

## UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

### UNIVERSITY COURT

A meeting of the University Court was held at 2pm on 10 September 2024 in the Ustinov Room, Bonar Hall, City Campus.

Present: Amanda Millar (Chair);  
Glenn Allison;  
Alan Bainbridge (online);  
Tricia Bey;  
Manaswi Budhathoki;  
Carolina Castro;  
Greg Colgan;  
Claire Cunningham;  
Professor Kim Dale;  
Professor Sir Mike Ferguson;  
Marcus Flucker;  
Professor Iain Gillespie (Principal & Vice-Chancellor);  
Andrew Lothian;  
Dr Ian Mair;  
Professor Linda Martindale;  
Ron Mobed (online);  
Dr Anna Notaro;  
Carla Rossini (online);  
Amina Shah;  
Karthik Subramanya;  
Jay Surti (online);  
Professor Garry Taylor;  
Sharon Sweeney; and  
Susan Walker.

In Attendance: Peter Fotheringham (Director of Finance);  
Elise Gallagher (Director of People);  
Professor Blair Grubb (Vice-Principal (Education))(Items 1-6));  
Rex Knight (Independent Observer)(online);  
Dr Neale Laker (Deputy University Secretary);  
Dr Jim McGeorge (University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer);  
Dr Christine Milburn (Director of University Executive & Strategy Office)(Items 1-7);  
Professor Shane O'Neill (Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost); and  
Dr Alison Ramsay (Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance))

Apologies: No apologies were received.

#### 1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR OF COURT**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and, in particular, welcomed Manaswi Budhathoki, Carolina Castro, Marcus Flucker and Ian Mair to their first meeting of the Court.

## 2. MINUTES

**The Court decided:** to approve the minutes of the meeting on 10 June 2024.

## 3. MATTERS ARISING

### Action Log

The Court received the action log of Court business. Members noted that there were no matters arising which were neither already on the agenda or not yet due.

**The Court decided:** to note the update.

## 4. 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 an institutional and sectoral level. Members were apprised 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 advised the Court that she had attended several of the Summer Graduation ceremonies and thanked colleagues for their efforts in making these events memorable for the graduates and their families and friends. Members also noted that she had joined members of the LGBTQ+ Staff Network and allies at Dundee Pride.

More recently, the Chair had attended the DJCAD Masters Show launch and commended the variety and impact of the output from the University's School of Art & Design. Members noted that the Chair had also launched, and chaired elements of, the annual conference of the Centre for Freedom of Information. The Court was advised that the Chair had been in attendance at the Summer Academic Accelerator Showcase in conjunction with Elevator, and the University Engagement and Enterprise Showcase, hosted by the Vice-Principal (Enterprise and Economic Transformation).

Finally, the Chair noted that the meeting would be the last attended by the Director of Finance. On behalf of the Court, the Chair thanked Mr Fotheringham and wished him well in his future endeavours.

**The Court decided:** to note the report.

## 5. 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, since the last meeting of the Court, the University had been named Scottish University of the Year 2025 by the Daily Mail. The University had also improved its position in the Guardian University Rankings and the QS World University

Rankings, which reflected the University's stronger performance in the NSS results. Set against a sector background of rising costs, income constraints and a challenging political environment, it remained imperative for the institution to deliver its mission while taking steps to maintain its resilience.

Dundee had been shortlisted for Entrepreneurial University of the Year in the Triple E Awards for Europe and had secured significant research grant income. The University had enjoyed media attention for a variety of research initiatives and intended to transmit its research prowess into further enhanced national and global reputational recognition.

The Principal advised the Court that the 2024/25 New JNICHES negotiations had taken place over an extended period in an attempt to reach a resolution on the national pay award but that meetings had concluded without resolution. In contrast, proposals for consultation on the outcome of the 2023 valuation of the UoDSS Pension Scheme had been accepted by the campus unions and had been positively received by the wider staff community. The valuation would therefore conclude and changes to the Scheme implemented during September 2024.

The Court was advised that the change in UK Government had not yet resulted in any significant positive impact on student numbers. Most UK Universities were noted as being in competition for the same student cohorts, making the recruitment market for RUK students particularly challenging. The Court was advised that the University expected its RUK recruitment to be just under that of last year, but that it was currently projected to fall below its targeted intake of Scottish domiciled students. This failure to fill all of the institution's SFC-funded places could result in financial clawback. The University would require to demonstrate its ability to recover and to meet funded number targets next session in order to avoid the possibility of SFC removing funded places in future. The Court was also advised that the University was conducting a full process review and would develop its plan for responding to the situation within the next month.

Court noted that the political and economic environment had impacted negatively on other institutions across the sector and were apprised of developments elsewhere globally which could help the UK to recover its position as an attractive market for international students. Members were advised of changes in applicant behaviours which had made previously-used predictors of conversion rates far less reliable and noted that an update on student numbers would be provided to the meeting of the Finance & Policy Committee (F&PC) at its next meeting.

Members welcomed the candour with which the University Executive had reported to Court and commended the constructive approach with which the institution intended to respond to the challenging environment. Thereafter, the Court noted that its committees would receive regular updates as the situation developed throughout the course of the academic session.

**The Court decided:** to note the report.

## 6. NSS OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

The Vice-Principal (Education) introduced the above analysis of the results of the 2024 National Student Survey (NSS), which had been published on 10 July 2024. The University's response rate to the 2024 survey had been 85.8%, the highest return in recent years, with School responses ranging between 81-100%. Members were advised that the most significant improvement in the 2024 survey was the response to the question 'Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course', which had risen from 73.74% to 82.40% and was the University's best performance since 2020.

