



UNIVERSITY COURT

22 April 2024, Institute for Regeneration and Repair, Edinburgh BioQuarter

Minutes

- Members Present:** Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
Simon Fanshawe, Rector
Rushad Abadan, Co-opted Member (items 1-12)
Robert Aldridge, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
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
Alistair Smith, Co-opted Member
Kavi Thakrar, Co-opted Member
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor (items 1-7)
- Member Apologies:** None
- In Attendance:** Imran Khan, Governance Apprentice
Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
Gale Macleod, 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
Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
Ruth Elliott (Vice-President Community elect)
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
Dora Herndon (EUSA President elect)
Gary Jebb, Director of Place
Louise Kelso, General Counsel & Director of Legal Services

Alan Mackay, Deputy Vice-Principal International
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

Welcome

Paper A1

The Rector welcomed members and attendees, extending a particular welcome to those attending a Court meeting for the first time:

- Gale MacLeod, Rector's Assessor
- Imran Khan, Governance Apprentice
- Dora Herndon, Students' Association President elect
- Ruth Elliott, Students' Association Vice-President Community elect
- Olivia Hayes, Clerk to Senate
- Damien Toner, Director of Estates

The Rector thanked Court members for the welcome he had received since taking up his role and the opportunities he had had to engage with many members of the University community, including a number of Court members and attendees. He noted his priorities in the role of Rector, which included promotion of the free exchange of ideas and fostering constructive disagreement, relating these to the ideals of the Scottish enlightenment that were central to the University's history. He expressed his hope that such notions would underpin the University's continued success and enable it to meet a variety of challenges.

Having opened the meeting, the Rector invited the Senior Lay Member to chair the main items of business on the agenda.

1 Minutes

Paper A1

The Senior Lay Member welcomed the Rector to his first meeting of Court. She thanked David Argyle and Ashley Shannon for their presentation earlier in the day on the BioQuarter and thanked colleagues from the Institute for Regeneration and Repair for hosting the meeting and providing a tour of the Institute.

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2024 were approved, subject to amended wording relating to the EUSA President's Report, which had been requested by the student members of Court and agreed by the Senior Lay Member. This amended wording was shared with and agreed by Court within the meeting.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

The Action Log was noted.

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, introduced his written report. He noted in particular the positive relationship that the University had with, and the constructive challenge it received from, EUSA and looked forward to this continuing under the incoming EUSA sabbatical officers.

Key points in the report included the following:

- The UK higher education sector was facing significant financial challenges with a variety of causes. Edinburgh was in a strong position relative to many other universities but would not be immune to the relevant external developments.
- Senior University leaders had taken part in the second Student Voice Forum organised by EUSA.
- There had been two occupations of University premises, in March and April, which had caused significant disruption to learning and teaching, although the University had made every effort to minimise this. The occupations had been staged in relation to the situation in Palestine, including protests against alleged connections to the University's investments.
- Lauren Vicary, Senior Vice President at an influential Washington DC-based thinktank had visited the University and contributed to a wide variety of educational and other events over a four-day programme designed to provide maximum benefit to students and foster collaboration with colleagues.
- The Principal had participated in a series of successful events as part of a visit to New York and Toronto organised by Development & Alumni, including engagement with alumni groups, supporters and prospective students.
- The University had seen excellent performance in attracting research funding in the first half of the 2023/24 academic year, with a range of major awards across all three Colleges.

Subsequent discussion focused on how the University managed its investments in line with ethical principles, with reference made to claims made in the context of the aforementioned building occupations. It was noted that the University had been seen as a model for other institutions with respect to a number of investment and divestment decisions and that the University's Investment Committee was aware of relevant current debates within the University community. The Director of Finance gave an overview of relevant processes, noting that Investment Committee was an independent body reporting into Policy and Resources Committee (PRC), not a branch of the executive. In addition, the University worked through external investment managers to invest in funds, rather than directly selecting companies to invest in. The external fund managers were instructed to work to certain criteria, including the University's agreed policies regarding ethical investment. Where any concerns were raised about companies within relevant investment funds, the University sought clarification from its investment managers, would take action as appropriate and would feedback the outcomes of this process to those who had raised concerns. It was agreed that Investment Committee should summarise relevant matters in a future report to PRC.

