



## University Court

6 October 2025

John McIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls

### Minutes

<b>Members Present:</b>	Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member Simon Fanshawe, Rector Katya Amott, Students' Association Vice-President Education Morag Angus, Co-opted Member Richard Blythe, Senatus Assessor Sandra Cummings, Co-opted Member Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member Neil Johnston, Trade Union Professional Services Staff 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 Christopher Morson, Co-opted Member Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member Ash Scholz, Students' Association President Kavi Thakrar, Co-opted Member Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor
<b>Member Apologies:</b>	Rushad Abadan, Co-opted Member Robert Aldridge, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor David Ovens, General Council Assessor
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary Gale Macleod, Rector's Assessor Claire Sarafilovic, Governance Apprentice
<b>Presenters &amp; Observers:</b>	Lewis Allan, Senior Governance Advisor to the Vice-Principal & University Secretary David Argyle, Head of College, Medicine & Veterinary Medicine Liz Baggs, Interim Vice-Principal Research & Innovation Fiona Boyd, Chief of Staff & Head of the Principal's office Lucy Evans, Associate Principal & Deputy Secretary Students Iain Gordon, Head of College, Science & Engineering

James Gray, Chief Financial Officer  
Kim Graham, Provost  
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students  
Louise Kelso, General Counsel and Director of Legal Services  
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services  
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal & Chief Information Officer, and Librarian  
Sarah Prescott, Head of College, Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary, Governance and Strategic Planning  
Daniel Wedgwood, Head of Court Services (clerk)  
Liv Stevens, President of the Sports Union (item 6)  
Damien Toner, Director of Estates (item 8)

## **OPENING ITEMS**

### **Opening and Welcome**

Simon Fanshawe, Rector, opened the meeting, noted the apologies received and welcomed members and attendees. He extended a particular welcome to the following new members and attendees:

- Neil Johnston, Trade Union Professional Services Staff Member of Court;
- Morag Angus, Sandra Cummings and Chris Morson, Co-opted Lay Members of Court;
- Liz Baggs, Interim Vice-Principal Research & Innovation;
- James Gray, Chief Financial Officer
- Lucy Evans, Associate Principal & Deputy Secretary Students

The Rector noted that he had been contacted by Lord Mann, the UK Government's independent adviser on antisemitism. It had been confirmed that the University had a positive reputation in relation to this issue. The Rector noted that he was involved in planning events aimed at encouraging constructive dialogue on campus, drawing on successful initiatives at other institutions.

### **1 Minutes**

**Paper A1**

Court approved the minutes of the meeting of 23 June 2025.

### **2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log**

**Paper A2**

#### Matters Arising

Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary, noted that the Responsible Investment Advisory Group (RIAG) had been established and was to hold its first meeting very soon. The Convener of RIAG, Ruth Girardet, gave an overview of the group's initial priorities and noted that communications about the group would follow as soon as possible. It was recognised that there was substantial interest in the group and that there was significant strength of feeling in the University community regarding relevant current issues, as reflected in a petition that had recently been received by Court. However, communications needed to be timed to avoid pre-judging any aspect of the group's work.

It was also noted that the report of the University's academically-led Race Review had been published and a response group had been established to consider its recommendations.

#### Action Log

The Action Log was noted.

### **3 Principal's Report**

#### **Paper B**

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, introduced the report and additionally noted recent announcements regarding the intention to introduce a levy on international student fees in England. The implications of this proposal for Scottish higher education remained unclear.

The following points were made in discussion:

- There was a need to balance the freedom to protest with the experiences of those attending graduation ceremonies. The nature of protests at recent ceremonies had had a significant negative impact on staff and visitors. Some changes had been made to ceremonies and further changes would be implemented if necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those attending.
- It would be important for the Race Review Response Group to consult widely, recognising that the review represented the views of its academic authors and that a variety of views on relevant issues were held in the University community.
- Staffing changes following the University's voluntary severance scheme and uncertainty during the period of strategic change and budgetary re-balancing had inevitably had an impact on staff morale. In order to minimise this impact, the University's senior management wished to effect necessary changes quickly and transparently.
- Relations between the University management and the recognised trade unions were constructive despite significant disagreements, primarily over the potential use of involuntary redundancy, which had led to recent industrial action. It remained the position of senior management that involuntary redundancy would be avoided if possible but that none of the potential means of effecting necessary cost savings could be wholly ruled out.

### **4 Committee Business**

#### **Exception Committee**

#### **Paper C1**

The report contained details of the appointment, made on behalf of Court, of an external member of Audit & Risk Committee. The report was noted.

#### **Policy & Resources Committee**

#### **Paper C2**

The report was noted.

On the recommendation of Estates Committee and Policy & Resources Committee, Court approved the reallocation of funding to cover additional costs, which had arisen unavoidably under statutory contractual conditions, for an electrical connection to the Advanced Computing Facility.

