

**Minutes - University Court Monday 27th March 2023**

14:00 – 16:00

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

Mr H Adam (Chair); Mr K Fraser; Mr H Grossart; Dr P Gupta, Mr G Hastie; Mr D Kearney; Ms C Morrison; Dr M Allison; Ms S Gordon; Mr J Roberts; Professor M MacLeod; Professor Sir G McCormac; Mr D Dodds; Professor J Donaldson; Professor H Nehring; Mr W Stancer, Ms J Reid, Ms T Miller; Professor P Hancock; Professor J Tinson; Ms P Crawford and Mr G Fleming.

In Attendance

Ms R Edwards, Ms C Gallagher, Ms J Harrison, Ms K Lawson, Mr C McNally, Ms J Morrow, Prof J Phillips, Dr J Rogers, Ms E Schofield, Mr L Spillane, Dr D Telford, Mr M Nichol (Clerk), Prof N Wylie and Dr L Zhuang.

In accordance with the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance, the meeting was preceded by a meeting of Court members, chaired by the Vice Chair of Court. The Chair of Court and those in attendance were not present.

Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Paul Cowell.

The Chair thanked Ms T Miller and Ms J Reid for their enthusiasm and contribution to University Court, members of Court joined the Chair in offering their best wishes for the future.

The Chair welcomed Ms R Edwards to Court in her role as Interim Executive Director of Finance.

The Chair provided an overview of recent developments that included the election of three senior staff (Professor L Sparks, Professor R Norman and Ms C Gallagher) and a former Chair of University Court (Dr A Simpson OBE) to the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

The Chair noted numerous sporting achievements that included the men's tennis team and two of University of Stirling's student golfers who won their British and Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) events.

The Chair acknowledged achievements of University of Stirling students at the Royal Television Society Scotland Student Awards, who won awards in factual production, animation, camerawork and editing categories.

1. Declarations of Interest

Mr H Grossart declared an interest in the re-appointment to University Court proposed at Item 15.

2. Minutes

Court approved the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2022.

3. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

There were no matters arising not otherwise on the agenda.

4. Developments in the External Environment

University Court received an overview of recent developments in the External Environment which included coverage of the outcome of the Scottish National Party (SNP) leadership contest, UK Spring Budget 2023, the new UK Government department for Science, Innovation & Technology, the Windsor Framework and the draft Scottish Budget 2023/24.

University Court noted the recent developments in the external environment.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

5. Quarter 2 Performance Report

University Court received an introduction to the Quarter 2 Report, underpinned by the management accounts and the associated indicative financial forecast position for the academic year 2022-23.

Members discussed key operating indicators associated with the University’s performance at Quarter 2, including the management accounts.  The forecast out-turn surplus of £7.2m (4.4% of income) for 2022-23 was in line with the Court approved budget. Members noted a number of movements including an increase in Scottish Funding Council grants due to additional research funding of £0.7m awarded in November 2022; an increase in other income (£0.9m) associated with project-based activities; and an increase in other operating expenditure (£2m) reflective of increased costs in commercial areas.

Members discussed the forecast cash position based on the Quarter 2 management accounts.  It was noted that the University was forecast to end financial year 2022-23 with a net operating cash inflow of £19.3m and access to cash and working capital facilities of £88.4m. It was confirmed that given the forecast cash position, the University would be covenant compliant in 2022-23.

Members considered student recruitment performance and the significant progress made towards consolidating a step-change in unregulated student recruitment achieved against the challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Members noted in particular successes in the postgraduate taught overseas recruitment market and discussed the number of applications received, UK Visas and Immigration and the approach adopted to manage the intake of students.

University Court considered and noted the Quarter 2 Report.

6. Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan

University Court received an update on the Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan, Quarter 2.

Members discussed the 2022/23 Quarter 2 forecast and the indicative infrastructure expenditure for the four-year period to 2025-26, and the forecasting exercise undertaken for Quarter 2 that realised a significant re-phasing of £9m from 2022-23 to 2023-24.

It was confirmed that the Scottish Funding Council Financial Transactions Fund (SFC FTF) application was finalised and would fund new projects contributing to the University’s roadmap to Net Zero by 2040.

