

**UNIVERSITY COURT**

**Summary of Findings and Recommendations from an Externally Facilitated Review of Governance Effectiveness 2024**

**Introduction**

1. The University engaged AdvanceHE to undertake an externally facilitated review of the governing body’s own effectiveness, in accordance with the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance 2023. At its meeting in October 2024, University Court considered the findings of the review, including seven recommendations. A summary of the findings and details of the recommendations are provided below.

**Terms of Reference**

2. The following Terms of Reference were agreed for the Review:

* Whether Court and the committees of Court are appropriately structured, undertake appropriate self-reflection and evaluation of their effectiveness, and have the capacity to deliver the University’s ambitious forward strategy and vision.
* The balance of diversity, skills and experience on Court and to determine whether the University is fully utilising the knowledge, skills and experience of members, and is equipping members appropriately for their roles, including as chairs of sub-committees.
* The extent to which Court is adequately managing risk, particularly in respect to the current external environment.
* The ways in which the Executive and the University more generally engage with Court to improve communication and also enhance understanding of the University and the wider Sector.
* Providing an assessment on the ability of Court to deliver the University’s Strategic Plan, in compliance with the overall principles of good and effective Higher Education Governance.
* Explore the distinction between governance and management in the operation of the Court and the need for constructive challenge by the Court to be understood and accepted by both members and the Executive.
* Assess the level of Court visibility and engagement with the wider University community of staff and students and other stakeholders.

**Overview of Review Methodology**

3. Findings of the review were drawn from responses to a bespoke e-survey of Court members and attendees, a review of documents and evidence focused on requirements of Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance, observations of Court and committee meetings, and a combination of one-to-one and group interviews with members of Court and key executive staff.

**Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

4. The Review Team observed a set of behaviours and relationships which indicated a significant amount of mutual respect and trust between the Court and the Executive. There was clear evidence of cohesiveness and of acting in concert across the stakeholder groups that was consistent with a governance and management focus on careful stewardship of the University, its community and environment.  Almost all felt listened to and respected.  The positive environment was partly attributed to the Principal's leadership in setting the University’s culture.  This was reflected in the member survey with an overall score of 97% for those questions related to working relationships and board room behaviours and 93% for those related to Court commitment to organisational vision, culture and values.The Executive made significant efforts to be open and provide the Court with a wealth of information; in return, much was delegated and entrusted to the Executive.  There was an impressive Court with a clearcommitment to the University and a desire to make the quality of the University more widely recognised.

5. The Review Team found no major deficiencies in governance arrangements and observed some opportunities for the University to make improvements to the approach to the induction and development of members of Court, ensuring a more comprehensive student voice and to continue in its efforts to diversify the membership of the Court.

6. Recommendations were intended as an initial prompt for the University to consider in developing an action plan for implementation.

7. The action plan is based on recommendations from the Review and includes a brief statement on how the University has responded.

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| **Ref.** | **Recommendation**  | **Action**  |
| i.  | After any leadership changes, the Executive and Court discuss how to ensure that they maintain a shared understanding of the place and benefits of early debate and constructive challenge. | Undertaken on an ongoing basis. Court and the Executive take responsibility for ensuring the effective management of the University and planning the institution’s strategic development and future direction.  |
| ii.  | The University continues to explore innovative ways of developing diversity and specifically explores the possibility of using a Board Apprenticeship scheme.  | This will be considered on an ongoing basis by Governance and Nominations Committee. The University recognises that diversity enriches the work, learning and research experiences of the entire campus and community. University Court, the governing body, monitors its composition regarding the balance and diversity of its members.  Our Governance and Nominations Committee is responsible for the recruitment of lay members of Court and makes recommendations to Court concerning the appointment of all members of Court and other Committees.  The Committee in making its appointments will pay regard to the balance of membership and the needs of the University for expertise in important areas of its operation.  |
| iii. | The University reviews its approach to induction, so that it formally identifies the specific knowledge that members need and how they can acquire it. This should include further consideration of the needs of student members.   | Induction is an ongoing matter for Governance and Nominations Committee and new members receive an induction on joining University Court and its Committees.Governance and Nominations Committee will ensure induction is full and opportunities for further development continue to be provided in accordance with the individuals needs and responsibilities.Specific attention will continue to be made for student governing body members due to their short tenure.  |
| iv. | Consideration is given to adopting a more systematic approach to member development interviews and development opportunities.    | The Chair of Court will continue to actively involve members’ in reviewing their individual contribution (a minimum of every two years). Opportunities for relevant personal development will be identified through the standardised process.  |
| v.  | Discussions are held with student representatives to establish the most effective way to support them in developing their contribution to Court debates. The Court should also consider how more opportunities for it to hear from a wider range of students might be provided.   | University Court will continue to take responsibility for understanding the environment the University operates and will ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for engaging with the students’ association and foster contributions from student governing body members. This includes the opportunities to meet with the student community as part of Court’s pre-meeting briefings and visits. |
| vi.  | As part of its approach to external communications, the Court members should be provided with key messages suitable for external audiences, notably on topical matters of public interest.   | The University’s Communications Team is the main point of contact for media organisations wishing to find out more about the work of the University. The team manage all media enquiries on behalf of the University and issue news releases using a range of media channels.In addition to reports on the external environment presented at meetings of Court and issues of Staff Round-up, a summary of key themes, including national press cuttings as appropriate, will be circulated by the Communication Team to members of Court (once a semester).  |
| vii | The meeting evaluation approach is reviewed to ensure the current process adds sufficient value.   | This will be considered on an ongoing basis by Governance and Nominations Committee. Court and its Committees will continue to review effectiveness regularly and will satisfy itself the approach adds sufficient value. |

**Data Classification**

8. This document is classified as *public*.