

MINUTES OF UNIVERSITY COURT

5 May 2020

Meeting held by videoconference

Present: Dame Sue Bruce (Convener), Paula Galloway (Vice-Convener), Professor Sir Jim McDonald (Principal), Dr Jeremy Beeton, Ronnie Cleland, Amanda Corrigan, Alison Culpan, Gillian Hastings, Stephen Ingledew, Susan Kelly, Professor Scott MacGregor, Councillor Ruairi Kelly, Peter Young, Dr Archie Bethel, Kayla-Megan Burns, Matt Crilly, Dr Kathy Hamilton, Dr Neil McGarvey, Dr Katharine Mitchell, Gillian Pallis, Malcolm Roughead, Heather Stenhouse, Marion Venman, Brenda Wyllie

Attending: Professor Tim Bedford, Professor Douglas Brodie, Adrian Gillespie, Sandra Heidinger, Professor Atilla Incecik, Dr Veena O'Halloran, Professor Eleanor Shaw, Rona Smith, Professor Iain Stewart, Steven Wallace, Dr Daniel Wedgwood

Apologies: None noted.

Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed Court members and attendees to the meeting.

No interests were declared.

1. Minutes

Court **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2020.

2. Matters arising

There were no matters arising, other than those covered in the main agenda.

3. Principal's Report

The Principal outlined the University's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. He commended the work of the Executive Team, which had been meeting at least twice a week since the start of the crisis. Key points included:

- management of the University's student residences, support for those staying in them, and preparing to make residences available to NHS staff;
- support for Strathclyde students overseas, whether to return to their homes or on-going support for those remaining abroad;
- a successful transition to online teaching and working, demonstrating the robustness of established frameworks such as Strathclyde Online, with provision of IT equipment to students needing it;
- creation of a dedicated student hardship fund in relation to the pandemic situation, to which members of the Executive Team had made significant donations and to which other members of staff were able to contribute;
- provision of online wellbeing resources to staff and students, including an expanded offering from the counselling service;
- sector-leading decisions on releasing students from residential contracts, exemplifying the University's compassionate approach;

- co-ordinated regular communications with staff and students, directly from the Principal and other senior officers;
- creation of an Operational and Business Continuity Team, which included representatives of the student body;
- regular contact with the Scottish and UK governments and higher education sector bodies, including close engagement with Ministers and the SFC;
- significant contributions to national efforts to combat the pandemic, including the provision of experts to national advisory bodies, co-ordination of manufacturing and supply chains and research efforts: Strathclyde was the third highest recipient of pandemic-related research funding from the Scottish Chief Scientist's Office.

Anticipating the Chief Financial Officer's contribution later in the agenda, the Principal noted that the University was in a strong financial position in the context of the sector, while recognising the significant levels of uncertainty inherent in the pandemic situation and its potential consequences on a global scale. The University would monitor finances closely on an on-going basis and, where actions were required, act in a timely way and with the involvement of Court.

Overview of Positive Response & Planning Groups

The Principal gave an overview of the initial work carried out by three high-level groups to draw lessons learned and identify opportunities arising from the pandemic situation and to stimulate innovation as the University moves forward. It was noted that the University's Leadership Group had been involved in this initial work and had given excellent feedback, creating a sense of ownership of future planning across the institution.

Court members commended the University's response to the crisis and the leadership shown in difficult circumstances. It was noted that the move to online provision had been achieved smoothly, as evidenced by low numbers of issues raised to the Students' Association. Effective partnership with industrial partners to expedite emergency manufacturing efforts was also noted.

Members discussed the potential effects of the cancellation of school examinations on the admission of students from areas of multiple deprivation. It was noted that the University's contextual admissions processes had the flexibility to account for the unusual circumstances.

In addition, members discussed possible future developments of online teaching provision. Members noted that the existing framework allowed significant flexibility and that the pandemic situation had provided very useful experience for assessing future options.

4. Corporate Risk Register and COVID-19 Register

The University Secretary & Compliance Officer (USCO) explained that the Corporate Risk Register had been prepared for presentation to Court immediately prior to the pandemic crisis and the decision had been taken to supplement this with a separate Covid-19 Risk Register. The latter incorporated elements of a planned new approach to risk management and risk appetite.

Members noted references to wellbeing in the risk register and commended the University's attention to this in its handling of the Covid-19 crisis and the importance of continued work in this area.