Members discussed projects totalling £1.6m brought forward into 2022-23 from future years including the transformational Learning Spaces Redevelopment Project (£1.1m), Firestopping (£0.3m) and the Student IT project (£0.3m).  New projects of £0.5m were approved for spend in 2022-23, including the Student IT Upgrade (£0.4m) and the fees to progress the Campus Boulevard and Haldane’s Lawn project (£0.1m).

Members discussed the Learning Spaces Redevelopment project, and approach to mitigate any implications on availability of accommodation associated with the Muirhead Refurbishment project.

University Court approved the Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan 2022/23, Quarter 2.

7. City Region and Growth Deal

University Court received an update from the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board.

Members discussed the development of the business case for the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH) and the issues pertaining to terms of the Phase 1 contract for construction and financial implications due to substantially increased estimates in the final contract process.

Members discussed the recommendation from the City Region & Growth Deal Programme Board to create the Alloa Innovation Hub.  It was confirmed that both the second phase of Scotland’s International Environment Centre (SIEC 2) and the Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub (ILIH) projects would proceed through a single programme.

University Court:

* considered the report from the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board.
* discussed the position with National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH).
* approved the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board recommendation for proceeding with the second phase of Scotland’s International Environment Centre (SIEC 2) and the Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub (ILIH) through a single Alloa Innovation Hub project.
* noted the updates on Phase 1 of Scotland’s International Environment Centre, the International Marine Science & Environment Centre, and the Machrihanish Innovation Hub.

8. Development of the Strategic Plan

University Court received an update on the development of the University’s next Strategic Plan.  Members discussed the key themes identified through consultation and engagement activities, potential implications and opportunities associated with Artificial Intelligence over the duration of the next Strategic Plan, and the approach to measuring the impact of the strategy on the staff and student experience.

University Court noted the update and timeline on development of the Strategic Plan.

GOVERNANCE

9. Public Sector Equality Duty

University Court received an overview of the Mainstreaming the Equality Duty report, the University’s Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED) and specific statutory reporting obligations.

Members discussed progress on the University’s Equality Outcomes 2021-25 and the sector wide persistent inequalities identified by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report, Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together.

Members noted in particular work undertaken to narrow the University's gender pay gap, discussed the diversity of membership on University Court and noted action proposed to meet the Gender Representation on Public Boards objective.

University Court approve the report on mainstreaming equality for publication in April 2023.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

10. Students' Union Update

University Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities that included the outcome of the 2023 Students' Union election and voter turnout, the development of a housing guide for students and cost of living support available for students.  Members discussed the community food bank at the Cornton, and challenges associated with increased local demand.  It was noted that further discussion on the sustainability and use of the service would be taken forward.

University Court noted the activity update from the Students’ Union.

11. Staff and Employment Update

University Court received an update on staff and employment matters that included coverage of employee relations, national negotiations in relation to pay led by UCEA, and notices of ballots issued for industrial action.

Members received an overview of findings from the staff pulse survey on agile working.  It was confirmed that a briefing would be provided as the Pre-Court discussion topic in June.

Members noted progress pertaining to secure contracts, narrowing the gender pay gap and gender equality, and discussed in particular the approach to resource management.

University Court considered and notedthe staff and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

12. Academic Council

University Court considered and noted the report from meeting of Academic Council which took place on 8 March 2023.

13. Joint Policy, Planning & Resources Committee (JPPRC)

University Court considered the report from the meeting of JPPRC which took place on 28 February 2023.

It was noted that JPPRC had approved the proposed Accommodation Allocation Policy and rent levels for 2023/24, and that, unlike previous years, the Rent Review Group had been unable to reach a mutually agreed position with the Students' Union.

University Court approved the Annual Safety, Security and Continuity Report.

14. Audit Committee

University Court considered and noted the report of Audit Committee which took place on 6 February 2023.  Approved the Panel’s recommendation that Ernst and Young be appointed as the University’s Internal Auditors and noted the recommendation for the University to maintain cash balances along with working capital facilities to provide access to funds that would ensure commitments could be met for at least three months.

15. Governance and Nominations Committee

University Court considered and noted the report from the meeting of Governance and Nominations Committee which took place on 24 January 2023, approved the revised remit of Governance and Nominations Committee and approved the recommended lay member re-appointment to University Court.

RISKS

16. Risks Arising

University Court considered risks associated with items discussed in the context of the agreed risk appetite statement.

OTHER ITEMS

17. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other competent business.

18. Next Meeting

University Court noted the next meeting of Court was scheduled on 12 June 2023.