

Minutes for University Court (21/22) - 13th June 2022

14:00 - 16:00

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

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

In Attendance

Ms L Dickson (item 5), Ms C Gallagher, Ms J Harrison, Ms K Lawson, Mr L McCabe, Mr C McNally, Ms J Morrow, Prof J Phillips, Dr J Rogers, Ms E Schofield, Prof L Sparks, Mr L Spillane, Ms J Stevenson (item 11), Dr David Telford, Mr M Nichol (Clerk), Prof N Wylie and Dr L Zhuang.

Welcome and Apologies

**Welcome:**

The Chair welcomed Ms Tash Miller (Students’ Union President) and Ms Jess Reid (Students’ Union Vice President Communities) to the meeting following their appointment to University Court.

The Chair welcomed Mr Julian Roberts, Ms Poonam Gupta and Mr William Stancer following their appointment to the position of Lay members of University Court.

The Chair welcomed the Provost of Stirling, Douglas Dodds to University Court following the local authority election held in May.

The Chair welcomed Professor Julie Tinson to University Court following her appointment to the position of Academic Council representative.

The Chair thanked Barbara McKissack for her contribution to University Court, noting her term would expire on 31 July 2022.

**Apologies:**

Apologies for absence were received from Ms P Crawford , Mr J Roberts and Ms B McKissack.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

2. Minutes

Court **approved** the minutes of the meetings held on 28 March 2022.

3. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

There were no matters arising as actions had been completed and reported elsewhere or were underway.

4. Developments in the External Environment

Court received an overview of recent developments in the External Environment.  This included coverage of Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 results, SFC Final Funding Allocations (2022/23), the Scottish Government Spending Review and sustainability.

Members discussed the outcome of the case brought against the University of Bristol regarding discrimination and potential implications for higher education institutions.  Members noted the 2022 Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) commercial development award for Campus Central.

Court **noted** the recent developments in the external environment.

5. Research Excellence Framework 2021

Members received a presentation on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 that included general background information, an overview of REF 2022 results and initial analysis of the data.

Members discussed the main outcomes and highlights that included:

* 87% of the University’s research had an outstanding (4\*) or very considerable (3\*) impact.
* More than 80% of Stirling research was world leading (4\*) or internationally excellent (3\*).
* 85% of research environment was rated 4\* and 3\*.

It was confirmed that, having reflected on the previous REF, main performance outcomes included:

* The results overall indicated a consolidation of the improvements made from the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) to REF 2014.
* The University improved its Grade Point Average (GPA), from 2.92 in 2014 to 3.09 (unweighted for submission size) in 2021.
* The institutional profile demonstrated strength in impact scores with overall GPA for impact at 3.28 (unweighted for size of submission) and to a lesser extent the environment with a GPA of 3.07.
* GPA for outputs at 3.01 brought down the overall GPA and demonstrated a need to develop a greater pool of 4\* outputs over the forthcoming REF period.

Members discussed initial analysis of the *Times Higher Education* rankings lists for institutions and noted Stirling placed 51st overall and 7th in Scotland.  Members noted that the University received notice of its Research Excellence Grant (REG) funding from the SFC on 26 May.  There had been no uplift in the quantum of REG funding for the sector from the SFC despite the improvement in quality and significant uplift in the volume of staff submitted.  As a result, overall, the University’s REG funding declined by 1.6% compared to 2021-22.  It was confirmed that findings from REF 2021 form part of our understanding of research culture at the University, and would be integrated into the development of the Strategic Plan.

Court **noted** the update on the outcome of Research Excellence Framework 2021.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

6. Integrated Planning and Budgeting 2022/23

Court received an update on Integrated Planning and Budgeting at Quarter 3.  It was confirmed that the 2021-22 Quarter 3 Management Accounts presented a forecast outturn surplus of £12.4m and that the result was achieved through increased tuition fee income of £1.5m compared to Quarter 2, coupled with a reduction in staffing expenditure of £800k as gap savings increased due to continued difficulties in the recruitment market.

