

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

UNIVERSITY COURT

A meeting of the University Court was held on 27 February in the Ustinov Room, Bonar Hall, City Campus, University of Dundee.

Present: Amanda Millar (Chair);
Janice Aitken;
Glenn Allison;
Alan Bainbridge (online);
Tricia Bey;
Ian Buerger;
Greg Colgan;
Claire Cunningham;
Professor Sir Mike Ferguson;
Professor Iain Gillespie (Principal & Vice-Chancellor);
Professor Linda Martindale;
Nyasha Mutembwa;
Dr Anna Notaro;
Carla Rossini;
Amina Shah;
Jay Surti (online);
Sharon Sweeney;
Professor Garry Taylor;
Karen Thomson; and
Keith Winter (items 36 – 46)

In Attendance: Dr Paul Bennett (Deputy Director, Strategic Planning)(items 31-37);
Peter Fotheringham (Director of Finance);
Elise Gallagher (Director of People);
Professor Lianne Gibson (Vice-Principal (Research))(Items 31-36)
Dr Neale Laker (Deputy University Secretary);
Dr David McBeth (Vice-Principal (Enterprise & Economic Transformation))(items31-36);
Dr Jim McGeorge (University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer);
Dr Christine Milburn (Head of Principal's Office)(items 31-37);
Professor Shane O'Neill (Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost); and
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance))

Apologies: Professor Blair Grubb, Andrew Lothian, Karthik Subramanya, Ron Mobed, Susan Walker.

31. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR OF COURT

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Court.

32. **MINUTES**

The Court decided: to approve the minutes of the meeting on 24 November 2023.

33. **MATTERS ARISING**

Action Log

The Court received the action log of Court business.

The Court decided: to note the update.

34. **CHAIR'S REPORT TO COURT**

The Court received a report from the Chair on activities undertaken on behalf of the Court and the University at a University and sectoral level. Members were advised that the Chair continued to hold regular discussions with the Vice-Chancellor, Secretariat officers and UEG colleagues, which had served to keep her up to date with matters both within and outwith the University.

The Chair noted that she had attended a Committee of University Chairs (CUC) event on prevalence surveys and harassment & sexual misconduct in universities. Members were advised that the Chair had also participated in a Committee of Scottish Chairs (CSC) collective meeting of the Chairs of Governance and/or Nominations Committees, which had provided opportunities for learning experiences and sharing best practice ideas.

The Court noted that the annual Public Stakeholder Engagement Event had been both well-attended and well-received. Attendees had provided positive feedback, as well as constructive comments for improvement and the Chair thanked the Principal and the Deputy Chair for their contributions.

Ms Millar advised the Court that she had recently joined the launch of the University's Law Clinic and had participated in events during the University's Race Equality Week. These had included an update on progress made since the publication of the Founders Report and the launch of a public information comic on experiencing microaggressions.

Members noted that the Chair had attended an alumni event which had honoured Lord Malcolm, Senator of the College of Justice and a Supreme Court judge. Finally, the Court was advised that Ms Millar would be speaking at a public event to mark International Women's Day 2024, on the theme of 'Inspiring Inclusion'.

The Court decided: to note the report.

35. UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE GROUP REPORT TO COURT

The Principal & Vice-Chancellor introduced the University Executive Group report to Court, which provided an update on emerging sectoral issues, strategic matters, and recent events. The Principal advised the Court that the period since the last meeting of the Court had brought a number of challenges for the UK Higher Education (HE) sector. These included a substantial drop in the international student market, significant changes to the political environment and a reduction in the Scottish Government HE budget.

Members were advised that a recent report into the financial sustainability of the sector had highlighted the vulnerability of universities and had predicted that a likely proportion of institutions would fall into deficit by 2024/25. This had been compounded by the decrease in the Scottish Government HE budget, which constituted a 2.7% reduction overall and almost a 6% cash cut to budgets for teaching.

The Court was reminded of the sector-wide decline in international student recruitment and its effect on the September intake. Members noted that the January intake had continued to be challenging and that the scale of change in the external environment had made it impossible for the University to avoid an overall year-on-year decline in tuition fee income.

The Court was advised that the decrease in income would be partially offset by lower costs associated with student recruitment, reduced cost of pensions and other cost savings. Longer-term budget expectations and all other financial matters would be monitored, working closely with the Finance & Policy Committee over the coming months.

The Principal provided an update on pensions matters, noting that the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) valuation had completed in December 2023. Benefits adjusted in April 2022 would be restored from April 2024 and new, lower contribution rates introduced from 1 January 2024. A valuation of the local University of Dundee Superannuation Scheme (UoDSS) had been taken at 31 July 2023 and the settled position from the Scheme Trustees was expected imminently. This would allow the Pensions Sub-Group, the Finance & Policy Committee and the UEG to consider potential change options for communication and consultation in the coming months, which would be relayed to the Court in due course.