### **Governance & Nominations Committee**

### **Paper C3**

Court noted the report, which contained details of appointments to the Responsible Investment Advisory Group and decisions made relating to the process for recruitment of the next Senior Lay Member.

### **Audit & Risk Committee**

### **Paper C4**

Douglas Millican, Convener of Audit & Risk Committee (ARC), introduced the report. He noted that the committee had requested a progress report in relation to the management of the University's financial sustainability risk and that such a report had not been available at the committee's most recent meeting. It had been agreed that the committee would engage directly with executive leaders through a deep-dive workshop in the lead-up to the December meeting of Court, to gain a detailed understanding of this progress.

He also noted that the Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement had been presented to Court, but the financial risk appetite was for noting only, as this was subject to ongoing work. Noting this caveat, Court approved the Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement.

ARC had noted progress made by the Finance team that, it was hoped, would result in an improved year-end process for the completion of the audited Annual Report & Accounts.

The committee had found the work of Internal Audit to be effective in illuminating areas for further improvement. It was noted that overdue audit actions remained a significant issue, although it was recognised that there was work in progress to address this.

### **Remuneration Committee**

### **Paper C5**

Hugh Mitchell, Convener of Remuneration Committee, introduced the paper, noting that changes to the Remuneration Committee Framework for Decision Making document had been made following a recent review by Internal Audit.

Court approved the revised Remuneration Committee Framework for Decision Making.

## **KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION**

### **5 Finance and Planning Update Report**

### **Paper D**

James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, presented the report.

Kim Graham, Provost, provided an overview of the workstreams focused on strategic change and the delivery of the savings required to achieve the two-year budget. Projects had been prioritised and work had been accelerated on a number of projects within the Staff workstream. Associated tools and guidance were being developed within HR and consultation with the recognised trade unions would be carried out accordingly.

The following points were made in discussion:

- There was a desire in the staff community for more information on the intended outcomes of staff-related changes. This would help staff members who were considering their career options, among others. It was noted that the need to

provide clarity as soon as possible was recognised but there were unavoidable constraints on the availability of information as work developed.

- To carry out the intended scale of organisational change would require significant dedicated resource and particular capabilities. It was observed that this had been assessed carefully and there had been investment in relevant areas, including relevant training. The organisation and resourcing of the workstreams took account of lessons learned from the review of the implementation of the People & Money system.
- Relatedly, the empowerment of decision-makers at different levels of the organisation would be important. The role of Heads of School was discussed in particular. The Heads of College outlined processes that were in place for engaging Heads of School in planning and implementing change.
- The outcomes of the currently open voluntary redundancy and retirement options would affect the overall remaining budgetary challenge. By the time of the planned November engagement with ARC, these outcomes should be clearer and planning would continue on this basis.
- Clarification was sought regarding the methodology used to derive narrative aspects of the management accounts, including the underlying financial position. In response, it was noted that work was underway to provide greater clarity on some elements of the University's finances, including interactions between operating and capital transactions.

## **6 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports**

### **Students' Association President's Report**

### **Paper E1**

Ash Scholz, President of the Students' Association, introduced the report, highlighting a successful start to the academic year, including high engagement in Welcome Week activities. A number of concerns within the student community were also highlighted, including a desire to see progress in relation to campaigns for divestment and uncertainty surrounding the University's plans for strategic change and cost saving and their potential implications for education and the student experience.

In discussion, the hope was reiterated that all parts of the University community could work together to ensure that future graduation ceremonies would be positive experiences for the graduands, their family members and supporters and the staff involved.

### **Sports Union President's Report**

### **Paper E2**

Liv Stevens, President of the Sports Union, introduced the report, highlighting some of the Sports Union's priorities for the current academic year. These included a particular focus on engagement with international and postgraduate students. The year was also to include a review of the Sports Union's governance structures. The Union had a substantially refreshed staff team, who were working within new management structures, alongside University staff, under new branding as Edinburgh Sport.

The Sports Fair during Welcome Week had attracted high numbers of students and memberships of sports clubs and intermural sports were on course to show an increase on the previous year.

The Sir Chris Hoy Sports Scholarships had recently been launched, a very positive and high-profile development.

In discussion, the social media output of the Sports Union was commended.

## **7 Student Surveys 2025: Results and Responses**

## **Paper F**

Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students, and Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students, introduced the paper, noting the overall pattern of improvement in the University's survey results but minimal change in relative rankings, as a result of improvements also in other institutions' results. It was noted that the largest improvements in the University's results were in areas that had been subject to active prioritisation and significant work, including the area of assessment and feedback. There was reason to expect continued improvement in future years, as cohorts of students who had benefitted over a number of years from recent changes became survey respondents, the National Student Survey (NSS) being a survey of final-year students.

Variation in the results for different parts of the University was notable. This was taken to reflect the positive impact that could be made at the local level but also suggested a continuing need to standardise practices.

