

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

UNIVERSITY COURT

A meeting of the University Court was held on 12 September in the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science, Ewing Building, City Campus, University of Dundee.

Present: Amanda Millar (Chair);
Janice Aitken;
Glenn Allison;
Alan Bainbridge (online);
Tricia Bey;
Ian Buerger;
Claire Cunningham;
Professor Sir Mike Ferguson;
Professor Iain Gillespie (Principal & Vice-Chancellor);
Professor Linda Martindale;
Ron Mobed (online);
Nyasha Mutembwa;
Dr Anna Notaro;
Carla Rossini (online)
Amina Shah;
Karthik Subramanya;
Jay Surti;
Sharon Sweeney;
Professor Garry Taylor;
Karen Thomson (online);
Susan Walker; and
Keith Winter.

In Attendance: Professor Wendy Alexander (Vice-Principal (International));
Peter Fotheringham (Director of Finance);
Elise Gallagher (Director of People);
Professor Lianne Gibson (Vice-Principal (Research));
Professor Blair Grubb (Vice-Principal (Education));
Dr Neale Laker (Deputy University Secretary);
Dr David McBeth (Vice-Principal (Enterprise and Economic Transformation));
Dr Jim McGeorge (University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer);
Dr Christine Milburn (Head of Principal's Office) (online);
Anne Poulson (Director of Strategic Change & Delivery)
Professor Shane O'Neill (Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost); and
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance));

Apologies: Greg Colgan, Andrew Lothian.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR OF COURT

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Court and, in particular, welcomed Janice Aitken, Glenn Allison, Linda Martindale and Amina Shah to the Court. The Chair also

welcomed Professor Lianne Gibson, (Vice-Principal (Research)) and Dr David McBeth (Vice-Principal (Enterprise and Economic Transformation)) to their first meeting of Court.

2. MINUTES

The Court decided: to approve the minutes of the meeting on 13 June 2023, subject to two minor amendments.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Action Log

The Court received the action log of Court business and noted that the sole action would be considered at the November meeting of the Court.

The Court decided: to note the update.

4. CHAIR'S REPORT TO COURT

The Court received a report from the Chair on activities undertaken on behalf of the Court and the University at a University and sectoral level. Members were advised that the Chair had attended several of the summer graduations and had taken great pleasure in sharing the successes and celebrations of so many and in spending time with Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnett, who had stepped down as Chancellor at the end of the graduation season.

The Chair thanked members for their input into both the Review of the Effectiveness of the Chair and for their contributions to the Court Effectiveness Review, which would be presented to the next meeting of the Governance & Nominations Committee. The Court was also advised that the Chair had met with the staff network leads, the new Court members and the new Vice-Principals (other than Lianne Gibson), as well as contributing to the development of a CUC practice note on the role of the Secretary to the Board. The Chair had participated in the induction process for new Court members and requested that those involved provide their feedback to the Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance).

The Chair reminded the Court that all members should feel able to contribute to the business of the Court and that the experiences and talents brought by members to the collective were equally valid. Finally, the Chair asked that members raise any issues or concerns with herself, and if not comfortable to raise directly with her, with the Deputy Chair of Court or the Clerk to the Court.

The Court decided: to note the report.

5. UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE GROUP REPORT TO COURT

The Principal & Vice-Chancellor introduced the University Executive Group report to Court, which provided an update on emerging sectoral issues, strategic matters, and recent events.

The Principal drew members' attention to the recent Universities Scotland Members' Strategy Day 2023, which he had hosted as the new Convener of Universities Scotland and which had agreed an exciting, if challenging, direction of travel for colleagues across the sector. Since the last meeting of the Court, Elise Gallagher (Director of People), Dr David McBeth (Vice-Principal (Enterprise and Economic Transformation)) and Professor Lisanne Gibson (Vice-Principal (Research)) had joined the University Executive Group, bringing the new leadership team up to full strength.

The Principal had recently visited Malawi, where he had participated in the first University of Dundee Malawi Summit, held in celebration of the first anniversary of the signing of the Blantyre declaration. Members noted that the first PhD studentships had been announced and MOUs signed with each of the six partner institutes. In relation to the University's partnerships in China, the Court was advised that the institution was taking forward a range of actions intended to reverse its decline in international rankings.

The Principal provided an update on the University's financial performance and outlook, noting that the Financial Statements for 2022/23 would be presented to the meeting of the Court in November 2023. Members were advised that the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) 2023 had been extremely disappointing, with overall satisfaction having dipped from 76.7% to 73.7%, and that the Court would receive and consider a response to the results elsewhere on the agenda.

The Court was apprised of the current position in relation to the identification of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) on campus and noted that three buildings had been identified which contained critical-rated RAAC in the roofs. Business Continuity processes had been initiated and alternative arrangements for teaching and research had been put in place.

