

# **Minutes - University Court**

25/03/2025 | 2.00pm to 4.00pm

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

Mr Harry Adam (Chair), Ms Leen Ali, Professor Kirstie Blair, Ms Pamela Crawford, Mr Gary Fleming, Mr Kenny Fraser, Ms Susan Gordon Hardy, Mr Hamish Grossart, Mr Graham Hastie, Mr Douglas Kearney, Dr Deborah Keith, Professor Malcolm MacLeod, Ms Lynne Marr, Professor Sir Gerry McCormac, Ms Catriona Morrison, Professor Gozde Ozakinci, Ms Justine Pedussel, Mr William Stancer and Dr Clare Wilson.

In Attendance

Mr Graeme Duff, Ms Rose Edwards, Ms Cathy Gallagher, Ms Jennifer Harrison, Ms Karen Lawson, Mr Colin McNally, Ms Joanna Morrow, Mr Moray Nichol (Clerk), Ms Eileen Schofield, Professor Helen Scott, Professor Terri Scott, Mr Liam Spillane, Dr David Telford, Professor Paul Townsend, and Dr Lee Zhuang.

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Poonam Gupta, Dr Magdalena Ietswaart, Professor Julie Tinson and Lord Provost Elaine Watterson.

The Chair thanked Ms Leen Ali, Students’ Union President for her contribution to University Court, and congratulated Ms Justine Pedussel on her election as Students’ Union President.  The Chair confirmed that the incoming sabbatical officers would commence from the beginning of June.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mr Hamish Grossart declared an interest at Item 16 – Appointment of Chair of University Court.

There were no other declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Court approved the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2024.

4. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

The Chair provided a statement to Court on the remuneration of senior staff at the University and provided assurance that the criteria and processes used to determine and review salaries were robust and fair.

There were no other matters arising.

5. Key Developments in the External Environment

Court received a report on recent developments in the external environment that included coverage of the Scottish Government Budget for 2025/26, the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill, developments on immigration policy, and an update on the US Presidential Elections and geopolitical matters.

Court discussed the challenging economic environment and constraints caused by funding settlements and UK government immigration policy that presented risk to institutional financial sustainability across the UK and Scottish sectors, and these matters had featured within recent discussions within the Scottish Parliament's Education Committee.  It was confirmed that, at the University of Stirling, a detailed review of resources aligned to activity was undertaken against expenditure forecasts to ensure delivery of the 2024-25 Court approved break-even operating outturn position, and that the University was forecast to end the financial year 2024-25 with strong cash balances and would be covenant compliant for 2024-25.

Members received an overview of recent institutional successes that included achieving an institutional Athena Swan Silver award and a Silver Award for the Division of Biology and Environmental Sciences, that highlighted developments and progress to advance gender equality across the University.  Members noted recent sporting successes across multiple disciplines that included tennis, athletics and swimming.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

6. Quarter Two Performance Report

Court received the Performance Report that was underpinned by the Quarter Two management accounts and associated indicative financial forecast position for the academic year 2024-25.

It was confirmed that the management accounts presented a forecast operating surplus of £74k in line with the Quarter One position despite a competitive recruitment environment and the associated challenges with tuition fee income capture and the evolving nature of grant income.  Expenditure continued to be prioritised for business critical areas to support the realisation of the forecast savings.  It was confirmed that further targeted expenditure controls and resource optimisation measures would be implemented for the remainder of the year to ensure the University achieved its breakeven operating position.

Members discussed forecast capital expenditure and the re-phasing of £2.8m of 2024-25 expenditure primarily to 2025-26 and the Quarter Two cash position.  It was confirmed that cash inflow was forecast to be £12.5m, down from £14.7m at the Quarter One position, and the movement of £2.2m reflected a reduction in deferred income for both tuition and research income.  It was confirmed that the forecast cash balance at 31 July 2025 was £66.2m, which demonstrated the University had a strong liquidity position with cash balances accumulated in accordance with sound treasury management practices in line with the Treasury Management Policy.

Members discussed the spectrum of activities that contribute to the University's operation and the disaggregation of reported income streams that would enable Court to further explore areas of growth that related to commercial activity and sport in particular.

Members discussed the student numbers target for 2030 set out in the Strategic Plan.  It was confirmed that the target remained appropriate and achievable based on projected growth of new provision, including through strategic international partnerships.

Court approved the Quarter Two Performance Report.

COLLABORATION

7. City Region and Growth Deal

Court received an update on the University’s City Region and Growth Deal projects that included progress with Scotland's International Environment Centre and the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NAITH).  Members were offered the opportunity to visit the completed NAITH building prior to the next meeting of Court in June.

