

Heriot-Watt University

THE COURT**Minutes: 29 September 2022**

In the Chair: Ms Morag McNeill, Chair of Court

Present:

Dr Richard Armour, Lay Member	Mr Paul Lewis, Lay Member
Professor Scott Arthur, Dean	Dr Bill MacPherson, Senate Member
Professor Lynne Baillie, Trade Union Member	Mr Cameron Millar, Lay Member
Professor Mark Biggs, Vice-Principal and Provost	Mr Jürgen Munz, Trade Union Member
Professor Marc Desmulliez, Staff Member	Ms Marta Phillips, Deputy Chair of Court
Mr Graeme Dickson, Lay Member	Mr Chris Pirie, Staff Member
Dr Fadi Ghaith, Senate Member	Mr Alan Robertson, Lay Member
Mr Steve Heathcote, Lay Member	Mr Mike Tumilty, Lay Member
Mr Brian Henderson, Alumni Member	Mr Graham Watson, Lay Member
Mr Gary Kildare, Lay Member	Professor Richard Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor
Mr Sanjit Krishnakumar, Student Union President	Ms Dorothy Wright, Lay Member
Ms Molly Knight, Student Union Vice-President (Education)	

In attendance:

Ms Ruth Moir, University Secretary
 Mr Bruce Pritchard, Chair of Court Designate (for M22/65 – 68, and M22/70 onwards)
 Professor Mushtak Al-Atabi, Vice-Principal and Provost (Malaysia)
 Professor Malcolm Chrisp, Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life)
 Mr Richard Claughton, Global Director of HR
 Ms Sue Collier, Global Director of Governance and Legal Services (GALS)
 Ms Lucy Everest, Global Chief Operating Officer (GCOO)
 Ms Andrew Jefferson, Global Chief Financial Officer (GCFO)
 Professor Steve McLaughlin, Deputy Principal (Research and Impact) (for M22/64 and M22/69 onwards)
 Ms Lisa Herlihy, Clerk to the Court

Invited:

Dr Maggie King, Head of Academic Quality (M22/74)
 Professor Tadhg O'Donovan, Interim Deputy Vice-Principal (Dubai – Academic Leadership) (M22/71)

Apologies:

Professor Heather McGregor, Vice-Principal and Provost (Dubai)
 Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer, Deputy Principal (Global Sustainability)
 Dr Gill Murray, Deputy Principal (Enterprise and Business)
 Ms Sue Clarke, Chair Transition (EBS Advisory Board)

MINUTE
 REF
 M22/64

WELCOME, APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting, making particular mention of Professor Chrisp, who would attend Court during the period that he was Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life). The Chair also noted the Professor Heather McGregor would attend future meetings of the Court as Vice-Principal and Provost Dubai, having assumed the role on 1 September 2022.

The apologies for absence were noted.

The Chair noted that this was the first Court meeting since the passing of Her Majesty the Queen. The University paid tribute to her tireless commitment to UK higher education around the world and her lifelong dedication to public service. The Chair and the University Chancellor had had the privilege and honour of attending Her Majesty's funeral and were grateful to have taken part in such a historic event.

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

M22/65 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JUNE 2022

The Court received and approved the minutes of the meeting of 27 June 2022.

The Court received and noted the Court Actions Log and received the following updates:

- **M21/63.4** – this action, in relation to oversight of rolling budget resets, had been set aside due to difficulties encountered with the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system implementation. The action would now be removed from the Log because it related directly to 2021-22. However, it was noted that oversight of future rolling budget resets would be undertaken by the Finance Committee.
- **M22/63.4** – the work around the ‘Resource efficiency’ SPI remained ongoing at present and would be reported back the Court once it was complete.
- **M21/80.1** – oversight of Professional and Organisational Development would be delegated to the Staff Committee because it sat naturally within the Committee’s remit.

Study World Court Case

The University Secretary provided a brief overview of the status of the court case with Study World, who had previously been the University’s partner providing infrastructure services in Dubai. The Court noted that the Dubai courts had awarded £8m to Heriot-Watt as a result of the court case. Study World had appealed, and both of those appeals had been unsuccessful.

