

**UNIVERSITY COURT**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2020**

**Present:** Mr H Adam (Chair), Ms M Allison, Dr Robert Black, Dr P Cowell, Ms P Crawford, Prof J Donaldson, Mr K Fraser, Ms S Gordon, Prof A Green, Mr H Grossart, Mr S Haldane, Prof P Hancock, Mr G Hastie, Mr D Kearney, Mr G MacLeod, Prof M MacLeod, Prof G McCormac, Ms B McKissack, Ms C Morrison, Mr J Muirhead, Prof H Nehring, Rev M Roderick, Ms C Whyte

**In Attendance:** Ms C Gallagher, Ms J Harrison, Mr L McCabe, Mr M McCrindle, Mr C McNally, Ms J Morrow, Prof J Phillips, Dr J Rogers, Ms E Schofield, Prof L Sparks, Mr L Spillane, Dr David Telford, Ms F Wheater (Clerk), Prof N Wylie

**Apologies:** Councillor C Simpson

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 virus the meeting was held online with all members and attendees joining the meeting remotely.

Members remembered Kate Howie who was a member of Court between 2015 and 2018 and had recently passed away.

Members welcomed the following new members to their first meeting having successfully won the recent staff elections:

* Ms Pamela Crawford - Professional Services Staff representative
* Dr Paul Cowell – Academic staff representative

Members noted that this would be the last meeting attended by Chloe Whyte who was thanked for her contributions to Court.

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Robert Black declared that he had been asked by the University of Aberdeen to oversee a review of the University’s governance arrangements and to review the governance arrangements of the Scottish Police Authority. Both of these had been recorded in the University’s Register of Interests.

**2. MINUTES UC(19/20) Minutes 2**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2019 were **approved** as an accurate record subject to some minor corrections to the text under the External Environment item relating to Advanced Research Projects Agency.

**3. MATTERS ARISING NOT OTHERWISE ON THE AGENDA**

There were no matters arising.

**4. KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT UC(19/20)37**

Court **received** a report on recent developments in the external environment and their potential impact upon the higher education sector. Members **noted** the recent award of the Queen’s Anniversary Prize to the Institute of Aquaculture and that the City Region Deal had recently been signed by the University and government partners.

*COVID 19 Virus Briefing*

The situation was rapidly developing and in the last few days the University’s operations had moved online except for a small number of essential workers who were required to keep critical campus-based services running. A high proportion of Academic and Professional Services staff were working from home.

Members received an update from the relevant Executive Directors and Deputy Principals on the work that was being done to ensure the health and safety of staff, students and the public and where possible keep services running. Some of the key points from the discussion were:

* The Principal was in regular contact with the Government and Scottish Funding Council who had agreed to be flexible in terms of reporting requirements and to work with Universities to ensure financial stability as far as possible.
* All learning and teaching was being delivered online and staff were working to deliver alternative forms of assessment.
* All student services were being delivered online including individual meetings with counsellors, careers advisors etc.
* Staff were working to support students who remained on Campus who were not able to return home for any reason or for whom the Campus was the main residence.
* Staff in the Organisational Development team were working to support staff with home working and online teaching and learning.
* Access to non-residential buildings had been restricted but daily checks remained in place for services such as heating and water. Consideration was being given to other health and safety issues such as the danger of Legionella which could occur when water systems were not regularly used. Security staff were still on campus.
* IS staff were working behind the scenes to enable remote access including liaison with providers such as Microsoft and Canvas to increase capacity. There had been a significant increase in online working and accessing digital library resources.
* The hotel on campus had closed but essential services such as the pharmacy and campus supermarket remained open.
* The sports centre had closed including for the training of elite athletes. Sports Development staff were exploring ways to continue to engage with members and students who remained on campus.
* Finance staff were working at home and payments/receipts continued to be processed. Finance and HR staff were working together to ensure payroll could be run.
* All face-to-face student recruitment activity across the globe had stopped. The Communications, Marketing and Recruitment team (CMR) were investigating the hosting of virtual recruitment events and making use of footage that had been filmed on campus before the lockdown.
* CMR and Admissions were working with relevant bodies on how to offer places to students for 20/21 entry with revised arrangements in place for school level qualifications.
* Regular updates were being provided to staff and students across email and major social media platforms and there was a set of Frequently Asked Questions that was being regularly updated.
* Internationalisation and Partnerships were in contact with Transnational Education partners and were working with them, particularly those who currently had students on campus.
* Many research activities had paused particularly those involving vulnerable people, and those requiring access to campus facilities/laboratories. The Research & Innovation Services were liaising with research funders.

Members recognised the considerable effort that had been made by staff across all areas to keep the University going and keep staff and students safe.

Court **noted** the update on the external environment.

***DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN***

**5. KPI REPORT UC(19/20)38**

Court **noted** the KPI report which presented an update for 2019/20 at quarter 2. The report considered the performance of each KPI against target and actions in progress to improve performance.

***PLANNING & BUDGETING***

**6. FORWARD LOOK 2021 Oral**

Court **considered** the oral update given on the current financial position of the University at quarter 2. It was anticipated that there would be a significant financial impact as a result of the COVID 19 virus. For example, accommodation and commercial income from sport, hotel services and events would be severely impacted. It was also projected that there would be a significant reduction in overseas fee income. Although there would be some savings in operating costs these would not compensate for the reductions in income.