University Court noted the progress report on the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme.

GOVERNANCE AND POLICY

8. Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund Strategy

Court received the University’s Knowledge Exchange & Innovation Fund (KEIF) Strategy.  It was confirmed that submission of the strategy to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) was a condition attached to the KEIF funding which replaced the University Innovation Fund.

The strategy was submitted to the SFC on 14 February 2025, and was assessed by an expert panel in early 2025 to provide assurance to SFC that the University had a long-term plan to best utilise their KEIF allocation and contributions to Government priorities.  It was confirmed that starting from Autumn 2026, a report describing institutional performance against its KEIF Strategy over the previous academic year would be required to be submitted annually.

Court homologated the Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund Strategy.

9. Renaming of Stirling Management School

Court received a proposed amendment to Ordinance 69 that reflected the renaming of the Stirling Management School.  It was confirmed that, to reflect recent developments at the Stirling Management School, its international standing, comprehensive offerings, and commitment to supporting the business community, it had been agreed to rename Stirling Management School as the University of Stirling Business School.

Members considered the approach to branding and marketing of the University of Stirling Business School and noted this would be progressed in conjunction with the Communications, Marketing and Recruitment Team.

Court approved the proposed amendment to Ordinance 69.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

10. Students' Union Update

Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities that included coverage of the Welcome Week events, Women's History Month, the Students’ Union election, activity to enhance student engagement, Sports Union membership and environmental sustainability initiatives.  The Students' Union President thanked members of Court for their support during both terms of office.

Court considered the activity update from the Students’ Union.

11. University of Stirling Students' Union Accounts

Court received and noted the annual report and financial statements for the University of Stirling Students’ Union for 2024/25.

12. Staff and Employment Update

Court received an update on staff and employment matters that included coverage of negotiations on the 2025-26 pay award, Health and Wellbeing initiatives for staff across the institution and an overview of findings from the recent Be Heard Staff Engagement survey on Staff Active Health.

Court noted the staff and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

13. Academic Council

Court received a report on the meeting of Academic Council held on 12 March 2025.  It was confirmed that matters considered by Council in addition to those presented to Court for approval as separate items on the agenda included an update on the UK Visas and Immigration Audit, an update from the Institute of Advanced Studies and the development of Council Committees.

Court noted the report from the meeting 12 March 2025.

14. Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee

Court received a report from the meeting of Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee held on 27 February 2025 which included the Research Concordat annual report and action plan, and draft Procurement Strategy for approval.

It was confirmed that the Research Concordat was a continuous improvement tool designed to guide institutions to make steps towards a better research culture.  It was confirmed that the Concordat action plan was relevant to all staff engaged in research at the University and had a strong focus on the needs of Early Career Researchers whilst aligning with key institutional strategies.

Members considered the draft Procurement Strategy.   It was confirmed that the strategy had been developed through consultation with academic and professional services staff, and that all contracting authorities with an annual spend greater than £5m were required to develop, and annually review, a procurement strategy under the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.  It was confirmed that the Procurement Strategy contributed to financial sustainability by achieving best value and savings, and supported the University’s Net Zero objectives.

Court noted the report on the meeting of Joint Policy Planning and Resources Committee held on 27 February 2025.

Additionally, Court:

* approved the Research Concordat annual report and action plan
* approved the draft Procurement Strategy

15. Audit Committee

Court received a report on matters considered by Audit Committee at its meeting held on 7 February 2025 that included a progress update on Internal Audit activity and the Institutional Register of Strategic Risk.  It was confirmed that Audit Committee were satisfied with management's response to findings from recent Internal Audit activity and the associated immediate and longer-terms actions that had been agreed.

Court noted the report from Audit Committee of 7 February 2025.

16. Governance and Nominations Committee

Court received a report on the meeting of Governance and Nominations Committee held on 4 March 2025.  It was confirmed that Governance and Nominations Committee recommended to University Court the appointment of the Chair of Court, approved the report on the Chair of Court election for publication and noted the Chair of Court honorarium.

Court approved the appointment of Mr Hamish Grossart to the position of Chair of University Court for an initial term of four years from 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2029.   Mr Hamish Grossart is eligible to be reappointed for a second term of four years, subject to approval by Governance and Nominations Committee.

Additionally, the Chair advised members it was agreed that a recruitment process to fill the vacant lay member positions on Court would commence.  The vacancies would be advertised by the University and any suggestions for potential candidates should be provided to the Chair of Court or the University Secretary.

RISKS

17. Risks Arising

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

OTHER ITEMS

18. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other competent business.

19. Next Meeting

Court noted the next meeting was scheduled on 16 June 2025.