The Court noted recent events recognising staff, including the inaugural Dundee Difference Awards, intended to thank those individuals and teams who had made an outstanding contribution through their work to the success of the University. The dedicated service of staff members had been celebrated at the recent Long Service Awards ceremony, which had afforded the Principal the opportunity to thank individuals for their impact on the institution. Members were further apprised of finalists selected for the Scottish Life Sciences Awards and commended Professor John Rowan for securing a significant Leverhulme award for doctoral training.

In discussion, members requested further information on the recent media coverage suggesting that international foundation programmes allowed underqualified international students to bypass normal admissions routes. The Principal noted that several newspapers had in fact conflated two separate student cohorts and that Universities UK had since published a response. The response, fully supported by the University, clarified the very important differences between entry requirements for International Foundation Years and

full degrees, as well as emphasising the value of international students to Higher Education.

The Court then sought additional explanation of the downturn in international student recruitment and were advised that competitor destinations outside the UK had aggressively re-entered the market at a time when UK government policy relating to international students had become increasingly hostile. This included the £29K threshold for migrant workers, the cessation of dependant visas for many and the potential withdrawal of post-study visas. Professor Gillespie noted that the University would respond to the external environment by building strength in its transnational partnerships and by taking Dundee to the world as a UK University with global reach.

The Court decided: to note the report.

36. **UNIVERSITY STRATEGY 2022-27: ENSURING EXCELLENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

The Principal introduced the above presentation on the delivery of a key element of the University Strategy 2022-27: Ensuring Excellent Academic Performance. Professor Gillespie noted that members had received a suite of papers, intended to provide the Court with a current state analysis and plans for enhancing evidence measures on performance.

Court then received a presentation from the Principal & Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost on the development of Ensuring Excellent Academic Performance, one of the three key pillars emerging from the implementation of the University Strategy 2022-27, which had been introduced at the previous meeting of the Court in November 2023. The UEG intended to present the second pillar, Growth and Globalisation, at its meeting in April and to bring these pillars to fruition with its vision for the Vibrant Campus at the Court Retreat in June.

Professor Gillespie reminded members that, at the Retreat in September 2021, the Court had received an assessment of School performance. This had resulted in the mandate for UEG to establish five projects intended to create a clear academic vision with a focus on academic excellence. The Court was then apprised of progress to date in these five areas, noting that substantial change had been effected.

Professor O'Neill then provided the Court with an assessment of the Schools' current performance against agreed metrics and apprised members of the Portfolio Plans for the Vice-Principal (Research), the Vice-Principal (Education) and the Vice-Principal (Engagement and Enterprise) respectively. Key Performance Indicators for each School had been identified through the new integrated planning process, with progress mapped against each of these.

The Court was advised that the UEG would continue to engage in discussion on key elements underpinning Ensuring Excellent Academic Performance, including the REF, NSS outcomes and the vision for innovation. An end-to-end review of the planning and budgeting process was envisaged for later in the year and the Court would receive the outcome of the review.

In the course of a lengthy discussion the Court considered, *inter alia*, the need to allow disruptive but potentially important areas of research to emerge as part of the academic culture in Schools. Members were advised that work had been initiated to develop the research environment across all Schools, from grant capture to interdisciplinary collaboration.

Members welcomed the clarity emerging from the papers and presentation and noted the importance of supporting the development of the vision. The Interim Director of Strategic Change and Delivery advised the Court that the UEG would shortly discuss a proposal for how best to resource those areas critical to the delivery of the Strategy and that the Planning Office business intelligence team was working to bring together diverse sources of data to improve management information and, as a result, increase performance.

The Court considered how best the UEG could advise on progress, including whether this should be an annual report to Court or individual reports to specific Committees of the Court. Members noted that a dynamic reporting tool would assist in the presentation of information in a meaningful way but were reminded that some of the KPIs employed brought with them a significant time lag.

Thereafter, the Court commended the vision contained in the papers and the ambitions delineated in the presentation delivered by Professor Gillespie and Professor O'Neill.

The Court decided: to note the reports.

37. RESERVED BUSINESS: LEAGUE TABLES - PERFORMANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

The University claims exemption under s33 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

38. RESERVED BUSINESS: INSTITUTIONAL RISK REGISTER

The University claims exemption under s33 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

39. REPORTS FROM THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS

(1) Report of the meeting of the Senate on 29 November 2023

The Court received and considered the above report of the meeting of the Senate held on 29 November 2023, prepared for the Court's information. Members noted that any actions detailed within the report would be taken forward as indicated in the minutes for the meeting of the Senate.

