THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

University Court

15 June 2026

Engineering Forum, King's Buildings

Minutes

Members Present:
Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
Simon Fanshawe, Rector
Rushad Abadan, Co-opted Member
Morag Angus, Co-opted Member
Matt Bell, Senate Assessor
Richard Blythe, Senate Assessor
Sandra Cummings, Co-opted Member
Ruth Girardet, Co-opted Member
Neil Johnston, Trade Union Professional Services Staff Member
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Sarah McAllister, Professional Services Staff Member
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Christopher Morson, Co-opted Member
Kathryn Nash, Trade Union Academic Staff Member
Colin Pulham, Academic Staff Member
Syjil Ramjuthan, Students' Association Vice-President Welfare
Bradley Stevens, Students' Association President
Sarah Wolffe, General Council Assessor

Member Apologies:
Robert Aldridge, City of Edinburgh Council Assessor
Alastair Dunlop, Chancellor's Assessor
Douglas Millican, Co-opted Member (present for addition discussion session for item 6)
David Ovens, General Council Assessor
Kavi Thakrar, Co-opted Member

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
Frank Armstrong, Senior Lay Member Elect
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 (up to item 7)
Daniel Wedgwood, Head of Court Services (clerk)

OPENING ITEMS

Welcome
Simon Fanshawe, Rector, welcomed Court members and attendees and noted apologies, as above. Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, assumed the chair for the remainder of the meeting. She thanked members for a highly constructive discussion of the University budget in the prior additional session [see item 6, below].

1. Minutes **Paper A1**
Court approved the minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2026.

2. Matters Arising & Review of Action Log **Paper A2**

Matters Arising
There were no matters arising.

Action Log
The action log was noted.

3. Principal's Report **Paper B**
The Principal's report was noted.

There was discussion of the political context, noting that there was some continuity in key roles in the Scottish Government, notably the First Minister and the Minister with responsibility for higher education, albeit within a slightly changed ministerial brief. The Future Framework for Higher Education, as outlined in Paper M, was a significant development, reflecting recognition across government and the sector of a need to address the funding of higher education in Scotland. This work was working to a revised timeline.

4. Committee Business

Policy & Resources Committee **Paper C1**
Janet Legrand, as Convener of Policy & Resources Committee (PRC), introduced the report, noting in particular the committee's support for partial acquisition by the University of the assets of one of its subsidiaries and the delegation of authority that had

been granted by PRC to the Vice-Principal Corporate Services, in consultation with the Chair of the PRC Commercialisation Sub-Group, to continue discussions with the company and its advisers and conclude the matter.

Governance & Nominations Committee **Paper C2**

Janet Legrand, as Convener of Governance & Nominations Committee (GNC), introduced the report. Court approved a number of appointments to committees and other groups on the recommendation of GNC.

[Note: The membership of Court's committees can be viewed at: https://governance-strategic-planning.ed.ac.uk/governance/university-committees/court-committees]

Court also noted a number of appointments made by GNC to committees and other relevant positions, as detailed in the report.

Audit & Risk Committee **Paper C3**

Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary, introduced the report in the absence of the Convener of Audit & Risk Committee (ARC), highlighting in particular that:

- the committee had considered a status update on the 2025/26 Internal Audit plan and had noted that there had not been progress in reducing the overall number of outstanding management actions;
- in considering the Internal Audit Strategy & Plan 2026/27, the committee had not supported a reduction in internal audit resource, in a period of heightened risk and when Internal Audit continued to identify material issues requiring attention; and
- oversight of teaching and research had been discussed and it was agreed that the existing control landscape should be mapped, recognising that these areas were subject to a high degree of external scrutiny from quality agencies and professional and learned bodies but these assurance mechanisms were not highly visible to the committee.

Court approved the Internal Audit Plan 2026-27, the External Audit Plan 2025-26, the External Audit Fee for the 2025-26 audit; and the extension of PwC's contract for a further 2 years.

