

COURT**Minutes**

In the Chair: Mr Grant Innes

Date of Meeting: 6 November 2020

Present also: Dr Richard Armour
Professor Mark Biggs
Professor David Cobham
Professor Marc Desmulliez
Mr Graeme Dickson
Professor Fadi Ghaith
Dr Amos Haniff
Mr Steve Heathcote
Dr Brian Henderson
Dr Paul Hopkinson
Ms Emily King

Ms Morag McNeill
Mr Cameron Millar
Mr Jürgen Munz
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
Mr Richard Claughton
Ms Sue Collier
Ms Lucy Everest
Professor Gill Hogg
Mr Andrew Jefferson

Professor Ammar Kaka
Ms Ruth Moir
Dr Gill Murray
Professor Garry Pender
Professor John Sawkins

M20/100 WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded Court members of the extreme sensitivity of the papers presented at the meeting and emphasised the need to maintain confidentiality.

M20/101 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Ms Tracey Ashworth-Davies and Lord Iain Vallance, who had been invited to attend the meeting.

M20/102 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (Paper Ct7/20/57)

The Court approved as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of Court held on 25 September 2020.

M20/103 MINUTES OF RECENT MEETINGS OF THE COURT INTERIM BUSINESS COMMITTEE

The Court received and noted minute reports of the Court Interim Business Committee relating to meetings which were held on 8 and 26 October 2020. The report of the meeting held on 26 October 2020 was relevant to paper item Ct7/20/60 and the recommendations contained therein.

M20/104 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chair of Court invited declarations of interest. Professor Marc Desmulliez declared an interest in paper item Ct7/20/58 on the agenda, being a member of staff of the School of Engineering & Physical Sciences. Professor Desmulliez stood aside from the discussion on that matter.

M20/105 MATTERS ARISING**105.1 Acting Head of the School of Engineering & Physical Sciences (Paper Ct7/20/58)**

The Court approved the recommendation from the Senate Committee for Interim Business & Effectiveness (SCIBE) for the appointment of Professor Duncan Hand as Acting Head of the School of Engineering & Physical Sciences from 1 January 2021 until 31 July 2021, or earlier if an

appointed new Head of School is in post sooner. The Court agreed also that the appointment may last until 31 July 2021 or when the appointment is taken up by the new Head of School appointee, whichever date is the later one, without the need for further Court approval. The Court noted that, should the Acting Head appointment need to be extended beyond July, the SCIBE will report this in advance to the Court.

The Court noted that Professor Steve McLaughlin would step down from the position of Head of School after 31 December 2020, and the process for appointing his successor is under way. The appointment of Acting Head of School would provide vital continuity of academic leadership in the interim period.

The Principal confirmed that the search and selection for the Head of School position, arranged in terms of *Ordinance F8: Head of School*, will be open to both internal and external applicants and the successful candidate will be the assessed best candidate in terms of their academic credentials, including professional body membership(s).

It was agreed that the thanks and appreciation of the Court should be relayed to Professor Steve McLaughlin for his valued leadership of the School of Engineering & Physical Sciences.

M20/106 REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL (Paper Ct7/20/59)

The Court noted and discussed a report from the Principal which provided context for the University Executive report on the outcomes and recommendations on the strategic change proposals (Paper Ct7/20/60) as well as an update on Strategy 2025 and University life.

The Principal emphasised the clarity and consistency which had characterised the current Change Programme which is about ensuring that the University can address financial sustainability through cost reduction and income generation and to ensure the strategic change needed for future sustainability is delivered. Throughout the process, the Executive had engaged constructively with staff and trade unions. The proposals set out in the report from the University Executive (Paper Ct7/20/60) aimed to address those fiscal and strategic imperatives.

The Principal emphasised that the priority had been to ensure the wellbeing of staff and students in all locations, working closely with the regulatory bodies in each of the University's three national jurisdictions. He emphasised the rapidly changing circumstances at each location and his thanks and appreciation to colleagues who continued to work hard to meet the challenges.

