

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

UNIVERSITY COURT

An informal meeting of the University Court was held at 2pm on 15 July 2025 in the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science, Ewing Building, and *via* Microsoft Teams.

Present: Dr Ian Mair (Acting Chair);
Alan Bainbridge (online);
Regius Professor Sir Mike Ferguson;
Claire Martin;
Dr Anna Notaro
Ron Mobed (online);
Dr Andrea Mohan (online) (items 213-222);
Professor Nigel Seaton (Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor);
Amina Shah (online)
Jay Surti (online);
Sharon Sweeney (online)

In Attendance: Dr Jacqui Brasted (SFC)(*qua* observer)(online);
Tánaiste Custance (DUSA President, observer);
Professor Blair Grubb (Vice-Principal (Education))(items 207-208);
Roddy Isles (Head of Corporate Communication);
Dr Carlo Morelli (DUCU, observer)
Dr Veena O'Halloran (Interim University Secretary)(items 207-217);
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance));
Umran Sarwar (Director of Legal); and
Dr Martine van Ittersum (Staff Council, observer)

Apologies: Manaswi Budhathoki, Carolina Castro, Gregory Colgan, Marcus Flucker, Dr Neale Laker, Andrew Lothian, Professor Linda Martindale and Karthik Subramanya

207. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE ACTING CHAIR OF COURT**

The Acting Chair welcomed members to the meeting and, in particular, welcomed Dr Carlo Moretti and Dr Martine Van Ittersum to their first meeting of the Court as observers. Dr Mair noted that the Court was not being asked to take any formal decisions at the meeting, but to receive updates on a number of matters, to ask questions of management and to discuss legal and fiduciary considerations in relation to the SFC Financial Transactions Loan.

208. **NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) 2025 RESULTS**

The Vice-Principal (Education) provided members with an oral report on the University's performance in the National Student Survey (NSS). Professor Grubb advised Court that the

University's of Dundee's Overall Satisfaction had increased by 2.5 percentage points from 78.4% to 80.9%, outperforming the Scottish average by 3.9 percentage points. Out of the 15 Scottish standard Universities (excluding SRUC, GSA and RCS), Dundee ranked fifth, a fall of one place since 2024. The top performing themes for Dundee, exceeding the UK average, were noted, with two themes ('Organisation & Management' and 'The Students' Union effectively represents students' academic interests') failing to meet the national average.

Members were advised that the University had ranked first in Scotland overall in 12 subjects, with three areas in which staff scored 100% for student satisfaction. Professor Grubb paid tribute to the staff of the University and praised their exceptional efforts to the Court.

In discussion, Court commended the University on its performance, noting that Dundee remained an institution which provided high-calibre education to its students and, through its staff, contributed to society more widely. Members noted that this would be the last meeting of Court attended by the Vice-Principal (Education) prior to his retirement and congratulated Professor Grubb on the improvements achieved. The Court wished Professor Grubb well in his retirement and thanked him for his contribution to the University.

[Secretary's note: Professor Grubb left the meeting at this point]

[Secretary's note: following the meeting the DUSA President requested that a note be added to the minute to reflect that 'The Students' Union effectively represents students' academic interests' was a question and not a theme]

209. **APPOINTMENT OF THE INTERIM PRINCIPAL AND THE INTERIM UNIVERSITY SECRETARY**

The Acting Chair of Court invited the Court to note formally the appointment of Dr Veena O'Halloran and Professor Nigel Seaton as Interim University Secretary and Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor, respectively. Dr Mair reminded the Court that the appointment of Professor Seaton had been made under the terms of the University's Resilience Plan and that members had now reverted to being full charity trustees.

In discussion, Court requested clarification of the sequence of events and the time frames within which Resilience Plan had been invoked and was advised that the Plan had been enacted for the appointment of the Interim Principal. The Interim University Secretary agreed to provide a summary timeline of actions taken under the Plan to members

Resolved: to formally note the appointments of Professor Seaton and Dr O'Halloran.

210. **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The Acting 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. Thereafter, no new conflicts were declared.

211. **INTERIM DIRECTOR OF FINANCE: DEPARTURE AND RECRUITMENT**

The University claims the exemptions in Section 38(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Members are expected to treat this item as strictly confidential at this time.

Professor Seaton then advised members that interviews would be conducted shortly and thanked colleagues in People Services for their assistance in identifying two suitable candidates. Court was apprised of the composition of the interview panel, which would include an external Financial Director and noted that it would be advised of the outcome in due course.

In discussion, members questioned whether the absence of an Interim Financial Director would impact detrimentally on the production of the University Recovery Plan and were advised that the working group had already met to progress the development of the Plan. Noting that the production of the Plan would require significant input from the Finance Directorate, the Court sought assurances that there was sufficient resource within the Directorate. Professor Seaton commended the Head of Financial Accounting and the Head of Finance Business Partnering and noted that the University would seek to fill essential vacancies within the Directorate.