The Court decided: to note the report.

(2) Report of the meeting of the Senate on 31 January 2024

The Court received and considered the above report of the meeting of the Senate held on 31 January 2024, prepared for the Court's information. Members noted that any actions detailed within the report would be taken forward as indicated in the minutes for the meeting of the Senate.

The Court decided: to note the report.

40. COMMITTEE REPORTS

(1) Finance & Policy Committee Report

The Convener of the Finance & Policy Committee introduced the report from the most recent meeting, drawing members' attention to the Committee's consideration of a report on student numbers. The Court further noted that the Committee had received and considered the Q1 Management Accounts.

The Committee had also received a report on future financial planning for the Students' Association. Members were advised that the Committee had expressed some concerns about the clarity of mission and vision contained in the report.

Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 23 January 2024

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

- The Court decided:**
- (i) to note that the Committee approved the Annual Procurement Efficiencies Report for submission to the Scottish Government; and
 - (ii) to approve the minutes.

(2) Governance & Nominations Committee

The Convener of the Governance & Nominations Committee introduced the report from the most recent meeting and, in so doing, drew members' attention to the Committee's appointment of a search agency for the recruitment of new lay members of Court. Members were also advised that the Committee had agreed to begin discussions with one individual to explore the scope and plan for the Quinquennial Review of the Effectiveness of Court.

The Convener informed the Court that the Committee had agreed that a report under the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act would be submitted in 2024. Finally, the Court noted the Committee's approval of new Museum Governance Policies for submission to Museum Galleries Scotland as part of its re-accreditation process.

Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 23 January 2024

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

- The Court decided:**
- (i) to approve the Committee's recommendation that Amina Shah join the membership of the Governance & Nominations Committee;

- (ii) to approve the appointment of Glenn Allison as Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee from 1 August 2024;
- (iii) to approve the appointment of Tricia Bey as Convener of the Endowments Sub-Committee from 1 August 2024;
- (iv) to approve the appointment of Alan Bainbridge as the Convener of the Remuneration Committee from 1 August 2024; and
- (v) to approve the minutes, subject to one minor amendment.

(3) People & Organisational Development Committee

The Convener of the People & Organisational Development Committee introduced the report from the most recent meeting, in doing so drawing members' attention to the positive progress on the People and Talent Strategy. The Court was advised that the Committee had been encouraged by UEG's efforts in increasing the range and depth of communications to staff and students.

The Court was also invited to approve the Committee's endorsement of the revised Health & Safety Policy.

Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 25 January 2024

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

- The Court decided:**
- (i) to approve the Committee's endorsement of the revised Health and Safety Policy;
 - (ii) to approve the minutes.

(4) Welfare & Ethical Use of Animals Committee

Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 25 January 2024

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

- The Court decided:** to approve the minutes.

41. **STAFF COUNCIL MINUTES**

The Court reviewed the minutes from the meeting on 20 November 2023.

- The Court decided:** to approve the minutes.

42. **NARRATIVE FOR THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS**

The Chair of Court recommended, and the Court agreed, to highlight to Senate the Court's discussions on Ensuring Academic Excellence, league table performance and the importance of ensuring cyber security.

The Court decided: to note the areas for inclusion in the report to the Senate.

43. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE COURT**

The Court agreed that the post-Court communication to staff and students would focus on the mutual responsibility of all in remaining vigilant to cyber security matters, the Court's strategic discussion on Ensuring Academic Excellence and its consideration of the report on league table performance.

The Court decided: to note the areas for inclusion in the communication to staff and students.

44. **DUSA PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The Court received and considered the above report, which provided the Court with an update on DUSA matters.

The Court decided: to note the report.

45. **SENIOR STAFF APPOINTMENTS**

(1) Appointments

The Court noted the appointment of the following members of staff:

Name	Title	New appointment	Internal promotion
Lizzi Nicoll	Director of Advancement	Yes	Yes
Alija Advukic	Professor of Political/Moral Economy and Islamic Finance	Yes	No
Jennifer Lees-Marshment	Professor of Political Marketing Management	Yes	No
Rachel Simpson	Assistant Director (Commercial) of Research and Innovation Services	Yes	Yes

(2) Appointments

The Court approved the appointment of Prabhupada Prana Dasa (George Mullen), Rabbi Eliran Shabo and Ayalah Shabo as Honorary Chaplains for the period of 1 year in the first instance, with immediate effect.

- The Court decided:**
- (i) to approve the appointment of Prabhupada Prana Dasa (George Mullen), Rabbi Eliran Shabo and Ayalah Shabo as Honorary Chaplains; and
 - (ii) to note the other appointments.

Amanda Millar
Chair of Court
University of Dundee