The level of higher education funding in Scotland was also discussed. The Principal noted that a recent reduction to the sector's teaching grant from the Scottish Funding

Council was a cause for concern, but that the outlook for the University remained optimistic overall, albeit in the context of an increasingly challenging wider environment.

4 Committee Business

- **Senior Lay Member's Overview**

The Senior Lay Member noted that she had replied to the letter shared with Court at its February meeting by the President of the Students' Association (EUSA) and that a longer response to this letter had also been supplied by the University's executive leadership. Both of these responses had been made available to Court members.

- **Policy & Resources Committee**

Paper C1

The report was noted. The Senior Lay Member, as Convener of Policy & Resources Committee (PRC), highlighted PRC's recommendation that Court approve the requested funding for works to remediate the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in University buildings [see item 13] and emphasised that both Estates Committee and PRC had considered this matter thoroughly.

- **Audit & Risk Committee**

Paper C2

The Convener of Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) highlighted the Strategic Risk Report [see item 15], which he commended as a high-quality report resulting from a thorough collaborative exercise, involving ARC and the University Executive, and taking into account a peer benchmarking exercise. He also highlighted the continuing issue of overdue internal audit actions, noting that progress in this area had been very slow.

A review of the process for completing the Annual Report & Accounts had given confidence that the normal timetable for this could be achieved in the coming year, following an exceptional process in 2023, albeit one in which all key deadlines had been met.

Court noted the report.

- **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

Paper C3

Court noted the report.

- **Senate**

Verbal

The Principal & Vice-Chancellor, as Convenor of Senate, noted that there had been no meeting of Senate since the last meeting of Court. Therefore, no written report had been provided. Two relevant developments were noted:

- Elections to Senate were underway. Those nominated for professorial positions had been elected unopposed, as there had been fewer candidates

than vacant positions in this case. There had been discussion of how to increase interest in professorial Senate membership in the future.

- The Task & Finish Group on implementation of the recommendations of the Senate effectiveness review had begun its work, focusing initially on prioritising the recommendations.

The Senate Assessors commented that the Task & Finish Group had made a very positive start to its work and noted a desire to explore ways to improve communication between Senate and Court.

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

5 Student Experience

Paper D

Court received an overview of recent progress in relation to enhancement of the student experience. Within the Student Support Model, the cohort lead role, which had been discussed at Court's February meeting, had been a point of focus. There had been significant work to clarify and develop this role, with a recognition that some variation across different Schools remained. There had been monitoring and evaluation of the interaction of students with different University services as part of measuring the success of the Student Support Model.

A single, consistent tool had been developed for tracking practices around assessment and feedback, with a focus on meeting the three-week turnaround target for feedback on assessments. This was at an early stage and undergoing testing but promised much greater clarity in this area, supporting College-level oversight and escalation processes. Assessment and feedback had also been the focus of a recent meeting of the Academic Strategy Group, with all Heads of College highlighting the high priority attached to improvement in this area and stressing the importance of both quality and timeliness of feedback.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- The proposed portfolio review was welcomed. It was noted that further detail on this would be provided in the next update to Court on the Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP).
- Reliable numerical data on the timeliness of feedback could not yet be provided. There was a commitment to provide indicative quantitative data to the next meeting of Court, although the data would necessarily be preliminary at that stage. It was noted that one purpose of the target was to help identify and address barriers to feedback within this timeframe, which could relate to academic discipline, course size and other factors. Analysis of differences across Schools was carried out regularly and good practice shared across the University.
- It was noted that the student experience retained a high risk rating in the University's risk register. This was felt to be an appropriate reflection of the importance of the issue and the sense of urgency that the University leadership shared with members of Court, in addition to the likely time-lag for current progress to feed into measurable outcomes, such as National Student Survey results.

- The project to implement the Student Support Model was reaching its end, after which the Model would be integrated into business as usual. It would be important to maintain support throughout the institution in order to ensure a consistent quality of student experience. There had been positive feedback from students, in particular with regard to the wellbeing service and the availability of student advisors locally. Staff had noted that improved alignment of support had made problems easier to anticipate and address at an early stage. Work was in progress to clarify the roles of student advisors, the limits to these roles and referrals to the wellbeing service.
- Work on implementation of the recommendations of the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review was on-going. An update would be provided to the Students' Association following relevant forthcoming meetings.
- The high priority attached to the student experience should not prevent Court from giving due attention to other important matters. Therefore, thought should be given to how Court would receive and consider updates on this area at future meetings.

