



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

University Court

23 February 2026

Pentland Suite, John McIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls

Minutes

- Members Present:** Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
Simon Fanshawe, Rector
Rushad Abadan, Co-opted Member
Katya Amott, Students' Association Vice-President Education
Matt Bell, Senate Assessor
Richard Blythe, Senate 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
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Christopher Morson, Co-opted Member
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
David Ovens, General Council Assessor
Ash Scholz, Students' Association President
Kavi Thakrar, Co-opted Member
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor
- Member Apologies:** Robert Aldridge, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
Morag Angus, Co-opted Member
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
- In Attendance:** 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, Head of College, Medicine & Veterinary Medicine
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
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)

OPENING ITEMS

Opening and welcome

Simon Fanshawe, Rector, opened the meeting, noted the apologies received and welcomed members and attendees. On behalf of Court, he congratulated Toby Kelly on his recent appointment as Director of the University's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities.

Also on behalf of Court, the Rector expressed sorrow at the death in January 2026 of the Former Deputy First Minister Rt Hon Jim Wallace, Baron Wallace of Tankerness, an alumnus of the University.

1. Minutes

Paper A1

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2025 were approved, subject to minor amendments to clarify the participants in the General Council event that had been hosted by the Rector and to correct the sources of certain assessments of limited assurance that had been noted in the Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report.

2. Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

Matters Arising

Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary, updated Court on the process for appointment of the next Senior Lay Member, noting that candidates for election had been identified by the Selection Panel and that details of the candidates and the election process would be circulated to Court in due course.

Action Log

The Action Log, unchanged since the last meeting, was noted.

3. Principal's Report

Paper B

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, summarised notable points from the report and highlighted the following developments since the paper had been issued:

- University College London (UCL) had reached a settlement regarding a legal claim from former students who had made a claim relating to the education they had received during the Covid pandemic.
- While there was an agreement in place between the University and the trade union UCU that there would be no industrial action under the union's current mandate, the UCU Edinburgh branch was now seeking a new mandate for industrial action. The agreement would not apply to any new mandate.

4. Committee Business

Policy & Resources Committee

Paper C1

Janet Legrand, Convener of Policy & Resources Committee (PRC) introduced the report, noting that the majority of the matters covered there appeared elsewhere in the Court agenda.

On the recommendation of PRC, Court approved the transfer of approximately 0.35 acres of land from the University to Scottish Power Energy Networks by way of a ground lease, noting that in exchange Scottish Enterprise would transfer land of approximately 0.45 acres to the University by way of a disposition.

Governance & Nominations Committee

Paper C2

Janet Legrand introduced the report, as Convener of Governance & Nominations Committee (GNC). The majority of committee membership decisions would be made later in the year, following the election of the next Senior Lay Member. However, the following appointments had been recommended immediately, in one case to help establish the membership of Court ahead of other decisions and in the other case to address an earlier conclusion to a current term of office.

On the recommendation of GNC, Court approved:

- the re-appointment of Douglas Millican as a member of Court for a term of four years, from 1 August 2026 to 31 July 2030; and
- the re-appointment of David Argyle as a Curator of Patronage, from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2027.

Audit & Risk Committee: Note of workshop sessions

Paper C3

Taken under item 6, below.

Senate

Paper C4

Peter Mathieson introduced the report, as Convener of Senate. He noted that Senate had passed a number of motions, as set out in the report, which indicated the strength of feeling of Senate members regarding the impacts and risks of current cost reduction programmes. The University Executive had been informed of the motions that touched on work under the Executive's purview, in line with undertakings made to Senate.

Richard Blythe, Senate Assessor, drew particular attention to the Senate motion on the Academic Contribution Framework (ACF) and clarified that Senate members' position was that some elements of the ACF entailed a change in strategy regarding academic activity and that Senate should have authority in the relevant areas of strategy.

It was noted that Court was unambiguously the University's supreme governing body and that work to clarify the responsibilities of Senate was in progress and would be brought to Court at a future meeting.

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

5. Students' Association and Sports Union Reports

Students' Association President's Report

Paper D

Sports Union Report

Paper E

Ash Scholz, President of the Students' Association, introduced the two reports, drawing particular attention to the following points:

- A briefing had been supplied to Court which summarised students' perceptions of the impacts of current cost reduction activities, as expressed through a recent survey.
- A new Students' Association strategic plan was in development and would be shared with Court in due course.
- There were now breakfast clubs across all of the University's main campuses. University colleagues, in particular the College of Science & Engineering, were thanked for their help in facilitating this.
- The Teviot Row House student union was soon to re-open. Celebrations were planned and there was excitement in the student community to make use of the refurbished building and improved facilities.
- With the assistance of colleagues in Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling in Registry Services, data had been drawn together that showed an association between engagement in sport and academic attainment.
- The University continued to achieve good results across a range of competitive sports, maintaining fifth place in the UK-wide BUCS ranking.

In discussion, it was observed that industrial action had been the factor most often cited in the student survey as a negative impact associated with the cost reduction programme. It was noted that the refurbishment of the Teviot union exemplified the direct benefits of the University's capital investments for students.

Recent rent increases for University accommodation were discussed. It was noted that these rents remained below private sector levels and lower than at some peer institutions. The increases had been approved by a majority decision of the University Executive in recognition of the need to fund investment in the accommodation, to maintain capacity and quality.

It was observed that the data on engagement in sport and academic attainment, while only associative, demonstrated that many members of the student community were able to succeed in sport and academic study at the same time, which reflected well on those individuals and the environment created by the University.

It was noted that an Edinburgh graduate, Megan Keith, had recently set a new European record for the 10 kilometre road run.