Finally, the Principal expressed his great pleasure that the University had received the accolade of 'UK's Best University for Spin-out Success 2023' in the *Gateways to Growth: The Entrepreneurial Impact Report* from Octopus Ventures, one of Europe's largest venture capital teams. Additionally, the Business School was congratulated for having received accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), an elite league of business educators.

In discussion, members noted the decline in undergraduate RUK demand and were advised that this was the case across the Scottish sector in varying degrees. The UEG was committed to driving business forward in other future markets as well as continuing to focus on the RUK sector. The Court was advised that the UEG would be bringing developments in the globalization strategy for discussion by members during the coming session and that work was underway to strengthen partnerships in China.

Members requested any update on the forthcoming industrial action and were advised that the current action was based principally on dissatisfaction with pay settlements. The Court was reminded that pay negotiations were a collective process and that a national conversation on a collective pay and reward structure would be desirable.

The Court decided: to note the report.

6. UNIVERSITY STRATEGY 2022-27: SUB-STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS UPDATE

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost introduced the above report on proposed strategic change priority initiatives for the coming year, which had been selected on the basis that they would be positively transformative in the delivery of the University Strategy during Year Two of the five-year implementation window. Members were reminded that at its meeting in June the Court had considered progress during Year One and had noted that, whilst a great deal had been achieved, some planned initiatives had not been delivered. The Director of Strategic Change & Delivery (SCD) informed members that these latter initiatives had required to be reprioritized for Year Two but that an assessment had been undertaken by SCD to ensure that progress remained on track.

The Court was advised that the full SCD team had now been recruited and that sub-strategy oversight boards had been formed, which would report into the overall Strategic Planning Change Delivery Board. The new Strategic Planning Process would be a key vehicle for mainstreaming initiatives into the regular business of Schools and/or Directorates, with sub-strategy owners required to propose priorities and timescales for progress.

Members requested clarification from the Director of SCD on targets and timescales associated with each of the key priorities and were advised that a dashboard was in development which would enable members to interrogate specific priorities. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost noted that these would be developed for each project which would track specific sub-strategies. The Director of SCD was requested to bring more detailed information on project dates and timescales to the next meeting to ensure that the Court was sighted on progress and any areas where actions might not be progressing at pace. Specifically, members requested the identification of responsible officers for each of the priorities, as well as the introduction of RAG-ratings to indicate potential issues of capacity or resource.

A member questioned whether the University would review its approach to workload planning. The Court was advised issues of workload and wellbeing would be considered as part of a broader examination of institutional values.

The Court decided:

- (i) to request that timescales and deadlines for the sub-strategies be brought to the next meeting of the Court;
- (ii) to note the report.

7. NSS OUTCOMES

The Principal & Vice-Chancellor introduced the above report of the NSS Results released in August 2023. Professor Gillespie advised the Court that the UEG had been disappointed by the results but reminded members that management had not expected a rapid improvement on the 2022 results. There clearly remained areas for improvement but colleagues were to be commended for their efforts.

The Vice-Principal (Education) advised members that the format of the survey had changed in 2023, inasmuch as the core survey questions had been set in a more direct style and the response options had changed to a new four-point Likert scale, removing the option for

students to give a neutral response. In addition, whilst the survey remained a national activity, the final summative question on overall satisfaction had been removed from the survey in England. This was likely to have a significant influence on national rankings, having previously been employed by national newspapers as one component of their overall ranking calculation.

Whilst the University had retained many areas which had performed well, overall satisfaction had declined from 77.1% to 73.8%. Set against an average decline of 0.7% across the Scottish HE sector, this constituted a net decline of 2.5%. Out of the 15 Scottish institutions, Dundee ranked 12th, well below its historic performance.

Positive outcomes were noted, including being ranked both first and second in Scotland in a number of subjects. Accounting had seen the largest single improvement with Physical Geography and Computer Science moving up four and three places, respectively.

In the course of a lengthy discussion, the Court noted contributing factors to the NSS performance in 2023 including the return to campus learning following the global pandemic, ongoing industrial action, and the formation of the School of Humanities, Social Sciences & Law. Other factors were noted as the sharp increase in student numbers during 2022-23 and the need to enhance the vibrancy of the campus.

The Court considered, *inter alia*, taking a whole campus approach with significant student engagement based on a robust Student Partnership Agreement, mapping the staff survey data to areas with lower results and making significant use of the data provided rather than hypothesizing the reasons for the decline in performance. Members encouraged senior officers to engage actively with the student community, inviting open dialogue on individual experiences. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost noted that this had been the subject of significant discussion by the Deans' Group and that management was committed to understanding the complex variations between Schools.

