

## UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

### UNIVERSITY COURT

A meeting of the University Court was held at 2pm on 26 March 2026 in the Leverhulme Research Institute for Forensic Science, Ewing Building, and *via* Microsoft Teams.

Present: Esther Roberton (Chair);  
Nicholas Buckworth;  
Maggie Chapman(online);  
Greg Colgan (online);  
Tánaiste Custance;  
Marcus Flucker (online);  
Dr Nicola Gray;  
Dr Annie Ingram;  
Professor Susan Kinnear;  
Noel Lawlor (online);  
Dr Ian Mair;  
Claire Martin;  
Ron Mobed (online);  
Dr Andrea Mohan;  
Dr Carlo Morelli;  
Emma Preston;  
Professor Nigel Seaton (items 328-331);  
Jay Surti (online);  
Amina Shah (online);  
Bishop Andrew Swift;  
Dr Martine van Ittersum; and  
Margo Williamson.

In Attendance: Kirsteen Campbell (Interim Chief Operating Officer)  
Lee Hamill (Interim Director of Finance) (items 328-331);  
Roddy Isles (Head of Corporate Communication);  
Richard Maconachie (SFC) (*qua* observer);  
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance));  
Umran Sarwar (Director of Legal) (item 328);  
Louise Soutar (Head of Principal's Office & V-C's Chief of Staff) (items 328-331); and  
Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir (University Secretary)

Apologies: Alan Bainbridge and Irene Wilson

#### 324. WELCOME AND UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR OF COURT

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from Alan Bainbridge and Irene Wilson. Ms Roberton formally welcomed Dr Sveinsdottir to her first meeting as University Secretary and recorded her thanks to Philip Henry for his significant contributions and support as Interim University Secretary.

Members were advised that the Court had three significant items of business to discuss and one

further, tabled, matter. The Chair informed the Court that the formal offer of Section 25 funding had been received from SFC on Friday 20 March and had been accepted on Monday 23 March. Ms Robertson commended the Interim Principal and Senior Officers for their work and noted that, following discussion of the matters already on the agenda, a legal resolution would be presented, which was required in order to formally draw down the £12m SFC Financial Transactions Loan Court had approved at its previous meeting.

**325. 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.

**326. RECRUITMENT OF THE NEXT PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR**

The Chair of Court and the University Secretary introduced the above report, providing the Court with an update on the process to recruit the next Principal & Vice-Chancellor, and which had already been considered by the Governance & Nominations Committee (GNC). Following a tendering exercise in February 2026, executive search consultants Perrett Laver had been engaged to support the University and a Selection Panel was being brought together. Ms Robertson advised Court that membership of the Selection Committee was being finalised and that Professor Sue Rigby, Principal & Vice-Chancellor of Edinburgh Napier University, had agreed to join the Selection Panel as an external member.

The Committee noted the requirements as stipulated in the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance 2023 regarding the composition of the Selection Panel and considered the proposed membership of the Selection Committee. In discussion, it was proposed that additionally a member of the trade unions be nominated to join the Panel. This was endorsed by Court and it agreed that Emma Preston join the Selection Committee.

Members noted that staff and students would be given meaningful opportunities to contribute their views on the leadership qualities, priorities and vision which should be sought in the next Principal. This feedback would be used to inform the job description ahead of the search commencing and a detailed communication plan was in development to ensure that stakeholders were kept informed. The Remuneration Committee would be required to consider the remuneration package to be offered in the coming weeks, with the salary range driven by market data.

- Resolved:**
- (i) to approve the proposed recruitment process and associated timeline;
  - (ii) to approve the inclusion of Emma Preston on the proposed membership of the Selection Panel;
  - (iii) to agree that the responsibility for finalising the membership of the Selection Panel be delegated to the Chair of Court; and otherwise
  - (iv) to note the report.

### 327. EXTENSION TO INTERIM PRINCIPAL'S CONTRACT

The Chair and the University Secretary introduced the above paper, seeking the approval of the Court to extend the contract of the current Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nigel Seaton, by a further period of six months to ensure alignment with the ongoing process for recruiting a new Principal. Members were advised that the proposal had already been considered by the Governance & Nominations Committee (G&NC), which had endorsed the proposal to the Court for approval.

Members were reminded that Professor Seaton had been appointed Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor on 20 June 2025 for a period of three months and that this appointment had been extended by one month on 20 September 2025. Specially arranged meetings of Senate and Court were convened during October 2025 and, at its meeting on 13 October 2025, the Court agreed to extend Professor Seaton's contract by a further six months in the first instance, and agreed that, subject to satisfactory completion of a formal review after a period of five months (in March 2026), the contract could be extended to October 2026.

The Chair advised that, as agreed by Court, she and Dr Ian Mair, Deputy Chair of the Court, had conducted the performance review during March 2026, following this process, they had agreed to recommend that Professor Seaton's contract be further extended by a period of six months.

