

Minutes - University Court

11/12/2023 | 14:00 – 16:00

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

Ms Leen Ali; Dr Mary Allison; Ms Zoe Crosher; Mr Gary Fleming; Mr Kenny Fraser; Ms Susan Gordon Hardy (Chair); Mr Hamish Grossart; Mr Graham Hastie; Dr Magdalena Ietswaart; Mr Douglas Kearney; Dr Deborah Keith; Professor Malcolm MacLeod; Professor Sir Gerry McCormac; Ms Catriona Morrison; Mr William Stancer; Professor Julie Tinson; Professor Neville Wylie; Dr Lee Zhuang and Dr Clare Wilson

**In Attendance**

Ms Rose Edwards, Ms Cathy Gallagher, Ms Jennifer Harrison, Ms Karen Lawson, Mr Colin McNally, Ms Joanna Morrow, Professor Judith Phillips, Dr John Rogers, Ms Eileen Schofield, Professor Leigh Sparks, Mr Liam Spillane, Mr Moray Nichol (Clerk), Dr David Telford, Professor Neville Wylie, Dr Lee Zhuang and Ms Linsey Dickson (Item 5 and 6).

Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Harry Adam, Ms Lynne Marr, Professor Kirstie Blair, Dr Poonam Gupta and Mr Julian Roberts.

The Chair welcomed Dr Deborah Keith and Dr Clare Wilson following their appointment to University Court.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

Court approved the minutes of the meeting of University Court held on 23 October 2023.

3. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

Court noted the action from the previous meeting held on 23 October 2023 at item 13 was subsequently withdrawn, points of clarification sought on the approach the University had taken to Marking and Assessment Boycott pay deductions and the nature of assessments undertaken prior to actions being put in place had not been submitted to the Clerk of Court and the Chair of Court.

There were no other matters arising not otherwise on the agenda.

4. Developments in the External Environment

Court received an overview of developments in the external environment that included coverage of UK Government immigration policy and post study work visas, Scottish Government priorities and policy announcements, the Scottish Budget 2024/25, the Regional Innovation Fund, Scottish Research Alliances and the Research Excellence Framework.

Members discussed findings from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment that is undertaken to measure 15-year olds' ability to use reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real life challenges across different education systems over time.  Members discussed potential resource implications of the findings for the University and the work of the Stirling Centre for Research into Curriculum Making founded in October 2023 to engage in knowledge exchange with policy makers and practitioners to develop curriculum across education systems.

Court noted the recent developments in the external environment.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

5. Digital Strategy 2023 - 2030

Court received a presentation on the draft Digital Strategy 2023 - 2030 that included an overview of its guiding principles and six key themes.

Members discussed opportunities and risk associated with the development of Artificial Intelligence, the use of smart technologies to minimise environmental impact and the development of staff and students’ digital skills over the lifetime of the strategy.   Members discussed the approach undertaken to ensure the aims of the Digital Strategy integrated with the suite of emergent enabling strategies pertaining to learning, teaching, research, estates and campus services in particular.  Members discussed the approach to ensure that the University's strategies, policies and practices were assessed to identify opportunities to promote equality and ensure likely adverse impacts on protected equality characteristics of people were removed or mitigated as required.

Court approved the Digital Strategy 2023 - 2030.

6. Research and Innovation Strategy 2023 - 2030

Court received a presentation on the draft Research and Innovation Strategy 2023 - 2030, that included an overview of the University's institutional values and how these align with the University's research culture and community.

Members discussed engagement and consultation undertaken as part of the development of strategy, the proposed mission-orientated approach to research activities, and the ambition to foster excellent, sustainable and resilient programmes over the lifetime of the strategy.

Court approved the Research and Innovation Strategy 2023 - 2030.

7. University Annual Report and Financial Statements 2022-23

Court received an overview of the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2022-23.  It was confirmed, the Quarter 4 management accounts as at 31 July 2023 presented an operating surplus of £8.5m prior to the accounting adjustments required in the presentation of the statutory financial statements.  Following the adjustments required for pensions, City Regional Deal income and receipt of a new endowment, the University generated an accounting surplus of £17.4m (£14.4m deficit in 2021-22).