6 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports

6.1 Students' Association Report

Paper E1

Court noted the report. The President of the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) noted that she had received a reply from the Senior Lay Member, on behalf of Court, and a more detailed response from the University's senior executive leadership to the letter that EUSA had submitted to the previous Court meeting, on the topics of rents for University accommodation, the impacts on students of increases in the cost of living and the handling of reports of gender-based violence. EUSA would consider these responses, which had also been shared with Court, before engaging further on any of these topics.

The popularity of the EUSA Student Awards and Teaching Awards was highlighted: a high number of nominations had been received in both cases. It was noted that this implied widespread appreciation of the efforts of students and University staff in ways that often went far beyond their usual responsibilities and beyond expectations.

There was discussion of the turnout for student elections. This had been raised relative to previous years but remained below EUSA's strategic target. It was noted that the current levels were in line with sector norms. EUSA continued to seek innovative ways to raise the turnout.

Court thanked the two student members of Court, Sharan Atwal and Lauren Byrne, for their substantial contributions as members of Court. Their terms of office were drawing to a close and recently elected EUSA sabbatical officers would be taking up the role of student Court member as of the June meeting of Court.

6.2 Sports Union Report

Paper E2

The report was noted. Court noted that the paper contained details of a number of exceptional performances by the University's elite athletes.

7 Finance

7.1 Director of Finance's Report

Paper F1

The Director of Finance introduced the report, which included an update on the Quarter 2 forecast position for 2023-24.

As reported to the previous meeting of Court, inflation had affected the University's financial position through increased expenditure and the University had experienced a shortfall, relative to targeted levels, in tuition fee income, as a result of changing patterns of international recruitment that had affected the UK higher education sector as a whole.

It was noted that work was in hand to improve the provision of management accounts to Court, such that more up-to-date results could be provided to future meetings. Work was on-going at executive level to ensure expenditure was correctly categorised, to forecast market conditions, to mitigate risks and to review capital plans, and Court would be fully informed of the outcomes.

7.2 Planning Round

Paper F2

Court was provided with an interim update on progress in the planning round. To provide context, movements in major income streams were outlined, including recently announced funding for universities by the Scottish Funding Council. While this had come to constitute a relatively small proportion of the University's total income, it continued to play a crucial role, including in leveraging other sources of funding.

Court discussed the importance of integrating expenditure on major University initiatives into the largely 'bottom-up' planning round process. It was noted that this integration had improved in recent planning rounds and that the work of the University Initiatives Portfolio Board should bring still greater understanding and articulation of the costs of major initiatives.

The University's 'size and shape' principles were also raised as context for planning round decisions. It was noted that recruitment targets continued to be set in the context of these principles. Growth was not sought as an end in itself, nor would growth be used as a means to tackle financial challenges. Size and shape remained an important area of active analysis, with post-pandemic effects continuing to affect the size and balance of the student population.

8 People and Money Systems and Roadmap Update

Paper G

Court received an overview of recent developments relating to the People and Money (P&M) system. An Improvement Plan, also known as the 'roadmap', had been developed and had been shared with Court. It was noted that this was not a detailed project plan nor a communications tool, but rather a prioritised set of activities that was designed to be flexible and to incorporate more detailed projects in due course. P&M had now moved into a new phase of activity and, with it, new governance and reporting arrangements; P&M was now reporting into the University

Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB), alongside other prioritised major initiatives, with UIPB reporting in turn to the University Executive.

Court had also received a letter from the Business Committee of the General Council, seeking reassurances on a number of points that had been raised in the external review of P&M which had been discussed ahead of Court's December meeting. A proposed response to this letter, provided by the University's senior executive leadership with additional material supplied on behalf of Court where appropriate, had been shared with Court.

One amendment to this draft response was proposed, to clarify that Court would continue to be involved in responding to the external report, in the following ways:

- publication of the full report (which had already been done);
- taking oversight of the commitment received from Senior Leadership to implement the report's recommendations; and
- ongoing review of progress with addressing the recommendations, via relevant committees.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- It would be advisable to have systematic reporting on progress towards delivery of the roadmap. It was noted that UIPB had developed a tracking tool to this end.
- The external report had highlighted issues of staff engagement and trust following the implementation of P&M. Reporting on steps taken to address these points was requested and there was discussion of how the University's Risk Register captured risks relating to staff engagement and confidence.
- It was noted that it was unusual for the General Council Business Committee to write directly to Court. It was understood that this was intended as an exceptional action, reflecting the exceptional nature of the external report on P&M.

