

Minutes – University Court

26/03/2024 | 10:30am – 12:30pm

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

Mr Harry Adam (Chair); Ms Leen Ali; Dr Mary Allison; Ms Pamela Crawford; Ms Zoe Crosher; Mr Gary Fleming; Mr Kenny Fraser; Ms Susan Gordon Hardy; Dr Poonam Gupta; Mr Graham Hastie; Dr Magdalena Ietswaart; Mr Douglas Kearney; Dr Deborah Keith; Professor Malcolm MacLeod; Ms Lynne Marr; Professor Sir Gerry McCormac; Mr Julian Roberts; Mr William Stancer; Councillor Elaine Watterson; 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 and Dr Lee Zhuang.

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Ms Lynne Marr and Councillor Elaine Watterson following their appointment to University Court.

The Chair thanked Ms Zoe Crosher, Students’ Union Vice President Communities for her contribution to University Court, and confirmed the incoming sabbatical officer team will start from the beginning of June.  The Chair congratulated Ms Leen Ali on her re-election as Students’ Union President.

The Chair provided an update on recent activity that included an overview of discussion at the Committee of Scottish Chairs'.  The Chair confirmed that, as part of an accreditation process, the University was awaiting the outcome of a visit by Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) assessors.

Apologies for absence were received from Professor Kirstie Blair, Mr Hamish Grossart, Ms Catriona Morrison and Professor Julie Tinson.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Court approved the minutes of the meeting of University Court held on 12 December 2023.

4. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

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

5. Key Developments in the External Environment

Court received an overview of developments in the external environment that included coverage of Scottish Government Budget and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) funding for 2024/25, Scotland’s International Education Strategy, the Commissioner for Fair Access Report 2024 and UK Government Policy Reforms for International Students.

Members discussed the financial sustainability of the UK Higher Education sector, the University's approach to financial modelling and scenario planning, and potential impact of a graduate visa route review undertaken by the Migration Advisory Committee, a non-departmental public body that advises the UK government on matters related to migration.

Court noted the recent developments in the external environment.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

6. People Strategy

Court received an overview of the People Strategy and its underpinning key themes to enable the University's success through its people.

Members discussed the University's approach to the development and appraisal of its people, the recruitment and retention of diverse and talented individuals, opportunities for promotion and terms and conditions of employment.  Members discussed the culture fostered at the University, the promotion of physical and mental wellbeing, and the provision of support available for staff.  Members discussed key indicators to enable progress of delivery to be to be monitored and the approach undertaken to ensure objectives of the Research and Digital strategies in particular were integrated.   It was confirmed the strategy was shaped by people's experiences of working at the University, drawn from feedback generated through Strategic Plan engagement sessions.

Court to approved the People Strategy.

7. Quarter Two Performance Report

Court received an overview of institutional performance at the Quarter 2 milestone, and an associated appraisal of the sector context and factors that presented opportunities or risks to the University.

Members discussed the management accounts and associated indicative financial forecast position for the academic year 2023-24.  It was confirmed that the Quarter 2 management accounts presented a preliminary out-turn forecast surplus of £4.3m for 2023/24, this reflected a £2.4m reduction on Quarter 1 and a £0.2m reduction against the Court-approved budget. Total income generation was forecast to be £170m, in line with the budget and overall the University was forecast to end 2023/24 with a net operating cash inflow of £17.6m compared to £21.2m at Quarter 1.

Members discussed the Capital and Infrastructure Plan.  It was confirmed that due to the economic climate, tendered costs for certain projects were higher than previously expected. In instances where costs increased, most notably in discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), proactive measures were implemented to prevent additional capital expenditure in the current financial year.

It was confirmed that the University has sufficient cash and working capital facilities to ensure it was able to meet its liabilities as they fell during 2023-24.  Considering the forecast position, the University was covenant compliant in 2023/24.

Court considered and approved the Quarter Two Performance Report.

COLLABORATION

8. City Region and Growth Deal

Court received an update on the University's programme of City Region and Growth Deal projects that included Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC), the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH) and the Alloa Innovation Campus.

Members discussed progress, the strengthened level of engagement over the duration of the programme and risks associated with its delivery.

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

GOVERNANCE AND POLICY

9. Legislative Updates to Policies

Court received an overview of updates to the Flexible Working and Paternity Leave policies required due to new legislation that came into force on 6 April 2024.  It was confirmed the amendments would support inclusivity and introduce greater flexibility for staff.

Court approved updates to polices to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

10. Amendment to Ordinance 16 - Honorary Degrees

Court received an overview of a proposed amendment to Ordinance 16.  Members discussed the provision for Academic Council to grant Doctor of the University (DUniv) and Master of Arts (MA) honorary degrees, and provision for the withdrawal or rescindment of an honorary degree to ensure the continued integrity and reputation of the University.

It was confirmed there were no active cases where an offer of an honorary degree was to be withdrawn or for an honorary degree that had been conferred to be rescinded.

Court approved the proposed amendment to Ordinance 16.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

11. Students' Union Update

Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities that included coverage of the Students’ Union election, academic representation, student advice and help, and sustainability.  The Chair congratulated the Student's Union on efforts to increase democratic engagement.

Court considered the activity update from the Students’ Union.

12. University of Stirling Students' Union Accounts

Court considered the annual report and financial statements for the University of Stirling Students’ Union for 2022/23.

13. Staff and Employment Update

Court received an update on staff and employment matters.  Members discussed improved University Superannuation Scheme benefits and findings from a Be Heard pulse survey that related to the staff experience of welcome and induction at the University.  Members discussed the approach undertaken to build confidence amongst staff to share information about themselves and their experience of working at the University, to build upon the University's culture and ensure all staff feel valued and part of the community.

Court considered the staff and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

14. Academic Council

Court noted a report from the meeting of Academic Council held on 6 March 2024.

15. Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee

Court received a report from the Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee held on 27 February 2024. Members discussed progress and activity in delivering on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, detail of safety, security and business continuity performance for the academic year 2022/23 and proposed amendments to the Health and Safety Policy.  Members discussed the reporting of health and safety related incidents and work undertaken to foster a culture of reporting.

Court considered the report from Joint, Policy Planning and Resources Committee of 27 February 2024.

Additionally, Court approved:

* the Research Concordat report and 2023-26 action plan;
* the Annual Safety, Security and Continuity Report; and
* the revised Health and Safety Policy subject to confirmation that the policy addressed the University's legal obligations relating to stress in the workplace.

16. Audit Committee

Court noted a report from the meeting of Audit Committee held on 29 January 2024.

17. Governance and Nominations Committee

Court noted a report from the meeting of Governance and Nominations Committee held on 8 March 2024.

RISKS

18. Risks Arising

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

OTHER ITEMS

19. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other competent business.

20. Next Meeting

Court noted the next meeting was scheduled on 10 June 2024.