

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 30 APRIL 2025**

**Present:** Julie Ashworth (in the Chair for Minutes 208 onwards)  
Lesley Birse  
Ainhoa Burgos Aguilera  
Martin Barker  
Eleanor Bentley  
George Boyne (except for Minutes 239 to 245)  
Ewan Cameron  
Owen Cox  
Iona Fyfe (in the Chair for Minutes 206 to 207)  
Iain Grant  
Ayten Hajiyeva  
Luke Halliday  
Richard Hepworth-Young (from Minutes 217 onwards)  
Fiona Islam (via Teams)  
Helen Martin  
Caryn Miller (via Teams)  
Lorenzo Moretti (via Teams)  
Alison Rankin  
Shona Russell  
Joachim Schaper (via Teams)  
Christina Schmid  
Diane Skåtun  
Adaku Ufere  
Ilia Xypolia

**In attendance:** *Senior Management Team Members/University Officer*  
  
Fraser Bell (except for Minutes 257 to 259)  
Ashar Eshan (for Minutes 236 to 237)  
Pete Edwards (except for Minutes 257 to 259)  
Samantha Waters (except for Minutes 257 to 259)  
Mark White (except for Minutes 257 to 259)

**Clerk:** Bruce Purdon

**Apologies:** Gary McRae

**WELCOME AND RECTOR'S REPORT**

206 The Rector opened the meeting and recorded Court's appreciation of the presentation given by the Students' Union Sabbatical Officer Team the preceding evening.

- 207 The Court received and noted the Rector's report on recent activities and meetings undertaken in the role since the last meeting of Court (CT20250430\_1).

#### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REMINDER OF COURT AND MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

- 208 The Court noted the standing reminder of the responsibilities of Court and members as charity trustees (CT20250430\_2). It was noted that Diane Skatun had a standing item in the register of interests regarding the Business School.

#### MINUTES

- 209 The minutes of the meeting of held on 26 February 2025 were considered including some potential amendments. These were approved subject to amendment of minute 160 and the addition of a clerk's note of clarification at minute 192.
- 210 Following a clarification, the minutes of 18 March 2025 were approved without amendment.
- 211 The minutes of 3 April 2025 were approved subject to a correction to record an apology and an amendment to minute 2.16 (first bullet point).
- 212 The minutes of a closed business session on 19 November 2024, which had previously been circulated to Court on 26 February 2025 and taken away for further review by the Chair and the Secretariat in response to clarifications sought, were following discussion, approved by those members present bar one member.

#### MATTERS ARISING, ACTION LOG AND DECISIONS BY CIRCULATION

- 213 The Court received and noted a report on Matters Arising, the Court Action Log and decisions reached by circulation (CT20250430\_4).
- 214 It was confirmed that the Court would be engaged further on the progression of the projects prioritised for progression under the reimagining our campuses plan. It was also confirmed that responses to questions lodged on future transnational education projects would be provided as soon as practical on the Court Teams site.
- 215 The Court formally recorded that it had by circulation:
- (i) Approved the composition and membership of the Selection Committee for the Principal & Vice-Chancellor.
  - (ii) Approved the Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2025.

## REPORT FROM THE SENIOR GOVERNOR

- 216 The Court received and noted the Senior Governor's report on recent activities and meetings undertaken in the role since the last meeting of Court (CT20250430\_5). The report noted in particular developments with regard to governance, the tertiary education Bill, senior executive remuneration and the financial position of the sector in Scotland and the Senior Governor provided a further verbal report on recent discussions between the sector and the Scottish Government in this context.

## REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL AND UPDATE ON HE SECTOR/UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS

- 217 The Court received a written report (CT20250430\_6) on developments within the University and in the wider higher education sector, which the Principal supplemented with an oral report.
- 218 The Principal's oral report highlighted that there were numerous instances of universities announcing reductions in staff across the UK. There were related discussions across the sector where the current operating model of many institutions was not considered to be sustainable and around what the new norm might be. There was also cause for concern regarding potential further policy changes at a UK Government level which might make the recruitment of international students more rather than less challenging. In a Scottish context, while the Scottish Government was supportive of recruiting international students, it did not control immigration policies which were at a UK level. In terms of the Scottish higher education funding model, no substantive change to the current position was expected before the next Scottish Parliament election.