The Executive Director of Finance was liaising with SFC regarding the possibility of grants and cashflow support. There had been discussions about utilising the Financial Transactions Fund, but this was in the form of a loan rather than grant.

The University was working closely with the banks. Money was still available to the University via the revolving credit facility, but it would be difficult to generate more liquidity.

Court **noted** the update and forward look on the University’s financial position. Work would continue with the SFC and the Scottish Government regarding the financial position and impact of COVID 19 on the higher education sector.

**7. OUTCOME AGREEMENT UPDATE 2020-2021 UC(19/20)39**

Court considered the updated Outcome Agreement for 2020-21 that had previously been considered at the December 2019 meeting of Court. Since the version previously considered by Court a number of updates had been made. In light of the current position, the SFC had indicated that they would be likely to accept the near final versions of the Outcome Agreements that they had already received from universities.

Court **endorsed** the Outcome Agreement Update 2020-21 and **approved delegated authority** to the Chair of Court, Chair of JPPRC and Principal to approve any further amendments that were required.

**8. CITY DEAL UC(19/20)40**

Court **received** an update on the City Region Deal which had been formally signed between the UK and Scottish Governments and regional partners on 26 February 2020. The next phase was the development of a full business case for each project in order to access the funding quarterly in arrears.

It was likely that there would be some delays due to the COVID 19 virus but economic growth would be crucial once the initial phase of the virus had passed so work was continuing on business development to raise the additional funding for capital costs and the preparation of business plans.

The proposals for the third project, the Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub, had not been approved yet, however, positive feedback had been received and a response was awaited from the UK Government.

Court **noted** the update on the City Region Deal.

***INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENTS***

**9. CAPITAL UPDATE UC(19/20)41**

Court **noted** the current Capital Expenditure Update and the fact that it was likely to be amended in the light of the COVID 19 pandemic. Court **approved delegated authority** to the Chair of Court, Chair of JPPRC and Principal to approve any further amendments that were required and to make decisions in relation to the SFC Financial Transactions loan and associated documentation.

***COMMITTEE REPORTS***

**10. ACADEMIC COUNCIL UC(19/20)42**

Court **received** an update from Academic Council from its meeting of 11 March 2020. Members discussed the proposed amendments to Ordinance 2 – Code of Student Discipline. It was noted that the proposed amendments had been developed over an 18 month period with extensive consultation across the University and in accordance with best practice guidance. It was also acknowledged that members had not had much time to properly consider the proposed amendments and some members had some points they wished to raise about the proposed Code of Student Discipline. After some discussion members **agreed to approve** the revised Ordinance so that the benefits of the new arrangements could be implemented as soon as possible. However, it was agreed that feedback could be submitted by Court members for consideration as part of the next review of the Ordinance which would be brought forward for consideration earlier than originally planned.

**[Action: All Members]**

Court **approved** the proposed amendments to Ordinances 2, 30 and 59 and **noted** the remaining items in the report from Academic Council

**11. JOINT POLICY, PLANNING & RESOURCES COMMITTEE (JPPRC) UC(19/20)43**

Court **considered** the report from the JPPRC meeting held on 3 March 2020. The report included updates on developments in the external environment, management accounts, KPI report, capital expenditure update and recruitment contingency planning.

Court **approved** the Procurement Policies subject to adding in the Community Benefit requirement into the relevant flowcharts. Court also **approved** the Safety, Environment and Business Continuity Annual Report for 2018/19 and the Treasury Management Policy.

Court **noted** the remaining items in the report from JPPRC.

**12. AUDIT COMMITTEE UC(19/20)44**

Court **considered** the report from the Audit Committee meeting of 11 February 2020. It was noted that the Committee had agreed to run a tender for the external audit contract despite having the option for an additional one year extension. Court **agreed** that this may have to be reconsidered in the light of the current pandemic.

Court **noted** the remaining items on the report from Audit Committee.

**13. GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE UC(19/20)45**

Court **received** a report from the Governance and Nominations Committee for actions taken during February and March 2020. Members **noted** that the interview with the new candidate for the position of Chair of Court had been postposed and that the current circumstances meant that it would not be possible to complete the recruitment/election process before the end of the academic year. The University Secretary would continue to liaise with the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council on the way forward.

Court noted the remaining items in the report from the Governance and Nominations Committee.

***ACTIVITY UPDATES***

**14. STUDENTS’ UNION UPDATE UC(19/20)46**

Court received and **noted** the report from the Students’ Union.

**15. STAFF AND EMPLOYMENT UPDATE UC(19/20)47**

Court **received** an update on staff and employment issues. The report provided updates on the 2019/20 pay dispute, USS dispute and industrial action. It was clarified that staff participating only in action short of strike (ASOS) would not have pay deducted unless it was deemed that they were breaching their contract.

The Unions had confirmed that the further ballots had been suspended in light of the COVID 19 virus.

Court **noted** the staff and employment update.

***RISKS***

**16. RISKS ARISING Oral**

No additional items were identified to add to the institutional Register of Strategic Risks.

***OTHER ITEMS***

**17. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

The issue of quorum for Court was raised. It was noted that the rules for quorum were stated in the Court Standing Orders. Members considered that there was no significant risk at present of not achieving quorum. Members agreed that the meeting held via video conference had been successful.

**18. NEXT MEETING**

Court **noted** that the next meeting was scheduled for 15 June 2020.

Policy & Planning

March 2020