The 2022-23 University Budget derived an outturn surplus of £7.1m (4.5% of income). Using the 2021-22 forecast at Quarter 3 as a comparator the result was achieved through increased total income of £8.3m.  Expenditure increased by £14m that reflected inflationary pressures, the increased cost of projects and commercial activity and increased levels of costs as the University returned to pre-covid levels of activity.  Increased staff costs were £8m, coupled with increased costs in other operating expenses of £5m.

Based on the Quarter 3 forecast surplus and progress with the approved capital programme the University was forecast to end the financial year 2021-22 with available cash facilities of £64m. It was confirmed that the University would be covenant compliant based on the forecast operating cash position.  Predicated upon the 2022-23 Budget, the University anticipated ending the financial year 2022-23 with available cash facilities of £54m.

Members discussed assumptions pertaining to forecast income and expenditure, residential accommodation income and occupancy rates, the University of Stirling Pension Scheme and the University's cash strategy and approach to maintaining sufficient cash balances along with working capital facilities. Members discussed that in principle the University would seek to put in place a Revolving Credit Facility of £10m, a fuller proposal would be brought back to Court for consideration and approval in due course.

Set against the context of institutional performance and achievements delivered during 2021/22, members received an overview of institutional and faculty priorities for delivery during 2022/23.  It was confirmed that, in tandem with the development of the new Strategic Plan, the University would prioritise the consolidation in the step-change in student numbers and research award capture, whilst continuing to invest in learning infrastructure to enable a top-class, digital-ready and flexible learning experience.

Court **approved** the integrated planning and budgeting item. Additionally, Court **noted** that the financial forecasts for the period 2021-22 to 2023-24 as contained in the paper would be submitted to the Scottish Funding Council at the end of June 2022.

7. Capital and Major Infrastructure Update

Court received a presentation on a proposed redevelopment of learning spaces. The aim of the transformational project was to deliver a comprehensive modernisation of the University’s core learning and teaching spaces would provide a consistent approach to digital learning technologies within refurbished rooms.   It was confirmed that the indicative capital plan combined both the digital and physical aspects that created one major project that had been re-phased across 2022/23 and 2023/24, with an expected completion date of September 2023.

Court subsequently received an overview of the Capital and Major Infrastructure Quarter 3 update. It was confirmed that the 2021-26 Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan presented an indicative five-year plan of £51.3m.  The projects recommended for delivery in 2022/23 were informed by health and safety requirements, as well as priorities supporting learning, teaching, and research activities.  Strategies for Estates, Residences and Digital would be developed in tandem with the development of the Strategic Plan during academic year 2022/23, and would inform further development of the Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan thereafter.  

Court discussed the indicative plan and updates on priority projects, including Learning Spaces Redevelopment, Clinical Skills Facilities, Lifespan Research Lab and Fire Alarms and Fire Stopping.

Members discussed the approach to building inclusion and wellbeing into the design stage of projects, linked to objectives set out in the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies, and the importance of consultation with key stakeholder including the Students' Union and the Disabled Students Association of Stirling University.

Court **approved** the 2022/23 Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan update.  Additionally, Court **noted** that the capital plan for the period 2021-22 to 2023-24 contained in the paper would be submitted to the SFC at the end of June 2022.

8. COLLABORATION

a) University College Health Partnership

Court received an overview of a proposal for a tripartite University College Health Partnership between the University, Forth Valley College, and NHS Forth Valley to be established from September 2022.

Court discussed the key outcomes and workstreams being developed under the headings of Joint Strategic Working, Research and Innovation, Education and Skills, Workforce Development and Career Pathways and plans for the proposed oversight board and operational boards.

It was confirmed that the proposal required no direct additional resources at this stage and that the partnership would require resource built into future planning rounds based on the agreed priority actions.

Court **approved** the establishment of the University College Health Partnership.

b) Forth Valley College

Court received an overview of the intended direction for the partnership, and wider opportunities to collaborate between the University and Forth Valley College.

