MINUTES OF UNIVERSITY COURT  
2 OCTOBER 2012

Present: Richard Hunter (Convener)  
Principal Professor Sir Jim McDonald, Ronnie Cleland, David Gray, Dr Jack Perry, Margaret McGarry, Dr Jane Morgan, Jeremy Beeton, Dr Archie Bethel, Robin Crawford, Marion Venman, Malcolm Wishart, Councillor Stephen Curran, Dr Rose Mary Harley, Professor Kenneth Miller, Malcolm Moir, Rebecca Maxwell Stewart, Professor Niamh Nic Daeid, Dr Veena O'Halloran, Professor Lisa Woolfson, Niall Sturrock

Attending: Hugh Hall, David Coyle, Professor Scott MacGregor, Professor Iain Hunter, Professor Susan Hart, Brian Green for Professor Tony McGrew, Sandra Heidinger, Simon Jennings, Jill Kyle, Tom Collins, Jim McConnell, Dr Craig Young (for item 5)

Apologies: Gillian Hastings, Professor James Fraser, Professor James Thomson, Professor Tony McGrew

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Convener welcomed members to the first meeting of the new session, in particular extending a warm welcome to the new members: Mr Jeremy Beeton, Dr Archie Bethel, Dr Jane Morgan and Ms Marion Venman (new lay members of Court), Professor Niamh Nic Daeid, Dr Veena O'Halloran and Professor James Thomson (elected as Senate representatives), Councillor Stephen Curran (representing Glasgow City Council), Mr Malcolm Moir (USSA President) and Ms Rebecca Maxwell Stewart (USSA Vice-President, Education).

2. Minutes / Matters arising

The minutes of the meeting on 26 June 2012 were approved. The Convener looked forward to the Court’s business for the year noting key themes would include:

- REF Preparation
- Outcome Agreements
- TIC and Estates more generally
- Funding and Finances
- Attracting and Retaining talent

a. Strategy Refresh

The Principal reported on progress in delivering the University's Strategy. The Strategy will form the focus of the Executive Team’s strategic session on 3 October. Substantive discussion
on this issue would also take place at the November Court strategy session, with an emphasis on implementation and embedding the strategy across the institution.

b. James Weir Masterplan

The Chief Financial Officer indicated that the RSA Insurance settlement and reparations were in hand.

The Director of Estates Services provided an update on the latest position following the James Weir fire. Court noted that various occupants of the James Weir Building continue in temporary accommodation and that 105 teaching rooms had been upgraded over the summer at a cost of approximately £3M in order to address the loss of generic teaching rooms within the James Weir building.

With reference to the £28M investment programme in the building approved by Court in June, the Court noted that additional investment was also being considered and a sub-committee of the Estates Committee had been established to examine proposals.

Court noted its satisfaction that (i) there had been no loss of life in the fire, (ii) the University had reacted quickly and responded well to the situation and (ii) opportunities were being taken in terms of viewing the re-investment of the insurance settlement by bringing forward the planned refurbishment programme.

c. Review of Alumni Engagement & the role of the Graduates Association

The Chief Operating Officer reported that Dr Jeff Fergus had agreed to Chair the Review Group which would aim to report to Court in February 2013. Court noted that the Review Group would meet later that day and its agreed terms of reference would be circulated to Court members in due course.

3. Principal’s Report

The Principal updated the Court on key activity during the period since its June 2012 meeting including finalisation and submission of the University’s outcome agreement, meetings with the Secretary of State for Scotland Michael Moore and Lord Michael Heseltine, with Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, a Universities Scotland meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and positive discussions a group of the university’s senior officers had held with the Chairs and Principals of the Glasgow regional colleges.

Professor McDonald went on to draw the Court’s attention to recent positive recognition including the University’s shortlisting in four categories in The Times Higher Education Awards 2012 including UK University of the Year and Strathclyde’s improved performance in the recently published Sunday Times University Guide and the QS World Rankings and to recent successes in grant awards for major research projects and meetings with external partners including those undertaken during a business trip to the United States which had garnered an extension to the existing research collaboration between Strathclyde’s Institute of Photonics and Stanford University.

The Principal also observed that the University is becoming more prominent in strategic debate in recognition of its contribution to the productivity, effective working and sustainable economic growth of the country and its views were increasingly being sought out. In this regard, the
Principal had met variously with Professor Andrew Morris (Chief Scientist Scotland), Professor Muffy Calder (Scottish Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser), and Dr Sir Harry Burns (Chief Medical Officer) on health policy and research. The Principal concluded his update by outlining a recent positive meeting with Mr Gers Graus (CEO of The Children’s University) with a view to establishing a partnership which would be unique to Scotland and assist in further widening access.

4. Outcome Agreement with Scottish Funding Council

The Chief Financial Officer presented a summary of key deliverables from the Outcome Agreement submitted to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) at the end of July 2012. Court heard that introduction of Outcome Agreements marked the outset of a change in the developing relationship between the HE sector, the Scottish Government via the SFC which would place an increasing emphasis on specified outcomes in return for government funding. The Chief Financial Officer informed the meeting that the University was actively engaged with the SFC and Universities Scotland in considering ‘lessons learned’ from this inaugural year in order to inform the process in subsequent years.

