MINUTES OF UNIVERSITY COURT
20 November 2014

Present: Richard Hunter (Convener)
Principal Professor Sir Jim McDonald, Vice-Principal Professor Scott MacGregor, Ronnie Cleland, Marion Venman, Gillian Hastings, Jeremy Beeton, Dr Jane Morgan, Margaret McGarry, Alison Culpan, Malcolm Roughhead, Susan Kelly, Dr Alistair Goldsmith, Dr Veena O’Halloran, Professor Lisa Woolfson, Professor James Thomson, Dr Debra Willison, Dr Jonathan Delafield-Butt, Niall Sturrock, Gary Paterson, Mairi MacVicar

Attending: Hugh Hall, David Coyle, Professor David Littlejohn, Professor Susan Hart, Professor Tony McGrew, Professor Atilla Incecik, Sandra Heidinger, Simon Jennings, Ray McHugh, Stella Matko, Dr Stuart Brough, Dr Lewis Allan

Apologies: Dr Jack Perry, Dr Archie Bethel, Councillor Stephen Curran

Welcome and apologies

The Convener noted apologies and welcomed Court members. There were no declarations of interest.

1. Minutes

The minute of the meeting held on 2 October 2014 was approved.

2. Matters arising

Court noted the following matters arising:

- Industrial action: The Director of Human Resources provided an update on the suspension of the boycott of marking and assessment initiated by the University and College Union in relation to proposed changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme. The suspension will continue until after the UK Joint Negotiating Committee meeting scheduled for 15 January 2015, with the Industrial Action Planning Group at Strathclyde continuing to meet in the interim.
- National Physical Laboratory (NPL): The Chief Operating Officer summarised an earlier email communication to Court members providing an update on academic and legal/commercial progress on the NPL partnership.

3. Principal’s Report

The Principal informed members of the following key activities since the October meeting:

- Engagement with the Smith Commission on Devolution, including through Universities Scotland
- Scottish Government Consultation on HE Governance (tabled under Item 9)
- Preparation for the REF 2014 results, to be considered at the February 2015 Court meeting
- International engagements, including with strategic partners the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and New York University
- Widening access strategy event involving head teachers from the Glasgow area and other key partners
- Winning the ‘Continuous Improvement: Institutional Change’ category at the 2014 Green Gown Awards
4. Financial Statements 2013-14

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Deputy Finance Director presented the draft Financial Statements 2013-14. The CFO provided a commentary on the statements, describing factors underpinning the surplus of £7.3M, growth in income to £254.4M and decline in liquidity to finance high levels of investment in the University estate.

Members discussed investment in spin-out companies, noting the change in approach over the previous two years to more focused investments in more rigorously assessed companies, with benefits expected in coming years with potential larger ‘exits’ to follow as a result. It was noted that the Commercialisation and Investment Advisory Board will review progress since its establishment shortly.

The Convener brought Court’s attention to the Treasurer’s comments submitted in advance of the meeting. The Treasurer’s comments were supportive of the Financial Statements and thanked the Finance team for their work in preparing the statements. The Convener of Audit Committee commented on the positive report from the external auditors and signalled support for the statements.

Court approved the draft Financial Statements 2013-14.


The Chief Financial Officer and Director of Strategy & Policy introduced the Q1 Business Report and Performance Measurement Framework annual report.

Members discussed the following points:
- The role of the newly formed Performance Development Group in assisting the Executive Team to meet projected surplus and income levels
- Refinements to the Business Reporting template as requested by Court, including the greater provision of quantitative information for student profile indicators
- Mechanisms for scrutiny of expenditure
- The relatively low number of students from the Rest of the UK, with the University seeking to recruit greater numbers at undergraduate and postgraduate level

6. Operating Plan 2014-15

The Chief Operating Officer presented the draft Operating Plan 2014-15. Court noted that:
- The plan meets the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance supporting guideline that ‘[Court] should also approve an annual operating plan that identifies those aspects of the strategic plan being implemented in the year in question’
- The plan summarises existing Departmental and Faculty plans
- In future years, the Operating Plan will be developed within the standard planning cycle and will be submitted to Court alongside the draft budget

Court approved the Operating Plan 2014-15.

7. Draft Outcome Agreement Additions for 2015-16

Court received the initial draft of the University’s Outcome Agreement annex addressing additional Scottish Funding Council requirements for 2015-16. Members discussed comparable practice in strategic partner universities and suggested that the document replace ‘Additions’ with ‘Revisions’ in the title.

Court noted that the annex will be further refined post-Court, with a ‘well-developed draft’ to be submitted to the Scottish Funding Council in early December.

8. University Marketing Strategy

Court considered the University’s draft Marketing Strategy, with the following points raised in discussion:
- Appointment of Professor Susan Hart as Associate Deputy Principal (Marketing) when Professor Hart’s term of office as Executive Dean of Strathclyde Business School concludes in July 2015
- Message Grids: could mention industrial connections as contributing to student experience; ‘Message Five – Our People’ proof points could increase to more than three
- Activity should be linked to strategic objectives (the ‘golden thread’ approach)
- Staff training to assist with promoting the university to prospective students
- The University's profile is high in key industries but more can be done to raise the University's profile more generally
- The role of the Strategic Marketing Group – to be established following approval of the Marketing Strategy – to include developing delivery plans and outcome-based milestones for implementation of the Strategy and a framework for reporting to the Executive Team and Court.

Court approved the University Marketing Strategy.

9. Higher Education Governance Bill consultation

A briefing and draft response to the Scottish Government’s Higher Education Consultation Bill was reviewed. Members discussed the likely ongoing role of the Privy Council given the University’s Royal Charter, support from external partners for the existing legal and regulatory framework which uphold university autonomy and the importance of close coordination with Universities Scotland.

Having considered views of student representatives, Court on balance supported a robust response to the consultation, with the responsibility for finalising the response delegated to Court Business Group given the closing date of end January 2015.

Items for formal approval

10. Convener’s Actions

Court approved the appointment of Susan Kelly and Alison Culpan to Staff Committee and approved the nomination of Reverend Ian Miller as an Honorary Member of Ross Priory.

Committee Reports

The following committee reports were received by Court:

11. Senate
12. Executive Team
13. Court Business Group
14. Audit Committee (including Annual Report to Court)

Court approved Audit Committee recommendations that:

i) The Financial Statements 2013-14 be approved (under Item 4 above)
ii) Relevant officers be authorised to sign the printed Financial Statements
iii) Ernst & Young LLP be retained as the University’s External Auditors for the audit of the Financial Statements 2014-15.

15. Education Strategy Committee Annual Report 2013-14
16. Estates Committee

17. Any other business

The Principal reminded members that the launch event for the Technology & Innovation Centre will take place on 16 December.

Date of next meeting

- 09.30-12.00 Thursday 26 February 2015

LA, 5 December 2014