Senate **Paper C4**

Peter Mathieson, as Convener of Senate, introduced the report. In line with discussion at the previous meeting of Court, Senate had reconsidered the approach to recording its proceedings, such that more conventional minutes would be produced in the future, rather than lengthy transcripts. This change was welcomed. It was noted that GNC had sought improvements in reporting from Senate with respect to the assurances given to Court of Senate's discharging its responsibilities.

It was noted that, at a special meeting of Senate, Senate had considered and approved temporary variations to academic regulations and policies in response to disruption

caused by industrial action, as recommended by the Senate Academic Policy and Regulation Committee (APRC) and the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC).

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

5. Finance and Planning Update Report **Paper D**

James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, presented the report. The Quarter 3 financial forecast indicated that the University would deliver the 2025-26 budget but this had been achieved in part through non-recurring savings, meaning that significant sustainable savings would have to be achieved in the coming year.

As a result of these cost savings, the University was forecast to achieve an operating surplus, but one that was lower than that achieved in recent years. Cash balances had fallen. The University maintained good headroom on its debt covenants.

Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning, summarised current data and projections regarding student recruitment, noting that there was significant complexity and uncertainty in predicting outcomes, especially with regard to international markets. It was noted that some targets had been reduced when compared to previous plans, in recognition of sector-level risks.

In discussion, it was noted that the University would have the capacity to over-recruit, relative to target, as a result of the risk-adjusted targets. Further mitigation of the relevant risks included improvements to the offer-making process and ongoing analysis of market demand. In the context of sector-level pressures, the University had increased its market share in some key markets in recent years.

It was noted that there continued to be dependency on one international market but efforts to diversify the international student population continued. Some diversification had been achieved, at a time when some peer institutions had experienced an increase in the concentration of one market.

It was noted that the University's offer was flexible and responsive to demand.

Court noted the report.

6. 2026-27 Budget, Update on Planning and Cost Savings and 2027-31 Plans **Paper E**

[Secretary's note: the following summarises discussion carried out in a dedicated additional session held immediately prior to the main meeting, in addition to discussion and decision within the main meeting.]

James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, Peter Mathieson, Principal, and Kim Graham, Provost, introduced the paper, noting that a two-year budget had been approved by Court in June 2025. The 2026-27 budget put forward in the paper was therefore not a wholly new proposition but rather the product of updates and adjustments to the existing approved

budget, in the light of developments over the current year. The two major differences from the previously approved budget were (1) adjustments to recognise revised projections of tuition fee levels and (2) the addition of a provision in the budget to account for the re-profiling of cost reductions, recognising that some cost-saving projects were expected to deliver later than originally planned, moving some savings into future years.

As had been the case in June 2025, the revised budget was predicated on achieving the targeted level of sustainable cost savings through the current strategic change initiatives. It was noted that the need to rebalance finances was in large part a response to global and sector-level pressures and that many other universities were also pursuing significant cost savings.

Longer-term planning, beyond the 2026-27 budget, was focused on fee income, delivery of strategic change projects and clarifying investment needs and priorities, including capital investment in the physical and digital estates. The primary purpose of the budget was to return the University to financial sustainability in the near future, in order to support required investment. It was noted that investment would include support for income generation and that surplus generation was also critical to enable the University to take advantage of any future opportunities aligned to its strategic aims, which could include income generating initiatives in addition to activity that would advance world class research, education and innovation. The creation of a long-term debt repayment vehicle had also been incorporated into the plan. It was noted that the revised budget maintained suitable headroom with regard the University's debt covenants.

Responding to requests made by Policy & Resources Committee, a summary was provided to Court of the anticipated non-financial benefits of the current strategic change projects and additional information on the expected timelines for delivery was also provided. It was noted that a number of details of timing were still under discussion and it was expected that further clarity could be provided in the near future.

