

**UNIVERSITY COURT**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2021**

**Present:** Mr H Adam (Chair), Ms M Allison, Dr Robert Black, Dr P Cowell, Ms P Crawford, Prof J Donaldson, Mr K Fraser, Ms S Gordon, Prof A Green, Mr S Haldane, Mr H Grossart, Prof P Hancock, Mr G Hastie, Mr D Kearney, Mr G MacLeod, Prof M MacLeod, Prof G McCormac, Ms B McKissack, Ms C Morrison, Mr J Muirhead, Prof H Nehring, Rev M Roderick, Councillor C Simpson and Ms A Smith.

**In Attendance:** Mr G Duff, Ms C Gallagher, Ms J Harrison, Mr L McCabe, Mr M McCrindle, Mr C McNally, Ms J Morrow, Prof J Phillips, Dr J Rogers, Ms E Schofield, Prof L Sparks, Mr L Spillane, Dr David Telford, Mr M Nichol (Clerk), Prof N Wylie, Dr L Zhuang and Ms J Stevenson (item 9)

**Apologies:** No apologies for absence were received.

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. MINUTES UC(20/21) Minutes 2**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2020 were **approved** as an accurate record.

**3. MATTERS ARISING NOT OTHERWISE ON THE AGENDA**

There were no matters arising.

**4. KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT UC(20/21)37**

Court received the report on latest external factors that presented potential challenges for the University, and policy developments in the external environment relevant to the Higher Education (HE) sector.

Members discussed in particular the Covid-19 landscape, including an overview of the Scottish Government’s approach towards international travel and quarantine measures, and the cancellation of school exams, additional funding for the HE & FE sector, the SFC budget update, Scotland Hydro Nation Chair, the introduction of the Turing Scheme and free speech on campus.

Court **noted** the recent developments in the external environment.

***PLANNING & BUDGETING***

**5. UPDATE ON FINANCIAL PLANNING AND INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES UC(20/21)38**

Court received an update on Financial Planning and Institutional Priorities that included the developing financial position, the institutional response to the pandemic and progress against institutional priorities.

Members discussed in particular the forecast outturn position for the academic year 2020/21, a £1.976m deficit, which represented a £2.7m favourable variance against the Q1 forecast position provided to Court in December (£4.7m deficit) and significant movements across income and expenditure lines including forecast tuition fee income.

Members received a summary of the financial position for 2020-21 informed by the Q2 management accounts and accompanied by a summary of an indicative cash position. It was confirmed that SFC had approved offering the University financial transactions loan funding of £6.7m subject to formal approval of the loan. Approval of the loan by Court was sought in accordance with SFC’s requirements for granting borrowing consent.

Court discussed the terms of the additional financial transactions loan funding including the interest rate and repayment period and sought assurance on the overall level of borrowing, projected growth and covenant compliance.

Members discussed the setting of strategic financial objectives, in particular the level of surplus that would be appropriate for the University. It was confirmed an ambition to achieve a 6% surplus for the purpose of reinvestment formed part of the University’s approach to planning and budgeting and in recent years reinvestment had been made to support strategic initiatives, such as implementing the Research Strategy.

Court **considered** the Institutional Priority and Financial Planning update, including the Q2 2020-21 financial forecast and further indicative position and **approved** the additional loan of £6.7m from the SFC’s financial transactions fund.

**6. CAPITAL AND MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE UC(20/21)39**

Court received an update on forecast capital and major infrastructure plans for 2020-21, as at 31 January 2021.

It was confirmed that following the impact of COVID-19, all planned expenditure within the 2018-23 capital plan was reviewed, with only essential expenditure committed in 2020/21. The forecasted capital and major infrastructure planned spend for 2020/21 was £18.7m.

Members discussed in particular the University’s major capital projects including Sports facilities, Campus Central and the University’s IT and digital environment.

Court **noted** the update on capital and major infrastructure.

**7 STUDENT ACCOMODATION RENT PROPOSAL 2021/22 UC(20/21)40**

Court received an overview of the recommendation from the Rent Review Group on proposed University managed student accommodation rents for the academic year 2021/22. Members discussed the promotion and utilisation of the Student Hardship Fund and the ease in which students are able to access financial assistance through the fund.

Court **approved** the recommendation to freeze rent at last year’s prices.

**8 TRAC RETURN 2019/20 UC(20/21)41**

Court received an overview of the University’s TRAC Return for the year ended 31 July 2020. It was confirmed that in light of the challenges presented by the pandemic, the submission deadline for the 2019/20 return was moved to 31 March 2021. The TRAC return was prepared in accordance with the relevant guidance issued by Office for Students (OfS) in conjunction with Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

Court **approved** the TRAC return 2019/20.

**9 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTIES UC(20/21)42**

Court received a report on the University’s Public Sector Equality Duty and specific statutory reporting obligations.

Members discussed in particular progress on mainstreaming the equality duty, the proposed Equality Outcomes for 2021-25, and the development of a balanced framework of key performance indicators for monitoring progress.

