# University of Stirling logo **Minutes – University Court**

21/10/2024 | 2:00pm to 4:00pm

Stirling Court Hotel

Present

Mr Harry Adam (Chair), Ms Leen Ali, Professor Kirstie Blair, Mr Gary Fleming, Mr Kenny Fraser, Ms Susan Gordon Hardy, Mr Graham Hastie, Dr Magdalena Ietswaart, Mr Douglas Kearney, Dr Deborah Keith, Professor Malcolm MacLeod, Ms Lynne Marr, Professor Sir Gerry McCormac, Ms Catriona Morrison, Professor Gozde Ozakinci, Ms Justine Pedussel, Mr Julian Roberts, Mr William Stancer and Dr Clare Wilson.

In Attendance

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

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Pamela Crawford, Dr Poonam Gupta, Mr Hamish Grossart, Professor Julie Tinson and Lord Provost Elaine Watterson.

The Chair welcomed Professor Gozde Ozakinci following her election to University Court and welcomed Professor Helen Scott following her appointment as Deputy Principal (Education).

The Chair confirmed that Dr Mary Allison had taken the decision to resign from University Court. On behalf of University Court, the Chair thanked Mary for her commitment and contribution.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Court approved the minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2024.

4. Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

There were no matters arising not otherwise on the agenda.

5. Remit, Composition and Membership

Court noted the remit, composition and membership of Court for 2024/25.

6. Key Developments in the External Environment

Court considered an overview of developments in the external environment that included coverage of the new UK Government, financial sustainability of Higher Education and conflict in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Members discussed implications of the UK Government's Autumn Budget that included increased employers national insurance contributions and undergraduate tuition fees for UK students studying in England.

Members discussed the sporting achievements of athletes at the Olympic games in Paris during the summer. Court welcomed the news that the University successfully attained an Athena Swan Charter silver award in recognition for its commitment to advancing gender equality following an extensive application process.

Court noted the recent developments in the external environment.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING

7. Quarterly Performance Reporting

Court received an overview of institutional performance during the fourth quarter (Q4) of the 2023-24 academic year, that included key achievements, challenges and trends observed during the period.  In addition, Court received an update regarding the budget for 2024/25 and a forward-looking assessment of the first quarter (Q1), alongside an appraisal of the sector context and factors that may present strategic opportunities or risks to the University.

It was confirmed that the 2023/24 Q4 management accounts present a preliminary operating surplus of £2.2m, in line with the Q3 position, with a net operating cash inflow of £10.9m and access to cash balances of £75.2m.  It was confirmed, considering the cash position, the University would be covenant compliant for 2023-24.

Members discussed delivery of the reprioritised Capital and Major Infrastructure Plan conducted with consideration of the parameters of affordability.  It was confirmed that critical projects associated with health and safety compliance, externally funded projects and prioritised projects that were at an advanced stage continued to be progressed.  Members discussed work undertaken to successfully mitigate the impact of the lead contractor for the Muirhead House refurbishment project entering administration.  It was confirmed that a new contractor had been appointed and work was progressing in line with an adjusted project plan.

Members discussed the reduced student population forecast for 2024/25 as a result of the prevailing recruitment environment.  It was confirmed that a reduced population has been anticipated when the budget was set and granular monitoring against budget expectations was ongoing.  Members discussed factors contributing to the continued financial pressure for the sector that included a real-terms decline of the unit teaching resource, year-on-year cuts to the SFC's main teaching grant and legacy impacts of the Conservative Government's policy approach to international students.  It was confirmed that the efficiency savings identified within Other Operating Expenses (£10.5m) as part of the 2024-25 budget setting process had been operationalised in line with the Court-approved breakeven budget.

Members discussed risk associated with financial sustainability and opportunities for UK higher education institutions moving forward.  Members discussed the approach undertaken to diversify income streams to mitigate challenges that included: strategic international partnerships to deliver transnational education; enhanced recruitment activity in key markets; and activity to review the University's curriculum and portfolio design.

Members considered and noted the Quarterly Performance Report.

8. Annual Performance Report

Court received an overview of the University’s performance during the 2023/24 academic year, and an assessment of progress against the University’s strategic ambitions.