Members discussed notable successes in performance for the University across all income lines in 2022-23 that included the consolidation of international taught postgraduate student numbers across both Autumn and Spring intakes, increases in research, commercial and enterprise activity and a strong reserves position with total net assets of £143.1m (2022: £134.8m).  Members discussed the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and it was confirmed provision made within the financial statements reflected the March 2020 valuation.

Court approved the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2022-23 and considered the Letter of Representation and Report to the Audit Committee from the external auditor.

8. Quarter 1 Reporting

Court received an introduction to the report on Quarter 1 performance underpinned by the management accounts and associated indicative financial forecast position for the academic year 2023-24.  It was confirmed that the Quarter 1 management accounts presented a preliminaryout-turn forecast surplus of £6.7m (3.8% of income) for 2023-24, and that this reflected a positive uplift of £2.1m against the Court approved budget.  Members discussed emergent risk associated with the external environment, in particular continued economic uncertainty.

Member discussed the income generation forecast, the revised Capital and Major Infrastructure plan for the period 2023-28, and a programme of remedial work required to areas affected with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).  It was confirmed remedial work at the Students' Union was a major capital project to be considered separately.

It was confirmed that based on the Quarter 1 management accounts out-turn surplus and progress with the capital plan, the University was forecast to end financial year 2023-24 with a net operating cash inflow of £21.2m and access to cash facilities of £64.9m.  Based on the forecast cash position, it was confirmed the University would be covenant compliant in 2023-24.

Court considered and approved the Quarter 1 report.

COLLABORATION

9. City Region Deal

Court received an update from the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board that included Scotland's International Environment Centre, the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH) project, the Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub and the International Marine Science and Environmental Centre.

Court considered the update from the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board.

POLICY

10. Freedom to Speak Up (Whistleblowing) Policy

Court received an overview of the revised Freedom to Speak Up: Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy.  It was confirmed the current version of the policy was approved by University Court in June 2019 and was due to be reviewed as part of the policy review schedule prior to June 2024 to ensure its ongoing effectiveness.

Members discussed the proposed amendments to further clarify the scope and purpose of the policy, and to make provision for a Designated Person to carry out an initial assessment, normally within ten working days, to determine whether the matter required further investigation.

Court approved the Freedom to Speak Up (Whistleblowing) Policy.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

11. Students' Union Update

Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities.  Members discussed the growth of enrolment of international students and opportunities for further collaboration to foster an inclusive culture and experience for students and staff.

Court considered the activity update from the Students’ Union.

12. Staff and Employment Update

Court received an update on staff and employment matters that included coverage of national negotiations in relation to the 2023/24 pay round, the Scottish Government's Fair Work First policy, proposed changes to the USS pension scheme and the University's approach to staff engagement.

Court noted the staff and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

13. University Court

Court considered and noted the annual evaluative report from Court 2022/23.

14. Academic Council

Court noted the report from the meeting of Academic Council held on 29 November 2023 and discussed the annual evaluative report from Academic Council.

15. Joint Policy, Planning & Resources Committee (JPPRC)

Court noted the report from the meeting of Joint Policy Planning and Resources Committee held on 22 November 2023 and discussed the annual evaluative report for 2022-23.

16. Audit Committee

Court considered a report from the meeting of Audit Committee held on 13 November 2023, the annual evaluative report from Audit Committee for 2022-23 and the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2022-23.

17. Governance and Nominations Committee

Court considered the annual evaluative report from Governance and Nominations Committee and noted the report on committee appointments approved by Governance and Nominations Committee and Court.

18. University Research Ethics Committee

Court considered the annual report from the University Research Ethics Committee for 2022/23 and discussed key activities of the Committee during the year 2022/23.

RISKS

19. Risks Arising

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

OTHER ITEMS

20. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other competent business.

21. Next Meeting

Court noted the schedule of meetings for the remainder of 2023-24 was:

* 25 March 2024 (Court Dinner from 6.30pm)
* 26 March 2024 (meeting of Court from 10.30am – 12.30pm)
* 10 June 2024 (meeting of Court from 2.00pm – 4.00pm)