6. Finance and Planning

Audit & Risk Committee: Note of workshop sessions

Paper C3

Douglas Millican, Convener of Audit & Risk Committee, summarised concerns expressed at the recent ARC workshop on the University's financial risk. It had been noted that the £140m of cost saving measures that underpinned the Court-approved budget were not being delivered to the required timescale. While greater clarity had been provided on progress to date and its financial implications, and this clarity was welcome, the committee had expressed concern regarding the University's ability to achieve its financial sustainability goals and the impact on students and staff of a prolonged cost reduction process. There was to be a further ARC workshop before the April meeting of Court and the committee would seek further clarity and reassurance at that stage, with a particular focus on indicators of financial precarity, including the University's debt covenant headroom.

Finance and Planning Update Report

Paper F

James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, summarised key points from the report, recognising that delivery of cost savings was behind schedule, as identified at the ARC workshop, and noting that sector-wide trends in international student recruitment had brought the expectation of a shortfall in income relative to budget.

The following points were made in discussion:

- It had been stated by ARC that greater clarity on cost-saving plans was required in order to inform detailed financial projections and this clarity was also sought by members of Court in order to provide assurance of future financial sustainability.
- Given the need to deliver the originally planned savings and recover a shortfall, a change in approach might be required. A greater degree of agility was likely to be needed and a greater departure from business-as-usual. The capacity to deliver should be examined and augmented as required.
- Objective assessment of progress was required in order to inform Court's oversight of delivery. It was noted that external consultants were already contracted to assist with delivering required savings in relation to one College and it was requested

that this support should be extended to the other Colleges and the external consultants should produce independent reporting on progress.

- The strategic parameters used to drive savings in each budget area should also be clarified, to provide reassurance of alignment with both the University's strategic objectives and best practice, as informed by the external consultants' knowledge and experience.
- The consultants' knowledge and experience should also be used to examine whether all savings were being achieved as quickly as possible and whether any other opportunities to make cost savings were being missed.
- Appropriate consultation and engagement, with careful attention to academic staff concerns such as those expressed by Senate, might help avert industrial action by the UCU union.
- While extensive consultation and staff buy-in could be important to the success of change programmes, this should not unduly delay required decision-making. Rather, more meaningful and effective consultation might follow from the presentation of specific options and decisions. Clear 'milestones' in decision making would encourage this.
- Some of the work being pursued in the present context could have been fruitfully pursued in times of less financial restraint, within a culture of continuous improvement, and this might have eased the current pressure. Lessons might be drawn from this for the future.
- A commitment to the University's future should be balanced with a sensitivity to the impact of current measures on the present students and staff. A rescheduling of plans to meet the budgeted savings was appropriate in this context.
- It would be crucial to ensure that the cost savings achieved through the current work would recur sustainably. This might require re-examination of a number of the University's processes.
- The mission of the University, including its charitable mission as an educational institution, must underpin all relevant decision-making.
- In the context of the concerns expressed about the pace of delivery, it was noted that many University staff were highly engaged in the effort to deliver the required changes and that significant progress had been made, both in improved engagement across the workforce and in the delivery and implementation of plans.

Summarising, the Senior Lay Member noted that Court members' concerns regarding progress in achieving financial sustainability had been noted, and that the following would be taken forward:

- As already requested by ARC, a delivery plan with milestones for the two years of the present budget was to be presented to the next PRC and ARC meetings and then to Court.
- This should also provide a clear articulation of financial risk, including covenant risk, for subsequent years.
- The external consultants' remit should be extended, including reporting independently on progress across all Colleges. Heads of College would be asked to contribute to the next meeting of Court.

7. Responsible Investment Policy: Representations Process Update **Paper G**

Kim Graham, Provost, provided an overview of discussions of the representations process that was being developed by the Responsible Investment Advisory Group (RIAG), among the other tasks delegated to RIAG by Court. Key elements of the process, including how it should be resourced and supported, remained to be established.

Input had been taken from Policy & Resources Committee (PRC) and Governance & Nominations Committee (GNC), which had focused particularly on the publication of the outcomes of the representations process. It was noted that RIAG's independence was an important part of its effectiveness as an advisory body but also that the University's decision-making and oversight processes as a whole should issue clear and coherent outcomes. To this end, PRC and GNC had recommended an amendment to RIAG's terms of reference, to clarify that the published outcomes of applying the representations process would in all cases be the finalised University position.

It was observed that outputs from RIAG had been limited to date and that there was some frustration in the student community over the pace of RIAG's work. The contrary view was also noted: that it was appropriate to prioritise quality of outcomes when dealing with important and complex issues and that RIAG had made good progress in these terms.

It was proposed that the representations process should make reference to Court's responsibilities as the trustee of the University's endowment.

Court noted the update and approved the amendment to RIAG's remit, such that clause 2.5 of its terms of reference would read "To publish the University's response to submissions that meet the criteria within the Responsible Investment Policy's representations process".

8. Academic Staff Member Election Regulations 2026 **Paper H**

Court approved the regulations and approved an amendment to Court's Standing Orders to introduce a degree of flexibility into the length of terms of Court membership, where necessary to align the terms of different Court members. In line with this, it was agreed that the winner of the forthcoming Academic Staff Member Election should be granted a slightly extended term, from 1 June 2026 to 30 July 2030.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

9. Scottish Consortium for Rural Research **Paper I**

Court approved implementation of the necessary constitutional and governance changes to allow the transfer of governance oversight responsibility for the Scottish Consortium for Rural Research from Court to the Moredun Foundation.

10. Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity **Paper J**

Court noted the report.

11. Self-Evaluation Action Plan**Paper K**

Court noted the Self-Evaluation Action Plan. It was noted that the Plan, although prepared for external assurance purposes, was valuable to the Students' Association as a record of relevant activity and of the impact of the student voice in learning and teaching.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date of Next Meeting

20 April 2026