

MINUTES OF UNIVERSITY COURT

6 October 2020

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, Chelbi Hillan, Stephen Ingledew, Dr Barbara Keating, Councillor Ruairi Kelly, Susan Kelly, Professor Scott MacGregor, William McLachlan, Dr Katharine Mitchell, Malcolm Roughead, Heather Stenhouse, Peter Young, Brenda Wyllie

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, Helyn Gould (item 6), Claire Carroll (item 7), Professor Stephen McArthur (item 7)

Apologies: Marion Venman

Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed Court members and attendees to the meeting. The Convener extended a particular welcome to new members of Court for 2020/21, who were attending their first formal business meeting.

No interests were declared.

1. Minutes

Court **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2020.

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. Court had recently received a separate update in relation to management of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the present meeting, the following points were noted by the Principal and the University Secretary & Compliance Officer:

- Teaching had begun in the new academic year. In accordance with the University's plans, teaching was entirely online at this stage. There would be a transition to blended learning within 3-5 weeks, subject to external conditions and guidance at the time.
- There had been cases of Covid-19 in University accommodation and elsewhere in the student community, but these were isolated clusters rather than significant outbreaks. These cases were being dealt with within households, in accordance with government guidance. While the data were by nature subject to fluctuation, the evidence pointed to an on-going reduction in the number of cases on campus.
- The University had worked closely with the Students' Association, whose contributions were commended by the Principal, to manage the arrival of students on campus and the commencement of online teaching.

- A 'buddying' system for students had had a very positive response from staff, with many volunteers coming forward.
- The University continued to work closely with Public Health Scotland and the NHS and to engage with the Scottish Government and the higher education sector. Glasgow City Council's Environmental Health officers had visited University accommodation and expressed satisfaction with arrangements for preventing and managing the virus.
- There had been regular communication with students both to clarify required behaviours and to convey positive messages and support around health and wellbeing.
- The University was injecting further funds into its Covid-19 Hardship Fund, which had seen high demand.
- November graduation ceremonies had been cancelled. A Conferment Day would be marked online, as had been done in place of summer graduations.
- Through the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland, the University was continuing to contribute to manufacturing efforts that would help combat the pandemic, including further manufacture and distribution of PPE equipment, for the University's own use and for local charities.
- A number of important research projects relating to Covid-19 were being pursued in the University, often in partnership with the NHS.

The Principal's updates on other topics included the following:

- The University had risen sharply in the Guardian and Sunday Times rankings of UK universities.
- In Widening Access, the University was exceeding Scottish Government targets. At the same time, entry qualifications remained high.
- A Strathclyde Medal ceremony had been held, providing recognition for the efforts of staff across the University. The Principal thanked the Convener for her contributions to this event.
- The Principal had completed a new series of engagement sessions with University staff, with over a third of staff attending in total. Other Senior Officers had also attended. The sessions had generated much positive feedback from staff.
- The University's Centre for Sustainable Development had been launched on 1 October. On the same day, the University had published its sustainable investment plans.
- Notable recent achievements by Strathclyde staff included the award of the 2021 IEEE Richard Harold Kaufmann Award to Professor Stephen McArthur, for his work in smart energy systems.
- Despite the unusual and challenging external context, the University was continuing to recruit exceptional academic talent and was maintaining and extending its international partnerships.

Court **noted** the report.

4. Student Recruitment 2020/21 – UG, PGT & PGR Position at 29 September 2020

The Director of Strategy & Policy updated Court on student recruitment and fee income, noting that the Covid-19 pandemic had had a significant impact in many areas of recruitment. The data were consequently expected to be subject to change for a longer period. In addition to an extended window for student arrivals, a number of additional taught postgraduate (PGT) programmes starting in January would mean that the recruitment data would continue to change for a number of months.

Widening Access admissions had reached the target set by the Commission on Widening Access. The University was not expected to exceed tolerance levels for recruitment of SFC-funded students. In general, recruitment of home and rUK students at both undergraduate and PGT levels was strong. Research postgraduate recruitment was showing growth from the previous year.

[Reserved]

The Chief Financial Officer noted that the financial impact of reduced international fees income would not, under realistic scenarios, lead to a breach of the University's proposed updated debt covenants, with the European Investment Bank, while noting that the negotiations for these covenants was ongoing. The Chief Financial Officer stated that quantifying the full changes to budget resulting from the current Covid-19 response would be completed as part of the Q1 Forecast process.

It was noted that the University was engaged in co-ordinated communications efforts to provide as much reassurance as possible to new and continuing students.

Court **noted** the report.

5. SFC Outcome Agreement update

The Director of Strategy & Policy outlined the current position regarding the University's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The SFC had suspended the Outcome Agreement process in response to the pandemic crisis, but Strathclyde had submitted its near-final document for the previous year, with appropriate caveats to reflect its dependence on previous circumstances. No guidance had yet been received regarding the current academic year's Outcome Agreement process, but the University and the wider sector were in dialogue with the SFC. Both the content and timing of the process were expected to differ from other years. Guidance was not expected to be issued until the first phase of the SFC's Review of Coherence and Sustainability had been completed. Court would be informed of developments.

Court **noted** the update.

