

Minutes - University Court Monday 12th June 2023

2.00pm to 4.00pm

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

Mr Harry Adam (Chair); Dr Mary Allison; Ms Zoe Crosher; Ms Pamela Crawford; Councillor Douglas Dodds; Mr Kenny Fraser; Ms Susan Gordon Hardy; Mr Hamish Grossart; Dr Poonam Gupta; Professor Peter Hancock; Mr Douglas Kearney; Professor Malcolm MacLeod; Professor Sir Gerry McCormac; Ms Catriona Morrison; Ms Leen Ali; Mr Julian Roberts; Mr William Stancer; Professor Julie Tinson; Dr Paul Cowell

**In Attendance**

Ms Rose Edwards, Mr Graeme Duff, Ms Cathy Gallagher, Ms Jennifer Harrison, Ms Karen Lawson, Mr Colin McNally, Ms Joanna Morrow, Professor Judith Phillips, Dr John Rogers, Ms Eileen Schofield, Mr Liam Spillane, Dr David Telford, Mr Moray Nichol (Clerk), Professor Neville Wylie, Dr Lee Zhuang and Mr Tom Collins (Item 4)

Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Professor Jayne Donaldson, Mr Gary Fleming, Mr Graham Hastie and Professor Holger Nehring.

Court approved the appointments recommended by Governance and Nominations contained in the report at Item 16.  The Chair subsequently welcomed Ms Leen Ali (Students’ Union President) and Ms Zoe Crosher (Students’ Union Vice President Communities) to the meeting following their appointment to University Court.

The Chair thanked Dr Paul Cowell, Professor Jayne Donaldson, Professor Peter Hancock and Professor Holger Nehring for their contribution to University Court

The Chair congratulated Ms Rose Edwards on her appointment as Executive Director of Finance.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declaration of interest.

2. Minutes

Court approved the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2023.

3. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

There were no matters arising not otherwise on the agenda.

4. Developing the Strategic Plan

Court received an overview of the strategic direction articulated in the draft Strategic Plan and discussed the proposed vision, mission and values for the University, and five strategic priorities.

University Court considered the draft Strategic Plan and informed key revisions ahead of the written draft being made available to the University community for consideration and comment.

5. Developments in the External Environment

Court received an overview of developments in the external environment that included coverage of student visa reforms, changes to the Scottish Government Cabinet, funding announcements from Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill and Horizon Europe and the Pioneer Prospectus.

Court noted the recent development in the external environment.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

6. Planning and Budgeting 2023/24

Court received an introduction to the Planning and Budgeting item including the Quarter 3 Management Accounts 2022-23, the University Budget 2023-26, an update on the Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan and an update on the cash position.

Members discussed the forecast outturn surplus variances between the Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 milestones across each primary income and expenditure line.  Members noted the primary variances, a positive variance for tuition fee income (£2.1m, following confirmation of the spring intake coupled with a reduction in fee waivers) and an adverse variance for other operating expenditure (£3.0m, due to an increase in the provision against student fee income that may be considered unrecoverable).

Members discussed institutional priorities and direction of travel for the 2023/24 academic year, and reflected on the University’s progress towards the strategic ambitions articulated in the Strategic Plan Addendum 2021- 23.  Members discussed key institutional achievements delivered during 2022/23 and performance against institutional Key Performance Indicators at Quarter 3.

Members noted the 2023-24 University Budget derived a budgeted outturn surplus of £4.6m (2.7% of income), and provision was made for targeted investment in line with the recommendations from Core Planning Group and the implementation of the pay award as recommended by Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA).

Members discussed the recommended increased costs of £17.4m for delivery of the 2022-28 Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan and noted the priorities supported learning, teaching, research and commercial activities. Members discussed new proposals recommended by the Infrastructure Group, including a Stirling Court Hotel bedroom refurbishment phased over 3 years and a rolling phased annual investment of IT equipment for staff.

Members noted the University anticipated ending the financial year 2023-24 with available cash and working capital facilities of £63.1m, and with a budgeted net operating cash inflow of £17.2m the University would be covenant compliant.

Court considered and approved the integrated planning and budgeting item.

Additionally, Court noted that the financial forecasts for the period 2022-23 to 2024-25 as contained in the paper would be submitted to the Scottish Funding Council at the end of June 2023.

