



**UNIVERSITY COURT**

**MINUTES**

of the meeting of the University Court held on Wednesday 27 April 2022 at 1.00pm in the Boardroom and via Microsoft Teams

Chair: Mr M Shaw  
Vice-Chair: Dr A Ingram

Ms N Ahmed	Professor T Inns	Professor N Seaton
Mr A Bailey	Mr F Keir	Professor E Sim
Professor L Bacon	Ms V Lynch	Dr K Smith
Mr J Barnett	Mr J Macgregor	Ms C Summers
Ms R Donoghue	Mr A Marks	Ms R Thiel
Mrs A Duffy	Mr I McDonald	
Ms G Ghafoor	Ms C MacEachen	
Mrs L Hamilton	Dr H Mehyrpouya	

Secretary: Mr P Henry  
In attendance: Ms A Kildare  
Ms J McKenzie  
Mr G Weir  
Ms E Fraser  
Dr L Millard (for Item 6)  
Mr J Nicholson (for Item 15)  
Mr A Porter (Advance HE Observer)

**NON-RESERVED AREAS OF BUSINESS**

**56 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and extended a special welcome to Ms Robyn Donoghue, who was attending her first meeting as a new member of Court. Those in attendance were noted as Ms A Kildare, Ms J McKenzie, Mr G Weir, and Ms E Fraser. Members heard that Mr Luke Millard would join the meeting to speak to Item 6, while Mr James Nicolson would join to speak to Item 15. The Chair also welcomed Mr Aaron Porter, who was observing the meeting on behalf of Advance HE as part of the Court Effectiveness Review.

Apologies were received from Ms H Dunk and Mr F Jakimow.

**57 DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The Chair reminded members of their responsibility to indicate if they had, or could be perceived to have, a conflict of interest in relation to the non-reserved

items for discussion. No declaration was made.

### **COURT AND GOVERNANCE MATTERS**

58 **MINUTES OF THE CHAIR'S COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 APRIL**  
CT/0422/43

Court noted the above minutes for information. The Chair advised members that given the other business to be discussed an update on the NSS Survey would now be brought forward for discussion at the Court meeting in June 2022.

59 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COURT HELD ON 16 FEBRUARY 2022: UNRESERVED**  
CT/0422/44

Court approved the minutes as an accurate record subject to a correction to the spelling of Ms Thiel's name.

60 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THESE MINUTES**  
Oral report

The Interim Secretary to Court provided members with a brief update on the Court Effectiveness Review, noting that it was an important opportunity for Court to seek assurance about its fitness for purpose and to reflect on opportunities for development and enhancement.

It was noted that, since Court's last meeting in February, much progress had been made, working closely with Aaron Porter and his colleagues at Advance HE. A 45-question survey had been sent out to members of Court and members of the Executive Team who attend Court regularly and contribute to meetings. The Survey began on 14 March and was completed on 25 March.

It was noted that Professor Ella Ritchie from Advance HE had observed the FCPC meeting on 29 March and would be observing the GNC meeting on 16 May. Aaron Porter who was observing today's Court meeting, would be attending the June meeting of Court in person.

Mr Henry advised that a number of focus groups have been arranged with Court members, Executives and Advance HE, together with some 'one to one' meetings. It was noted that most of these had been held with the rest due to be completed by the end of May.

Court noted that a Steering Group has also been established to look at the outcome of the survey and the various meetings and to identify themes for further discussion by Court. The Group was comprised of Dr Ingram, as Chair of GNC, Lynne Hamilton, Kate Smith, Veronica Strachan (University Secretary at RGU), Aaron Porter and the Interim Secretary to Court.

Court was advised that steps were being taken to avoid unnecessary duplication/overlap between this Court Effectiveness Review and the planned Internal Audit Review of Governance.

The Chair advised members that a later item on the agenda would deal with a proposal on the appointment of a new University Secretary.

**MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION/APPROVAL**

61 **STUDENT RETENTION: UPDATE**

CT/0422/45

*[Secretary's note: Dr Millard joined the meeting at this point]*

The Chair invited Professor Bacon to introduce the update on Student Retention, noting that it followed on from discussions at the November Court meeting.

Professor Bacon advised members that the paper gave an overview of the findings from the detailed work that had been undertaken since November and highlighted some key findings and additional actions that were underway. Additional analyses undertaken had identified several factors that had an impact on retention and progression into (in particular) Year 2, including early student engagement and non-submission of work.

Members noted that, in term one of 2021/2, new Student Success Officers (SSOs) were tasked with making sure that the University was engaging with and supporting all stage 1 entrants. A full analysis of the impact would be undertaken at the end of the academic year. With regard to non-submission, it was found then when students submit their work, 97% of students achieve a pass. Part of the engagement was therefore to support students to submit work.

