

# **Minutes – University Court**

10/06/2024 | 2:00pm to 4:00pm

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

Mr Harry Adam (Chair); Ms Leen Ali; Dr Mary Allison; Professor Kirstie Blair; Ms Pamela Crawford; Mr Kenny Fraser; Ms Susan Gordon Hardy; Mr Hamish Grossart; Dr Magdalena Ietswaart; Mr Douglas Kearney; Dr Deborah Keith; Professor Malcolm MacLeod; Ms Lynne Marr; Professor Sir Gerry McCormac; Ms Catriona Morrison; Mr Julian Roberts; Mr William Stancer; Professor Julie Tinson and Ms Justine Pedussel.

In Attendance

Mr Graeme Duff, Ms Rose Edwards, Ms Jennifer Harrison, Ms Karen Lawson, Mr Colin McNally, Ms Joanna Morrow, Ms Eileen Schofield, Professor Terri Scott, Professor Leigh Sparks, Mr Liam Spillane, Mr Moray Nichol (Clerk), Dr David Telford, Professor Neville Wylie and Dr Lee Zhuang.

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Clare Wilson, Dr Poonam Gupta, Mr Graham Hastie, Mr Gary Fleming and Provost Elaine Watterson.

Court approved the appointments recommended by Governance and Nominations contained in the report at Item 15.  The Chair subsequently welcomed Ms Leen Ali (Students’ Union President) and Ms Justine Pedussel (Students’ Union Vice President Communities) to the meeting following their appointment to University Court.

The Chair welcomed Professor Kirstie Blair following her appointment to University Court and welcomed Professor Terri Scott, Deputy Principal (Student Experience) who joined the University of Stirling in April 2024 in an interim capacity.

The Chair paid tribute to Dr John Rogers and expressed his appreciation of John's extensive knowledge and experience, influential leadership and his contribution to higher education, research and innovation.

The Chair thanked Professor Judith Phillips and Professor Leigh Sparks for their contribution and expertise in their capacity as Deputy Principals.

The Chair provided an update on recent activity.  He noted that the largest contingent of swimmers from the University of Stirling to date was competing at the Olympic Games in Paris and wished them luck on behalf of the University Court.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Court approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2024.

4. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

It was confirmed that the revised Health and Safety Policy approved by University Court at its meeting held on 26 March 2024 addressed the University's obligations relating to stress in the workplace.

There were no other matters arising.

5. Key Developments in the External Environment

Court received an overview of developments in the external environment that included coverage of the UK General Election, the Migration Advisory Committee review of the Graduate Route, Scottish Funding Council Final Funding Allocations for 2024/25 and Scotland’s change of First Minister.

Members congratulated the University of Stirling Management School on being accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Accreditation was confirmed following a rigorous external review and placed the Stirling Management School among the top 6% of business schools globally.  It was confirmed that following submission of an Athena Swan Charter application, a silver award for the institution was conferred subject minor conditions being met.  The award recognised efforts toward the advancement of gender equality and inclusive working practices.

Court noted the recent developments in the external environment.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

6. Quarter Three Performance Report

Court received an overview of the Quarter Three Performance Report underpinned by the management accounts.  It was confirmed the management accounts presented a preliminary out-turn forecast surplus of £2.1m for 2023/24.  This was a £2.2m reduction on Quarter 2 and a £2.5m reduction against the Court-approved budget.  Total income generation was forecast to be £171.8m, £0.9m higher than budget.

Members considered the financial sustainability of the UK Higher Education sector and factors in the external environment that could present opportunities or risks to the University.  Members discussed key operating indicators associated with the University’s performance at Quarter 3 that included net operating cashflow, bad debt provision, covenant compliance and student satisfaction.  It was confirmed the Quarter 3 position for tuition fee income highlighted an uplift from Quarter 2 of £1.5m, due mainly to the Spring 2024 intake of international undergraduate and postgraduate taught students.  This resulted in an increased forecast to £69.4m, £1.5m ahead of the outturn position last year but £2m behind the budget position.  It was confirmed the University would be covenant compliant in 2023/24 and was forecast to end 2023/24 with a net operating cash inflow of £6.1m, compared to £17.6m at Quarter 2.

Court approved the Quarter 3 Performance Report.

7. Planning and Budgeting 2024/25

Court received an overview of Planning and Budgeting for 2024/25, and the institutional priorities used in tandem with financial planning to guide and inform decisions on the University’s future shape and objectives.

It was confirmed that, against the context of reductions in income from Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and a decline in anticipated international student numbers, significant cost efficiencies had been applied in the 2024/25 budget and indicative onward years.  Key elements of the 2024/25 draft budget compared to the Quarter 3 forecast for 2023/24 included an overall operating breakeven budget, reduced income in SFC Grants and Tuition Fees, increased Research Grant and Contract income and other income, increased staff costs  and reduced Other Operating Expenditure.