Members considered the growth in total income, research income and the student population over the reporting period and discussed student satisfaction and retention in the context of comparative performance across the sector.  Members discussed activity to build upon strengths and address areas for improvement throughout 2024/25.

Court approved the Annual Performance Report.

COLLABORATION

9. City Region and Growth Deal

Court received an update on the University's programme of City Region and Growth Deal projects that included Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC), the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH), the Alloa Innovation Hub and the International Marine Science and Environment Centre.

Members considered significant changes in the external environment in which the City Region and Growth Deals operate including a new UK government with shifts across political parties in relation to Scottish representation, and a new First Minister for Scotland.  It was confirmed that a heightened focus on financial constraints across both governments had introduced greater risk in relation to previous priorities as well as those City Region Deals where commitments were yet to be formalised.  It was confirmed that the UK Government's Autumn Budget may provide further clarity on the way forward.

Court to noted the update from the University’s City Region and Growth Deal Programme Board.

GOVERNANCE

10. External Review of Governance Effectiveness

Court received an overview of the external review undertaken evaluate the effectiveness of Court and its committees.  It was confirmed that the Lead Reviewer met with a review Steering Group at key stages to agree the approach, assess emerging findings, and consider recommendations.

It was confirmed that the Review Team found that current arrangements relied on mutual respect and appreciation between the Executive and the Court.  The Executive made significant efforts to be open and provide the Court with a wealth of information; in return, much was delegated and entrusted to the Executive.  The Review Team found that Court had a clear commitment to the University and a desire to make the quality of the University more widely recognised.

It was confirmed that the Review Team found no major deficiencies in governance arrangements and observed some opportunities for the University to make improvements.

Members discussed findings from the review and a draft action plan based on recommendations.  It was confirmed that action to ensure appropriate arrangements were in place for engaging with the students’ union and fostering contributions from student governing body members would involve co-creation with the students’ union.

Court considered and approved the draft action plan based on recommendations from the external review of governance effectiveness and a summary of findings from the review for reporting purposes.

11. Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework

University Court received an update on the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) and considered the new quality assurance and enhancement arrangements applicable to colleges and universities in Scotland.

12. Amendment to Ordinance 58

Court received an overview of a proposed amendment to Ordinance 58.   It was confirmed that Ordinance 58 related to Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates of the University, and specified all of the qualifications that can be awarded by the University.

Members discussed the proposal to introduce a new programme within the University’s portfolio, which would lead to a new qualification for the institution, the Professional Diploma in Education (PGDE).  It was confirmed the proposal was endorsed by Academic Council at it meeting held on 11 September 2024.

Court approved the addition of the PGDE award to the University’s Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates, and the amendment to Ordinance 58.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

13. Students' Union Update

Court received an update on recent Students’ Union activities that included coverage of trustee recruitment, Students’ Union finance, a review of democratic processes, the cost of living, inclusion, sports membership, induction events and environmental sustainability.

Members discussed the democracy review, improved turnout for the autumn election and Students' Union finances.  Members discussed the longer term ambition of reducing the level of block grant spent on permanent and sabbatical salaries in line with the sector target of 70% and requested further information on the approach.

**[ACTION: Students' Union President]**

Court considered the activity update from the Students’ Union.

14. Staff and Employment Update

Court received an update on staff and employment matters that included the Pay Award 2024/25, Be Heard Staff Engagement and an update on employment legislation.  Court noted that the local University and College Union (UCU) branch had been made aware of increased level of stress amongst some academic staff. Members noted activity undertaken to promote the health and wellbeing for staff in line with objectives set out in the People Strategy and support available for staff that included an Employee Assistance Programme.

Court considered the staff and employment update.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

15. Academic Council

Court noted a report from the meeting of Academic Council held on 11 September 2024 and considered the Annual Report on Academic Council Effectiveness 2023/24.

16. Remunerations Committee

Court considered an overview of Remuneration Committee business during 2023/24 that included coverage of the Senior Staff Remuneration Procedure, the Principal and Vice Chancellor's remuneration, the Senior Staff Retention Procedure and progress to further narrow the gender pay gap.

17. Governance and Nominations Committee

Court considered a report from the meeting of Governance and Nominations Committee held on 15 August 2024 that included coverage of membership of University Court and Chair of Court recruitment.

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 the next meeting was scheduled on 9 December 2024.