

COURT**Minutes**

In the Chair: Dame Frances Cairncross

Date of Meeting: 23 July 2020

Present also: Dr Richard Armour
Ms Tracey Ashworth Davies
Professor Patrick Corbett
Mr Graeme Dickson
Professor Fadi Ghaith
Dr Amos Haniff
Mr Steve Heathcote
Dr Paul Hopkinson
Mr Grant Innes
Professor Julian Jones
Ms Emily King
Dr Amanda Lyness

Ms Morag McNeill
Mr Cameron Millar
Mr Roger Murray
Professor Máiréad Nic Craith
Ms Marta Phillips
Mr Alan Robertson
Ms Dawn Skidmore
Ms Jandy Stevenson
Ms Lara Stroudinsky
Mr Mike Tumilty
Mr Graham Watson
Professor Richard Williams

Officer in attendance: Professor Mushtak Al-Atabi
Ms Sue Collier
Ms Lucy Everest
Professor Gill Hogg
Professor Ammar Kaka

Mr Hugh Mitchell
Mr Andrew Jefferson
Ms Ruth Moir
Professor John Sawkins

Others in attendance: Ms Em Bailey (for item M20/75)
Mr Richard Claughton (for item M20/74)

Professor Robert MacIntosh (for item M20/73)

M20/64 WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed the following in particular:

- Mr Hugh Mitchell, who attended the meeting on the nomination of Lord Iain Vallance; and
- Ms Ruth Moir and Ms Lucy Everest, who were present in the joint capacity of Acting Secretary of the University.

The Chair reported that Mr Richard Claughton, Global Director of HR, Professor Robert MacIntosh, Head of the School of Social Sciences, and Ms Em Bailey, Acting Director of Planning would join the meeting for discussion on particular items.

The Chair reminded Court members of the extreme sensitivity of papers to be considered at the meeting on 23 July 2020 and the need to maintain strict confidentiality and security of the information being shared.

M20/65 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from: Ms Marta Phillips, and the following who had been invited to attend the meeting: Lord Iain Vallance, Dr Gill Murray and Professor Gary Pender.

M20/66 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Court approved as accurate records the minutes of the meetings of Court held on 29 June 2020.

M20/67 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chair of Court invited declarations of interest. No interests were declared.

M20/68 MATTERS ARISING

- 68.1 The Acting Secretary of the University (Ms Ruth Moir) reported on the temporary Dubai Campus leases which had been approved by the Court Interim Business Committee on 16 July 2020.
- 68.2 The Acting Secretary of the University (Ms Ruth Moir) encouraged Court members to provide input to the current consultation with staff and Court members on the role of Pro-Chancellors. The process towards an appointment at each of the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses is currently under way. Court members were also encouraged over the next few weeks to respond to the current consultation with members on future Court meeting dates.

M20/69 STRATEGY 2025: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS FROM THE PRINCIPAL (Oral report)

The Principal reported on continuing intensive activities and communications with staff. Included in the latter, an important all-staff meeting would take place on 23 July 2020. He reported that a link to this recorded event would be available to Court members.

The Principal reported on the recent announcement of the Islands Deal investment (Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland). The Islands Deal would provide various strands of capital and other investments and would provide new strategic opportunities for the University and its research facilities on Orkney.

The Principal reported that a paper would be distributed to Court members on 23 July 2020 which summarises the UK Government R&D roadmap, which is currently out for consultation. This reported on a significant planned uplift in UK R&D including multi-billion pound funding by 2025 and the creation of a new science funding agency. **XXX Reserved section (Ref: Section 33, FOI(S)A).**

M20/70 REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE AND THREE-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN 2020-2023

The Court received reports from the Finance Committee which related to the meetings of the Committee held on 14 and 20 July 2020.

XXX Reserved Section (Ref section 30,33, FOI(S)A).

70.4 Conclusion

The Court unanimously approved the draft Three-Year Financial Plan 2020-2023 for onward presentation in the required form to the Scottish Funding Council by 31 July 2020.

The Chair of Court on behalf of the Court thanked the Finance Committee and the GCFO for their work to develop the Plan in this year's exceptional circumstances.

M20/71 GROUP FINANCIAL DASHBOARD AND MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO JUNE 2020 (Paper Ct5/20/39)

The Court received and noted a Group Financial Dashboard report and full Management Accounts for the period ending 30 June 2020 (period 11).

XXX Reserved section (Ref sections 30,33 FOI(S)A).

M20/72 DELIVERING STRATEGY 2025 IN DUBAI: UPDATE REPORT (Paper Ct5/20/40)

XXX Reserved section (Ref sections 30,33 FOI(S)A).