## UPDATE ON THE RECRUITMENT OF THE PRINCIPAL

- 219 The Court received a verbal report on the progress of the recruitment of the Principal. The update covered: meetings of the Selection Committee; the timetable for the process, which would be shared with Court, and provisional date for the interview of shortlisted candidates; and the engagement activities that were in place to receive feedback and input from the University community.
- 220 The Court also discussed how the process would seek to deliver a diverse as well as excellent field of candidates and the efforts being made, in partnership with the Students' Union, to engage the student community in the process. The Court also discussed the early stage feedback from the recruitment consultants on the status of the market and expectations around the candidate pool.

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

- 221 The Court received a largely unredacted copy of the report of the Review of the Change Management Process within Modern Languages, Translation and Interpretation in the School of Languages, Literature, Music and Visual Culture (a redacted form of the report, recommendations and appendices to the report having been previously circulated).

222 The Court sought and received assurance that the recommendations from the review had been accepted by the Senior Management Team and would guide how any future similar processes were undertaken going forward. In discussion, it was noted that the Court should also be cognisant of the review's findings in terms of its role in such processes. This would include seeking assurance that the relevant processes were being followed and on the robustness of the information presented to it when Court was required to make a decision. It was also noted that a culture of trust and of openness to consider alternative ideas and views was important. The review's findings with regard to taking appropriate time when such processes were being undertaken were also highlighted.

223 The Court recorded its thanks and appreciation to the author of the review and those who has supported this very extensive piece of work.

#### FINANCE – THREE YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN

224 The Court received a paper (CT20250430\_9) which reported on:

1. 2024/25 Projected Budget Out-turn;
2. Budget Setting Process for 2025/26 to 2027/28
3. 2025/26 Projected budget position;
4. Actions underway and proposed to address the financial challenge in 2025/26.
5. Presentation on future Operating Model 2025-28 (due to limitations on time the presentation was not given but was received as a paper);
6. Data on the Financial Position/Performance of each School.

225

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

*Financial Out-Turn 2024/25*

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[REDACTED]

[Redacted]

*2025/26 to 2027/28 Budget Setting and 2025/26 Budget Position*

227 [Redacted]

228 [Redacted]

229 [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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*2025/26 Budget - Actions to Address*

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#### STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE

236 The Court received a report on the projected student intake for September 2025 (CT20250430\_11). In discussion, the Director of Global Engagement, Marketing and Recruitment provided a further verbal update on the key points contained within the report.

- 237 The Court also received a verbal update with regard to the expected outcome of a University application for an in-country TNE project.

#### STAFF SURVEY 2024

- 238 The Court received a report on the Staff Survey Institutional Action Plan (CT20250430\_10). The Court discussed a number of points arising from the report, including:

- Assurance on how the response to the Staff Survey through the Plan was being communicated to staff and the extent to which the measures outlined in the plan were sufficient. The Chief Operating Officer noted he would welcome further feedback on this from members.
- Noting a suggestion that Post-graduate Research students be considered for inclusion in future surveys.
- The specific steps and further work being taken in response to the survey with regard to bullying and harassment, which although in benchmark terms were comparable to or better than institutional peers, the University considered required action whatever the level. This further work included understanding why the results in this part of the survey were more significant in some areas of the University rather than others. Further promotion of the whistleblowing policy would also be considered.
- That the Senior Management Team was reflecting on how it engaged and communicated with staff and where that might evolve going forward.

#### CLOSED BUSINESS ITEM: **CONFIDENTIAL TO COURT**

*Minutes 239 to 245 are confidential to Court*

#### GIFT ACCEPTANCE POLICY

- 246 The Court received a draft University of Aberdeen Gift Acceptance Policy (CT20250430\_12.2).
- 247 The Court noted that, following its previous consideration by Court, the draft policy had been updated to include e-cigarette companies within the definition of tobacco companies, these being organisations which the University did not accept donations from. Subject to the correction of a typographical error, the Court approved the policy.
- 248 In further discussion, it was noted that the University would review its procurement policy in response to points raised within the recent student assembly.

#### UASLAS PENSION SCHEME: FLEXIBLE APPOINTMENT ARRANGEMENT

- 249 This agenda item was withdrawn pending further required legal information and would be considered by circulation or at a future meeting.



## REPORTS FROM SENATE AND COURT COMMITTEES

### SENATE

- 250 The Court received and noted a report (CT20250430\_14.1) on the main items of business considered by Senate at its meetings of 5 February and 19 March 2025.
- 251 The Court, on the recommendation of the Senate, approved in principle the draft Resolution, 'Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees' which would now be subject to the statutory consultation process before being formally proposed for approval by Court.

### GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

- 252 The Court received a report (CT20250430\_14.2) on the business considered by a sub-set of the Governance and Nominations Committee on 17 and 24 March and from a meeting of the full committee on 25 March, all of which related to the composition and membership of the Selection Committee for the Principal. The Committee had recommended to Court by circulation:
- Proposal 1 – to approve the composition and membership of the Selection Committee for the recruitment of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor.
  - Proposal 2 – to approve the formation of an Advisory Group to the Selection Committee
- 253 The Court approved proposal 1 but not proposal 2. As part of their respective consideration of the composition and membership of the Selection Committee, both the Governance and Nominations Committee and the Court, received a motion passed by Senate on 19 March with regard to the composition and membership of the Selection Committee.
- 254 The Chair reported that the Committee had in the preceding days before the meeting of Court approved by circulation the appointment of Luke Halliday as:
- (a) Member of the Remuneration Committee on an interim basis;
  - (b) Chair of the Pensions Advisory Group.
- 255 One member of the Committee had requested that expressions of interest from other independent members should have been sought and for this reason had not been able to approve the appointments. The Senior Governor outlined to Court that there had been an imminent need to address vacancies in the Remuneration Committee for forthcoming additional meetings it was due to undertake with regard to the remuneration of the next Principal and with regard to other urgent business and that it was only a temporary appointment. Likewise it was necessary to ensure the Pensions Advisory Group had a Chair in case it needed to meet.
- 256 The Court agreed to approve the two appointments.

*With the exception of the Principal, Senior Management Team Members in attendance (including the Chief Governance Officer & University Secretary) left the meeting for the next item.*

#### REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

- 257 The Court received a report (CT20250430\_14.3) on the business considered by the Remuneration Committee at its meeting of 6 March. The report detailed the Committee's consideration and approval for the remuneration parameters for a senior management appointment.
- 258 The report also noted that the Committee was giving consideration to which benchmarking comparators should be used for future senior management appointments and would consider this further at a future meeting.
- 259 In discussion, feedback from some members on the remuneration parameters was noted and the rationale for the Committee's decision was explained further.

#### AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

- 260 The Court received and noted a report (CT20250430\_14.4) of the business considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting on 27 March. This included a detailed report of the Committee's consideration of a presentation on the University's financial position and the development of the three year financial plan and of a revised Operating Model.
- 261 In discussion, the Court noted in particular the Committee's consideration of progress against required mitigations relating to compressed gas safety systems. The lack of gas leak detection systems in certain areas of the University, presented a risk of an adverse event, albeit with very low likelihood. The Committee would receive a further update at its next scheduled meeting regarding this. It was confirmed that the Court would also receive an update.  
**Action: Chief Operating Officer.**
- 262 A member sought assurance with regard to approval processes for expenses being followed and it was noted that an update to Audit and Risk Committee on this would be provided.  
**Action: Chief Financial Officer.**
- 263 It was also suggested and noted that consideration might be given to whether the Strategic Risk Register captured sufficiently risks around Artificial Intelligence.

## USS DEBT MONITORING REPORT

- 264 The Court received and noted a report (CT20250430\_14.5) on the USS debt monitoring results for financial year 2023/24. As had been reported to Audit and Risk Committee, this confirmed that although the University had exceeded two of the metrics in 2023-24, it would not need to enter into further engagement with the USS Trustee as all four metrics must be exceeded in any year, or any three of these metrics in consecutive years, for this to be required.

## FINANCE AND RESOURCING COMMITTEE

- 265 The Court received and noted a report (CT20250430\_14.6) of the business considered by the Finance and Resourcing Committee at its meeting of 26 March.

## PREVENT DUTY ANNUAL REPORT

- 266 The Court received and noted a report (CT20250430\_15.1) which provided an update on the University's activities over the past year to provide assurance that the University was meeting its legal obligations under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

## COURT SCHEDULE OF BUSINESS

- 267 The Court received a reminder of its current schedule of business for the year (CT20250430\_16).

## ITEMS PROVIDED FOR INFORMATION AND NOTING

- 268 The Court received and noted the following reports:

1. Development and Alumni Relations Update
2. Bi-Annual Risk Management Report

## DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 269 The next formal scheduled meeting of Court would be on Wednesday, 25 June from 9am to 4pm.