The Principal reported that stringent actions, supported by the compliance demonstrated by students and staff, had so far resulted in a very low incidence of positive Covid-19 cases across the University. Cases are being tracked daily along with statistics on self-isolation, and there had been no incidents of tracking transmission back to teaching or campus settings. However, the University is by no means being complacent, as circumstances could change rapidly.

The Principal highlighted the reported current status of access to physical space and activities on campus at its different locations. The Principal relayed thanks and appreciation to colleagues whose hard work has ensured that University's responsive blended learning approach is enabling student learning to continue in a coherent manner.

The Principal reported that pulse surveys had been undertaken for staff and separately for students at all locations. At the meeting of the Senate on 5 November 2020 the detailed and quantitative responses of the most recent student pulse surveys across each School and campus location were considered. Students are well engaged and supportive of the University's work. A response, assurance and feedback system had been put in place where free format comments from students are being invited and considered. The Principal invited the President of the Student Union to comment further on student engagement and the student experience.

106.1 Report from the President of the Student Union

The President of the Student Union relayed thanks and appreciation of behalf of the Union for the work of staff to deliver supportive and flexible provision for student learning and revision. The President reported on the welcome partnership approach between the Union and the University for

which the Union is thankful, as well as the Union's tireless work to promote student engagement and new social opportunities.

The President highlighted the negative feedback that had been received from students through the pulse survey that had been undertaken earlier in Semester 1. Evidence had arisen of students feeling overworked and overwhelmed, signalling a need for more guidance through learning materials, while recognising at the same time that University staff are working very hard in challenging circumstances.

The President drew attention to broader concerns about mental health in the student body and a general sense of low morale. Students are being advised about accessing help and support and, while the University is in a stronger position than some others in the wider sector, it is clear that more needs to be done to support the wellbeing of students.

106.2 Concluding comments

The Principal relayed thanks to the Student Union for its hard work and to the work of the Sports Union, Student Councils and Residence Life, Safeguarding and Estates Teams for their support.

The Principal reported the outcomes of pulse surveys which showed that students in residence are clear in their wishes to have more face-to-face contact and access to comfortable and well-equipped learning spaces. Meanwhile, the University had been clear and definitive in its communications to students about their studies and associated arrangements, including stable term dates, timetables, assessment dates and assessment arrangements etc. The University is currently planning the Christmas break exit and arrangements for the launch of the new Semester in January 2021. Particular care would be necessary over support for an anticipated enlarged number of residential students in Scotland. The Principal also reported on plans to launch winter graduation ceremonies which would provide customised on-line graduations for students and their families.

The Principal reported on the growing realisation that the challenges are likely to persist well into 2021, thereby signalling further change and substantial amounts of work over the period ahead. He emphasised that that regular business of delivery of Strategy 2025 has continued and needs to progress further to realise new opportunities to generate income, not just from existing programmes but also from new opportunities that have arisen from the pandemic. In the circumstances, the University will continue to rely on positive staff morale which is at the heart of the University's values-led approach. Maintaining morale, goodwill and commitment of all staff will be essential as the University progresses into Semester 2 and progress is made on the change programme to deliver efficiency and the future sustainability of the University.

The Principal concluded by reporting on a planned online Remembrance Day Commemoration for the University community, the link to which he would provide to Court members later on 6 November 2020.

106.3 Round up by the Chair and discussion

The Chair of Court reported on this wish to see larger important matters placed high in future Court agendas, including staff and student focused issues. He therefore asked for due prominence to be given to the outcomes of staff and student pulse surveys at the next meeting of the Court on 20 November 2020. He emphasised the need for the University to continue to consider the measures that can be taken to optimise the student experience in continuing difficult circumstances while working in partnership with the student body.