6. National Student Survey 2020

Helyn Gould, Deputy Associate Principal, summarised key results of the National Student Survey (NSS), which had been largely completed prior to the Covid-19 crisis and had been judged by regulators not to have been substantially affected by it. The NSS provided important input to inform the University's pursuit of excellence in learning and teaching.

Strathclyde's results showed that the overall gains of the previous year had been maintained, with the overall satisfaction rating improving relative to the University's benchmark group. At greater levels of detail, movement could be found in both directions. Full analysis would be carried out of areas in which improvement had been evident and where more work was required, to learn lessons from both. Past successes had been used to disseminate good practice more widely across the University and this approach would continue. An analysis in terms of sector quartiles confirmed that the University had improved in many areas not only in its absolute scores but also relative to other institutions.

Members discussed the ways in which best practice could be identified outside the University. It was noted that the Higher Education sector had a strong culture of sharing best practice in these areas and that the University actively monitored relevant external developments.

Further discussion centred on the detailed parameters according to which the data could be analysed and the ways in which qualitative data could supplement the quantitative results of the NSS. It was noted that the University drew on a number of sources of qualitative and quantitative data in addition to the NSS.

Court **noted** the presentation.

7. REF update

Professor Stephen McArthur (Deputy Associate Principal) and Claire Carroll (Research Policy Manager) gave an overview of preparations for the REF2021 submission. The current focus of preparations was on enhancing Environment and Impact statements and case studies. The University continued to take a conservative approach in estimating outcomes.

Discussion focused on the development of the University's approach to REF preparations since the previous REF exercise. It was noted that the University had a strong understanding of requirements and could be confident that appropriate actions had been taken, with the focus in the right areas. The Principal and staff

members of Court commended the REF team's contributions. It was noted that the team had been able to continue to engage across the University despite the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members noted the wider, cross-sector importance of a robust, positive narrative on social and environmental governance and that the REF was an opportunity to convey the University's contribution in these areas.

Court **noted** the update.

8. Corporate Risk Register

The University Secretary & Compliance Officer (USCO) presented the two corporate risk registers, one being dedicated to risks relating to Covid-19 and the other a continuation of the pre-pandemic register. The intention was to merge these two registers in the near future, reflecting the fact that it was necessary to begin to view management of Covid-19 as being integrated with business-as-usual. The Vice-Convenor noted that this approach had been welcomed by Audit & Risk Committee.

In subsequent discussion, members noted how both practical and reputational risks relating to the pandemic had been managed and how related opportunities may arise on the basis of changes that had been prompted by the crisis. In particular, members noted how Strathclyde had been able to transition rapidly and successfully to online and blended learning on the basis of existing high-quality online provision and discussed how the benefits of online learning might be captured and used in the future, as part of a wider programme of digital transformation.

Court **noted** the risk register and **approved** the top risks.

Items for formal approval

9. Court Strategy Session, November 2020 – initial planning

The Convenor and the Principal outlined initial plans for the Court Strategy Session. Given the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, the event would be held entirely online and would be limited to one day, 26 November 2020. A shortened business meeting would be followed by a strategy session that would include breakout group discussions, which would build on previous strategy discussions carried out within the Executive Team and Leadership Group. Each discussion group should have a Court lead in addition to an Executive lead; the Convenor invited members to volunteer to act as Court leads.

Court **noted** the outline plans.

10. Amendments to the Ordinances and Regulations

Court **approved** amendments to the University's Regulations and Ordinances in order to effect:

- removal of the upper limit on co-opted members of Enterprise & Investment Committee; and
- changes to the list of the University's Senior Officers, to remove the position of Chief People Officer and add the position of Chief Information Officer.

10a. Convenor's Actions

Court **homologated** prior approvals, by Convenor's Action, of:

- the appointment of Heather Stenhouse to Court Business Group and Linda Brownlow to Court Membership Group;
- the granting of University Status to NHS Lanarkshire, subject to specified management arrangements; and
- the submission of the ELIR Follow-on Report to QAA Scotland.

11. Annual Review of key Court documentation

Court **approved** new versions of the Court Standing Orders and Handbook for Members of the University Court (incorporating Court's Statement of Primary Responsibilities), noting that amendments had been made in order to:

- reflect the requirements of the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016, which the University had implemented for the beginning of academic year 2020/21;
- align with the University's Charter and Statutes, as revised earlier in 2020 in the context of implementing the above Act;
- reflect changes made within the last year to certain committees of Court; or
- improve the clarity of the text.

12. Annual Statement on Institution-led Review of Quality for Scottish Funding Council, Academic Year 2019/20

Court **approved** the Annual Statement on Institution-led Review of Quality, noting that, in line with standard practice, this had been submitted to the SFC by its deadline of 30 September 2020, marked as being subject to Court's approval. [Minute note: a Statement of Assurance noting Court's approval was sent by the Convener to the SFC after the meeting.]

Item for information

Court received and **noted** the following items:

13. Court Members' Annual Survey 2020

14. Complaints Handling Annual Report 2019/20

15. Health & Safety Annual Report and Strategy update

Committee Reports

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

16. Executive Team

17. Senate (relevant approvals noted under item 10a)

18. Court Business Group

19. Court Membership Group (relevant approvals noted under item 9)

20. Audit & Risk Committee

21. Staff Committee

22. Enterprise & Investment Committee

23. AOB

There was no other business.

Date of next meeting

- 26 November 2020