

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

UNIVERSITY COURT

A meeting of the University Court was held at 9.00am on 1 April 2025 *via* Microsoft Teams.

Present: Tricia Bey (Acting Chair);
Alan Bainbridge;
Manaswi Budhathoki;
Carolina Castro;
Greg Colgan;
Regius Professor Sir Mike Ferguson;
Marcus Flucker;
Dr Ian Mair;
Claire Martin;
Professor Linda Martindale;
Ron Mobed;
Dr Anna Notaro;
Professor Shane O'Neill (Interim Vice-Chancellor);
Carla Rossini;
Karthik Subramanya;
Jay Surti;
Sharon Sweeney; and
Professor Garry Taylor

In Attendance: Dr Paul Bennett (Director of Strategic Planning & Insight)(items 102-103);
Professor Kim Dale (Interim Vice-Principal (International))(items 102-103);
Elise Gallagher (Director of People);
Sapreena Kumar (Director of Future Students)(items 102-103);
Dr Neale Laker (Acting University Secretary);
Richard Maconachie (Director of Finance, SFC)(*qua* observer);
Lizzi Nicoll (Interim Director of External Relations);
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance)); and
Helen Simpson (Interim Director of Finance)

Apologies: Glenn Allison, Andrew Lothian and Amina Shah

96. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE ACTING CHAIR OF COURT

The Acting Chair welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for attending. In particular, Ms Bey welcomed the Interim Director of External Relations, who was attending as an observer.

97. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Chair invited members to declare if they had, or could be perceived to have, any conflicts of interest in relation to any items on the agenda, beyond those already declared. No new conflicts were declared.

98. **RESERVED BUSINESS: MINUTES**

The Court decided: (i) to approve the minutes of the meeting on 18 March 2025, subject to amendments requested by the Interim Director of Finance; and
(ii) to approve the minutes of the meeting on 25 March 2025.

99. **MATTERS ARISING**

Action Log

Court received and considered the action log summarising progress in relation to outstanding actions from previous meetings. Members were advised that the composition of the Appointing Committee to take forward the process of the election of the next Chair of Court had been agreed and noted that potential external members would be identified and approached. Members noted that the Court would require to agree on a clear and distinctive set of characteristics and attributes it would seek in the new Chairperson.

Thereafter, Court noted that there were no items on the action log not already on the agenda or which were not yet due.

Resolved: to note the Action Log

100. **ACTING CHAIR'S REPORT AND UPDATE FROM INTERIM PRINCIPAL & VICE-CHANCELLOR**

The Acting Chair apprised the Court of her activities since its previous meeting and noted that her main focus had been to maintain open channels of communication with key stakeholders. Ms Bey advised members that she would be meeting Julie Ashworth, Convener of the Committee of Scottish Chairs (CSC), having been unable to attend the recent CSC meeting. The Acting Chair also noted that Professor Pamela Gillies had been appointed to lead the independent investigation into the University's financial position and requested that members co-operate fully with the investigation.

In view of emerging media reports on the University's correspondence with the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee (ECYPC), the Acting Chair invited the Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor to provide members with a verbal report on the current situation. Professor O'Neill advised the Court that he had written to the ECYPC, as requested, to provide further information in relation to questions asked at the meeting on 19 March 2025. The letter had been released on the Scottish Parliament website and had attracted the attention of a number of media outlets.

Court was advised that the reports had suggested an increase in the number of potential job losses which, as Professor O'Neill had noted in his letter to ministers, was the 632 FTE previously intimated expressed as a headcount figure. The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor reminded members that ministers had requested further consideration be given to the proposed reduction in staff headcount. The campus trade unions had brought forward a counter-proposal which was being assessed by PWC and would be discussed at a meeting of the Local Joint Committee (LJC) later that day.

Professor O'Neill apprised Court of Senate's discussions on the proposed reconfiguration of

the Academic Schools into three Faculties, which had identified the need for more meaningful consultation and dialogue on the proposals. UEG would be considering this at its meeting the following day and discussions on the future structure of Professional Services would begin in due course. An advisory group to support Professor O'Neill had been established, including Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, Sir Paul Grice and Professor Andrea Nolan. In addition, secondment opportunities were being discussed with Universities Scotland.

The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor advised Court that UEG and External Relations had been working to develop a different approach to communications with staff, students and stakeholders in order to regain control of the narrative. Members noted that the communications strategy was intended to deliver a concise message describing the future vision for the restructured University.

In discussion, Court noted that a number of options were being explored and expressed concerns that this would have the effect of delaying the Financial Recovery Plan (FRP). Members welcomed management's consideration of the campus union proposals but were advised that, notwithstanding ministerial encouragement to explore other options, no alternative plan could be developed without having secured financial support. Court noted that the reporting of Professor O'Neill's letter to the ECYPC in the national media could have the effect of further eroding staff morale.

Members welcomed the development of an alternative, more proactive approach to managing communications and noted that members would have a role to play in disseminating institutional messaging across different stakeholder networks. It was agreed that the strategy for rebuilding the University's reputation would be brought to the next meeting of the Court.

Resolved: to note the report

101. **RESERVED BUSINESS: STUDENT NUMBERS UPDATE**

The University claims exemption under Section 30 (b) and Section 33 (1)(b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Members are therefore required to treat the discussion and associated papers as strictly confidential and exempt from public disclosure. The status of this item will be reviewed at regular intervals and will be released when the exemptions are deemed to no longer apply, and following the approval of the Chair of Court.

102. **RESERVED BUSINESS: BLUEPRINT UPDATE**

The University claims exemption under Section 30 (b) and Section 33 (1)(b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Members are therefore required to treat the discussion and associated papers as strictly confidential and exempt from public disclosure. The status of this item will be reviewed at regular intervals and will be released when the exemptions are deemed to no longer apply, and following the approval of the Chair of Court.

103. **UPDATE ON FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

The Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) advised Court that work was ongoing with the Interim Director of Finance and the external auditors, EY, to have a set of approved

accounts finalised before the end of April. It was expected that the opinion of the auditors would be qualified and that an additional meeting of both the ARC and the Court would be required to ensure sign-off within the timescale.

The Interim Director of Finance noted that a meeting would be held to review the going concern statement within the accounts and that EY had reissued letters to those charged with governance with modified questions. It remained uncertain whether the Statements would be ready for submission to OSCR by the statutory deadline, which could in turn have a further adverse effect on the University's credit rating.

Resolved: to note the update.

104. **RESERVED BUSINESS: UPDATE ON CASH POSITION**

The University claims exemption under Section 30 (b) and Section 33 (1)(b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Members are therefore required to treat the discussion and associated papers as strictly confidential and exempt from public disclosure. The status of this item will be reviewed at regular intervals and will be released when the exemptions are deemed to no longer apply, and following the approval of the Chair of Court.

105. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Interim Director of Finance was requested to recirculate an earlier email relating to underlying payroll and operating expenses in order that members understood fully the implications of the PWC 'do nothing' scenario.

Thereafter, no other business was declared.

106. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 8 April, online, at 9am. The Chair advised members that UEG Officers would be invited to attend the scheduled meeting of Court on 15 April 2025.

Tricia Bey
Acting Chair of Court
University of Dundee