The following points were made in initial discussion:

- It was clarified that tuition fee projections were based on planning assumptions around intakes and fee rates which would be tested further, with work to examine relevant variables.
- It was noted that the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Science (CAHSS) had a longer timeline for delivery than the other colleges. The reasons for this were summarised, including the size and complexity of the College and the significant consultative and planning process that had been required across this complex structure. It was noted that one aim of the change projects was to reduce complexity for the future.

There was extended discussion of the risks associated with implementing the targeted cost savings and those associated with failing to do so. It was observed that the risks of pursuing the targeted levels of savings included negative effects on staff morale, potential loss of academic talent through restricted promotion and reward, and reputational impacts. The University should also be mindful of wider risks to higher education and

ensure that it did not erode the attractiveness and distinctiveness of its educational offer. It was noted that the risks of not achieving financial sustainability also included risks to staff morale, retention and recruitment and to wider reputation, since there would be negative impacts on the staff and student experience if the University were unable to invest at sufficient levels in estates and equipment.

Uncertainty within the staff and student communities was highlighted as a key concern. More information on timelines and expected outcomes was sought, particularly with respect to any potential reduction in staff. It was noted that projects had progressed and information had been provided as a result but some key elements of the programme were not yet fully formulated and therefore University-level data were not yet available. In due course, care would be taken to communicate directly with affected areas, in a timely manner. It was observed that completion of the programme of change would remove existing uncertainty and that, therefore, this should be pursued within the shortest reasonable timescale. Achieving financial stability would help the University to manage uncertainty in the external environment in the future.

It was suggested that further consideration of relevant staff-related policies might assist with delivering staff cost savings. It was noted that these had been an area of thorough consideration and relevant measures had been taken where possible.

It was noted that the strategic change projects included careful consideration of risks, including reputational risks, and that they were led by senior academic and professional services staff with relevant expertise. These colleagues were commended for their engagement and ongoing contributions.

It was noted that the University Executive would be responsible for oversight of delivery of the budget, on the basis of Court's approval. It was observed that the means of delivery should take account of the risks discussed by Court and that care should be taken to communicate effectively and in a timely way with the student and staff communities.

Court approved the University Group budget for 2026-27 and noted the outline forecast for 2027-31.

7. Students' Association and Sports Union Reports

Students' Association President's Report — Paper F

Bradley Stevens, President of the Students' Association (EUSA), noted that the report had been authored by the previous President, Ash Scholz. He commended the previous team of sabbatical officers for their achievements over the last year and for effective and informative handover to the new team. He highlighted comments in the report regarding areas for improvement in communication and promoting community cohesion.

Syjil Ramjuthan, Student Member of Court and continuing EUSA Vice-President Welfare, summarised key points from the report, including:

- EUSA participation in the Learning and Teaching conference in June, the topic of which was Student Voice;
- the creation of a new EUSA Strategic Plan, which was soon to be presented to the University Executive;
- two ongoing review processes, a democracy review and a review of EUSA Trustee Board effectiveness;
- continued positive feedback about and high usage of the renovated Teviot Row union.

Sports Union President's Report **Paper G**

Bradley Stevens introduced the report. The impressive achievements of many University sportspeople were commended and it was noted that events had been held to celebrate these achievements.

8. Statement of Senate's Primary Responsibilities **Paper H**

Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary, summarised the purpose and nature of the proposed Statement of Primary Responsibilities (SOPR) for Senate, reminding Court that this had been created in response to effectiveness reviews of Court and Senate. It was noted that, while the effectiveness of Senate was Court's responsibility, the draft SOPR had been opened to consultation with numerous key stakeholders, including through detailed feedback from a 'critical friends' group of elected members of Senate and a survey open to the full membership of Senate.

The SOPR was broadly welcomed as a source of clarity regarding Senate's responsibilities and its relationship with Court.

