice since its inception, with a focus on preparatory work and relevant training for UIPB members.

An integrated communications plan was in development, taking into account feedback from recent all-staff 'town hall' meetings.

In discussion, the costs of the ongoing work were raised. It was noted that costs were carefully monitored and controlled, with an awareness of previous expenditure in relation to the system, but also that the planned work included a number of essential matters.

It was noted that certain changes were to be made to the system independently, as Oracle was changing aspects of the user interface in all such systems. Information Services were preparing for this.

Court noted the update.

9 Forest and Peatlands Programme First Annual Report 2022-23 Paper H

Court received a summary of the First Annual Report of the Forest and Peatlands Programme, the University's in-house carbon off-setting scheme, which also brought multiple opportunities for educational, research and community benefits. Good progress had been made, with land purchases completed and partnerships with other landowners in development.

Court noted the report.

10 Development and Alumni Annual Report Paper I

Court noted the report.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

11 Small Works Programme and Statutory Compliance Budget Allocation Paper J

Court approved the allocation of funds included within the current capital plan for the Small Works and Statutory Compliance Programme 2024/25, noting that further work was underway to establish the additional funding required to meet the demand for small projects and essential works.

12 Proposed Multiyear Energy Efficiency Programme **Paper K**

Court approved funds from within an allocation in the current Capital Plan to establish a multiyear project pipeline for the Energy Efficiency Programme.

13 Update on arrangements for Senate and Senate Standing Committee Elections, and proposed amendments to Senate Election Regulations **Paper L**

Court approved the proposed amendments to the Senate Election Regulations, noting that this would include the Professional Services Staff Member of Court becoming an *ex officio* member of Senate, and approved a minor consequential amendment to Court's Standing Orders.

14 Professional Services Staff Member Election Regulations 2024 **Paper M**

Sarah McAllister, Professional Services Staff Member, recused herself from discussion and decision-making on this item.

Court approved the regulations for a Professional Services Staff Member Election.

15 General Council Membership & Registration Ordinance **Paper N**

Court approved the draft Ordinances, as presented in the paper, for submission to the Privy Council Office and delegated authority to the University Secretary to agree any further nonmaterial changes to the Ordinances as might be requested by the Scottish Government or Privy Council.

16 Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity **Paper O**

Court noted legacies and donations received and the reported alumni relations activities.

17 Court Meeting Dates 2024/25 and 2025/26 **Paper P**

Court approved the proposed meeting dates for 2024/25 and 2025/26.

18 Resolutions **Paper Q**

Court approved the following Resolutions:

- No. 1/2024: alteration of the Personal Chair of Sociology of Emotions and Relationships to be designated Personal Chair of Sociology;
- No. 2/2024: alteration of the Personal Chair of European Politics to be designated Personal Chair of Neuropolitics; and
- No. 3/2024: Foundation of a Chair of Generative AI.

19 Any Other Business **Paper R**

The Rector recused herself from the meeting. The Rector's Assessor proposed that Court should consider remunerating future Rectors, on the grounds that this could

open the position to a wider range of potential candidates, including those who might otherwise find it difficult to support themselves financially while devoting time to the role. It was agreed that Nominations Committee would consider this matter at a future meeting.

The Rector returned to the meeting. Noting that this was her final meeting in the role, and therefore her final meeting as a member of Court, the Rector thanked all the members of Court. She offered reflections on her time in this position, her background and experiences prior to this and her hopes and priorities for the future, stressing the importance of tolerance, respect and courage in all endeavours, both for the University and in other contexts.

20 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 22 April 2024, 14.00-17.00