The following further comments and observations were raised in the course of discussion:

- the Provosts of the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses provided update reports on experiences at their campuses. The Court noted a lockdown situation in Malaysia until 9 November; however, an extension to current restrictions is expected as case numbers have continued to rise. In the meantime at the Malaysia Campus online only teaching would continue through to the end of Semester 1 and staff were working hard to maintain regular communications, including frequent 'townhall meetings' and the use of pulse surveys. It had become evident that the use of learning analytics is necessary to enhance the student learning experience. The Provost

reported that matters are generally under control at present. The Provost of the Dubai Campus reported on broadly similar circumstances in Dubai. Feedback from students had been broadly consistent with views at other campuses and the Student Council at the Campus has been highly active under a new 'flourishing communities' programme, while external sports facilities are engaging university students. In the meantime the Campus continues to follow prescriptive KHDA guidelines. The Campus had experienced a similar small number of Covid-19 cases as reported at other campuses;

- communications to staff and students, parents/guardians of prospective students should include positive news about the efficacy of measures in place;
- the University should consider further measures that might be taken to increase socially distanced recreational activities, as the University looks forward to spring and improved weather in particular at the Scottish campuses. The Global Chief Operating Officer confirmed that plans in this regard are being progressed as far as circumstances/restrictions allow; and
- the Court noted that the University's own internal figures for Covid-19 cases on campus differs from those published on the national UCU webpage. The Principal reported a high degree of confidence in the internal data held by the University and could not account for the reported variance with UCU data. The Court noted that there is no mechanism for off-campus students to inform the University of Covid-19 infection. The Global Chief Operating Officer reported that the University would be happy to follow up the anomalous UCU published figures for the University with the UCU.

M20/107 STRATEGIC CHANGE AND COST SAVINGS REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE (Paper Ct7/20/60)

The Court received and discussed a report from the University Executive which included a recommendation in relation to the Change and Cost Savings process. The Court was asked to note the report of the meeting of the CIBC held on 26 October 2020 which confirmed the Committee's unanimous endorsement of the recommendation agreed by the University Executive.

107.1 Introduction

The University Secretary:

- reminded the Court of the background to the initiation of the programme of change;
- described the principles that have been adopted in the approach taken in seeking to achieve the pay and non-pay savings targets;
- reported on the way in which the current programme had been informed by the experience of and lessons learned from the earlier voluntary redundancy scheme in 2017. The University has adopted an approach designed to shape the University for the future, and to remove work in response to market changes and through more effective and efficient ways of working. Through the process the University had engaged in regular and open communications and consultation with the University community and the trade unions;
- described the ways in which University staff had been engaged in and supported through the process; and
- reminded the Court of the timelines and milestones in all the parallel processes involved.

107.2 Summary of outcomes

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

107.3 University Executive (UE) recommendations

The Principal reported on consideration by the UE of two options which had been discussed in the context of related risks and issues.

Option 1, the Option endorsed by the UE and the Court Interim Business Committee (CIBC), was presented as the recommendation that in the light of the improved income performance and progress with VR applications, flexible working options and non-pay savings, this phase of the change process should be concluded and consolidated. The other Option, discounted by the UE and the CIBC, was the recommendation that the current process of change proposals be extended, bringing forward further proposals for consultation in order to drive achievement of the required

savings through voluntary and compulsory redundancies where necessary, and targeted savings in non-pay.

The Court noted the risk areas and mitigations, as reported, that had been considered by the UE and the CIBC.

The Principal reported also on the proposed benefits of Option 1 recommended: this would avoid the need to progress to any potential compulsory redundancies, it aligned strongly with Strategy 2025 which puts staff and students at the heart of what the University does; it would provide the opportunity to focus on delivery of priorities in Strategy 2025 in particular in the delivery of the student experience, excellence in research and Responsive Blended Learning in Semester 2; it demonstrated responsive decision making by the UE through consultations with staff and trade unions and alignment with University values; it would significantly reduce ongoing uncertainty and disruption at a time of great challenge; and it would reduce the risk of industrial action arising from the formal dispute with the UCU. With regard to the latter, the Court noted that following a formal ballot industrial action is due to start on 10 November 2020 in the form of a discontinuous strike and Action Short of Strike.

