



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

University Court

20 April 2026

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
Morag Angus, Co-opted Member
Matt Bell, Senate Assessor
Richard Blythe, Senate Assessor
Sandra Cummings, Co-opted Member
Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor
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
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
Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member
- In Attendance:** Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
Gale Macleod, Rector's Assessor
Syjil Ramjuthan, EUSA Vice-President Welfare
- 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
Louise Kelso, General Counsel & 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
Fiona McClement, University Lead, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion: item 9
Alistair Fenemore, Chief Information Security Officer: item 11
Damien Toner, Director of Estates: items 12 and 13
Chris Cox, Vice Principal Philanthropy & Advancement: items 15 and 16
Daniel Wedgwood, Head of Court Services (clerk)

OPENING ITEMS

1 Minutes

Paper A1

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2026 were approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

The Action Log was noted.

3 Principal's Report

Paper B

Peter Mathieson, Principal, introduced the paper. In addition to the topics presented in the paper, the Principal highlighted the importance of behaviour across the University being in line with the Dignity & Respect Policy. The Policy applied to all students and staff exceptionlessly. A new statement on this was to be posted on the University's website, in the light of a number of challenging incidents.

It was noted that there had been improvements in behaviours towards the student members of Senate since this issue had been raised at a Senate meeting.

As a positive example, the Principal highlighted the constructive exchange of opposing views that had taken place at a recent EUSA debate in which the Principal had participated, with the additional positive feature that this had taken place in Debating Hall of the newly re-opened Teviot Row Student Union.

In discussion, it was observed that some dignity and respect policies could rely too heavily on subjective judgments and that objective tests and a threshold of reasonableness should be used in the application of such policies.

4 Committee Business

Policy & Resources Committee

Paper C1

Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, introduced the paper, as Convener of Policy & Resources Committee (PRC), noting that a number of later items on the agenda included

recommendations from PRC. In addition, the committee had approved the Students' Association's budget on behalf of Court and had approved acceptance of an interest-free government loan to fund the expansion of solar energy generation at Easter Bush.

Audit & Risk Committee

Paper C2

Douglas Millican, Convener of Audit & Risk Committee (ARC), highlighted the importance of the strategic risk register, which had been circulated to Court members alongside the meeting papers. He called to Court's attention a number of points in the ARC Report, including those risks marked as exceeding the agreed risk appetite. These included some risks regularly discussed by Court but also two risks in the areas of IT and information security which were not regularly raised to Court's attention. He noted that these flagged risks demonstrated the importance of investment in the University's digital estate and of cash generation to facilitate this.

The interconnectedness of many key risks was also noted, as was ARC's support for a more integrated approach to financial planning with greater agility in response to enable the University to manage some of the more pronounced strategic risks.

It was noted that feedback from ARC's April workshop on financial risk would be integrated into the discussion under item 7.

Senate

Paper C3

Peter Mathieson, Principal, introduced the report, as Convener of Senate, noting that there had been recent discussion of the recording of Senate meetings, leading, on this occasion, to the creation of a lightly edited transcript of recent meetings, alongside a factual summary of the business conducted.

In discussion, it was noted that the recording of meetings by means of a transcript was unusual and had a number of disadvantages, including the potential to stifle open and spontaneous discussion. It was also noted that the edited transcript constituted an excessively long record of each meeting.

It was noted that the often challenging dynamics of Senate meetings could be attributed in part to strength of feeling regarding the current cost-cutting programme and related changes. It was also noted that difficult relations within Senate pre-dated this programme. It was observed that work was in progress to change some processes within Senate, which could help to re-set expectations of the conduct of business.

Other on-going work aimed to clarify the remit of Senate. The hope was expressed that this would help to prevent requests from Senate for approval powers beyond its responsibilities or for Court to take action in these areas. It was noted that this work was progressing according to a planned timeline that allowed opportunities for appropriate levels of consultation, and that it would be brought before Court in due course.

It was suggested that greater engagement between Court and Senate could be beneficial. It was also observed that there were currently high levels of engagement

between the executive and Senate, in addition to other staff fora, including consultation on many elements of the current strategic change programme.

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

5 Student's Association and Sports Union Reports

Ash Scholz, EUSA President, introduced the reports, noting that this would be the final meeting attended by the current student members of Court, thanking Court members for their engagement over the last year and emphasising the importance of taking students seriously as stakeholders.

Student's Association President's Report

Paper D

Details highlighted from the report included the successful reopening of the Teviot Row union and the election of a new team of sabbatical officers.

In discussion, it was noted that recent roundtable discussions on the Student Voice had been widely appreciated and it was hoped that these would continue.

The impactful contributions of student representatives in various contexts, including the University Executive, were noted and it was observed that this exemplified the many ways in which the student voice was encouraged and listened to, while recognising that outcomes could remain subject to disagreement.