XXX(...)XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.33

Global College Negotiations

The University Secretary reported that the Global College was a key aspect of Heriot-Watt’s future growth and global widening access initiatives. The Court had previously approved the Global College Primary Academic Unit, and Dr Anna Fenge had been appointed as CEO. A commercial partner would be appointed to assist with reach into global markets, and negotiations were currently underway. The contract was currently being optimised during negotiations, with input from the Chair of Court, and would be presented the University Executive in October 2022. It would then be presented to the Finance Committee for endorsement before being presented for approval at the November 2022 Court meeting.

The Court noted that the Global College was active and recruiting students. An update on accommodation plans relating to the Global College would be presented to the Court in December 2022. An accommodation allocation had been made for the year ahead.

Watt Club Constitution Review

The Court noted that the Watt Club were not yet ready to present proposals for Court approval. The Executive team would continue to work with the Watt Club on the review of its Constitution. It was likely these would be presented in early 2023.

M22/67 REMARKS FROM THE CHAIR OF COURT (VERBAL UPDATE)

The Chair reported that they had, alongside the Acting Deputy Chair of Court, the Chair of the Finance Committee and Dr Richard Armour, visited the Malaysia Campus in September 2022 to attend the 10th Anniversary celebrations and meet with students, staff and other stakeholders. There had also been opportunity to be involved in a workshop with the Heriot-Watt University Malaysia Board and executive team, and the outputs of the workshop would be progressed by the Vice-Principal and Provost (Malaysia). The trip had also included a visit to the Dubai Campus and the group had been very impressed with the quality of the new campus buildings and the staff that had been recruited. The Principal thanked the Court members for taking the time out for the visits, noting how much this had been appreciated by staff in Dubai and Malaysia.

The Chair thanked all Court members who had attended the official launch of the National Robotarium on 28 September 2022 to celebrate the successful completion of the project.

The Chair also noted that the funding situation in Scotland continued to be difficult and that the flat settlement agreed by the Scottish Government would amount to a cut in funding to universities due to rising inflation.

The Court received and discussed the Update from the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, presented by the Principal.

The Principal reported that there had been a number of important senior staff changes over the summer period and that the appointment of a new Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) would shortly be announced. An opportunity for Court members to meet new members of the Executive team would be organised later in 2022.

The Principal noted that the National Robotarium opening had included the UK Scottish Minister and that the University's strategic relationship with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) had been announced. The partnership would have a significant impact across the University. The Principal also noted that Tan Sri Dr Mahmood, the Pro-Chancellor for the Malaysia campus, would be giving a lecture on planetary health on 3 October 2022 and all Court members were welcome to attend.

The University had been delighted to welcome students back to campuses for the new academic year, acknowledging that there was continued uncertainty and challenges for students and staff, with a number of operational challenges combined with concerns around the cost-of-living crisis. The Executive team was ensuring that they were engaging effectively with staff and students to understand and address their concerns.

68.1 Executive Away Day

The Principal reported that Executive Away Days had taken place in late August 2022, building on the themes and topics discussed during the May 2022 Court Strategy Day. Further details of the resulting priorities would be provided at the November 2022 Court meeting, along with the updated Strategy milestone map. The Executive had focused on:

- the key strategic projects the University needed to deliver;
- distinctive assets in recruitment, such as the Go Global programme;
- developing proposals to improve the University as a place to work;
- embedding sustainability in all University activities and the need to develop a clear plan of how this would be progressed;
- considering how to deliver NetZero by the agreed target of 2030; and
- how to deliver improved financial resourcing.

68.2 Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) Accreditation Risks and Mitigations

The Court noted that the University was progressing well with the initial stage of CAA licensure for the Dubai Campus. The University and its current accrediting body, the KHDA in Dubai, continued to have a very good relationship with repeated 5-star ratings awarded to the University. However, the CAA federal level accreditation would bring a number of benefits, including allowing graduates to access jobs with government bodies in the UAE, extended opportunities to attract a wider range of students, and access to federal level government funding.