107.4 Court discussion and decision

The Chair of Court confirmed his full support for the proposals, reporting his view that these represented an optimum outcome. He relayed thanks to all staff involved in the process for reaching the current point, before opening up discussion on the recommendations.

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

- the importance of being clear about income targets and monitoring these as the key counterbalance to cost savings. The Court noted the central importance of the Portfolio Modernisation Review programme in this context, and the Principal reported that there would be an opportunity to discuss the opportunities and competitive challenges at the forthcoming Court Strategy Discussion meeting. The Vice-Principal & Provost described the developing new strategic and operational planning process being put in place which will involve fore-sighting, market review, and investment needs;
- objectives and targets to deliver the strategy for growth and the means through which these are to be resourced and achieved should be included for Court discussion in the agenda of the Court Strategy Day on 11 December 2020;
- other major future risks, such as the pensions issue, must be considered in the context of regular horizon scanning;
- the GCOO emphasised the Portfolio Modernisation Review programme is a continuing process, not a one-off review, and developing new partnerships will become an increasingly important feature of sustainable future growth through new programme developments. She reported that new programmes are being lined up for delivery in 2021 and 2022;
- it was noted that steps will continue to make staff savings in those areas within the scope of the current change programme where targets have not yet been met, including, inter alia, in LINCS, through voluntary severance and re-deployments etc. It was reported that while it is proposed to discount compulsory redundancies as a possibility in the current change and cost savings process, the University would be unable to give a guarantee that this will not be a possibility in any future change or cost savings initiative which might arise;
- in response to concerns from the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee about challenges to the timely delivery of the ERP project, the Principal reported that the UE has reviewed and continues to monitor this project and has committed to additional resources to ensure that the ERP is delivered to plan. It is well understood that the cost-saving efficiencies and effectiveness sought through the change programme are in part dependent on delivery of the ERP project;
- the Principal outlined the proposed approach that would be taken in the communication to University staff, should the Court agree to adopt Option 1. He reported on the intention to report on the consultation process undertaken, the positive position of compulsory redundancies having been avoided, the continuing challenges arising from the pandemic, and the need to focus on new income, while working together to resolve continuing challenges in a

spirit of partnership. Thanks would also be relayed to all colleagues for their continued engagement and commitment; and

- the Chair of Court recommended that a positive communication to the student body should be arranged in conjunction with the Student Union.

The Court approved the recommendation of the UE, endorsed by the Court Interim Business Committee, to adopt Option 1, i.e: in light of the improved income performance and progress with VR applications, flexible working options and non-pay savings, this phase of the change process is concluded and consolidated.

The Court approved the proposed next steps by the UE, to:

1. communicate outcomes of the Court meeting to staff, working in partnership with the recognised trade unions;
2. continue to focus on staff and student engagement and communications, supporting staff and students through current challenges;
3. focus on Strategy 2025 and delivery of priorities, including income generation;
4. process the VR applications and agree exit dates with individuals, updating and reporting on final outcomes;
5. continue with the reshaping of Professional Services and effective management of changes;
6. continue to drive non-pay savings, with a particular focus on recurring savings;
7. prepare for delivery of efficiencies, increased effectiveness, and longer term savings from the introduction of ERP and other new systems;
8. welcome the external-led review of LINCIS. It was noted that the UE receive a report on 10 November and will agree a process and timeline with SoSS to achieve necessary savings/income improvements, without recourse to compulsory redundancy;
9. continue to enhance partnership working with the recognised Trade Unions, building on the current high levels of engagement;
10. monitor closely financial performance and deliver budget re-set in November/December 2020 and in February 2021 in relation to key intakes (September and January), income and expenditure; and
11. continuously monitor risks, managing mitigations and impact on the University.

M20/108 DATES OF THE FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

The Court noted the dates of forthcoming meetings of the Court:

- Friday 20 November 2020 (ordinary meeting)
- Friday 11 December 2020 (rolling budget review and strategy discussion meeting)

Date

Signature