Members discussed key assumptions used in the preparation and setting of the 2024/25 draft revenue budget and guiding principles applied to achieve a breakeven budget.

Members discussed operating cash, covenant compliance, financial risks and sensitivities and financial projections for the City Regional Deal capital grant.  It was confirmed that the Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan had been re-phased to maximise the use of external funding and available cash levels.  It was confirmed the revised plan prioritised externally funded projects, contracted commitments and essential projects in the short-term, and that careful and robust capital management would be required during 2024/25.

Members reflected on key institutional achievements delivered during 2023/24 and considered a draft suite of Key Performance Indicators aligned with the new Strategic Plan.  It was confirmed the Key Performance Indicators were in a development stage and a full Monitoring and Evaluation Framework would be presented for Court approval in autumn 2024.

Court considered and approved Planning and Budgeting for 2024/25.

Additionally, Court noted that the 2024/25 budget, and the indicative forecast for 2025/26, would form the basis of the Financial Forecasts that would be submitted to the SFC at the end of June 2024, in accordance with the requirements of its financial reporting framework.

8. Global Engagement Strategy

Court received an overview of the Global Engagement Strategy.  It was confirmed the enabling strategy was developed in consultation with staff and students and reflected priorities of the new Strategic Plan.  The aim of the strategy was to enhance the institution’s core activities of research and innovation, learning and teaching and student experience.

Members discussed the University's ambition to further enhance its international reputation and diversify resilient revenue streams vital for financial sustainability. Court noted the University's responsibilities to meet the needs of international students, carry out all aspects of global engagement in a responsible manner and in accordance with the University's values and ethical framework.   Members considered engagement opportunities in the context of a competitive global market, opportunities for enhanced employability skills for students, and discussed the proposed criteria and targets for monitoring and evaluating progress to deliver the aims of the strategy.

Court approved the Global Engagement Strategy.

COLLABORATION

9. City Region and Growth Deal

Court received an update from the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board that included progress and next steps on the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub project that included coverage of the construction programme and business case.

Court noted the report on the University’s programme of City Region and Growth Deal projects.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

10. Students' Union Update

Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities that included participation in a national sustainability accreditation programme designed to support environmentally and socially sustainable practice within organisations.  Members discussed progress on the proposed redevelopment of the Students' Union in the Robbins Centre.

Court considered the activity update from the Students’ Union.

11. Staff and Employment Update

Court received an update on staff and employment matters.   Members discussed activities that took place during the Mental Health Awareness Week, key actions identified and implemented as a result of the Be Heard pulse survey on induction and engagement, and activities associated with the University’s People Strategy that included events with leadership teams and the introduction of Employee Reference Groups.

Court considered the staffing and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

12. Academic Council

Court considered a report from the meeting of Academic Council held on 29 May 2024 that included an update on a proposed development of Council Committees, and semester dates for the 2025/26 academic year.

13. Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee

Court considered a report from the meeting of Joint, Policy Planning and Resources Committee held on 21 May 2024 that included fee setting and institutional fee waiver proposals for 2025/26 entrants, and the Student Attendance and Engagement Policy.

14. Audit Committee

Court considered a report from the meeting of Audit Committee held on 31 May 2024 that included an update on the internal audit plan, priority areas of audit activity during 2024/25, an overview of the external audit plan for 2023/24 and emerging and significant strategic risks.   Members discussed areas identified in the external audit plan as elevated areas of risk.  Audit Committee confirmed it was satisfied with the approach to student debtor provision and that it remained an area of focus for the external auditors.

15. Governance and Nominations Committee

Court approved appointments recommended by Governance and Nominations Committee.

16. Combined Joint Negotiating and Consultation Committee (CJNCC)

Court considered the annual report from Combined Joint Negotiating and Consultation Committee for 2023/24 that highlighted areas of strategic importance the committee had focused on.  Members discussed the composition and membership of CJNCC and the Recognition and Procedure Agreement.  It was confirmed that following retirement of the Unite local representative, a replacement representative had not been appointed to the due to lack of interest in the role and heightened efforts were ongoing to resolve the matter.

17. Academic Promotions Committee

Court considered an annual report from Academic Promotions Committee.  Members discussed outcomes of the academic session 2023/24 and development activity implemented to support the promotions process.   It was confirmed that overall gender balance of successful applicants had increased from 51% identifying as female in 2022/23 to 58% in 2023/24.  Work undertaken to support and encourage female staff had contributed to a female representation of 48% within senior academic roles (Grade 9 and above) at the University as at 31 May 2024.

RISKS

18. Risks Arising

Court considered risks associated with items discussed in the context of the agreed risk appetite statement.

OTHER ITEMS

19. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other competent business.

20. Next Meeting

Court noted provisional meeting dates for 2024/25.