Through visits and discussions, the CAA had recognised that Heriot-Watt had a distinctive integrated global model which was different to most branch campuses in Dubai. A headline assurance had been provided that the University would be able to operate in Dubai as it did in Edinburgh.

XXX (...) XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30 and s.33

68.3 National Student Survey (NSS) Outcomes

The Court had a full discussion of the outcomes of the recent NSS, which was an annual survey of all final year UK university students. The results had been below Heriot-Watt's expectations. The Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) reported that the NSS results affected UK and international rankings and the University had seen consequent drops in some league tables. More Heriot-Watt disciplines were now included in top 10 rankings, but this was counteracted by reductions in the overall institutional rankings.

The Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) provided a detailed summary of the results, which had been analysed to identify areas which required improvement. Analysis of free text comments had also been undertaken. Key themes had been dissatisfaction with feedback and assessment, organisation, communication, the handling of the pandemic, and the impact of staff strikes. The Court noted that the NSS was undertaken in a specific time window and that it was not unusual to see events within that window impacting the feedback from students more directly than their overall university experience.

The University was now working with the student body to ensure it returned to providing an excellent student experience. A Taskforce had been established to address both the NSS and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), involving staff from across the University at all levels. The Taskforce reported to the Global Operations Executive (GOE). Action plans had been developed and feedback provided to Schools and Services, which fed into the Institutional Plan. Actions had been divided into short-term, medium-term, and long-term, and the short-term actions had been progressed early in the semester.

Directors of Learning and Teaching were now meeting with discipline staff regularly to monitor the effectiveness of the action plans. The Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) and the GCOO were ensuring that School staff concerns were considered, and student representatives were feeding back to the Taskforce to identify whether progress was being made. An early experience survey would be issued in Week 6 so that students could feed back on their experience of returning to campus. Any issues identified during the year would also be addressed.

The Court discussed the 'heat map' of results, particularly areas requiring improvement. **XXX (...) XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30 and s.33**

The Court observed that providing an excellent student experience was core to the University's mission, and the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) confirmed that this would be the University's priority. The Court discussed the importance of balancing interventions to improve the experience of final year students, with interventions to improve the experience from the very beginning of the student journey. Both approaches would benefit from the 'You Said, We Did' communications that were planned. The Court observed that it was important to address the student experience holistically, to ensure that the focus on areas for improvement did not result in a loss of good practice elsewhere.

The Court agreed that the ongoing work of the NSS / PTES Taskforce would be reported to the Global Student Life Committee (GSLC), which had the global student experience within its remit. The Committee would consider the specific actions being taken, the progress being made, and the University's feedback mechanisms. This would ensure that students could raise issues at an early stage for early resolution.

The Student Union President and Vice-President (Education) observed that there had been considerable uncertainty for students in the prior year, particularly as COVID-19 restrictions eased and activities began to return to campus. Changes to the environment had increased stress and the NSS had been used to surface these problems. Providing the means to surface issues at an earlier stage would be key, as would consistency in the student experience.

68.4 Student Recruitment

The GCOO provided an overview of the current student recruitment position, noting that stretch targets had been set after impressive growth in the prior year. The University had encountered some challenges in reaching the targets and had achieved similar numbers to the prior year. It was noted that the Global College had performed exceptionally well in its first intake and had exceeded its target.

XXX (...) XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.33

M22/69 CHAIR OF COURT ELECTION RESULTS (Paper: Ct7/22/39)

This was taken as the first item of business. At its conclusion, the Chair of Court Designate was welcomed to the meeting.

The Court received and confirmed the results of the Chair of Court Election, presented by the University Secretary.

The Court noted that the selection process had culminated in an election, with Mr Bruce Pritchard being elected to the role of Chair of Court for a period of four years from 1 October 2022 until 31 July 2026. The Court observed that the University had been fortunate to attract two excellent election candidates and the Court was very grateful for their willingness to stand.

