

University Court

19 September 2018, 14:00 to 16:45

EO1-EO2 Ness Walk (VC dial in code: 79708)



Attendees

Board members

Garry Coutts (Chair), Fiona McLean (Vice Chair), Willie Printie (Audit Chair), Andrew Rogers (FGPC Chair), Clive Mulholland (Principal & Vice Chancellor), Alan Simpson (President HISA), Rosemary McCormack, Anton Edwards (Rector), Andrea Robertson (Independent), Neil Stewart (Chair of Inverness College UHI), Alistair Dodds (Independent), David Sandison (Chair of NAFC), Heidi May (Independent), Linda Kirkland (Independent), Poonam Malik (Independent), Helps Sarah (Independent observer), Kirsty Macpherson (Independent observer), Callum Stephen (HISA Depute President), Michael Foxley (Chair FERB), Diane Rawlinson (Vice Principal Further Education), Fiona Larg (Chief Operating Officer & Secretary), Crichton Lang (Deputy Principal), Jeff Howarth (Vice Principal Enterprise), Lydia Rohmer (Vice Principal Tertiary), Neil Simco (Vice Principal Research & Impact), Roger Sendall (Clerk)

Meeting minutes

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair opened the meeting and noted that a quorum was present.

Court Agenda 19 September 2018.pdf

1.1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Gareth Davies, Roddy Burns, Iain Macmillan & Stuart Gibb.

1.2. Declarations of Interest

None.

1.3. Notification of other business

None.

1.4. Starring

Items 2.4, 3.2, 5.2, 7.3 and 8.1 were starred for discussion.

2. MINUTES OF MEETINGS

2.1. *Approval of the minutes of: 20 June 2018

The Court resolved to approve the minutes of the above meeting.

UC18-241 Court minutes 200618.pdf

2.2. *Matters Arising

The Court reviewed the paper setting out actions and matters arising from previous minutes. The following points were noted:

- Court considered that the quarterly status reports produced by academic partners and members of the

Action: HGRM &
COOS

University's SMT provided a valuable insight into University business and activities and agreed to formally request that Academic Partner Boards add the reports to their own meeting agendas as a standing item.

- Court would receive a paper on partnership compliance at the next meeting.

[UC18-242 Updated Matters arising.pdf](#)

2.3. *Review of Delegated Decisions

None.

2.4. Minutes from Committees of Court since last Court meeting

Action: HGRM

The Chair invited the chairs of committees of Court to each provide a brief report in connection with their most recent committee meetings.

It was agreed that committee meeting papers would be made available to all members of Court for reference via the University's Admin Control portal.

2.4.1. Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Chair of FGPC reported that the committee had received an informative presentation in relation to procurement of the University's new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The Chair further advised that the majority of committee discussion had focused on the proposal to develop a second phase of student residences at Fort William, challenges with under occupancy at existing student residences, issues with the finance system convergence project and pensions. These matters were also on the agenda for discussion by Court today.

[UC18-243a DRAFT FGPC Minute 100918.pdf](#)

2.4.2. Audit Committee

Action: HGRM

The Vice Chair explained that the Audit committee had received an excellent and reassuring presentation from the University's Data Protection Officer (DPO) in relation to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the new UK Data Protection Act.

Court agreed to invite the DPO to provide a brief presentation to members of Court at a future meeting.

[UC18-243b Audit draft minutes 30082018.pdf](#)

2.4.3. FE Regional Board

The Chair of FERB advised that draft minutes of the meeting held on 12th September were not currently available. The minutes would be published on Admin Control in due course.

The Chair of FERB explained that FERB reported that the committee had held good discussions on flexible workforce planning, enhanced curriculum mapping, digital learning and progress with the single policy environment project. FERB had also been pleased to note that the region had achieved both its core and ESIF student number targets and that SFC funding and credit cuts applied in AY17/18 had been reinstated.

It was noted that FERB had also had a frank discussion in relation to the allocation and distribution of rurality funding to individual academic partners and had agreed that the University must allocate rurality funding to the smallest and most rural partners in a manner that was consistent with SFC guidance in AY19/20 and cease making transitional payments of rurality funding to Inverness and Perth college who would not be eligible in accordance with SFC guidance.

2.4.4. Academic Council/Activity Report

Court noted the activity report and minutes of the Academic Council meeting.