Continued efforts across the University would be required to maintain progress and effect any change in the University's rankings.

The following points were made in discussion:

- While improvement in the survey results was welcome, it should be borne in mind that the student experience as a whole encapsulated more than the matters covered in the national surveys. The focus of work to enhance the student experience, and that reported to Court, should therefore be suitably broad. It was noted that the work of the current Learning & Teaching workstream for strategic change would be beneficial in developing different dimensions of the student experience.
- Given the significant variation in results across different parts of the University, there might be substantial value in exchanging good practice. It was noted that efforts were already made to facilitate dialogue across Schools. There were distinctive factors in different academic disciplines that could limit direct exchange of practice. Sharing practice across institutions, by academic discipline, could also be valuable.
- There could be value in publishing internal variation in survey results to encourage awareness of relative performance and incentivise improvement.
- The University had seen increased student numbers in some areas, largely as a result of the 'conditional offer' process for rest of UK students. Care was taken to ensure any expanded intakes were accommodated without detriment to academic standards.
- Reporting results to Court with more years of historical comparison would allow for more meaningful assessment of trends.

- The NSS survey question concerning the Students' Association was specifically focused on support for academic activity. While the Association was committed to improvement in this area, it was recognised that responses to this question were likely to be influenced by wider institutional context.

## **8 Teviot Row House Compliance Works**

## **Paper G**

Damien Toner, Director of Estates, gave an overview of additional work that had been required to complete the Teviot Row House refurbishment, resulting in the need to request the allocation of additional funds. There was discussion of the unusual background to the project, which had involved a re-scoping in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with consequences for planning and budgeting processes. Future projects would therefore not run according to the same processes and timelines. Additional lessons had been drawn from analysis of the project, reducing the risk of future projects over-running or exceeding budget. It was noted that the required additional funding in this case was expected to be taken from underspend in other Estates projects.

The concern was noted that overspend on Estates projects could negatively affect staff morale in the context of the reduction of expenditure across the University. It was noted that it was rare for a project to exceed its budget and that lessons for the future were always considered very carefully in such cases. It was emphasised that capital and revenue expenditure were drawn from separate budgets and could not be compared directly.

Works had progressed well under the revised timescale and it was hoped that the building would re-open early in 2026. It was noted that the refurbishment would result in significant improvements to the student experience, in addition to improved energy usage, accessibility and safety.

Court approved additional funding to complete the project.

## **9 Microsoft Agreement**

## **Paper H**

Court approved the new three-year Microsoft agreement and delegated authority to the Vice Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian to the University to sign the contract.

## **10 Consideration of the Investigation into Financial Oversight and Decision Making at the University of Dundee**

## **Paper I**

Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary, summarised the purpose of the paper, which was to provide Court with assurances in relation to the 'lessons for the sector' that had been stated in the report into the University of Dundee, and to help identify any areas for improvement. It was noted that versions of the paper had been considered by the University Executive, Governance & Nominations Committee and Audit & Risk Committee. In broad summary, the University's existing processes had been found to address the stated 'lessons for the sector' and that there were significant contrasts between the University's approach to financial management and governance and those reported to have been taken at the University of Dundee. It was also recognised that good governance was dependent on cultural and behavioural factors and that it was appropriate, in a spirit of continuous improvement, to seek areas for improvement at

these levels. It was observed that the ability of members of Court and governance committees to question and challenge decisions was well evidenced in meetings.

**11 Award of University Benefactor**

**Paper J**

Court approved the award of University Benefactor status to the Nippon Foundation, and David and Molly Pyott Foundation.

**ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL**

**12 The University of Edinburgh Cross & Salmon Trust:  
Appointment of New Trustee and Re-appointment of  
Continuing Trustee**

**Paper K**

Court approved the appointment of Leigh Chalmers as a new trustee from August 2025, and the back-dated reappointment of Chris Cox as a continuing trustee with effect from 1 October 2024, for a five-year term in each case.

**13 Legacy Loans Recommendation**

**Paper L**

Court approved the proposal for handling of a legacy collection and delegated authority to the Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian to the University to sign any relevant documentation, in consultation with the General Counsel & Director of Legal Services.

**14 Updates to Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure**

**Paper M**

On the recommendation of Policy & Resources Committee, Court approved changes to the University's Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy & Procedure.

**15 Anti-Fraud Policy 2025-26**

**Paper N**

On the recommendation of Audit & Risk Committee, Court approved revisions to the Anti-Fraud Policy.

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

**Paper O**

Court noted the report, including the high level of philanthropic income received. The Principal commended the work of Development & Alumni and, in particular, that of Morag Murison, Head of Legacies & Planned Giving.

**17 Any Other Business**

The Senior Lay Member thanked Colm Harmon for all his contributions to the University and to Court, as a regular attendee of Court, noting that this was to be his last Court meeting before leaving the University.

**18 Date of Next Meeting**

1 December 2025