On behalf of the Court and the Executive, the University Secretary thanked Ms Morag McNeill for her commitment to the role of Chair of Court since August 2021 and for her support of the Executive during such a challenging time. Gratitude was also offered to the Acting Deputy Chair of Court, Ms Marta Phillips, for the significant contribution she had made to the role, particularly as Chair of the Chair of Court Selection Committee. The Court noted that a wide range of colleagues had assisted with the selection

process, including Selection Committee members, those involved in visit days, and relevant officers. Thanks were owed to all for their time and effort.

Court members were delighted to welcome Mr Pritchard as Chair of Court, and Ms McNeill reported that she would return to her previous role as Deputy Chair as of 1 October 2022, working with Mr Pritchard to determine their split of duties. A full induction would be provided to Mr Pritchard and this would include introductory meetings with Court members to further develop his understanding of the University and the Court.

M22/70 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE MALAYSIA CAMPUS, 2021-22 (Ct7/22/40)

The Court received and considered the Annual Report from the Malaysia Campus for 2021-22, presented by the Vice-Principal and Provost (Malaysia).

The Vice-Principal and Provost (Malaysia) reported that the Malaysia Campus had celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2022. Many events had taken place in celebration and were highlighted in the report, which was structured around Strategy 2025 and the campus' contribution to each strategic theme. A positive surplus position was reported for 2021-22.

The Court noted that consistency of reporting between the Malaysia and Dubai campuses via a focus on Strategy 2025 was very welcome. The Vice-Principal and Provost (Malaysia) noted that a version of the report would be published for stakeholders and the community.

M22/71 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE DUBAI CAMPUS (Ct7/22/41)

The Court received and considered the Annual Report from the Dubai Campus for 2021-22, presented by the Interim Deputy Vice-Principal (Dubai – Academic Leadership).

The Interim Deputy Vice-Principal provided an overview of the report, which covered the first year of the new Dubai Campus, which had been very successful with both staff and students. The Court noted that Professor Ammar Kaka had stepped down as Vice-Principal and Provost (Dubai) at the end of 2021-22 and Professor Heather McGregor had been appointed to the role.

The Dubai Campus had been particularly focused on the Expo 2020 Project and CAA accreditation in 2021-22 (see M22/68.2). Heriot-Watt had been one of the four sponsors of the UK Pavilion at Expo 2020, which had allowed the University's teaching and research to be showcased the world. The Project had generated an increased media presence and the impact had been felt across the Group.

The Dubai Campus had increased its operating contribution by 70% due to significantly increased recruitment, including January intakes, and a change to the fiscal year to 13 months.

The Court noted that issues of financial control in Dubai had been addressed in 2021-22, with oversight by the GCFO and a recent change to the Head of Finance in Dubai. The University was currently considering how regular reporting to the Court from Dubai and Malaysia could be organised to provide oversight without requiring granular detail in the Annual Reports. An Advisory Board would be appointed for Dubai as part of the CAA accreditation process and would form part of this consideration.

M22/72 REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE (Ct7/22/42)

The Court received and considered the report from the Finance Committee, presented by the Chair of the Finance Committee.

The Chair of the Finance Committee reported that the Finance team had contributed significant effort to provide timely management accounts for the period up to 31 July 2022. Further work on the ERP system was required to produce reliable monthly accounts. The ERP Oversight Group would continue to provide oversight of delivery of the ERP Programme and the Court **approved** an extension of the Oversight Group up to 31 July 2023, which was the planned deadline for the implementation. The GCFO, the Finance team and all those involved in the ERP implementation were commended for their contribution.

The Court also noted that:

- the bond covenants had been met in 2021-22;
- the external audit was underway;
- the Finance Committee had approved a material increase to the payment made to support the Student Union; and

- the Finance Committee had had a full discussion of the University network project and were content with the budget of £3.5m, subject to some caveats before the contract was awarded.

72.1 Management Accounts

The GCFO presented the management accounts for the period up to 31 July 2022, noting that management accounts had been unavailable during 2021-22 and other metrics had been used to monitor the University's financial position.

