

## MINUTES OF UNIVERSITY COURT

17 June 2021

Meeting held by videoconference

**Present:** Dame Sue Bruce (Convener), Paula Galloway (Vice-Convener), Professor Sir Jim McDonald (Principal), Virginia Beckett, Dr Jeremy Beeton, Dr Archie Bethel, Linda Brownlow, Kayla-Megan Burns, Ronnie Cleland, Alison Culpan, Andrew Eccles, Gillian Hastings, Dr Barbara Keating, Susan Kelly, Professor Scott MacGregor, William McLachlan, Dr Katharine Mitchell, Malcolm Roughead, Heather Stenhouse, Marion Venman, Peter Young

**Attending:** Professor Tim Bedford, Professor Douglas Brodie, Adrian Gillespie, Professor David Hillier, Professor Atilla Incecik, Dr Veena O'Halloran, Professor Ian Rivers, Gordon Scott, Professor Eleanor Shaw, Rona Smith, Professor Iain Stewart, Steven Wallace, Dr Daniel Wedgwood, Manish Joshi (item 8), Olga Kozlova (item 11), Kirsty MacLeod (items 4 & 5), Lucy Noble (items 4 & 5)

**Apologies:** Chelbi Hillan, Stephen Ingledew, Councillor Ruairi Kelly

### Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed Court members and attendees to the meeting, noting apologies as above.

No interests were declared.

#### 1. Minutes

Court **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2021.

#### 2. Matters arising

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

#### 3. Principal's Report

The Principal updated Court on recent developments, noting that Court was now also being kept informed by receipt of the Principal's weekly messages to staff and the *Inside Strathclyde* bulletin. Key points included the following:

- The University intended to provide opportunities for all recent graduates to attend a graduation ceremony, following the cancellation of such ceremonies during the time of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.
- The Strathclyde Acceleration Teams were working at pace to progress ideas developed through the Court strategy session in May.
- The Principal was engaging with key figures in and around the HE sector, following a number of significant political and public appointments, including the new Scottish Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, Jamie Hepburn MSP. Initial engagements were positive in all cases and Strathclyde was well placed to influence and deliver on relevant priorities.
- Following a vote by staff and students, which had attracted high levels of interest, the two parts of the Learning & Teaching Building development were to be named after Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell

Burnell and Professor Mary Dunn. The University was considering ways to honour the other women who had been shortlisted in this process.

- The University's new Chief Digital & Information Officer, Beth Lawton, was to join the University in July.
- The current Executive Deans of the Faculties of Engineering and Science would be stepping down from these roles within the next academic year. The Principal expressed his gratitude to Professor Incecik and Professor Stewart for their significant contributions to the University's success in these roles. A recruitment process would be initiated during the summer, overseen by the Convener and Senior Deputy Convener of Court.
- The Principal was shortly to begin new staff engagement sessions, the fourth round of these sessions since the Covid-19 pandemic had begun.
- The Global Talent recruitment programme was reaching its final stages of the annual cycle. Offers had been made to highly talented researchers at both Chancellor's Fellow and professorial levels. The programme had attracted high quality candidates from around the world. 1400 applications had been received in total.
- The Executive Team had undertaken First Responder training in relation to sexual assault. This training was now to be rolled out through Leadership Group. In this context, the Principal reminded Court of the University's selection as a pilot institution for the EmilyTest Charter on gender-based violence and of the implementation of the QC Inquiry report recommendations (see item 12).
- Strathclyde had become the first Scottish university, and third in the UK, to be accepted as a signatory to the University Global Coalition, a global platform established to support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Three members of Strathclyde staff were among the 100-strong cohort selected worldwide this year to take part in the Homeward Bound global leadership programme for women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine.
- The University had seen positive results in national and international rankings, both institutionally and in the performance of individual subject areas. It was noted that such progress came from delivering the University's strategy, not targeting success in rankings.
- Eight members of Strathclyde staff had been elected Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

The University Secretary & Compliance Officer (USCO) updated Court on developments in the management of Covid-19. The number of positive tests recorded in the University community had been low and the number of cases continued to be monitored carefully in the context of the easing of national restrictions. Planning was underway for the potential establishment of vaccination sites on campus. The government had announced that international students would be able to benefit from national vaccination programmes within the UK.

The Convener commended the effective and efficient handling of the Covid situation by the University and, more broadly, the University's achievements over the academic year, in spite of the unusual circumstances.

Court **noted** the report.

#### **4. Q3 Business Report 2020/21**

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) presented the core financial data from the Business Report, focusing on progress between the Q2 and Q3 forecasts.