The following points were made in discussion:

- The hope was expressed that this would help to promote a clearer focus within Senate on its key responsibilities and on assuring Court as these responsibilities were discharged.
- In addition to providing increased clarity overall, the practical uses of the SOPR should include guiding agenda setting, for both Senate Business Committee and any individuals proposing agenda items.
- It was noted that research lacked prominence in the SOPR, relative to learning and teaching, and it was observed that care should be taken not to communicate any apparent undervaluing of the role of research in the University. It was noted that Senate's statutory role to 'promote research' was distinct from its role in relation to teaching. It was also noted that there was currently more discussion of research matters at Senate than in previous times.
- Clarity was sought on the nature and implications of Senate approvals, given the primacy of Court in the University's governance.

It was noted that feedback had not yet been provided on the comments received through the survey of Senate members, recognising that this feedback had been provided initially to Court for consideration, alongside the draft SOPR and additional feedback from GNC.

Given this, Court approved the SOPR in principle and agreed that further work should be done, with the involvement of relevant members of Court, to assess any potential amendments to the SOPR in the light of the feedback from Senate and GNC. In addition, responses to the feedback should be formulated, to aid understanding of why feedback had been adopted or not.

9. Joint Education Programme in Engineering **Paper I**

Iain Gordon, Head of the College of Science & Engineering, introduced the proposed joint education programme, noting that this provided the opportunity to further a number of strategic aims for the School of Engineering and the University, including greater cross-College collaboration, the development of areas of particular research and innovation expertise, increased activity in a geographical area of strategic interest and an expansion of transnational education in a way that would build upon existing successful activity, in line with the University's stated approach. The new proposal benefitted from an existing model to draw from and assurances that could be drawn from it.

The level of risk associated with the proposal was discussed. It was observed that prior experience and knowledge reduced overall risk in this case but risks would still be very carefully assessed.

The importance of the details of the financial model was emphasised, noting that these details were not yet available. Assurances were given that, if authority were delegated as requested, an appropriately strong and detailed financial model would a prerequisite for the University Executive to approve progressing the initiative further.

On this basis, Court delegated authority to the University Executive, as requested, to approve the business case and authorised the Principal to sign any MoU/MoA as needed.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

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

Court noted the report.

11. Education Act 1994 requirements in relation to the Students' Association **Paper K**

Court noted the paper and the assurances provided therein.

12. Prevent Duty Annual Compliance Report **Paper L**

Court noted the report.

13. External Developments: Tertiary Education and Training Act, Future Framework, CUC (rUK) Code of Governance, National Review of Awarding Arrangements **Paper M**

Court noted the paper and discussed the value of horizon scanning to inform Court's strategic decision-making. Potential topics for future Court seminars were discussed.

14. Resolutions

Boards of Studies' Terms of Reference **Paper N**

Court referred Draft Resolution No. 7/2026 to Senate and the General Council for observations.

Chair Resolutions **Paper O**

Court approved Resolution No.3/2026, Foundation of a Personal Chair of Clinical Trials and Complex Intervention Evaluation, and Resolution No.4/2026, Foundation of a Personal Chair of High-Performance Computing Applications.

Degree Programme Regulations **Paper P**

Court approved Resolution No. 5/2026, Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations, and Resolution No. 6/2026, Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations.

15. Any Other Business

Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member, thanked Rushad Abadan and Richard Blythe for their service as members of Court and of committees and other groups associated with Court. She also thanked Iain Gordon for his contributions to the University, in particular as Head of College.

She then offered reflections on her own time as Senior Lay Member of Court, noting the value provided by the diverse voices on Court and thanking members past and present for their support and for their thoughtful and constructive approach to balancing their responsibilities as Court members with their other roles.

The Principal, on behalf of Court, thanked Janet Legrand for her exceptional contributions as Senior Lay Member, for her substantial investment of time for Court and other University governance roles, and for her role in championing the University throughout her tenure as Senior Lay Member.

16. Date of Next Meeting

5 October 2026