

## COURT

## Minutes

In the Chair:	Mr Grant Innes	Date of Meeting: 4 February 2021
Present also:	Dr Richard Armour Professor Scott Arthur Ms Tracey Ashworth Davies Professor Mark Biggs Professor David Cobham Mr Graeme Dickson Professor Fadi Ghaith Dr Amos Haniff Mr Steve Heathcote Mr Brian Henderson Dr Paul Hopkinson	Mr Cameron Millar Mr Jürgen Munz Ms Marta Phillips Mr Alan Robertson Ms Dawn Skidmore Ms Lara Stroudinsky Mr Mike Tumilty Mr Graham Watson Professor Richard Williams Ms Dorothy Wright
Officer in attendance:	Professor Mushtak Al-Atabi Ms Sue Collier Ms Lucy Everest Mr Andrew Jefferson Professor Ammar Kaka Ms Ruth Moir Ms Karen Nicol (for item M21/08)	Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer (for item M21/11) Dr Gill Murray Professor Garry Pender Professor John Sawkins Ms Kirsty Scanlan (for item M21/14)

### **M21/01 WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed Professor Scott Arthur, Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Ms Dorothy Wright, who were attending their first meeting of the Court since being appointed respectively in the categories of Dean member and appointed independent lay member.

The Chair reported that the following colleagues would join the meeting for particular agenda items: Ms Karen Nicol, Head of Reward and Wellbeing (Paper item Ct1/21/02), Ms Kirsty Scanlan, Director of Strategic Planning and Performance (Paper item Ct1/21/07), and Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer, Associate Principal (Global Sustainability) (Paper item Ct1/21/04).

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

### **M21/02 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from the following members: Ms Emily King, Ms Morag McNeill, Professor Marc Desmulliez and Ms Jandy Stevenson, and from Lord Vallance, who had been invited to attend the meeting.

### **M21/03 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The Court approved the minute of the meeting held on 20 November 2020 and the minute of the ordinary business item considered on 11 December 2020 as accurate records, subject to a correction to minute M20/125.1 confirming that a restatement will not apply to accounts earlier than the current year. Court members were advised that notes of the Court Strategy Day discussion would be released to members immediately following the 4 February 2021 meeting.

### **M21/04 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The Chair of Court invited declarations of interest. No declarations were made.

**M21/05 MATTERS ARISING**

**5.1 USS Pensions Working Group (Paper Ct1/21/01)**

The Court approved a proposal, presented by the Chair of Court, to establish a short life ad-hoc Pensions Working Group which will report to the Court and the University Executive.

The Court noted that it was intended that this small working group, Chaired by Brian Henderson, would act in an advisory capacity in relation to the USS pension scheme and would work to improve understanding of the complexities of the scheme and institutional risks posed.

The Court approved the proposed membership of the Group, noting that it is intended to invite newly appointed Court member Dorothy Wright to join the Group also.

It was agreed that it would be appropriate for the Group to utilise pensions expertise which exists within the University, while not seeking to expand its own membership. It was agreed also that steps will be taken to provide clarity on the purpose of the Group and the basis of the advice its membership will ultimately provide to the Court. It was noted that the Group's work ought not to become confused with work going on within the sector, but should form its views on the basis of external advice and internal soundings. The Chair of the Finance Committee emphasised the need for close connectivity between the Group and the Finance Committee.

The Chair of Court agreed to arrange the development of Terms of Reference for the Group and relayed thanks to Mr Brian Henderson for agreeing to Chair the Group.

**5.2 HWU Online Strategy**

The Chair reported on the well-attended HWU Online Strategy update report which was delivered at an online Court meeting on 3 February 2021. The Chair thanked Mr Graeme Dickson for chairing the event and Court members for their contributions to the discussion where many challenging and interesting questions had been raised. The Court noted that the business case for HWU Online will be presented to the Finance Committee and the Court in due course.

**5.3 Annual Stakeholder Meeting**

The University Secretary reported on planned arrangements in relation to the Annual Stakeholder Meeting which is required in terms of the *Scottish Code*. Covid pandemic disruption had led to a postponement of the meeting which would otherwise have taken place in 2020.