Further discussion focused on financial risks and risks involving partner organisations that might be affected by the pandemic and its wider consequences. The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) noted that the University's debt covenants were secure for 2019-20 according to the latest modelling and that the University was maintaining close communication with its major lender, the European Investment Bank. The Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) noted that the University was working closely with major industrial partners to understand the impact of the current situation on them and to ensure the continuation of major projects. It was noted that the pandemic was likely to stimulate opportunities for new knowledge exchange activities, given the likelihood that supply chains would be re-examined in many industries to create greater resilience and the concentration of relevant expertise at Strathclyde.

Court **noted** the two risk registers.

5. Budget setting: Update on Progress and Submission of Financial Forecast Update to SFC

The CFO summarised the budget process, as amended in the light of the pandemic situation and its anticipated impacts. A 'base' budget model would be developed, which could be adjusted according to different scenarios as the situation developed. Adaptive modelling would be introduced in estimating tuition fee income, allowing the flexibility to account for changes in patterns of data relating to applicants. If necessary, approval of the budget at the June meeting of Court could involve approval of a range of potential budget outcomes. There had been fruitful engagement between Finance and the Faculties, which would continue to develop and refine the modelling.

The University was closely monitoring its debt covenant position. This would depend on the impact of the pandemic both on the University directly and on the global economy. While the University was in a strong position overall, careful management of cash, continued scenario planning and agility would be critical over the coming months.

In addition to the internal budget process, the University had responded to a call from the SFC to submit specified data to inform a sector-level scenario-planning exercise. Due to a restricted timescale, the submission had been circulated to Court Business Group for comment and agreed by the Convener on behalf of Court.

In discussion, members noted that, while high levels of uncertainty remained in wider environment, the University was well placed to mitigate any loss of income. Current indications were that the University had the potential to still see growth in international student numbers in the next academic year, subject to movement in current external constraints such as those impacting applicants' fulfilment of entry requirements, ability to travel or eligibility for visas. Applications from key intake groups were up year on year and remained under constant review. It was noted that the University was placed to supply what both governments and industry would need in the wake of the pandemic, in the form of high quality graduates, relevant applicable research and key contributions to growth-generating innovation.

Court **noted** the budget process update and **homologated** the approval by Convener's Action of the Financial Forecast Update submission to the SFC.

6. Special Advisory Group

The Associate Principal (Research & Innovation) outlined the nature and purpose of the Special Advisory Group, consisting of the Principal's Special Advisors, external experts and the University's leads in compliance and policy. The group was able to provide experience and external perspectives to complex new challenges facing the University and to advise the Principal and Executive Team.

Members commended the calibre of the Special Advisory Group's members and noted that diverse perspectives were critical, given, as an example, the disruptive potential of new technologies. It was agreed that the University leadership would co-ordinate with the student members of Court to investigate ways to involve a range of younger contributors.

Court **noted** the presentation.

7. TIC Zone Development within the Glasgow City Innovation District: Update on progress and timing

The Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) summarised how the TIC Zone project had been affected by the pandemic situation. Partners in the funding package had delayed decision-making and were re-assessing their future priorities and Scottish Enterprise would be re-assessing its future spend priorities across the board. The TIC Zone project was expected to remain highly attractive to funding partners as a generator of economic growth. Nonetheless, alternative sources of funding were being investigated as a contingency measure. Depending on the timescales adopted by partners, Court's approval for the final business case and funding model would be sought at either the June or October meeting of Court. Development of the research and innovation clusters associated with the Glasgow City Innovation District was continuing.

Court **noted** the progress report.

8. Amendments to Ordinances and Regulations

The USCO introduced this paper, noting that the majority of the proposed changes to the Ordinances and Regulations were required in order to ensure compliance with the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016 and that the Scottish Government had had sight of proposed new Ordinances.

Court **approved** the proposed amendments to the Ordinances and Regulations.

Committee Reports

Court received and **noted** the following committee reports:

9. Executive Team

10. Senate

11. Court Business Group

12. Court Membership Group

Court **approved** the appointment of Virginia Beckett to be a lay member of Court from 1 August 2020.

13. Audit & Risk Committee

Court **approved** the Whistleblowing Policy. The USCO gave clarification on the approval process for this policy, which had been changed since the previous iteration of the policy.

It was noted that Audit & Risk Committee had reviewed management actions from internal audit reports and found a record number of implemented actions. The Executive Team was commended for driving improvement in this area.

14. Estates Committee

15. Enterprise & Investment Committee

16. AOB

There was no other business raised.

Date of next meeting

- Wednesday, 17 June 2020