Subject to the amendment noted above, Court approved those parts of the response to the General Council Business Committee letter that were labelled as Court's response and noted the rest of the response.

9 Annual People Report

Paper H

This item was deferred to the 17 June meeting of Court for reasons of time.

10 Equality Diversity & Inclusion Data Report 2024

Paper I

Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), introduced the report. It was noted that the report focussed on data, rather than policy or relevant initiatives, and contributed to legal compliance in addition to keeping Court informed. Many areas showed progress with respect to EDI objectives, while areas for further work had also been identified. The latter included inequalities relating to ethnicity of staff and contract types held, where the data would be examined carefully to understand the precise nature of these inequalities and their likely causes, in the context of increasing diversity in the population. Similarly, further work was being undertaken to illuminate student attainment gaps relating to a

number of protected characteristics and how these might have been affected by factors including the Covid-19 pandemic and changes to assessment practices.

In discussion, the relationship between data reporting and the reporting of wider EDI work was clarified. The statutory requirement to foster good relations between different groups was also discussed: Sarah Cunningham-Burley stated that this responsibility was borne by all members of the community and recognised that this could be challenging in the context of deeply felt and strongly expressed views on certain topics. She added that the University had taken various actions to support those in groups that might be affected by external events and to promote constructive debate through on-going work on academic freedom and freedom of expression.

Court approved the report and its annexes for publication.

Court thanked Sarah Cunningham-Burley for all of her contributions in the role of University Lead on EDI, as she approached the end of her term in this role. It was noted that the University had recently successfully renewed its Athena SWAN Institutional Silver award.

11 Performance Measures to Support Strategy 2030: 2023-24 Mid-Year Report **Paper J**

Court noted the report.

12 Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity **Paper K**

Court received a report on recent donations, legacies and alumni relations activity and also a verbal report on general trends and aspirations in these areas.

Examples of successful initiatives were provided, including plans to generate maximum benefit from forthcoming engagement overseas and an example of creating valuable benefits for students from visiting alumni with specialist knowledge and experience.

The importance and the various benefits of philanthropic funding were outlined. The University was targeting sustainable growth in this area, maintaining a diversity of sources. It was noted that some of the University's largest gifts were received from non-alumni, reflecting external recognition of the quality of the University's research and the effectiveness of its external engagement with potential donors.

13 Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) **Paper L**

Court received an overview of progress in planning and works to remediate the presence of RAAC in University buildings. It was noted that Estates Committee and Policy & Resources Committee had considered the matter in detail and made recommendations to Court.

It was clarified that the costings provided did not include mitigation for staff costs that might be incurred as a result of RAAC-related disruption, for example, if research

projects had to be extended. It was noted that such considerations were to be included in on-going budget preparation.

Court:

- noted progress in remediation of the presence of RAAC in University buildings;
- approved funding as requested;
- delegated authority to Estates Committee to approve additional capital funding, should this be required as part of the University response to RAAC; and
- noted that the Principal could, under the Delegated Authority Schedule, authorise funding from revenue budgets up to £2m, should this be required for funding any of the required work (in which case Estates Committee would take any necessary technical decisions but could not authorise funding).

Court thanked Gary Jebb, Director of Place, for his service to the University, noting that this would be his final meeting of Court before retirement from the role.

14 Managing Security Related Risks in Internationalisation: Annual Update **Paper M**

Court noted the update.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

15 Strategic Risk Report **Paper N**

Court noted the report.

16 Professional Services Members of Senate Election Regulations **Paper O**

Court approved the regulations.

17 Edinburgh BioQuarter **Paper P**

Court noted the paper, having received a presentation on this topic earlier in the day.

18 Draft Resolutions: Degree Programme Regulations **Paper Q**

Court referred the draft Resolutions to Senate and the General Council for observations.

19 Any Other Business **Paper R**

The Rector informed Court of the contents of a letter that had been addressed to Court in response to his appointment. It was noted that a second letter had been received expressing a contrasting point of view and it was agreed that both letters would be made available to members of Court.

20 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 17 June 2024, 14.00-17.00