Resolved: to note the report.

212. **APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER**

The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor advised the Court that an Interim Chief Operating Officer had been appointed and would take up post on Monday 21 July 2025. Members noted that Kirsteen Campbell had been appointed following the advertisement of the post and a full recruitment process. Ms Campbell would bring over 30 years of leadership experience to the institution across the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

Resolved: to note the appointment of Kirsteen Campbell as interim Chief Operating Officer.

213. **UNIVERSITY RECOVERY PLAN**

The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor provided Court with a verbal report on progress made in relation to the development of the University Recovery Plan. Professor Seaton noted that a working group had been convened and that sections of the Plan were in preparation. Noting that proposed changes to the academic structure of the University had been shared for some time, members were advised that the UEG would shortly consider the future configuration of professional services.

Court considered the contracted period of time in which to produce such a strategically important document and expressed concern that it had not been sighted on proposals beyond a high-level direction of travel. The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor advised members that the Plan would be presented to Court prior to submission to SFC and noted the likelihood that the Plan would be subject to ongoing discussion and refinement, post-submission. Members requested clarification on the involvement of external expertise in the development of the Plan and were advised that formal advice would be sought where appropriate.

In discussion, the Court requested that management allow sufficient time for members to read the proposed Plan in order to facilitate meaningful debate and interrogation of its components. Members emphasised the inherent tension between the development of the Plan and the ongoing uncertainty regarding acceptance of the SFC Financial Transactions Loan, which would be discussed as a substantive agenda item under [paragraph 217](#).

Resolved: to note the report.

214. UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE GILLIES REPORT

The Acting Chair of Court advised the Court that a working group had been convened, led by the Interim University Secretary, to develop the University's response to the Gillies Report. Members noted that the group had held early discussions on the structure and format of the response, which would be shared with Court prior to submission to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on 1 August 2025.

Resolved: to note the update.

215. UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE OFFICE OF THE SCOTTISH CHARITY REGULATOR (OSCR)

The Acting Chair of Court advised members that work was underway, led by the Interim University Secretary, to develop the University's response to letters from OSCR, which required to be submitted by Friday 18 July. The Court was requested to delegate final sign-off of the response to the Acting Chair of Court, the Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor and the Interim Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee.

Resolved: to delegate final sign-off of the response to the Acting Chair of Court, the Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor and the Interim Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee.

[Secretary's note: The Interim Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee was on annual leave during the period in question and was not involved in the final sign-off of the letter.]

216. ENGAGEMENT WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The Acting Chair of Court drew members' attention to recent transactions with internal and external stakeholders. Dr Mair noted that he and Professor Seaton had held a joint townhall meeting for staff, which had been well-attended, both in person and online. The Minister for Higher and Further Education had visited the University and Dr Mair and Professor Seaton had also held a meeting with the First Minister of Scotland. Discussions and regular meetings with SFC were ongoing and remained constructive in nature.

Professor Seaton advised the Court that he had engaged in a lengthy online meeting with the University's external auditors, EY, during which he had acknowledged that the University had failed to meet its responsibilities in terms of openness, transparency and its statutory reporting duties. A further meeting would be held with EY which would be attended by the Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor, the Interim University Secretary and the Interim Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee to address outstanding correspondence and to consider a potential route to the conclusion of the audit relating to the 2023/24 Financial Statements.

Court welcomed the report and the opportunity for the University to reset its relationships with its stakeholders.

Resolved: to note the report.

217. **RESERVED BUSINESS: SFC FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS LOAN**

The University claims the exemptions in Sections 30 and 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.

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

The University claims the exemptions in Sections 30 and 33(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Members are expected to treat this item as strictly confidential at this time.

Court received and noted the above weekly updates on the University's cash position and key transactions expected by 31 July 2025. Members were apprised of the timing of cashflows impacting the current position, including the long-standing dispute with NHS Tayside. On-going cost-reduction measures had minimised weekly payments to suppliers with other short-term improvements noted.

Resolved: to note the cashflow position.

219. **RECRUITMENT OF CHAIR OF COURT**

The Acting Chair of Court apprised the Court of progress made in the recruitment of the next Chair of Court. Members noted that a number of potential individuals had been identified by the Head of Talent Attraction and External Relations and that applications would be considered by the Court appointing Committee, prior to an election being held in due course.

Resolved: to note the update.

220. **RECRUITMENT OF LAY MEMBERS OF COURT**

The Acting Chair of Court apprised the Court of progress made in the recruitment of lay members of Court. Members noted that a number of potential individuals had been identified by the Head of Talent Attraction and External Relations and that an open call for applications would be published shortly.

Resolved: to note the report.

221. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was declared.

222. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed as Monday 31 July 2025.

Dr Ian Mair
Acting Chair of Court
University of Dundee