Members noted that senior officers’ current expectation was that the allocation of the majority of funding for teaching, research and knowledge exchange would remain formulaic but ‘marginal’ funding would be used to incentivise universities’ activity in relation to skills, widening access and related government priorities. It was clarified that delivery of Outcome Agreements formed a condition of the Scottish Funding Council’s funding grant, but the potential extent of financial penalties for the non-delivery of outcomes remained a matter of discussion between Universities Scotland and the SFC.

Court noted that the implementation and delivery of the Strategy and the Outcome Agreement commitments were to be the focus of the Executive Team Strategy Session on 3 October. Members noted that monitoring of progress on key metrics would be incorporated into the Business Reporting process and the first court Business Report would be presented to the November meeting of Court. It was agreed that feedback would be sought from members of the Court Business Group and the Convener of the Audit Committee in order to shape final development of the business report format.

Court endorsed the Outcome Agreement submitted to the SFC and homologated its decision for the University to enter into this agreement.

5. REF Update

Dr Craig Young, Research Policy Manager, presented Court with an interim progress report on the REF 2014 Submission, focusing on the action being taken to improve both the volume and quality profile of the submission. The meeting noted that a more comprehensive report would be presented to the Court at its November strategy meeting by which time a fuller assessment of output profiles and impact case studies would have been undertaken.

Dr Young outlined that the REF Team had been in regular dialogue with all Heads of Department/School and Unit of Assessment Leaders. This had included discussions on the verification of eligible staff, the updating of research output information, impact case study
preparation and the drafting of the environment template (a narrative to describe the research environment).

Court discussed elements of detail relating to the University’s eligible population and the University’s assessment of quality profiles relative to RAE 2008. Members noted the competitive nature of the exercise meant it was not possible to compare preparedness and likely performance with other institutions, other than via profiles shared among partners making single submission within research pooling arrangements such as WestCHEM and SUPA. The Court also heard that research output constituted only 65% of the submission and that environment and impact were significant factors, the latter providing a particular opportunity for Strathclyde in light of its significant levels of knowledge exchange with industry.

The Court noted the progress report and asked and that performance profiles comparing projected performance to that in RAE 2008 would be included in the full report for November Court.

6. National Student Survey Report

The Director of Student Experience and Enhancement Services (SEES) presented Court with a report on the University’s results in the National Student Survey (NSS) 2012. The Report highlighted improvements in satisfaction levels across every section of the survey. Court heard that this positive outcome reflected a concerted two year campaign which promoted good practice across the University using the NSS data as a guide to focus activities on areas requiring particular attention.

Assessment and Feedback and Organisation and Management would remain key areas of focus in the coming year. Court noted the intention to build upon this positive progress to achieve the upper quartile for overall satisfaction in 2013 and across all sections of the survey within 3 years.

The President of the Students’ Association welcomed the overall satisfaction result and having overcome the timetabling difficulties encountered at the start of last session, noted that he could foresee further improvement in relation to Organisation and Management. The Student President went on to highlight satisfaction rates amongst subsections of students including those with disabilities and/or dyslexia, part-time and mature students. He observed that directing effort where the satisfaction of such groups was adrift of levels in the overall population could help improve both the learner experience and, by dint of this, make a positive contribution to Strathclyde’s NSS performance.

The meeting noted that surveys of undergraduate students are planned in years 1-3 in preparation for NSS in the final year and, in discussion, it was suggested that there may be merit in undertaking a survey of alumni circa 5 years post-graduation in order to gauge the views of former students’ experience at Strathclyde and how this had contributed to their career to date..

7. Court / Committee Membership

The Chief Operating Officer presented a paper on behalf of the Convener outlining the membership of Court and its Committees in 2012-13. Court approved the appointment of
Ronnie Cleland as Vice Convener of Court, noted the changes in Court membership and homologated the decision to appoint Marion Venman to the Staff Committee and Jeremy Beeton to the Estates Committee.

The Chairman of the Audit Committee informed the meeting that Mr Robin Crawford had intimated his intention to step down from the Audit Committee after its November meeting and the Court noted its thanks for the significant contribution he had made to the work of the Committee.

8. SFC Report: Internal Review Activity

Court received and endorsed the Institutional Statement on Internal Review Activity 2011-12 for the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), presented by Vice-Principal Professor Kenneth Miller who explained that this fulfilled Strathclyde’s statutory obligation to the SFC to report annually on institution-led review and external accreditation activity. The report demonstrated that the monitoring of academic quality assurance and enhancement activities was robust, highlighting areas of good practice and areas for improvement that were currently being addressed. This would also help to prepare the ground in anticipation of the next QAA Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) scheduled to take place during AY 2013-14.

9. Committee Reports

The Convener drew Court’s attention to the sub-committee reports provided for information.

The Convener of the Audit Committee reported that several recent internal audit reports had highlighted some non-compliance in following some prescribed policies and procedures but the Committee was assured that these matters are being pursued as appropriate by management.

10. AOB

A. University’s Golden Jubilee
The Court noted with interest the establishment of a Steering Committee to develop proposals to celebrate, in 2014, the Golden Jubilee of the University receiving its Royal Charter and it was agreed that a lay member of Court be invited to participate in this group.

B. Recognition of Estates staff work in readying the campus for the new academic session
Court joined Niall Sturrock in commending the Estates Team and others for the considerable commitment they had demonstrated in working to ensure the readiness of the estate for students and staff in time for the start of the academic year.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the Court would take place on 22 and 23 November 2012 at Ross Priory.

Dates for the remaining Court meetings in 2012/13 can be found on the Calendar of Dates.