There was discussion of how the University ensured that students were well equipped for the modern workplace and student involvement in curriculum design was advocated as part of this. It was noted that significant efforts were already made to facilitate student involvement and that student engagement could be a problem at the local (School/course) level.

It was observed that a high number of nominations had been received for the EUSA Student Awards and that this demonstrated effective representation and leadership by EUSA officers.

Sports Union President's Report

Paper E

Court noted the report.

6 Student Experience Update

Paper F

Lucy Evans, Associate Principal & Deputy Secretary Students, introduced the item, noting that enhancement of learning and teaching, and of the student experience more widely, remained matters of the highest priority.

Referring back to discussion under item 5, she noted that the University's Skills for Success Framework underpinned the preparation of students to thrive in today's economy and society and those of the future.

Positive engagement with the students' association was noted, in both development and publicising work on the student experience.

The following points were made in discussion:

- The importance of interdependencies with, for example, IT systems or College-level change was recognised and it was noted that a systematic approach could be used to mutual benefit, for example in preparing for and informing any relevant systems innovation.
- It was observed that more outcome-centred reporting had been introduced and further change in this direction was encouraged, to help measure and evaluate progress.
- The National Review of Awarding Arrangements, which had been commissioned following incidents at the University of Glasgow, had clarified areas in which the University of Edinburgh had good systems and practices, in addition to areas where improvements could be made. Action would follow in the latter areas.
- It was clarified that the ratings assigned to relevant University Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) reflected progress made, rather than absolute outcomes, and further progress was targeted.
- Recent years had seen a number of improvements, including cultural and policy shifts within the University, and there was significant positive feedback from students, but that this was not reflected in national survey results.
- The University had shown improvements in its survey results even when rankings had not improved due to parallel improvements elsewhere.
- The richness of initiatives exploring applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in learning and teaching was noted and welcomed.

Finance and Planning

Paper G

Douglas Millican, Convener of ARC, provided feedback from the recent ARC workshop on financial risk, noting that the committee had welcomed assurances that the University was working towards delivery of the required level of recurrent cost savings set out in the two-year budget, albeit to an extended timescale. It had been noted that this remained necessary, as many of the savings delivered in the present year had been of a short-term nature. While helpful in stabilising the immediate financial position, these short-term savings would not bring about financial sustainability. The committee had noted that, in this way, strategic change remained a key leadership priority and had sought more clarity over whether the approach to strategic change was appropriately University-wide and consistent.

Peter Mathieson, Principal, noted that engagement between the Senior Leadership Team and ARC had been very constructive and that there was a shared recognition that change needed to be delivered. He observed that delivery of the 2025-26 budget was forecast and this should be recognised as an important achievement, albeit on the basis of some non-recurrent savings. The savings delivered to date had been important in this context and some would yield sustained benefits.

James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, gave an overview of the finance and planning report, noting, in line with the previous speakers, the need to deliver a programme of recurrent savings to meet the 2026-27 budget. Delays in delivery of recurrent savings

would need to be managed through reduced capital expenditure, which would eventually lead to unsustainably low investment in maintaining the digital and physical estate, as well as limiting the University's ability to invest in its future.

The Heads of College all provided overviews of progress in developing plans to deliver the required sustainable savings. It was noted that the diverse nature of the Colleges resulted in different challenges in each case but that University-wide initiatives and frameworks were providing consistent principles and tools to address these. As Court had previously been informed, external consultants had been engaged to help guide the process first in the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences (CAHSS) and then, as appropriate, in the other Colleges. It was noted that this had been beneficial in catalysing progress and that the work with CAHSS had been used in refining the principles and frameworks used thereafter.

In further discussion, the following points were made:

- The additional clarity and detail provided by the Heads of College was welcomed.
- The implications of any compulsory redundancies for the University's reputation and for staff and student morale should be considered. Any possible alternatives to compulsory redundancy should continue to be explored. Assurances were given that this would remain a last resort and it was observed that all action taken at this stage would protect jobs in the long term by stabilising the University's financial position.
- Awareness of the intention to make staff cost savings was causing anxiety among staff and students. Targeted and specific communications would help to reduce this anxiety, while comprehensive but unfocused communication could be counterproductive.
- Uncertainty would only be fully removed by completion of the required change programme and so achieving a stable and sustainable position. It would be crucial to consider how this would be achieved and what capabilities would be required.
- The Heads of College anticipated changes to the size and shape of each College but no changes to their fundamental missions and priorities, changes following instead from the opportunity to plan the breadth and depth of activity consciously and according to set criteria, in addition to reducing complexity and any duplication.

It was noted that arrangements should be made to enable extended discussion on the day of the next meeting of Court, when the budget was due to be presented for approval.