XXX (...) XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.33

Finance Assurance Report

The Court noted that there had been recruitment of strong candidates to the Finance team, with some turnover due to the buoyant market. The focus was now on communicating with the University community regarding the ERP implementation. The Finance team were meeting with researchers to discuss research projects and changes to the Research Grants Finance team. The University was thankful for the patience of all those affected by issues around the ERP implementation.

The GCFO reported that there had been some recent turnover in the Dubai Finance team and that interviews for the new Head of Finance at the Dubai Campus would be held in October 2022.

M22/73 REPORT FROM THE STUDENT UNION (Ct7/22/43)

The Court received and noted the report from the Student Union, presented by the Student Union President.

The Student Union President reported that the return of students to campuses had been very successful, whilst also presenting some challenges that needed to be addressed. The cost-of-living crisis would be a fundamental influence on the student experience in 2022-23 and the Student Union and the University would need to support students through their journey, particularly as many faced the choice between studying and taking on multiple jobs to support themselves.

The Court noted that there had been a rise in misconduct and appeals cases in the last year. The high level of cases caused stress for both staff and students, with backlogs affecting the cases themselves and also the further support requested by students. The reasons for the increase in cases, as well as the support on offer, were being discussed with the Executive to identify solutions. The Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) reported that the University had been tracking an increase in cases for some time. Additional resource was being put in place to assist with the backlog, and the Chair of the University Discipline Committee was analysing the root causes. To address a known issue, a broad conversation was being held with students regarding what was necessary for academic study, and staff were being asked to improve the nature of questions set for take home exams. Progress in this area would be reported via the GSLC.

Over 50 societies had been present at the Watt Welcome Week on the Edinburgh Campus and there had been very good engagement, with 1,190 students signed up to at least one society.

The Court discussed the national difficulties around student accommodation and how Heriot-Watt could mitigate the impact of these issues. The Student Union President confirmed that they were working in partnership with the Head of Student Life to find solutions should lack of accommodation begin to impact students arriving late. There was potential to use space in University halls to accommodate students for a brief period whilst they searched for accommodation. The existing University guarantor scheme had been extended this year and this had been very helpful for students.

The GCOO reported that an Accommodation Strategy Group had been created to consider next steps, as Heriot-Watt accommodation was now full and the policy for each intake needed to be agile. Several options were under consideration, including using accommodation at the Borders Campus and providing a bus service for students.

The Chair of the Infrastructure Committee reported that the Committee would be considering the University's accommodation provision, particularly at the Edinburgh Campus. An external study of the provision had been commissioned, with potential options including procuring new accommodation and refurbishing older accommodation. This was not intended to address immediate accommodation needs and would instead future proof the University's accommodation provision.

M22/74 ANNUAL REPORT ON INSTITUTION-LED QUALITY REVIEW (Ct7/22/44)

The Court received and approved the Annual Report on Institution-Led Quality review, presented by the Head of Academic Quality. The Court agreed that the Chair of Court would sign the Assurance Statement contained within the Report on behalf of the Court.

The Head of Academic Quality reported that the annual report on institutional quality processes was required by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and would be submitted by the end of September 2022. After a thorough consultation process, final approval was required by the Court. The detailed report met internal requirements as well as those of the SFC, covering enhancement and partnership activities with students, as well as the University's global provision and the requirements of the in-country accrediting authorities in Dubai and Malaysia.

The Court noted that, in 2021-22, a new process had been introduced to provide assurance around Academic Quality. When the Senate received the Annual Report, it had approved the signature of an Annual Assurance Statement which was then provided to the Audit and Risk Committee. This Statement provided assurance on the effectiveness of the University's quality processes, the student learning experience, and the management of academic risk. Supported by a presentation on academic quality processes by the Head of Academic Quality, it enabled the Committee to fulfil its requirement to 'review, monitor and advise Court on the adequacy and effectiveness of the University's entire risk management (including academic risk), control and governance arrangements.'

The Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) thanked the Head of Academic Quality and her team for the rigour and robustness of their approach. The University's portfolio enriched Heriot-Watt and provided a unique selling point, and therefore came with heightened risk which was very effectively controlled by the Academic Quality team and those involved in teaching and learning.

The Court queried whether the University would be upgrading resources at its campuses to ensure the success of the hybrid learning approach. The Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) confirmed that the University was aware of the stress that hybrid learning was placing on IT systems and platforms and that they were working with the IT teams at each campus to identify required improvements and plan upgrades.

M22/75 REPORT FROM THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE (Ct7/22/45)

The Court received and noted the report from the Audit and Risk Committee, presented by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee. The Court approved the Terms of Reference, which remained unchanged, and the Assurance Check.

The Court noted that the Committee had agreed with EY, as External Auditor, to plan for sign-off of the Annual Accounts and Financial Statements for 2021-22 in February 2023. The Joint Meeting of the Audit and Risk and Finance Committees, which would consider the Annual Accounts and Financial Statements, would take place in early 2023.

XXX (...) XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30 and s.33

The Court noted that the University Secretary, Global Director of GALs and Head of Assurance Services had made continual improvements to the management of strategic risk and that this had been reflected in the Internal Audit Annual Report, which had confirmed that the University had 'an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance, internal control and economy, efficiency and effectiveness.' After a full discussion, the Committee had been content with the rating based on the wider risk management framework at Heriot-Watt. The Court observed that the University was now equal to its peer group and, whilst efforts would always be made to improve, the opinion of the Internal Auditors was very welcome.

M22/76 REPORT FROM THE STAFF COMMITTEE (Ct7/22/46)

The Court received and noted the report from the Staff Committee, presented by the Chair of the Staff Committee. The Court approved the Terms of Reference, which remained unchanged, and the Assurance Check.

The Chair of the Staff Committee reported that much of the discussion at the meeting had been around the annual pay uplift and the cost-of-living crisis. A global perspective was being taken and the University would need to be agile in its response.

The Court noted that Unison, Unite and the Universities and Colleges Union had balloted in relation to pay and/or pensions issues. The University had good local relationships with the Trade Unions and continued to focus on these relationships, as well as communications with staff and work to ensure competitive and attractive pay and reward.

The Chair of the Staff Committee reported that good progress had been made against the People Enabler Strategy in 2021-22, and that the Committee had endorsed the planned actions for 2022-23. The Committee had also invited the Head of Professional and Organisational Development (POD) for an annual discussion regarding POD's work and had noted that initiatives were in place to induct new staff into the Heriot-Watt community, including those who had joined during the pandemic.

The Court noted that it would receive a further update on matters relating to the Staff Survey in November 2022. Participation in the Survey had been slightly reduced, with scores for some areas seeing a decline. Action planning was currently ongoing and the intention was to produce focused, short action plans.

M22/77 REPORT FROM THE COURT INTERIM BUSINESS COMMITTEE (Ct7/22/47)

The Court received and noted the report from the Court Interim Business Committee, presented by the Chair of Court.

M22/78 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (REF) OUTCOMES, LEARNINGS AND FUTURE PLANS (PRESENTATION)

The Court received and discussed a presentation on the REF outcomes, presented by the Deputy Principal (Research and Impact).

The Deputy Principal (Research and Impact) provided an overview of the REF process, noting that the REF was a UK-only exercise and all the results referenced were for the UK campuses. The previous REF exercise had been completed in 2014, with the most recent exercise completed in 2021.

The Court received a summary of the outcomes of the 2021 exercise, including comparison between the formal outcomes and the University's predictions across its Units of Assessment (UoAs). The Court had previously expressed an interest in this data. The accuracy of the predictions had varied across the University and the Deputy Principal (Research and Impact) was reviewing how predictions were made to identify any improvements. Some areas had been very close in their estimations and any good practice from these areas would be identified.

