

MINUTES OF UNIVERSITY COURT

17 June 2020

Meeting held by videoconference

Present: Dame Sue Bruce (Convener), Paula Galloway (Vice-Convener), Professor Sir Jim McDonald (Principal), 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: Virginia Beckett, Professor Tim Bedford, Professor Douglas Brodie, Adrian Gillespie, Sandra Heindinger, Professor Atilla Incecik, Dr Veena O'Halloran, Professor Eleanor Shaw, Rona Smith, Professor Iain Stewart, Steven Wallace, Dr Daniel Wedgwood, Kirsty MacLeod (item 5), Lucy Noble (item 5).

Apologies: Dr Jeremy Beeton

Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed Court members and attendees to the meeting, extending a particular welcome to Virginia Beckett, who was observing the meeting at the Convener's invitation, ahead of joining Court as a lay member in the next academic year.

No interests were declared.

1. Minutes

Court **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2020.

2. Matters arising

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

3. Principal's Report and update on Covid-19 pandemic response

The Principal updated Court on the University's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, noting in particular the wide range of contributions that the University was making to tackling the pandemic and its effects, including diverse research work, engagement with industrial partners to expedite relevant manufacturing efforts and in-house manufacture of personal protective equipment, which had been distributed to a number of local health and care providers.

The University continued to take a values-led approach to staff and student issues during the crisis, including continued provision of rest days in recognition of additional pressures on staff that the situation had brought, and adaptation of student-facing services. The Principal had conducted a number of online engagement sessions with staff from different parts of the University, helping to both provide and gain insight into the impact of the pandemic on the University and the institutional response.

Looking back on the academic year beyond the pandemic, the Principal reflected on the University's many substantial successes and progress towards the achievement of strategic goals, as reflected in league table

and NSS performance and significant national awards. Strathclyde's standing as a research-intensive institution was reflected in its being the third-highest recipient of additional research funding recently distributed by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

The Vice-Principal outlined work in progress to prepare the University for the start of the next academic year, in the context of continued restrictions relating to management of the pandemic. To comply with the Scottish Government's roadmap to recovery, the University was preparing for stages of fully online teaching and blended learning. Intensive work within and across Faculties was being carefully co-ordinated and supported through relevant committees.

The University Secretary & Compliance Officer summarised the work of the Return & Resume Development Group, which combined members of the Executive Team, the Chief Executive of the Students' Union and relevant professional services leads. It was overseeing twelve work streams, preparing key aspects of the institution's preparedness for the resumption of normal activities with a suitably phased approach. The work was required to be agile, to work at pace while reacting to external developments and evolving government guidance.

Other work reported on included:

- creation of a Race Equality Working Group, building on discussions at the November Court strategy session;
- continued work to ensure readiness for the end of the transition phase of the UK's exit from the EU, through SEEWAG;
- close engagement with the SFC, Universities UK and Universities Scotland to influence the wider policy landscape, plus the Principal's appearance before the Scottish Parliament's Education & Skills Committee to advise on the impacts of the pandemic on the Higher Education Sector and how these should be addressed.

Members commended the University's response to the pandemic and its ability to continue to operate beyond immediate management of the crisis and to advance wider important agendas.

4. Q3 Business Report

The CFO summarised the financial elements of the report. Elements of both income and expenditure had been reduced by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The University's debt covenants remained secure, although headroom had been reduced.

The Director of Strategy & Policy summarised the non-financial elements of the report, highlighting in particular:

- continued significant growth in the total value of research awards, extending a multi-year trajectory;
- a continued positive picture regarding demand elements of student recruitment, although the pandemic situation had introduced much uncertainty and conversion would be key;
- an expectation that research postgraduate (PGR) students would be supported by the additional research funding provided by the SFC, a significant part of which was targeted at PGRs;
- high rates of acceptances of offers to prospective students from targeted SIMD quartiles, suggesting a positive trajectory for widening access.

The University was monitoring student demand at every level and working to reassure applicants and to support them to take up their places. The underlying picture was complex but being monitored in some detail, to understand, for example, different patterns in different countries among international applicants.

Members noted the importance of the University's contribution to widening access in the context of the wider social and economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

Court **noted** the business report.

5. Budget 2020/21

[RESERVED]

6. Climate Change and Social Responsibility Plan

The Associate Principal (Research & Innovation) and the Director of Strategy & Policy introduced the draft Plan, noting that this was a wide-ranging document and still actively in development. It was being presented at this relatively early stage to keep Court apprised of progress on this important strategic aim and in order to ensure that the overall direction and further development of the work had Court's support.