**[Reserved]** The value of the University's investment portfolio had recovered to a level slightly above pre-pandemic levels. Both income and expenditure were reduced relative to the Q2 forecast (underlyingly, accounting for capital grant recognition), largely due to direct effects of the pandemic. **[Reserved]** The forecasts gave grounds for cautious optimism, based on the expectation of further easing of Covid-19 restrictions nationally.

Members commented that the report demonstrated excellent stewardship of the University's resources. The CFO also provided a brief summary of progress with the Learning & Teaching Building project. The University had taken possession of the building and fit-out was in progress. It was noted that the University had settled,

at an appropriate and proportionate level, a claim from contractors in relation to additional costs brought about by the pandemic. This had been met within the project budget.

The Director of Strategy & Policy summarised other elements of the report. Key points included that:

- the value of research applications was in line with the same reporting stage in previous years;
- the value of research awards was lower than the same point the previous year, but this was partly attributable to uneven distribution of awards and the year-end position would be key;
- PGR numbers would be monitored carefully, as extensions due the pandemic were known to have expanded the overall PGR population temporarily;
- new Global Research Scholarships would help to increase the PGR intake and also mitigate the effects of the change in fee status of EU-domiciled students;
- although global uncertainty remained, student recruitment was showing strong positive trends, with both applications and offer-making showing growth on this point in the cycle in previous years.

Members noted the positive overall picture and commented on the student recruitment figures in particular, noting that the University's overall public profile was strong and continuing to grow, including through good performances in league tables and well-targeted online marketing during the pandemic.

Court **noted** the business report.

## **5. Budget, Financial Forecasts and Operating Plan, 2021/22**

The Chief Financial Officer presented the budget and financial forecasts for 2021-23.

The budget would produce a robust cash position and preserve headroom on all debt covenants. No new borrowing was foreseen, although the University would apply for SFC Financial Transactions loans as in recent years.

In the context of global uncertainty surrounding anticipated emergence from the Covid-19 pandemic, the budget was tipped to risk. It had been prepared on the basis of the best available information regarding the re-opening of the economy and the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions and this suggested a near-normal return to operations in most areas. Given the possibility of different scenarios, it was recognised that the University would need to maintain an agile approach in the coming year. Revised cost control mechanisms and an increase in 'stage-gating' for significant investments would contribute to this. This approach to planning would allow the University to capitalise optimally on opportunities in the post-pandemic context.

An overall surplus was forecast on the basis of the budget, but it was noted that a significant item of capital grant recognition, relating to the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS) project, heavily influenced this outcome. An underlying breakeven position was budgeted for.

While income from tuition fees was recognised to be a risk area, current indications supported the assumption of a return to growth in this area. The University's successful introduction of PGT courses with January intakes, alongside increasing maturity of online delivery, provided significant opportunities to support budgeted growth.

Budgeted expenditure included provision for the costs of returning to campus in the wake of the pandemic and assumed a reduction in travel costs relative to pre-pandemic levels.

The Treasurer commented that the budget assumptions were well evidenced and that the approach to managing the level of risk in the external environment was well considered. The University's record to date enabled Court to take confidence in both the budget process and the ability to deliver the budget.

Members enquired as to the University's exposure to exchange rate fluctuations. The CFO noted that some parts of the University's operations were affected by exchange rates, notably purchasing of stock for the library, but that the financial implications were not significant in the institutional context.

The Director of Strategy & Policy presented the University Operating Plan. Priorities for the year ahead included the University's response to the impacts of Covid-19, delivery against the Vision 2025 KPIs and embracing the opportunities brought by major new developments, including the Learning & Teaching Building, NMIS, the Glasgow City Innovation District and opportunities around the UN Climate Change

Conference, COP26. It was noted that presentation of the Plan fulfilled a requirement of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance, in addition to providing additional context to the budget.

Court **approved** the budget and the Operating Plan.

## **6. TIC Zone Planning: Design Stage 3 Approval**

The Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) provided an update on the TIC Zone project. The Covid-19 pandemic had unavoidably brought about delays to the project, in part through its impact on funding partners, but the importance of the potential contribution of the TIC Zone, as a driver of city centre economic recovery, was heightened in the current circumstances and it was well aligned with the priorities of both Scottish and UK governments.

It had been agreed that the project would be phased, with the TIC East building developed first. Estates Committee and the Executive Team had agreed that the building should be designed to the Passivhaus standard, the highest possible environmental standards for buildings of this kind, and to Wellness Design standards.

A full revised business case was to be presented to Court in the autumn. The project was now at a stage where discussions could be progressed with funders for all of the three parts of the funding package.

Approval to commence Design Stage 3 at this stage would prevent delays of some months and would help to create clarity for potential funders. Court's approval was sought in line with an earlier commitment to seek approval for significant new stages in the project.