COLLABORATION

7. City Region and Growth Deal

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

Members discussed progress and next steps on the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH) project that included coverage of the construction programme and business case journey.  Court noted the Programme Board's decision that the NATIH project should be re-examined as a single-phase project and that the implications of this should be explored with the governments.  Members noted a further report with recommendations would be brought to Court at its meeting in October 2023, with a view to commencing construction shortly thereafter.  As this would include a full re-examination of cash flow and risk implications, the previous authorisation to enter into a construction contract agreed by Court in December 2022 was rescinded.

Members discussed progress on the Alloa Innovation Hub, Phase 1 of Scotland’s International Environment Centre, the International Marine Science & Environment Centre, and the Machrihanish Innovation Hub.

Court discussed the progress with the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH) project, and noted the updates on the Alloa Innovation Hub, Phase 1 of Scotland’s International Environment Centre, the International Marine Science & Environment Centre, and the Machrihanish Innovation Hub.

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

8. Personal Relationships Policy

Court discussed the Staff – Student Personal Relationships Policy and noted the proposed policy statement would satisfy a recommendation of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) that institutions conduct a self-assessment of relevant procedures, and takes into account guidance published by Universities UK (UUK) in December 2022 on tackling staff-to-student sexual misconduct.

Members noted the Office for Students (OfS) launched a consultation in respect of formally regulating harassment and sexual misconduct in English higher education institutions in February 2023, and noted that the University's approach may need to be amended based on subsequent recommendations for the Scottish higher education sector from the findings of this review.

Court approved the Staff – Student Personal Relationships Policy.

GOVERNANCE

9. Amendment to Ordinance 22

Court received an overview of a proposed amendment to Ordinance 22 that would ensure the University has available the most effective range of honorary titles.

Court approved the proposed amendment.

10. SFC Outcome Agreement 2023/24

Court received an overview of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) agreement 2023/24.  Members noted, in respect of the 2023/24 Outcome Agreement and associated documentation, the SFC requested submission of a final draft by the end of October 2023 to demonstrate the University's contribution to the Scottish Government’s priority outcomes and impact for public investment.

Court considered an update regarding development of the Outcome Agreement and approved delegated authority to the Principal and University Secretary to approve drafts of the Outcome Agreement material for submission to the SFC during the summer period.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

11. Students' Union Update

Court considered an update on recent activities from the Students' Union including progress on development of the new Union Strategy 2023 - 2027, findings from a review of advocacy services and commercial trading services.

Court considered the activity update from the Students’ Union.

12. Staff and Employment Update

Court received an update on staff and employment matters including coverage of the employee relations landscape, institutional staff engagement activities including the Be Heard Pulse Survey approach and institutional activities associated with the theme of health and wellbeing.

Court discussed the Marking and Assessment Boycott and mitigating actions in place to ensure any disruption and potential impact on students was minimal.  Court noted work undertaken to ensure the academic standards of the University were maintained.

Court considered the staffing and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

13. Academic Council

Court noted the report from the Academic Council meeting of 30 May 2023.

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

Court noted the report from the Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee meeting of 23 May 2023 and the Committee's decision to approve fee levels and institutional fee waivers for 2024/25 entrants.

15. Audit Committee

Court noted the report from the Audit Committee meeting of 16 May 2023 including an update on progress with work on the 2022/23 internal audit plan, a proposed strategy for the external audit of the University and significant and emerging strategic risks.

16. Governance and Nominations Committee

Court considered and approved appointments nominated by Governance and Nominations Committee.

17. Combined Joint Negotiating & Consultation Committee (CJNCC)

Court noted the report from Combined Joint Negotiating Committee (CJNCC) for 2022/23.

18. Academic Promotions Committee (APC)

Court noted the annual report from Academic Promotions Committee including work undertaken by the committee to support and facilitate applications from female staff in recent years.   Members noted the gender balance of applications had been maintained from previous years with 51% of successful applicants in 2022/23 identifying as female.  Members noted this had contributed to female representation of 47% within senior academic roles (Grade 9 and above) at the University.

RISKS

19. Risks Arising

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

OTHER ITEMS

20. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other competent business.

21. Next Meeting

Court noted the 2023/24 meeting dates.