Members discussed the importance of collaboration between universities and colleges, local authorities, Government and external stakeholders.  It was confirmed that the institutional partnership with Forth Valley College served as an example of the University’s commitment to strategic partnerships and to local and regional contributions to society and the economy. The University and College are both ‘anchor’ institutions within the Forth Valley, making significant contributions to the region’s physical and digital infrastructures, economy through employment opportunities, skills landscape through vocational and academic provision, and knowledge generation/exchange through impactful research.

Subsequently members discussed recommendations made following the Scottish Funding Council’s Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability concerning ‘tertiary’ education.  It was confirmed the broad steer was that the Higher and Further Education sectors should work in an increasingly integrated manner in order to realise Scottish Government ambitions and outcomes.

Court **approved** the recommendation that the University of Stirling, in conjunction with Forth Valley College, identify best practice in the UK and internationally for a closer collaboration between the two organisations.

9. City Deal

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

Members discussed delivery of Phase 1 of Scotland's International Environment Centre, the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub and the Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub.

Court **noted** the report from the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board, in particular actions taken to progress the University-led projects and progress to date with the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal.

STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

10. Development of the Strategic Plan

Court received an overview of proposed principles to guide the development of the Strategic Plan.

Members considered the key themes and associated indicative timeline for developing the University’s next Strategic Plan.  Members discussed in particular the proposed programme and approach to staff and student engagement, led by the Senior Management Team, to stimulate and consider ideas, build discussion and gather feedback.

Noting the approach to engagement and development would be inclusive, Court considered and **approved** the outlined approach.

11. Race Equality Strategy

Court received an overview of the draft Race Equality Strategy and the context for the University’s approach to tackling racism and racial inequalities.

Members considered the five key priorities for the institution based on research reports, guidance and findings from engagement with staff and students.  Members discussed in particular resources to support interculturalism and anti-racism including the stimulation of open discussion and critical thinking on aspects of racism and race equality, awareness raising, mentoring, student engagement and support.

Court **approved** the Race Equality Strategy.

12. Information Security - Bring Your Own Device Policy

Court received an overview of the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy.

Members discussed the shifting landscape around cyber security and the increased use of personal devices, which presented risks to university systems and data.  Members considered the principles of the policy, responsibilities and oversight arrangements.  It was confirmed the key security measures to be introduced would support the safety and security of the University's data on personal devices.

Court **approved** the Bring Your Own Device Policy.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

13. Students' Union Update

Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities pertaining to recent awards and achievements, academic representation, Students' Union elections, campaigns and membership of clubs and societies.

Court **considered** the activity update from the Students’ Union.

14. Staffing and Employment Update

Court received an update on staff and employment matters that included coverage of topics including industrial action, the 2022/23 pay award and health and wellbeing.  Members discussed the recognition and ongoing consideration of recent increases to the cost of living in wider society and the impact on staff on lower incomes.

Court **considered** the staffing and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

15. Academic Council

Court **noted** the report from the meeting of Academic Council held on 1st June 2022.

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

Court **noted** the report from the meeting of Joint Policy Planning and Resources Committee held on 24 May 2022.

17. Audit Committee

Court **noted** the report of the Audit Committee meeting which took place on 17 May 2022.

18. Governance and Nominations Committee (GNC)

Court received an overview of the report from the Governance and Nominations Committee which took place on 30 May 2022.

Court **noted**the report from the Governance and Nominations Committee of 30 May 2022, considered and commented on the findings of the Court Effectiveness Questionnaire and **approved** the appointments nominated by GNC.

19. Combined Joint Negotiating & Consultation Committee (CJNCC)

Court **noted** the report from Combined Joint Negotiating and Consultation Committee for 2021/22.

20. Academic Promotions Committee (APC)

Court received an overview of the annual report from Academic Promotions Committee.

Members discussed the number of applications received, the outcomes by promotion route and enhancements made aimed at supporting staff and line mangers on their developmental path.

Court **noted** the annual report from APC.

21. Risks Arising

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

OTHER ITEMS

22. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other competent business.

23. Next Meeting

Court **noted** that the Court meeting dates for 2022/23 were scheduled for 19 September 2022; 12 December 2022; 27 March 2023 and 12 June 2023.