The Court noted that it is planned to hold the next meeting on a date in June 2021. The Secretary reported that a small team had been formed with the support of colleagues in Marketing & Communications, to develop the agenda for the meeting which will draw on materials also being developed for bicentennial celebration events. The postponement will therefore provide an opportunity to use high quality materials which showcase the University's work. The Chair relayed thanks to Mr Cameron Millar who had agreed to join the small planning Group which is developing plans further.

**M21/06 COURT ACTION LOG**

The Court noted the Court Action Log which had been updated as of January 2021.

**M21/07 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR (Oral report)**

The Chair reported on the recent externally facilitated Equality, Diversity & Inclusion workshop that had been attended by Court members. He thanked colleagues for their attendance and excellent contributions to the discussions. The Chair reported that slides and a report of the outputs of the workshop will be made available to all Court members in due course.

The Chair reminded the Court of the Court's aim to free up discussion time to focus on matters of strategic importance. As a consequence of the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, wellbeing had

grown as an important area of focus. Hence, at the last Court meeting, student wellbeing had been discussed. An opportunity would be taken to focus staff wellbeing through the discussion on the Staff Pulse Survey outputs which would follow from the Principal's report following next on the Court agenda.

## **M21/08 UPDATE FROM THE PRINCIPAL (Paper Ct1/21/02)**

**8.1** The Principal presented his report drawing attention to many areas of activity which were reported to be developing positively, despite Covid-19 disruption. He drew attention to the new Student Partnership Agreement which remains at the heart of the University's work. He reported also that in coming weeks the University would embark on an approach to planning via 'AP2.0'. Through this new approach the voices and advice of all colleagues would be captured in the planning process.

The Principal also drew attention with congratulations to the many colleagues who had been named in the report for their notable achievements which affirm the University's purpose and illustrate how it is achieving that purpose.

The Principal reported on the current demanding period and continuing uncertainty, which is expected to continue over coming weeks. The Court noted that no face-to-face teaching is in operation at any campus location, while experimental research activities are continuing in Scotland where safe environments can be assured.

The Principal reported on the decision to delay the Annual Staff Survey. A Staff Pulse Survey had recently been undertaken in order to understand the current situations of staff colleagues and to shape support. More than 1,900 members of staff had participated in a recent all staff briefing at which a summary of trending outcomes from the Pulse Survey had been shared.

The Principal updated the Court on an all-UK-staff briefing on 3 February which explored financial wellbeing. This successful session which had had been supported by Tilneys was attended by over 700 staff. In the future discussions with a focus on pension and reward matters would be organised across different staff constituencies.

The Principal explained the approach of the Executive to prioritise those operating areas and strategies which may need to be accelerated, and to focus on areas where staff and students need more support and on plans that might need to be paused or stopped. For example, support had been enhanced for the new VLE involving transition from the Blackbaud to the Canvas system. The Executive is also looking to accelerate some income activities in Foundation and Portfolio Modernisation. The Court noted, conversely, that some events relating to Bicentennial Year celebrations would be stretched into 2022 to avoid a concentration of activities and pressure on staff resources in the latter part of 2021.

The Principal reported on the ongoing Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability (Scotland's Colleges and Universities) by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). An outline budget had been announced for 2021/22 with an allocation for some Graduate Apprentices. He reported that the breakdown of funding across institutions is not yet clear and there is an expectation of further "Covid Consequentials" and a further Scottish Government budget in June 2021 (following the May election). In relation to the Review, based on recent discussions with the SFC, the Principal is of the view that in the Review would not proceed at pace in the current environment. The Principal emphasised the current potentially risky period as there is a view that the Review will be an instrument for radical change in the tertiary education sector in Scotland.

The Principal also drew attention to the recommended appointment of a Pro-Chancellor in Malaysia which is included in the 4 February Court agenda. In relation to the Dubai Campus appointment, initial dialogue is in progress with a favoured candidate and the Pro-Chancellor Selection Committee would receive an update report on this second Pro-Chancellor appointment soon.

