

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

UNIVERSITY COURT

A meeting of the University Court was held at 12 noon on 22 December 2025 *via* Microsoft Teams.

Present: Esther Robertson (Chair);
Alain Bainbridge;
Nicholas Buckworth;
Greg Colgan;
Maggie Chapman;
Tánaiste Custance;
Marcus Flucker;
Dr Annie Ingram;
Professor Susan Kinnear;
Noel Lawlor;
Dr Ian Mair;
Claire Martin;
Professor Rory McCrimmon;
Dr Andrea Mohan;
Dr Carlo Morelli;
Emma Preston;
Professor Nigel Seaton;
Amina Shah;
Jay Surti;
Bishop Andrew Swift; and
Dr Martine van Ittersum

In Attendance: Elise Gallagher (Director of People);
Lee Hamill (Interim Director of Finance);
Philip Henry (Interim University Secretary);
Richard Maconachie (SFC)(*qua* observer);
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance)); and
Louise Soutar (Head of Principal's Office and VC's Chief of Staff)

Apologies: Ron Mobed, Dr Andrea Mohan and Irene Wilson

298. WELCOME AND UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR OF COURT

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and thanked members for making time to attend so close to Christmas. Ms Robertson advised the Court that she had held helpful and productive meetings with the First Minister of Scotland and with the Chair and Chief Executive of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

Court noted that these discussions had been positive but that the University would continue to face unprecedented scrutiny as it moved towards a more secure financial position, which would facilitate the recruitment of the next permanent Principal & Vice-Chancellor. Ms Robertson intimated her belief that the University was already operating largely within the conditions likely to be imposed by SFC should a formal offer of Section 25 (S25) funding be made and

noted that she had made the case for accountability to SFC and the Scottish Government (SG) to be proportionate and streamlined going forward.

The Chair then invited the lead of the SFC Dundee Recovery Team to share his thoughts on interactions between the University and SFC since 26 November 2025. Mr Maconachie advised members that discussions remained constructive and that SFC recognised the need for the University to maintain momentum but noted that the products submitted by the University would have to demonstrate compliance with conditions imposed under S25.

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

300. S25 CONDITIONS OF FUNDING AND PROPOSED PRODUCTS

Court received and considered the above paper, intended to apprise members of the advice from the University Executive Group (UEG) to Court in relation to the conditions of funding proposed by SFC under Section 25 and which had been received by the University on 26 November.

Several members expressed concerns that UEG intended to use the financial support, if offered and accepted, to fund a programme of job losses and that this would run counter to the conditions of funding. These members proposed that the Court should write publicly and accept unequivocally the conditions as laid down on 26 November. The Chair reminded Court that SFC had yet to make a formal offer of financial support to the University and therefore the Court could not indicate acceptance. She also explained that Court was not being invited to approve the University response. Rather, the Court was being invited to comment on the draft products which had prepared for submission to SFC by the deadline of 31 December 2025. Furthermore, University Officers were cognisant that the conditions proposed by SFC would prohibit the use of S25 money to fund a programme of job losses and would adhere to these conditions.

The Court then considered the proposed products for submission to SFC, which had been submitted for information and discussion. The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor advised members that the products did not of themselves constitute new plans but rather expanded upon plans either previously approved by the Court or related to operational matters.

Court discussed the proposed requirement for the engagement of staff and students in the development of the University Strategy. Court requested that the Engagement Strategy as currently presented be revised to include more detailed information on the evidence base for the staff and student involvement in the preparation of the Engagement Strategy and associated Plan. Members were advised that the products under discussion constituted high-level compliance documents intended to signal direction and which would be reviewed following receipt of the formal offer of funding under Section 25.

In the course of a lengthy and involved debate, members expressed concerns regarding the progress of actions agreed to strengthen governance in response to the Gillies Report. One member pointed to the cancellation of an inquorate meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee (A&RC) and the lack of minutes of earlier meetings in the Court papers as evidence of inadequate governance arrangements. The Chair of Court and the Interim University Secretary advised the Court that the meeting in question had been a potential additional calendar hold. Externally co-opted members would be sought to augment the membership of A&RC and many of the outstanding actions would be brought to the Governance & Nominations Committee (G&NC) at its meeting in January 2026.

In relation to the inclusion of the minutes of previous meetings in the Court papers and the publication of minutes on the University website, the Interim University Secretary reminded Court that the minutes of previous meetings required to be approved by the Court prior to publication. It was agreed that a summary report would be produced and circulated following each Court meeting, ahead of the preparation of the fully minute of proceedings. Members expressed concerns that the University Secretariat lacked the capacity to adhere to the proposed deadlines for the production of minutes and requested that consideration be given to augmenting the Secretariat and Finance teams to facilitate the critical work required to ensure adherence to the proposed conditions of funding.

Mr Maconachie of SFC was again invited to comment on the current position and advised the Court that the products requested by SFC would necessarily be iterative in nature. Further work would be required to develop the Engagement Strategy and to identify appropriate Key Performance Indicators and measures of demonstrable engagement by staff and students.

Court thanked officers for their efforts in producing the draft products and requested that further development be undertaken in early 2026 in order to include evidentiary information and measures of success, with particular reference to the Engagement Strategy. Members also requested that the disparity in levels of detail in the products be addressed and were reminded that these documents would evolve as the University Strategy emerged.

Thereafter, Court noted the proposed draft products for submission to SFC by the deadline of 31 December 2025 and was advised that the accompanying letter of response from the Chair of Court would be circulated to members before publication to the University community.

Resolved: to note the report and associated products.

301. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was declared.

302. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The dates of the next proposed meetings were noted as follows:

- 14 January 2026; and
- 27 January 2026

Esther Robertson
Chair of Court
University of Dundee