Court **approved** the proposed Equality Outcomes for 2021-25 and **approved** for publication the Mainstreaming the Equality Duty report, which incorporated statutory reports on employee information, gender pay gap information and the University’s equal pay statement.

***RESEARCH***

***10* RESEARCH UPDATE**

Court received a presentationon the University’s research activity including an overview of the approach undertaken and recent success, the external research environment and the University’s proposed research strategy for 2022 and beyond.

***GOVERNANCE***

**11 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK SUBMISSION 2021 UC(20/21)43**

Court received an overview of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework submission. Following a national delay to the exercise as a result of COVID-19, it was confirmed the University Strategy and Policy Group approved the submission made by the University and that the primary outcome of the REF would be an overall quality profile on each submission published in April 2022.

Court **noted** the 2021 Research Excellence Framework Submission.

**12 UNIVERSITY COURT EFFECTIVENESS QUESTIONNAIRE UC(20/21)44**

Court received a report on findings from the Court Effectiveness questionnaire completed by members earlier in the year. It was confirmed a significant majority of responses to the questionnaire were positive, demonstrating that members believed that Court was effective. Members discussed the main conclusions and areas for development including the timely distribution of papers and noted that consideration was being given to the implementation of an alternative method for circulating and managing papers for University Court e.g. specialist software for managing governing body meetings.

Court **noted** the analysis of responses from the annual Court Effectiveness questionnaire.

***POLICIES***

**13 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION SAFEGUARDING CODE OF PRACTICE UC(20/21)45**

Court received an introduction to the Research and Innovation Safeguarding Code of Practice. It was confirmed the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) placed a requirement on all organisations that receive funding to take all reasonable steps to prevent harm. The Code of Practice supported the University’s requirement to meet these obligations whilst also supporting researchers following potential disclosures of harm.

Members discussed the purpose of the Code of Practice and the circumstances set out in the Code of Practice under which a report must be made. It was agreed that section 10 would be amended to include specific reference to disclosing allegations of sexual abuse and incidents of historic abuse.

Court **approved** the Research and Innovation Safeguarding Code of Practice subject to amendments to section 10.

**14 SUSTAINABILITY POLICY UC(20/21)46**

Court received the revised Sustainability Policy updated to reflect the new and changing environmental and sustainability duties and objectives.

Members discussed the approach to integrate sustainable development into everyday practice and the University’s proposed aims in relation to its environmental responsibilities. It was agreed that the aims would be strengthened to ensure the challenge faced in this area is met, by rewording the stated ambition of the University to be more active.

Court **approved** the revised Sustainability Policy subject to amendments to the aims associated with the University’s environmental responsibility.

**15 TIME OFF FOR DEPENDANTS POLICY UC(20/21)47**

Court received the revised Time Off for Dependants Policy and members discussed the proposal to increase the number of days paid leave (from 3 to 5 days) to enable employees to support dependants in an emergency situation. This included circumstances associated with the pandemic, associated restrictions and reduced childcare and school provision.

Court **approved** the revised Time Off for Dependants Policy.

**16 COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE UC(20/21)48**

Court received an overview of revisions to the University’s Complaint Handling Procedure. It was confirmed that the University was required by the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 to comply with the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) provided by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

Members discussed the new version of the MCHP which introduced a level of standardisation across the various MCHPs that exist for the areas within SPSO’s jurisdiction and noted the new version was required to be implemented by 1 April 2021.

Court **approved** the ‘Guide for Complainants’ and the proposed approach to the implementation of the new Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

***COMMITTEE REPORTS***

**17 ACADEMIC COUNCIL UC(20/21)49**

Court **noted** the report from the Academic Council meeting of 10 March 2021.

**18 JOINT POLICY, PLANNING & RESOURCES COMMITTEE UC(20/21)50**

Court **noted** the report from the meeting of JPPRC on 1 March 2021 and **approved** the Safety, Environment and Continuity Annual Report 2019/20.

**19 AUDIT COMMITTEE UC(20/21)51**

Court **noted** the report from Audit Committee meeting which took place on 8 February

2021.

**20 GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE UC(20/21)52**

Court **noted** the report from the Governance and Nominations Committee meeting held on 1 February 2021.

***ACTIVITY UPDATES***

**21 STUDENTS’ UNION UPDATE UC(20/21)53**

Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities including COVID-19 support and recovery, student engagement and the return of outdoor physical activity in line with guidance from Scottish Government.

The Chair thanked the President and the Vice-President Communities of the Students’ Union for their hard work throughout the year and wished them both success in the future. Court **noted** the activity update from the Students’ Union.

**22. STAFF AND EMPLOYMENT UPDATE UC(20/21)54**

Court received an update on Staffing and Employment topics including CJRS, employee lifecycle processes and activities to support employee mental health and wellbeing.

Court **noted** the update on matters relating to staff and employment.

***RISKS***

**23 RISKS ARISING**

Court **considered** risks associated with items discussed in the context of the agreed risk appetite statement.

***OTHER ITEMS***

**24 ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

There was no other competent business.

**25 NEXT MEETING**

Members **noted** the next full meeting of Court is scheduled for 14 June 2021.

**Policy & Planning**

**March 2021**