7 Strategy 2030 Strategic Performance Framework mid-year report Paper H 2025-26

Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning, introduced the report. She clarified that key performance indicators (KPIs) could be rated amber or green in this report even if marked red with the Strategic Risk Register, since the rating here might reflect progress rather than position relative to risk appetite or another benchmark.

A change to KPI16 (Net Zero) had been proposed, in order to align the relevant measure with the ambitions of the Court-approved Regenerative Sustainability Strategy. There was discussion of the appropriate level of ambition to target, given the current wider context. It was agreed that the matter should be considered further and proposals brought to a future meeting of Court.

Court noted the report.

8 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Data Report 2025 [taken before **Paper I** item 7]

Fiona McClement, University Lead, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, joined the meeting to introduce the report, which comprised a summary report, staff report and student report, and highlighted a number of headline findings.

There was discussion of the status of a number of categories used or potentially available for use, including care experience, categories of sex and gender and categories within the LGBTQI grouping. The categories used in the report were explained with reference to external reporting requirements.

The reported trends in student attainment gaps by characteristic were discussed. It was noted that measures put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic had narrowed these gaps, potentially allowing lessons to be drawn regarding the impact of certain admissions and assessment practices.

Court approved the report for publication on the University website.

9 Responsible Investment Policy: Representations Process Update **Paper J**

Kim Graham, Provost, introduced the proposed process and clarified changes that had been made since the previous meeting, when Court had received a draft version of the process document. Most notably, the eligibility criteria now allowed for group representations from groups of up to 25 people (while petitions would not be admissible). It was noted that implementation of the process would be delayed until outstanding questions over resourcing the process had been resolved.

Court approved the process. The Senior Lay Member thanked the Responsible Investment Advisory Group for its work in developing this process.

10 IT System Replacement **Paper K**

Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer & Librarian, introduced the item. Court approved the indicative funding range, in order to proceed with the procurement and deployment of a commercial solution.

11 Computer Room 4 Supercomputer Preparation Project, ACF **Paper L**

Noting the recommendation of PRC, Court gave formal approval to proceed with the project and drawdown Government funding from the grant award, subject to ongoing contract negotiations.

12 Small Works and Statutory Compliance Programme Budget Allocation **Paper M**

Noting the recommendation of PRC, Court approved:

- the Small Works and Statutory Compliance Programme 2026/27 allocation as included within the Capital Plan forecast, as a placeholder for Mandatory Compliance and Maintenance and Minor Works; and
- additional funding, to come from capital plan reallocations, e.g. extended pauses to projects.

13 Committee Effectiveness Reviews **Paper N**

Noting the recommendation of Governance & Nominations Committee (GNC), Court approved:

- the adoption of a requirement for all committees of Court to hold regular self-reviews; and
- the inclusion in the process of self-review of an expectation that reviews will usually be reported to GNC in the first instance, in addition to being shared with the body to which the reviewed committee reports (with the exception of GNC's own review, which will be shared with Court).

14 Development & Alumni Annual Report 2024-25 **Paper O**

Chris Cox, Vice Principal Philanthropy & Advancement, introduced the report, noting that 2024-25 had seen success in attracting philanthropic funding but growth was targeted for future years.

The University's performance in the context of the sector was discussed: it was noted that the University ranked as expected in this regard, given its nature and size.

It was suggested that data with greater historical depth might be provided in future, in order to show trends more clearly.

The Senior Lay Member commended the work of Development & Alumni.

15 Scope Expansion of Alumni Club Recognition Process **Paper P**

Chris Cox, Vice Principal Philanthropy & Advancement, introduced the proposal to expand the criteria for recognition of alumni organisations, noting that this would bring benefits for those leading such organisations while providing the University with a measure of control, if ever required.

Court approved the proposed changes to formal recognition of alumni clubs, alumni groups, and alumni regional contacts.

16 Award of University Benefactor

Paper Q

Peter Mathieson, Principal, proposed, and Court approved, the award of University Benefactor to donors to the University.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

17 Forest and Peatland Programme:

Paper R

Third Annual Report and Future Oversight

Court noted the report.

18 Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity

Paper S

Court noted the report.

19 Resolutions

Papers T1 & T2

- **Degree Regulations**

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

- Draft Resolution No. 5/2026: Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations; and
- Draft Resolution No. 6/2026: Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations

- **Chairs**

Court approved the Resolutions to:

- found a Chair of Large-Scale Database Systems; and
- alter the title of the Mary Dick Chair of Molecular Veterinary Medicine to the Mary Dick Chair of Physiology (backdated with effect from 1 October 2020).

20 Any Other Business

On behalf of Court, the Senior Lay Member thanked Toby Kelly, Ash Scholz and Katya Amott for their service and their many contributions as members of Court, as they would be demitting their respective Court positions before the next meeting.

21 Date of next meeting

15 June 2026