The Principal invited the Global Director of HR and Head of Reward and Wellbeing to present to the Court the outputs that had emerged from the current Staff Pulse Survey which would conclude on 5 February 2021.

## 8.2 Staff Pulse Survey, January/February 2021

The Court received and discussed a report from the Global Director of HR and the Head of Reward and Wellbeing on the outcomes so far of the Staff Pulse Survey which would close on 5 February. The level of engagement with the Survey had been good with 900 staff members having completed it so far and many leaving free text comments.

The Court noted the profile, demographic and personal living situations of staff respondents. It was noted that positive wellbeing scores were good overall, with a strong majority feeling that work priorities are clear, staff are empowered to make day-to-day decisions about work priorities, their manager is keeping them well informed, and staff feel broadly positive about organisational understanding of and support for their personal circumstances. The majority of respondents confirmed they know where to go for support about health and wellbeing.

The Court noted those outputs which were giving rise to more of a concern. The majority of respondents reported working more than their normal hours with a sizeable minority feeling that workload is unmanageable. Others felt that their current working conditions were not suitable for their type of work. Infrequent verbal communications with their line manager and a sense of poor wellbeing were reported by others. A substantial minority of staff reported that they did not currently have a good work/life balance.

The Court noted the positive developments / initiatives that had been put in place following previous staff surveys. Next steps would include establishment of a Wellbeing Programme for 2021, efforts to increase awareness of what is on offer, 'Blended Working', and links to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. The full Staff Engagement Survey will be launched in spring 2021.

The Chair of the Staff Committee gave her view that the survey results are consistent with similar findings in other workplaces currently. She drew attention to initiatives being taken by other employers to provide flexibility, especially for those with child-care / home schooling responsibilities. She emphasised the role of line managers to help support more flexible arrangements for staff. In response to a point that she raised in relation to IT support for change, the Head of Reward and Wellbeing reported on work already undertaken to ensure that staff have been able to get the necessary IT and other equipment to support their homeworking. She reported that staff were broadly on board with new ways of working supported by technology, though they remained a few hundred staff on furlough who are not office-based workers and maintaining contact with them is more challenging. The Court noted that taxi transport is being provided to staff who are continuing to work attend work on site at Scottish Campuses.

In the course of discussion, the following suggestions were made by Court members:

- initiatives should be considered which help to replace the team fellowship that used to be supported during break times and 'water-cooler' moments;
- advice and support should be given to managers to increase the level of engagement with their teams where this is shown to be low. A "buddy" support system might help in such cases;
- as soon as the regulations allow for more freedom of movement, consideration should be given to supporting opportunities for staff meet ups; such opportunities ought to be considered essential for staff wellbeing;
- review of the potential for "hybrid" forms of home/office working on a longer term basis; and
- a staff member of the Court reported that many staff members are unable due to the nature of their work to take advantage of the additional days off being provided by the Executive. The member highlighted that it would be helpful in the surveys to differentiate between the senior rungs of management and other line managers, and that one way to take the pressure off staff in the current circumstances would be to make the PDR process optional in 2021. In relation to the latter point, the Global Director of HR expressed reservations about foregoing what ought to be helpful and supportive conversations in the PDR process, although it will be important that staff are not unfairly penalised or disadvantaged in the process. The Principal re-emphasised this point.

Court members were invited to input any further thoughts on proposed post survey actions, directing these to the Global Director of HR.

**M21/09 REPORT FROM THE STUDENT UNION (Paper Ct1/21/03)**

The Court noted and discussed a report from the Student Union which was presented by the Student Union President. The President highlighted in particular:

- a series of successful School Town Hall meetings early in the semester which had boosted student engagement; more are planned;
- the work of the Student Advice Hub, which had continued to operate throughout the year;
- financial hardship funding which is able to be distributed quickly to students through the Voucher Scheme;
- the launch and growth of the Black Voices Project and a new MATES buddy system to combat student isolation and support improve student wellbeing. The new system is being supported also by the University and the Sports Union; and
- student concerns related to online only teaching provision, especially where courses may have a practical element and associated concerns related employability skills. There will need to be continued focus on addressing such concern and mitigating the impacts.