The Court noted that the process for the recruitment of the next Principal & Vice-Chancellor was underway (see [paragraph 326](#), above) and that the next Principal & Vice-Chancellor could potentially be in post by November 2026. The partner executive selection agency, Perrett Laver, was optimistic that the role could attract high-calibre candidates.

In discussion, the view was expressed that engagement with students appeared to have been sporadic or *ad hoc* and it noted that the Dundee University and College Union Branch Meeting (DUCU) had recently passed a motion of no confidence in Professor Seaton. The Chair noted that the DUCU did not represent the majority of staff members and that the vote of no confidence was a matter separate to the deliberations of the Court in discussing the extension to Professor Seaton's contract. It was noted that communication had been highlighted as an important area in Court's discussion in October, and the Chair and Deputy Chair reported that they had observed significant improvements in this area, as evidenced by regular and open town hall meetings held with staff, as well as increased communication with the University Community.

Thereafter, the Court agreed to approve the extension to Professor Seaton's contract for a further six months.

**Resolved:** to approve the extension to Professor Seaton's appointment by a further six months.

*[Secretary's note: The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor, the Interim Director of Finance, the Director of Legal and the Head of the Principal's Office joined the meeting at this point]*

### 328. **SFC FINANCIAL TRANSACTION LOAN: LEGAL RESOLUTION**

The Chair welcomed Professor Seaton, Mr Hamill, Mr Sarwar and Ms Soutar to the meeting. Ms Robertson advised members that, while the Court had approved a proposal to formally accept the £12m Financial Transactions Loan from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) at its previous meeting, a legal resolution was also required to be endorsed by the Court in order to fulfil the paperwork necessary to draw down the funds before 31 March 2026. Copies of the Resolution were circulated for members' information.

Members sought clarification that the terms relating to the acceptance of the Loan remained unchanged and that the Interim Principal, the Interim Director of Finance and the University Secretary would be the legal signatories to the Loan acceptance. Thereafter, the Court approved the legal resolution as tabled.

**Resolved:** to approve the legal resolution.

*[Secretary's note: The Director of Legal left the meeting at this point]*

### 329. **STRATEGY TO RECOVERY**

The Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor introduced the above suite of papers, intended to provide Court with the University Strategy to Recovery and associated supporting documentation required by SFC in relation to the Section 25 funding. Professor Seaton advised members that the Strategy to Recovery was intended to replace the Recovery Plan contained in the documents approved by Court in August 2025, which had been produced at pace and which merited more extensive development. Court noted that engagement with key stakeholders conducted as part of the development of the Strategy had provided management with a welcome opportunity to hear from the University community and that the insights, thoughts, views and experiences offered by staff and students had directly informed the Strategy to Recovery which the Court was invited to consider. Professor Seaton thanked all those who had participated and shared freely their views, including the negative lived experiences of the previous 15 months, and commended the work of Louise Soutar in preparing the document.

Members noted the timeline for the engagement plan, the methods of data collection, audience mapping and wider engagement activities and were advised that UEG had brought in Gillian Baxendale, previously Head of Participation and Communities at the Scottish Parliament to undertake an analysis of the engagement outputs. Ms Baxendale had presented her report to UEG, which had identified issues of trust and transparency in terms of data and systems and noted significant concerns amongst staff regarding the future of the Professional Services.

The Court was then invited to comment on the Strategy to Recovery (The Strategy) as presented, incorporating the period leading up to the establishment of a longer-term strategy under the leadership of the next Principal. It was intended that the Strategy remain in place until

superseded by a longer-term vision developed under the leadership of the next Principal & Vice-Chancellor.

Some members expressed concern that the Strategy may not meet the requirements as articulated by SFC in their letter of November 2025 and pointed to an absence of specific and measurable indicators of performance, particularly in relation to financial performance.

In the course of an involved discussion Court noted, *inter alia*, the imperative for a significant debate on the elements, not only of the Strategy itself, but also of its implementation plan as well as the associated Workforce Plan, Academic Operating Model and the Commercial Lending Strategy. Members agreed that further discussion would be helpful in order to articulate clearly to all stakeholders the future direction of the University as it related to them and to its mission.

It was agreed that a further iteration of the Strategy would be produced and that this would be informed by a dedicated Court workshop to be held for the sole purpose of articulating a Strategy to Recovery which the Court could fully endorse. Ms Robertson invited further comments to be provided by email to the Interim Principal and the Head of the Principal's Office ahead of the workshop.

**Resolved:** (i) to hold a workshop with Senior University Officers to discuss and develop further the Strategy to Recovery before presenting it again to Court for formal approval.

330. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was declared.

331. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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

Esther Robertson  
Chair of Court  
University of Dundee