The Court noted that overall, 86% of Heriot-Watt research outputs had been judged as 4* (world-leading) or 3* (internationally excellent) and would attract funding for the University. 14% of research was rated either 2* (internationally recognised) or 1* (nationally recognised) and would not attract funding. Overall, since 2014, there had been an increase in 4* research, and a reduction for each of the other classifications. In addition, the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) submissions from the University had increased from 352 to 422.

In relation to impact, which was another key measure within the REF, 83% of research was 4* or 3*. However, there had been a reduction in 4* and increases in 3* and 2*. The Court noted that smaller UoAs with a relatively small number of impact case studies were more likely to be rated 2* and this likely accounted for the change. Impact was much easier to demonstrate on a larger scale and this was a challenge that the University would be considering going forward.

The final key measure was the Research Environment, which was judged on a statement provided by each UoA. There had been improvements in 4* judgements in 2021, with a slight increase in 2* judgements from smaller UoAs. A national analysis had demonstrated that smaller UoAs struggled to reach 4* in this area. Institutional reviews were being piloted because larger returns made it easier to demonstrate excellence.

The Court discussed the REF outcomes and the factors that had impacted on the results. Scotland had seen a 36.6% increase in FTE for researchers, largely driven by the University of Edinburgh. Heriot-Watt had increased its FTE, but not at the same rate. This had implications for the University's Research Excellence Grant (REG) income, particularly as there was a real terms cut in overall REG funding. The University had also seen slightly lower improvements to its environment and impact scores in comparison to the wider UK sector.

Next steps

The Court considered next steps following the REF outcomes, which included the development of School research strategies in alignment with the University Strategy. These would be approved by the University Committee for Research and Innovation in November 2022, and would then be presented to the University Executive, the Senate and the Court for information. A number of the smaller UoAs were key to Strategy 2025 and the research strategies would aim to improve their ability to deliver impact.

Other areas being considered within the research strategies were:

- maximising recruitment of researchers who would contribute to the University's reputation and REF submission;
- ensuring that an appropriate publication strategy was in place to balance sharing information, via the Open Science approach, and managing access; and
- identifying the view of University staff regarding what excellent research was and then rolling this out via the PDR process.

The Court noted that impact cases would, in future, be tracked from the outset so that evidence was easily available for the REF submission. This would involve tracking and managing relationships, and receiving industry sign off where required, at an earlier stage in research activity.

In addition, the intention was to create a Graduate School which would allow consistency of experience for Postgraduate students and would also enable the University to grow Postgraduate numbers, including externally funded students. Finally, the University needed to embed Responsible Research and Innovation and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion into research.

The Court queried what lessons had been learned from the process which could be implemented in future to manage the challenging research income landscape. The Deputy Principal (Research and Impact) noted that the challenges with smaller UoAs could have been predicted and better mitigated via more robust processes of institutional oversight. This would be progressed for the future. In addition, the University of Glasgow had focused on driving the Grade Point Average and quality of their research up and Heriot-Watt would be considering whether a similar approach would be of benefit.

Whilst the reduction in REG income was unfortunate, this was in the context of a reducing pot of funding and the University was working with UK Research and Innovation to demonstrate the impact of that reduction to the Scottish Government.

The Court offered its thanks to the Deputy Principal (Research and Impact) for the very helpful presentation and noted that updates would continue to be provided as the next REF exercise approached.

M22/79 COURT FORWARD AGENDA PLAN (Ct7/22/48)

The Court received and noted the Forward Agenda Plan, presented by the Chair of Court. The Chair of Court reported that the business currently scheduled for November 2022 would be reviewed to ensure that there was sufficient time for strategic items.

M22/80 CLOSING REMARKS

As this would be the final meeting of Ms McNeill's term as Chair of Court, the Court offered its thanks for her incredible commitment and effort on behalf of the University. Ms McNeill noted her appreciation for the support she had received from Court members and from the Executive during her term.

M22/81 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Regular meeting via Teams, 16 November 2022, 8.30am (UK time), 12.30pm (Dubai time), 5.30pm (Malaysia time)
- Strategy Day and Dinner, 7 December (full day session)