Members enquired as to the risk of escalating materials costs in the current global environment. The CFO noted that the procurement and planning were being carried out with awareness of this and other risks and with a view to protecting the University from them. The project budget contained appropriate levels of contingency funding.

Court **approved** the next stage of design and contractor procurement and associated costs.

## **7. Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: Progress Report and Future Plans**

The Associate Principal (Research & Innovation) gave a summary of the background to the report. The use of such Concordats was the primary mechanism for setting agreed standards in relation to research across the autonomous institutions of the higher education sector. This new Concordat would complement others that were already well established. The intention was to co-ordinate annual reporting to Court on all relevant Concordats. For this reason, Court had been supplied with a brief interim update at this stage. It was noted that this national Concordat was well aligned with Strathclyde's own work in relevant areas, including elements of the People Strategy and work on PGR experience.

Court **noted** progress within the first year of Strathclyde becoming a signatory to this Concordat and the strategic objectives that would drive progress over the next year.

## **8. University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA) Budget and Plan, 2021/22**

The USSA President and Chief Executive presented the Student Union's budget for the financial year 2021/22, noting risks and mitigations in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and opportunities that would be created by the opening of the Learning & Teaching Building. A number of achievements over the last year were noted, including significant work in tandem with the University to ensure that students were supported in the difficult circumstances of the pandemic. The Union's appreciation was noted in relation to an agreed increase to the block grant received from the University.

The CFO noted the Union's strong cash position and overall resilience in the face of a period of external uncertainty but also significant opportunity.

Members noted the potential impacts of any changes to pensions costs over the coming year. While the budget did not make provision for these, this area was being closely monitored by the Union and its trustees. Members enquired as to the impact of the pandemic on Freshers' Week in the new academic year. The Union had taken the decision not to plan large events under the current circumstances, but hoped to be able both to provide a suitable welcome to new students and to benefit commercially through appropriate use of its venues in the new building.

Court **approved** the budget.

### **Items for formal approval**

#### **9. Court and Committee membership 2021/22**

The USCO summarised the proposed membership of Court and its committees for the coming academic year and remaining vacancies to be filled over the summer.

Court **approved**:

- an amendment to the Regulations, with respect to the Terms of Reference of Audit & Risk Committee, to allow the appointment of an additional co-opted (non-Court lay) member;
- the appointment of Neelam Bakshi, Melfort Campbell and Mary-Jo Jacobi as lay members of Court from 1 August 2021;
- the re-appointment of Virginia Beckett and Paula Galloway as lay members of Court, each for a term of four years from 1 August 2021;
- the appointment of Elaine Blaxter, University Librarian & Head of Library Services, as a member of Court, on the basis of election by Administrative and Professional Services, Technical and Operational Services staff;
- the re-appointment of Paula Galloway to the role of Vice Convener;
- the appointment of Virginia Beckett to the role of Deputy Convener, Estates; and
- the extension of the Convener's term of office by one year, in the context of the unusual conditions of emergence from the pandemic and the consequent development of key strategic initiatives on new timescales.

Court **noted**:

- a remaining vacancy for a member of Court elected by Senate, which would be filled in due course through the usual Senate processes;
- appointments and re-appointments to co-opted (non-Court) positions on Court committees;
- remaining vacancies for Court members on Court committees, which would be filled, through correspondence with Court Membership Group and Court, over the summer; and
- other details of the anticipated membership of Court and relevant committees.

#### **10. Case for Investment for Royal College Fire Safety Improvements**

Court **approved** the proposed fire safety improvement works.

#### **11. Intellectual Property & Commercialisation Policy**

The Director of Innovation & Industry Engagement introduced the paper, noting that the policy was largely a consolidation of and update to existing policies.

Court **approved** the policy.

### **Items for Information**

#### **12. Report of the Inquiry Recommendations Implementation Group**

Court **noted** the report.

### **13. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee Annual Report**

Court **noted** the report.

### **Committee Reports**

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

**14. Executive Team**

**15. Senate**

**16. Court Business Group**

**17. Court Membership Group**

**18. Audit & Risk Committee**

**19. Staff Committee**

**20. Estates Committee**

**21. Enterprise & Investment Committee, incorporating Annual Report**

**22. AOB**

The Convener thanked the following members, who were due to demit office at the end of the academic year, for their substantial contributions to Court and to the wider University:

- Dr Jeremy Beeton
- Dr Archie Bethel
- Kayla-Megan Burns
- Chelbi Hillan
- Dr Katharine Mitchell
- Heather Stenhouse
- Marion Venman

The Convener and the Principal also thanked Rona Smith, who was leaving her role as Director of Strategy & Policy, for her many important contributions to the University.

### **Date of next meeting**

- Tuesday 5 October 2021