M20/73 STRATEGY 2025 UPDATE REPORT (Paper Ct5/20/41)

The Court noted and discussed a report which set out the key priorities in each Strategy 2025 theme in 2020/21. These had been developed through workshops, including work undertaken by the Court

at its meeting on 5 May 2020 and review in the context of the impact of the global pandemic. In conclusion it had been determined that the four main themes of the strategy remain relevant, but that the priorities within each theme should be adjusted to reflect current circumstances.

The Head of the School of Social Sciences and Special Adviser on Strategy drew attention to the three conclusions that had been drawn from the review, i.e.:

- most of the Strategy Performance Indicators (SPIs) would remain unchanged by the pandemic;
- further work will be needed to develop suitable measures and associated action for two of the measures (global approach to widening access and to environmental sustainability). Specific plans for frameworks and measures would be developed in 2020/21; and
- the financial performance measures which were developed pre-pandemic should be further reviewed in line with the University's new rolling budget arrangement and extreme uncertainty about future income streams.

The Court noted the proposal to revisit the shape and size of strategy SPIs at the 6 November 2020 meeting of the Court. By this time firmer data will be available on international student recruitment and research income opportunities.

The Court noted that, following the Court's Strategy Meeting in May 2020, there had been three strategy workshops with the University Executive and the Global University Leadership Forum to identify clear strategic priorities which were set out in a range of new and continuing initiatives for delivery during academic year 2020/21 (provided in an appendix to the report). Within each theme the outputs of the Court Strategy Meeting had been incorporated against which priorities, actions and 'Operating Performance Indicators had been set.

The following points/observations arose in the course of discussion:

- the need not to lose sight of the ambition which has defined Strategy 2025 and to consider what this means in terms of the University's financial position, risk appetite and the external environment. It was noted that horizon scanning reviews undertaken at least six monthly and perhaps quarterly would be desirable, especially as competitors in the wider sector will be looking to similar new opportunities.
- the Principal agreed that there should be an opportunity in the near future to consider the University's risk appetite through a discussion which scene sets and agrees parameters for future activities.
- the Strategic themes should be reflected in staff PDR plans. The Court noted that the format of the PDR paperwork had been re-developed in alignment with the strategy in a way that will make staff members' contributions to the Strategy visible. Work would also be undertaken led by the Vice-Principal & Provost to re-develop the School and Professional Services planning round process so that local plans are developed through the lens of Strategy 2025 and there is clear ownership of Operational Performance Indicators. Through those measures, which combine a top down and bottom up approach, it is expected that staff members should begin to feel clearer connectivity between their roles and activities and the Strategy. It was noted that this process would continue to be supported through the programme of all staff briefings; and
- despite appearances in the paper there is a clear and developing strategy for environmental sustainability and a plan would be delivered in the coming year with Court involvement and sign off. He agreed that reports would be developed to make the plans clearer.

M20/74 STAFF SURVEY OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS (Paper Ct5/20/42)

The Court noted and discussed a report which summarised at University-level the key findings of the 2019 Staff Engagement Survey and explained the actions being taken in response. The Court was asked to note the report and to endorse the action plans.

It was noted that the 2019 Staff Engagement Survey had been the first linked to Strategy 2025 and it provided a starting benchmark position for future surveys which will be undertaken annually. While there were many positive signals emerging from the 2019 Survey, significant scope for cultural change and improvement in several areas had been identified. The Court noted that the results had been found to be fairly consistent across Schools and that while Campuses and Professional Services each had individual action plans relevant to them, key issues were appropriate for consideration at University-level.

Particular attention was drawn to five key areas identified for ongoing review and assessment of progress:

- staff understanding of and participation in Strategy 2025
- communications at all levels. The importance of communications in bringing the University's Strategy to life and meaningful to them in their roles. Improving communications and a range of actions to support this had been agreed, supported by regular "pulse surveys". Positive feedback had been received on enhanced communications, such as delivered through the new 'Cascade' messaging;
- managing change in the current turbulent and difficult environment to ensure that a strong and flourishing community is preserved;
- understanding bullying and harassment within the University and taking steps to eliminate these; and
- setting an ambition to be sector-leading as a truly inclusive and supportive flourishing community.

Moving forward, valuable lessons learned through the experience of working through the Covid-19 crisis and enhancements in communications which have resulted will also be drawn upon.

In response to a question about moving beyond simple process-driven measures to improve management practices, the Global Director of HR reported on work that had been undertaken since the Survey to define and develop the role of manager as a key role. Training in leadership skills remained an ongoing feature within professional development.

In response to a point raised about the new PDR process and some remaining negative perceptions among staff, the Global Director of HR reported that the paperwork had been simplified in response to earlier voiced concerns. While the new process aims to better support staff members in their personal development and in alignment of their roles with the Strategy, more work remains to be done on the PDR process.