[UC18-243d AC Officers Report 13 June 18.pdf](#)

2.4.5. Strategic Programme Assurance Group

Action: FGPC

Court noted the minutes of the last meeting.

Court recommended that FGPC should review the University's processes for monitoring performance and obtaining assurance in relation to business engagement and managing good relations with industry.

[UC18-243e SPAG Minutes DRAFT 20180615.pdf](#)

3. *CHAIRMAN/PRINCIPAL'S COMMENTS

The Principal & Vice Chancellor provided members with a brief report in relation to the University's recent successes, current challenges and concerns. The following points were highlighted:

- The University had performed particularly well in the National Student Survey this year ranking 5th overall in Scotland and exceeding its own CPI target.
- The University had met its own Partnership Planning Forum (PPF) HE student number targets for the first time this year.
- The University's first honorary doctorate had been conferred on Eileen Mackay at a ceremony at Highland Theological College in Dingwall by the Chancellor HRH Princess Anne.
- The University had also awarded its first research degree to a Msc Marine Science student from SAMS, previously research degrees had been awarded by the University of Aberdeen.
- The University had also been awarded Research Council capital funding and was the only post 92 institution to appear on the list.
- Financial sustainability, under occupancy of student residences, delays with the finance systems project, the capacity of the University to work flexibly and act quickly to meet new strategic opportunities (growth bids/island deals) as well as volatility/uncertainty in relation to future FE credit funding were highlighted as particular areas of concern.

3.1. *University Assembly

The Chair provided members with an overview of preparations for the partnership assembly at Eden Court on 26th September. Court noted that the assembly would provide an opportunity for all partnership stakeholders to voice opinions and concerns in relation to what the partnership currently did well and to make suggestions in relation to what the partnership should do in order to enhance operations, to address problems of financial sustainability, to create a positive culture of cooperation, to improve the student experience and create an institution that was greater than the sum of its parts.

Court noted that there was presently a high level of frustration within the partnership about a perceived lack of progress with previous initiatives to work more effectively together, to integrate colleges or to implement single/shared services and care was needed to ensure that the partnership assembly provided a genuine opportunity for participants to voice any concerns and to be heard, to identify common objectives and to set the tone and direction of the University's future development as a leading tertiary institution and destination of choice for learners and staff.

3.2. Quarterly Status Report

Court noted the quarterly status report.

Court was disappointed to note that a number of academic partners had not provided a status report this quarter and requested that the Principal & Vice Chancellor raise this matter through Partnership Council.

 [UC18-245 SMT and AP quarterly report.pdf](#)

4. COMMITTEES & MEMBERSHIP

4.1. Annual Effectiveness Reviews

Court noted the paper setting out the timescale for the next review.

 [UC18-246 Court Effectiveness.pdf](#)

4.2. *Governance Structures and the role of the RSB

COOS, VPFE

Court discussed the paper prepared by the Vice Principal Further Education in relation to developing and enhancing University governance structures to better reflect the tertiary nature of education delivery.

It was noted that the paper had been developed following the University's externally facilitated effectiveness review and as a response to comments from academic partner chairs who had expressed frustration about not having an appropriate consultative forum to discuss tertiary business.

Court welcomed and broadly supported the proposals outlined within the paper. Court agreed to establish a small sub-group to consider the implications of the proposals and to report back to Court with a firm recommendation by March 2019.

 [UC18-247 34 Governance Structures and the Role of the RSB.pdf](#)

4.3. *Remuneration Policy

Court considered a paper provided by the COOS seeking approval from Court to approve the process by which the Remuneration Committee reviews staff salaries.

It was noted that a number of members of Court were concerned about the proposal to recommend that the Remuneration Committee approve the payment of one-off bonuses to tier three staff based on exceptional performance. Concerns were founded on the basis that this was not a policy that could be mirrored by academic partners as those partners who were classified as public bodies were not permitted to make such payments as a matter of principle.

Contrary views were expressed including the importance of ensuring that the University provided equivalent remuneration policies to other HEIs and provided a fair mechanism for rewarding outstanding performance to encourage retention and to attract high calibre staff.

It was noted that Court would require sight of some additional information about the University's remuneration policy including the number and level of staff employed on spot salaries, information about the University's standard pay scales and sector norms. It was agreed to defer a decision on this matter until the next meeting of Court.