It was noted that the Plan recognised the different scales at which climate change would have an impact and at which action could be taken. Given this, the University was working very closely with other organisations at local, national and global levels, in addition to taking unilateral actions.

It was noted that a number of challenges and opportunities arose from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which had brought about sudden change in relevant areas, including travel, remote working and online delivery of learning and teaching. Despite the challenges of recovery from the crisis, it was understood that both the UK and Scottish Governments intended to maintain ambitious carbon reduction targets and to keep a focus on this area.

Members commended the draft Plan and discussed governance and accountability structures around the plan, noting the importance of stewardship by the Executive Team and the use of appropriate measures and indicators. Members acknowledged Strathclyde's leadership in this area, which would also create opportunities for the University in the context of ambitious carbon-reduction targets to which the Scottish and UK governments were committed.

Court endorsed the Plan for further development.

7. REF update

The Deputy Associate Principal (Research, Knowledge Exchange & Innovation) and the Research Policy Manager provided an update on preparations for the 2021 REF exercise. This included the first overall estimate of institutional performance. Although based on a cautious approach, this projected a strong performance. There remained opportunities for further improvement in some areas before the submission date. In addition, it was likely to be possible to include the impact of research and knowledge exchange work relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The REF team had been able to maintain its engagement with key internal stakeholders despite the pandemic and had not needed to change its overall approach in any significant way. The intention was to provide an update at each remaining Court meeting before the REF submission.

Court **noted** the update.

8. TIC Zone development update

The Chief Commercial Officer provided an update on the TIC Zone development. The business case had been created and subjected to Internal Audit scrutiny. The process for approval of the intended funding package had been affected by external agencies' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and the University was investigating alternative funding models as a contingency measure. The project continued to reflect the priorities of the Scottish Government and funding bodies and continued to receive strong support from stakeholders.

Court **noted** the update.

Items for formal approval

9. Court and Committee membership 2020/21

Noting that a member of Court remained to be appointed by Senate and that one student member of Court remained to be nominated by the students' association, Court **approved** the proposed membership of Court for 2020/21, including:

- the re-appointment of Stephen Ingledew and Peter Young as lay members of Court, each for a second term of office running from 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2024;
- the appointment of Dr Barbara Keating as a member of Court for a three-year term, having been elected by the academic staff; and
- the appointment of Andrew Eccles and William McLachlan as members of Court, each for a three-year term, having been nominated by the University's recognised trade unions.

10. USSA Financial Statements 2018/19, Budget and Plan

The Chief Executive of the Strathclyde Students' Union presented the organisation's 2018/19 financial statements and 2020/21 budget. It was noted that a change to accounting practices to include certain pensions liabilities on the balance sheet had turned a surplus into a loss for 2018/19. The Union's cash position had strengthened and enhancements had been made to governance and the assessment of risk.

Looking ahead, the Union's occupation of new premises within the Learning & Teaching building would be delayed as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. This would impact on the ability to expand and improve the Union's commercial activities. The Union was working closely with the University to plan for different eventualities. The University's support in the form of an uplift to the Union's block grant had been greatly appreciated.

The President of the Students' Union commended the Union's management and expressed confidence in the organisation's ability to respond to the challenges of the coming year.

Court **noted** the financial statements and **approved** the budget.

11. Re-appointment of Associate Principal & Executive Dean

The Principal noted his strong personal endorsement of the re-appointment of Professor David Hillier as Associate Principal & Executive Dean of Strathclyde Business School.

Court **approved** the re-appointment.

Item for information

12. Scottish Funding Council Review of Payment to the Former Principal of Aberdeen University

Court **noted** the publication of the report by the SFC, which had been circulated to Court for awareness, given that it concerned an investigation into governance matters at a Scottish university.

Committee Reports

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

13. Executive Team

14. Senate

15. Court Business Group

16. Court Membership Group (relevant approvals given under item 9)

17. Audit & Risk Committee

18. Staff Committee

19. Enterprise & Investment Committee

20. AOB

NMIS Land Agreement

Court **approved** the land agreement between the University and Renfrewshire Council regarding the land on which the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland would be constructed, details of which had been provided in an additional paper. It was noted that the land agreement would be in the form of a long ground lease, with the University having the option to convert this leasehold interest to a full heritable title.

Thanks to Court members on completion of terms of office

The Convener noted that Amanda Corrigan, Matt Crilly, Kathy Hamilton, Neil McGarvey and Gillian Pallis were all attending their final meeting as Court members, having completed their maximum terms of office in their respective roles, and thanked them for their service as Court members.

Date of next meeting

- Tuesday 6 October 2020