

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

UNIVERSITY COURT

A meeting of the University Court was held at 2pm on 26 August 2025 in the Leverhulme Research Institute for Forensic Science, Ewing Building, and *via* Microsoft Teams.

Present: Dr Ian Mair (Acting Chair);
Alain Bainbridge (online);
Maggie Chapman;
Gregory Colgan;
Tánaiste Custance;
Claire Martin (online);
Ron Mobed (online);
Dr Andrea Mohan;
Dr Carlo Morelli;
Professor Nigel Seaton;
Amina Shah (online);
Jay Surti (online); and
Dr Martine van Ittersum

In Attendance: Kirsteen Campbell (Interim Chief Operating Officer);
Elise Gallagher (Director of People);
Lee Hamill (Interim Director of Finance);
Richard Maconachie (SFC)(*qua* observer);
Roddy Isles (Head of Corporate Communication);
Dr Veena O'Halloran (Interim University Secretary); and
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance))

Apologies: Marcus Flucker and Dr Neale Laker

245. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE ACTING CHAIR OF COURT

The Acting Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and thanked everyone for their commitment to the University during this difficult time, particularly in view of the number of extra meetings requiring members' commitment. Dr Mair noted the sensitivity and importance of the matters under discussion and requested that members maintain the confidentiality of the Court deliberations.

246. 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 or previously declared. No new conflicts were declared.

247. **RESERVED BUSINESS: BANK OF SCOTLAND REVOLVING CREDIT FACILITY**

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.

Resolved: to approve the proposal to cancel the Revolving Credit Facility with the Bank of Scotland as soon as possible.

248. **LETTER TO THE ACTING CHAIR OF COURT FROM THE SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Acting Chair of Court introduced the above letter received from the Chief Executive of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on 18 August 2025. Dr Mair advised members that SFC had indicated it would expect to receive a response by 8 September 2025 but that, given that Court would meet on 9 September, it was proposed that the response be submitted following discussion at the meeting of the Court on that date. Members were reminded that, addressed to him in his capacity as Acting Chair of Court, the response would be from Dr Mair and that, whilst it would not require the endorsement of the Court he wished to have an open and consultative discussion regarding the contents of the letter received. Court was advised that this discussion would assist Dr Mair in framing his response to the stipulations contained in the letter.

One member expressed unhappiness that, although the Court had approved the University Recovery Plan (URP) by a majority vote at the previous meeting, the final version had not been disseminated. In relation to the letter to the SFC, the Interim University Secretary intimated that the draft response from Dr Mair would be shared with Court ahead of discussion at its meeting on 9 September.

Members noted SFC had intimated to senior University officers that the URP would likely not be accepted but had encouraged the University to submit the Plan despite the anticipated reaction of the Scottish Government. Court had anticipated that its submission would open a dialogue between the University and the funding body on the proposals contained therein and members expressed disappointment that these had been rejected.

Court noted the SFC requirement to submit a short-term plan for 12 months including the production of an accelerated plan to create permanent leadership for the University, the identification of 'no regrets' efficiencies and the development of a University Strategy based on demonstrable engagement with staff and students. The ongoing precarious financial position of the institution was considered and the SFC proposal to offer a resource grant to replace the Financial Transactions funding was welcomed. Nevertheless, members expressed concerns that the steps required by SFC lacked specificity and sought to understand the concept of 'no regret efficiencies'.

In the course of a lengthy and involved discussion Court considered, *inter alia*, the requirement to conduct a bottom-up review of its structures in order to move towards a positive cashflow position and attract commercial lending. Members of academic staff on Court exhorted management to involve the Senate in any plans to alter the academic structure of the University and were advised that Senate had already been consulted. The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor noted that any delay in implementing strategic change or any significant deviation

from the URP could have the effect of further destabilising the institution, thus making the University less likely to survive and thrive in the long term.

Court noted the imperative to rebuilding trust with staff and vigorously debated the relative implications of declining to deviate significantly from the URP as submitted and the development of an alternative strategic direction. Members sought to understand the powers of the University's regulators, including SFC and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) in directing the University Court as it sought to ensure the continued autonomy and success of the institution. The Director of People apprised the Court of current progress towards the recruitment of long-term leadership and reminded members that the next Chair of Court would require to be in place before the recruitment and selection process for the next permanent Principal & Vice-Chancellor could begin, although it was intended that the interim positions on the University Executive Group would be filled by Summer 2026. In the interim, consultation with staff and students could begin to define the criteria and characteristics required in the next Principal & Vice-Chancellor and members were advised that a full recruitment process would be conducted with the involvement of Senate.

Thereafter, the Acting Chair of Court thanked members for their contributions and noted that a draft letter of response would be presented to the next meeting for consideration.

Resolved: to note the letter.

249. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

i) Recruitment of Chair of Court and Lay members of Court

The Interim University Secretary advised the Court that applications had closed for the role of Chair of Court. Those individuals who had applied would be invited to attend for interview, as part of which they would meet with focus groups comprised of senior management, University staff and students. Those applicants deemed to satisfy the criteria for appointment would proceed to an election which would be held following a open meeting at which constituents could ask questions of the candidates. Members were reminded that, under the terms of the Higher Education Governance Act (Scotland) 2016, an election could only take place when more than one candidate had been identified who had demonstrated that they met the criteria for appointment.

The Court was also apprised of progress in the recruitment of new lay members to the Court and noted that applications would remain open until 1 September 2025 and a further update would be provided to the next meeting of the Court. One member expressed disquiet that the Court had not received any information on the proposed membership of its committees and was advised that this would be addressed once the vacancies on Court, including the nominated member from the support staff trade unions and the elected members from Senate, had been filled. A further member sought information on the composition of the Lay Member Appointing Committee and was advised that the Committee comprised: the Acting Chair of Court; the Independent Student Member; one member elected from the Staff Council, and; one member elected from the Senate. Another member advised those present that they had reviewed the current membership of the committees of Court and did not believe that these were quorate. The Interim University Secretary intimated that only those committees of Court which were quorate had met and that the membership of the committees of Court would be considered by the Governance & Nominations Committee before formal recommendations were brought to the Court.

ii) DUSA Funding

The DUSA President advised Court that the Students' Association funding had been reduced by 34% for Academic Year 2025/26. Members were advised that this would affect the services offered by DUSA and that the Association would likely feel compelled to engage in public-facing activities to protest the reduction. Such activities were noted as potentially having an impact upon the University's ability to recruit students through clearing.

Thereafter, no other business was declared.

250. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next scheduled meeting would be confirmed in due course.

Dr Ian Mair
Acting Chair of Court
University of Dundee