 UC18-248 salary review process 0918.pdf

5. STRATEGY & PLANNING

5.1. *Student Residences Occupancy update

HGRM

Court discussed the paper prepared by the Head of Governance and Records Management providing a summary of student occupancy within the halls of residence for AY2018/19 and actions to improve occupancy levels and to mitigate associated financial risks for the partnership.

Court noted that whilst occupancy had improved upon the previous year and that some good work had been done to mitigate losses and to increase occupancy overall, that significant challenges remained and there was a continuing need to focus attention on finding ways to increase student occupancy including developing curriculum that would attract more out of area students. In addition, Court noted that there was a need to review the affordability of the residences in the context of local market alternatives and including a review of the current policy of setting a uniform rent rate and modelling bursaries and or discounts to increase occupancy and the overall income as a means of reducing losses/exposure to any vacant rooms. It was noted that this work would be progressed via FGPC.

 UC18-249 Student Residences Occupancy.pdf

5.2. Student Residences - Fort William 2

COOS

Court considered a paper prepared by the Chief Operating Officer & University Secretary setting out a revised proposal for the development of a second 40 bed unit at Fort William. It was noted that the paper had been recommended for rejection by FGPC on 10th September on the basis that the proposition was too marginal and in the context of under occupancy and exposure to financial risks at existing residences.

Court noted that there was currently limited availability of affordable rental accommodation within Fort William and that this situation was likely to worsen in future as a result of new developments including the proposed Fort William Science and Technology centre. Accordingly, it was anticipated that there would be a requirement for an additional student residence in the future if the science centre was progressed. On this basis Court agreed to defer a decision on rejecting Fort William 2 and to refer the matter back to FGPC to consider the proposal again once further information was available about key developments and projected student numbers.

 UC18-250 Student Residences - Fort William 2.pdf

6. GOVERNANCE & RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1. Appointments to Assigned College Boards

Court homologated paper UC18-251 with regard to approving the appointment of a new Chair and independent members for the board of management of Perth College UHI.

 UC18-251 Appointments to Assigned College Boards.pdf

6.2. Amended Articles of Association update

Court noted the paper providing an update on progress with amending the University's Articles of Association.

 UC18-252 UC update on articles0918.pdf

6.3. Corporate Risk Register

Court considered and noted the updated corporate risk register.

 [UC18-253 Risk Management.pdf](#)

7. FINANCE & PERFORMANCE

7.1. Academic Partner Financial Monitoring

Court noted the summary of academic partner management accounts and financial monitoring data prepared by the Director of Corporate Resources.

 [UC18-254 AP Financial Monitoring.pdf](#)

7.2. NSS Report 2018

Court was pleased to noted the good results achieved by the University within the 2018 National Student Survey.

 [UC18-255 NSS brief report 2018.pdf](#)

7.3. Finance Systems Convergence Project update

Court discussed the paper prepared jointly by the Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Business Improvement providing an update on issues and progress with the finance systems convergence project.

Court noted that negotiations were continuing with the product provider.

 [UC18-256 Fin Syst Converg update-Sep 2018.pdf](#)

8. ACADEMIC BUSINESS

8.1. Annual report to SFC on institution-led review in AY 2017-18

DP

Court approved the annual report to the Scottish Funding Council in relation to the University's internal quality review processes, including subject and service review and annual monitoring.

It was noted that Court would welcome a presentation from the Deputy Principal or Academic Registrar in relation to quality monitoring processes at a future meeting.

 [UC18-257 SFC annual report Court.pdf](#)

8.2. Revised Criminal Convictions Policy

Court approved the amended Criminal Convictions Policy.

It was noted that the COOS would provide an assurance report in relation to safeguarding procedures and mechanisms in place to alert college management to high risk individuals.

 [UC18-258 revised CC policy v4.pdf](#)

8.3. Gaelic Language Plan

Court received and endorsed the draft gaelic language plan.

 [UC18-259 Gaelic Language Plan.pdf](#)

9. REPORTS & CIRCULARS

9.1. HISA Report

Court noted the update report provided by HISA.

 [UC18-260 HISA Court Update Sept 18.pdf](#)

10. DATE OF NEXT COURT MEETING: 28 November 2018