The Court was apprised that, prior to the 2023 survey, the best comparator across the UK had been the score for the 'Overall Satisfaction' question. That this question was now only asked in the devolved nations had reduced opportunities for direct benchmarking. This notwithstanding, the University's 2024 performance had surpassed its Scottish peers and exceeded the Scottish average. Of the 15 Scottish Institutions, Dundee ranked fourth behind only St Andrews, Aberdeen and Strathclyde. The University had been ranked first in Scotland for ten subject areas, with the single greatest improvement in Teacher Training.

Members were advised of the University's performance across the ten thematic areas and noted that the least positive response related to feedback and the efficacy of the Students' Association in representing students' academic interests. Additionally, overall satisfaction for four courses had declined below the 80% benchmark.

The Court noted that the institution retained a number of programmes with small numbers and was advised that the University was engaged in constant horizon-scanning to identify emerging study disciplines whilst also monitoring those subject areas whose popularity was waning. The differing demands of small and large cohorts were noted, with each presenting their own challenges.

In discussion, members welcomed the significant improvement in the University's performance and were reminded that the NSS was not the only metric by which the University measured its success. All Schools had developed targets and performance indicators as part of the annual planning process and these would be embedded across the institution. The Court was advised that the DUSA Executive and the University were working closely to establish continuity through the Student Partnership Agreement and that DUSA had plans in place to improve satisfaction across the student population. Members welcomed the improvement in the University's position and commended the commitment by all involved to continue the work to deliver ongoing progress.

**The Court decided:** to note the report.

## 7. REFLECTIONS ON THE COURT RETREAT AND PLANNING FOR 2024/25

The University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer introduced the above report, intended to stimulate discussion at the Court on areas for strategic consideration at its meetings during session 2024/25. Members were invited to comment on the opportunity for different types of engagement, including webinars and social events.

The Deputy Chair of Court noted that in the course of her annual discussions several members had expressed their desire to offer their expertise to the University beyond their participation in Court meetings. In discussion, the Court considered how this might be

achieved, whether through informal groups or focused panels. Members considered the format and purpose of the annual Retreat and noted the proposal to return the Retreat to its previous time of year. The Principal invited the Court to bring challenge to the University Executive on such matters as commercialisation, Key Performance Indicators and the political & economic landscape.

**The Court decided:** to note the proposed workplan for the coming session.

## 8. COMMITTEE REPORTS

### (1) Audit & Risk Committee

The Convener of the Audit & Risk Committee introduced the report from the most recent meeting and drew the Court's attention to the Committee's consideration of three internal audit reports. Members were also apprised of progress made in the implementation of outstanding actions.

#### Minutes of the Committee's meeting on 13 August 2024

The Court received the minutes of the meeting.

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

### (2) Welfare & Ethical Use of Animals Committee

The Court received the report of the meeting of the Welfare & Ethical Use of Animals Committee held on 25 April 2024. Members considered whether the use of artificial intelligence and other models could replace the use of animals in science in future.

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

## 9. NARRATIVE FOR THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS

The Chair of Court recommended, and the Court agreed, to highlight to Senate the Court's discussions of the political environment and the funding challenges faced by the sector. Court further agreed that the Senate would be apprised of its consideration of the NSS results.

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

## 10. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE COURT

The Court agreed that the post-Court communication to staff and students would focus on the Court's discussions on the University's successes in being named Scottish University of the Year 2025 by the Daily Mail and in securing significant research grant income. In addition, the Court wished to commend the University community in reaching an agreed position in relation to the UoDSS pension scheme.

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

11. **DUSA MANIFESTO**

The Court received the above DUSA Manifesto for 2024/25 and commended the key objectives contained therein, as well as the DUSA Executive's commitment to working with the University to enhance the student experience.

**The Court decided:** to note the manifesto.

12. **SENIOR STAFF APPOINTMENTS**

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

Name	Title	New appointment	Internal promotion
Kostas Galanakis	Chair in Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship	Yes	No
Louise Stanley	School Manager (School of Life Sciences)	Yes	Yes
Shona Johnston	Director of Student Services	Yes	Yes
Nicola Ternette	Professor of Cell Signalling and Immunology	Yes	Yes
Ingo Hein	Professor of Plant Sciences	Yes	Yes
Judy Finlay	Director of China (Globalisation)	Yes	Yes
Jens Januschke	Professor of Molecular Cell & Developmental Biology	Yes	Yes
Lesley Sinclair	Director of Registry	Yes	Yes
Stephen Land	Professor of Physiology & Biomedical Education	Yes	Yes
Marios Stavridis	Professor of Stem Cell Biology	Yes	Yes
Susan Wylie	Professor of Biochemical Pharmacology	Yes	Yes

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost advised the Court that several other appointments had been made which had not been reflected in the report.

**The Court decided:** to note the appointments.

13. **GOVERNOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Members were invited to contact the Senior Policy Officer (Corporate Governance) if they wished to participate in any of the sessions detailed within the AdvanceHE development programme.

**The Court decided:** to note the report.

14. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair noted that the Court had shared much positivity in its discussion at the meeting which had coincided with World Suicide Prevention Day. Members noted that many faced unseen challenges across all levels of society and encouraged colleagues to feel able to reach out if they found themselves struggling or if seeing others who might be in distress.

15. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 12 November 2024.

16. **REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CHAIR OF COURT**

The Chair of Court and officers, aside from the University Secretary, Deputy University Secretary and the Clerk to Court, left the meeting to allow discussions on the Review of Effectiveness for the Chair of Court. The Deputy Chair of Court facilitated a session which sought feedback on the Chair's effectiveness, which the Deputy Chair would relay privately following the meeting.

**The Court decided:** the Deputy Chair would provide feedback to the Chair.

Amanda Millar  
Chair of Court  
University of Dundee