Members welcomed the University's plans and priorities for improvement, noting that the purpose of any measure introduced as a consequence was ultimately intended to enhance the student experience. Senior Officers thanked the Court for their contributions and reminded members that their skills and experience were valued and would continue to be sought with this matter returning to Court in the coming months

The Court decided: to note the report.

8. APPOINTMENT OF THE CHANCELLOR

Members received and considered the proposal to approve the recommendation of the Chancellor's Appointing Committee that Lord Robertson of Port Ellen be appointed the University's sixth Chancellor.

The Court decided: to formally approve the recommendation of the Chancellor's Appointing Committee that George Robertson (Lord Robertson of Port Ellen) be appointed the University's sixth Chancellor for a period of five years in the first instance from 16 November 2023.

9. REVOLVING CREDIT FACILITY

The Court received the above proposal in relation to an undrawn Revolving Credit Facility (RCF) held with the Bank of Scotland for £40m. Members were apprised that the second anniversary of the agreement was approaching and that, whilst the University intended to replace the facility in due course, its existing cash position and forecast was such that retaining and extending the RCF provided the University with more than sufficient liquidity.

The Court decided: to delegate authority to the Convener of the Finance & Policy Committee and the Chair of Court to approve final terms for the extension/renewal of the Revolving Credit Facility with the Bank of Scotland by one year in accordance with the terms and conditions of the existing agreement.

10. DUSA MANIFESTO

The Court received the above DUSA Manifesto for 2023-24 and commended the key objectives contained therein, as well as the DUSA Executive's commitment to working with the University to enhance the student experience.

The Court decided: to note the manifesto.

11. COMMITTEE REPORTS

(1) Audit & Risk Committee Report

The Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee introduced the report from the most recent meeting, in doing so drawing members attention to the internal audit progress report and the reviews of International Student Support, the Digital Strategy and the Business Transformation Lessons Learned report. The Convener informed members that he was pleased with progress on internal audit actions and that the University had received a more positive risk rating for the year 2022/23. The Committee had received and considered the internal audit Annual Report and a letter from the external auditor on those charged with governance.

(i) Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 30 August 2023

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

The Court decided: (i) to approve the minutes.

(2) Welfare & Ethical Use of Animals Committee

(i) Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 4 May 2023

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

The Court decided: (i) to approve the minutes.

- (ii) Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 24 August 2023

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

The Court decided: (i) to approve the minutes.

12. **NARRATIVE FOR THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS**

The Chair of Court recommended, and the Court agreed, to highlight to Senate the Court's consideration of the NSS results, its discussions relating to the implementation of the University Strategy, its congratulations to the University and to the Business School for their external recognition and accreditations, as well as the appointment of the next Chancellor.

The Court decided: to note the areas for inclusion in the report to the Senate.

13. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE COURT**

The Court agreed that the post-Court communication to staff and students would focus on the NSS results, the appointment of the Chancellor and the success of the Business School in having received accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), an elite league of business educators.

The Court decided: to note the areas for inclusion in the communication to staff and students.

14. **ANNUAL REPORT TO SFC ON INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW**

The Court received the University's annual statement to the SFC detailing the subject reviews that had been carried out over the previous year. Members noted that the report was due to be submitted to the SFC by 30 September 2023.

Members noted that in approving the report the Court was asked to: confirm that it had considered the institution's arrangements for the management of academic standards and the quality of the learning experience for AY 2022/23, including the scope and impact of these; confirm that the institution had effective arrangements to maintain standards and to assure and enhance the quality of its provision; and therefore to provide assurance to the SFC that the academic standards and the quality of the learning provision at the University of Dundee continued to meet its requirements.

The Court was advised that the Governance & Nominations Committee had considered reports from the Director and Interim Directors of Quality & Academic Standards throughout the academic year and members noted the progression evidenced within the report.

The Court decided: to approve the report and ask that the Chair of Court sign the declarations set out above on behalf of the Court to accompany the submission to the SFC.

The Court decided: to endorse the report.

15. **GOVERNOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Members were invited to contact the Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance) if they wished to participate in any of the sessions detailed within the above development programme.

The Court decided: to note the report.

16. **SENIOR STAFF APPOINTMENTS**

The Court noted the appointment of the following members of staff:

Name	Title	New appointment	Internal promotion
Susan Kinnear	Professor of Marketing and Communications	Yes	Yes
Lisanne Gibson	Vice-Principal (Research)	Yes	No
David McBeth	Vice-Principal (Enterprise and Economic Transformation)	Yes	Yes
Christine Milburn	Director of the University Executive Office and Vice-Chancellor's Chief of Staff.	Yes	Yes

Amanda Millar
Chair of Court
University of Dundee