The Chair of Court commented on the useful debates on student experience matters through the Global Student Liaison Committee and the work of the Student Union which is vital and appreciated by the University.

The Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life) reported on his engagement with the Townhall meetings and periodic Student Pulse Survey. He reported on continuing work to consider the options for opening up lab and studio spaces. It is hoped that the Covid Regulations in place will be relaxed sufficiently to allow on-site activities post Easter 2021. In the mean-time the University must assure itself that all learning outcomes can be achieved through online means. Some other practical measures are being worked on, such as the use of take home kits for students in the School of Textiles and Design.

The Court noted that hundreds of students are currently in student residences across the two main Scottish campuses. Those campus based students were being supported by a large team of vital on-site staff in a variety of roles.

**M21/10 STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE REPORT (Oral report)**

The Court received and discussed an update report on student recruitment from the Global Chief Operating Officer (GCOO). The Court was reminded that the recent January 2021 student intake point had been introduced to mitigate the decline in international student recruitment to Scotland in September 2020. The Court was reminded of the September 2021 student recruitment indicators at the Scottish, Dubai and Malaysia Campuses.

**XXX Reserved section: ref sections 30, 33, FOI(S)A).**

**GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY (Paper Ct1/21/04)**

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

**DELIVERING STRATEGY 2025 IN DUBAI (Paper Ct1/21/05)**

The Court received an update report on the Dubai Campus from the University Secretary, noting that the project is on track for delivery. The fit out of the new building had been completed and the University is currently working through the relevant approval processes.

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

### **APPOINTMENT OF PRO-CHANCELLOR MALAYSIA (Ct1/21/06)**

The Court approved the appointment of the following to the position of Pro-Chancellor Malaysia for a period of five years:

- Tan Sri Dr Jemilah binti Mahmood

It was agreed that the appointment should run from 4 February 2021 or a little later, depending on the commitments and availability of the candidate to take up the position.

### **SFC/HWU INTERIM OUTCOME AGREEMENT (Paper Ct1/21/07)**

The Court received and approved an Interim Scottish Funding Council (SFC) / Heriot-Watt Outcome Agreement report for the academic year 2020/21.

The Court noted that document provided a factual summary progress report on the commitment and indicators in the University's Outcome Agreement for the current year. The Court noted that the document had been submitted to the SFC by the deadline date of 29 January 2021 with agreement that any necessary re-submission could be made following the Court meeting on 4 February 2021. The Court approved the Outcome Agreement report as it stood with no recommended changes.

### **COURT EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2020/21 (Paper Ct1/21/09)**

The Court received and noted a Court Effectiveness Review Court Plan which had been developed by the University Secretary with input from the Chair and Deputy Chair of Court.

The Court noted that for the 2020/21 Court Effectiveness Review a detailed review and mapping of existing actions from the Court Effectiveness Review Rolling Action Plan had been undertaken, resulting in a consolidated Court Plan for the current year including action leads, indicative timeline and measures. A questionnaire to Court and Court committee members would be used in due course to ascertain levels of satisfaction and identify areas of success and required improvement.

Court members were invited to provide written feedback and comments to the University Secretary by 19 February 2021.

### **M21/13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **Court rolling programme of business (as at January 2021) (Paper Ct1/20/08)**

**M21/14** The Court noted the rolling programme of forward business of the Court as at January 2021.

#### **HWUM Board Chair**

The Court noted the recent appointment of Datuk Yasmin Binti Mahmood to the position of Chair of the HWUM Board.

### **M21/15 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting would take place on 26 February 2021. This is an additional meeting to consider the Annual Accounts and Financial Statements; however, it remains to be determined whether the required external audit work can be completed during February and a further extension to the audit timetable might yet be required.

It was noted that the next ordinary meeting of the Court will take place on 25 March 2021.

Date .....

Signature .....