The Court was content to endorse the Staff Survey action plans.

M20/75 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS (Paper Ct5/20/43)

The Court noted and discussed a report which summarised the University's performance in the 2020 National Student Survey (NSS).

The Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching) drew attention to the small reductions in the University's scores for 'Overall Satisfaction' and 'Average % Agree', which had led to movements in UK rank from 35th to 45th place and 83rd to 86th respectively within a tightly clustered ranking of scores. He reported the University's disappointment in the result, albeit that the University's position remains well above the 2018 position of 91st in the UK. However most Scottish universities had improved their scores and UK ranking in 2020 and the University must look very closely at its results.

It was noted that the range of scores across the UK for Overall Satisfaction (and Average % Agree) fell in the year. This had not been unexpected given the strike action which took place in many pre-92 universities. The survey period had overlapped with the start of the Covid-19 lockdown, however, more widely, it was not thought that the results had been significantly affected by the pandemic.

The Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching) drew attention to particularly strong results in the Heriot-Watt mix where the University topped the UK in a few areas, is in the top ten universities for 9 out of 24 subjects based on Overall Satisfaction and or Average % Agree scores, and is first in Scotland in four subject areas by the same measures. Conversely the University had performed poorly in a group of other subjects where there is a seeming correlation with unsettling re-organisational activities. Four question areas in the Survey had been identified as being significantly astray from benchmark and therefore due for extra attention.

The Court noted that work would proceed to develop required actions to achieve improvements and taking a broad holistic approach. It was noted that there is no direct correlation between NSS scores and the popularity or financial viability of any particular programme, there were benchmark 'norms' in subject areas that the University paid attention to in its assessment of standards.

The Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching) reported that in the next stage of analysis and action planning the University will look carefully at the inconsistencies in performance across the University, while learning lessons also from movements in the wider sector.

The Court noted that the University Committee for Learning and Teaching, which is responsible for receiving, approving and monitoring NSS action plans, would consider plans at its meeting in November 2020 with progress reports to be considered in March 2021. The University's own Annual Survey which mirrors the NSS for Dubai and Malaysia would be considered alongside the NSS results.

M20/76 APPOINTMENT OF SECRETARY TO THE COURT (Paper Ct5/20/44)

The joint Acting Secretaries of the University, Ms Ruth Moir and Ms Lucy Everest, were absent from discussion on this item.

The Court noted and approved a proposal for appointing a Secretary of the University involving the selection of independent lay members of the Court to join the Appointment Committee with a view to making an appointment by the end of September 2020. The Court noted that extent of the role had been modified to take on board some of the recommendation of the Good Governance Institute in its Effectiveness Review of Court and the Senate conducted in 2018. This involved a stronger focus on serving the Court and governance process in addition to the University Executive but with few specific line management responsibilities for professional services than previously. The Secretary remained responsible for overall administration of the University in accordance with the Ordinance.

The Court:

- noted an outline description of the role which would include executive management responsibilities as well as the (unchanged) responsibilities in relation to governance support to the Court;
- noted and agreed that the role should be advertised internally only and that as a matter of good practice the composition of the selection committee set out in Ordinance K1: Appointment of the Secretary would be used for this appointment;
- approved the appointments of Ms Tracey Ashworth-Davies and Ms Morag McNeill to the joint Court and Senate appointment committee; and
- taking the recommendation of a Court member, the panel would be advised by an experienced external who held a Secretary equivalent role at a Scottish University.

M20/77 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

77.1 Valedictions

The Chair of Court relayed the thanks and appreciation of the Court for their valuable contributions to the Court to the following members who would complete their terms of membership on 31 July 2020:

- Mr Roger Murray

- Dr Amanda Lyness
- Professor Máiréad Nic Craith
- Professor Julian Jones
- Professor Patrick Corbett

The Principal relayed thanks and appreciation on behalf of the incoming new Chair of Court elect and all other members to Dame Frances Cairncross, who would complete her term as Chair of the Court on 31 July 2020. He relayed thanks also on behalf of the Executive for the exceptional commitment she had brought to the role and to the University, her generosity of time and the intelligent insight, energy and rigour that she had brought to the role. She was also acknowledged for her particular contributions in the areas of fundraising and stewardship. The Principal and the Chair of Court elect relayed best wishes for the future to Dame Frances and the latter thanked her for her support to him over a period of induction and transference of role through 2020.

77.2 Court Interim Business Committee

The Court noted that the Court Interim Business Committee would soon consider and report to the Court on institutional change / cost savings proposals in an arrangement agreed by the Court at its meeting in June 2020.

M20/78 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting will take place on Friday 25 September 2020.

Date

Signature