Dr Millard advised members of the work of the development group looking into micro-credentials. These were designed to build and improve on students' academic and social skills via self-diagnostic tests around individual strength and weaknesses. Members welcomed the analysis in the report and the work being done to address student retention. In response to question about engagement with prospective students in FE colleges, Professor Bacon confirmed that there was engagement with partner colleges, specifically on this matter. Dr Millard added that awareness of the issues that students faced in the transition to study at Abertay was one of the reasons why the introduction of micro-credentials in Year 1 was important.

There followed a lengthy discussion on the core reasons why students withdrew from the University (1. Unsuitable to the programme; 2. Personal reasons; 3. Health issues; 4. Financial). It was noted, however, that financial concerns may have influenced students who cited 'personal reasons' for leaving. None of these issues were unique to Abertay with most universities reporting similar issues. Further, it was acknowledged that it was more difficult to solve the problems students faced that related to non-academic matters. However, it was noted that the University did provide a range of services to help students, including counselling and financial support. The Students Association were also providing tangible and welcome support.

In response to a question about the need for a bolder approach to prevent students leaving in their third year, members were advised that, for many students, exiting with an Ordinary Degree was their target award, as it was the only qualification required by their chosen professional body.

It was noted that, given the approach to blended learning, there was a need to ensure students received the help that they needed both on and off campus.

Finally, it was acknowledged that the small group of students who leave the University at an earlier stage for well-paid professions such as Computer Games and Cyber Security should not be considered a failure.

The Chair welcomed the report and the discussion and looked forward to Court receiving an annual update on student retention.

Thereafter, Court noted the paper.

*[Secretary's note: Dr L Millard left the meeting at this point]*

62 DRAFT REVISED SCHEME OF DELEGATION

CT/0422/46

The Chair reminded members that this was the final version of the Draft Revised Scheme of Delegation that had been dealt with in several stages. The paper detailed the various proposed changes over each of these stages. He directed Court members' attention to the summary of activity to date, the summary of propositions, and the current version with tracked changes.

It was noted that the draft revised scheme had been recommended to Court for approval by the Governance and Nominations Committee, subject to additional clarification in Section C on partnerships. Mr Henry confirmed that this clarification was incorporated into the final version now presented to Court for approval.

In the discussion that followed, it was noted that partnerships were included within the framework for the Strategic Plan. It was noted, further, that it was important to have appropriate policies and processes in place relating to partnerships to provide the necessary assurance framework for Court and this was likely to be the subject of a further discussion.

Dr Ingram advised members that the Governance and Nominations Committee had discussed also the nature of the delegated authority from Court to Senate in relation to the Academic Governance Framework (Annex A to Enclosure 46). The document had been updated to include an introductory section on context that clarified the extent of the delegated authority from Court to Senate.

In response to a question about remuneration for the Chair of Court, the Chair of the Remuneration Committee, Mr Marks, confirmed that this was an item on the agenda for the next meeting of the committee on 16 May.

Finally, the Chair advised members that if the draft revised Scheme of Delegation was approved by Court, there would be a need for minor changes to the Financial Regulations to reflect the changes and to ensure that both documents were accurate and complementary.

***Thereafter, Court APPROVED the proposed revisions to Scheme of Delegation.***

63 COURT AND COURT COMMITTEES: DRAFT SCHEDULE FOR SESSION 2022/23

CT/0422/47

The Interim Secretary to Court introduced the Draft Schedule for the session 2022/23 adding that he was aware that some amendments may be required. It was accepted that the draft schedule would not be confirmed at the present meeting, and the Chair invited members to provide Mr Henry with any comments by no later than the 25 May.

A revised schedule would be brought back to Court for approval at its meeting on 29 June.

**MATTERS FOR APPROVAL**

64 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 MARCH 2022

CT/0422/48

Mr Barnett, the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, referred to the minutes and advised Court that the Risk Register had been updated following receipt of the Risk Management Update provided in line with the revised Risk Management Policy and Framework agreed by Court in June 2018. Further, he asked Court to note that the Committee had received updates on the 'Deep Dive' Review of Risk 5 (Disruption to University Operations Arising from Major Incident, Failure or External Attack), and the Business Resilience and Continuity Project and the good progress being made in both.

Mr Barnett advised Court that the Committee had received Internal Audit Review reports on Reputation Management and Subscriptions and had welcomed the reassurance provided by these reports. In addition, he asked Court to note that the implementation of the recommendations on cyber security was progressing well.

Thereafter Court approved the minutes.

65 FINANCE AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 MARCH 2022

CT/0422/49

Mr McDonald, the Chair of the Finance and Corporate Planning Committee, referred to the minutes and gave an update on a reserved matter.

Mr McDonald then asked Court to note several matters from the minutes. The Committee had received an update on SFC funding for 2022/23 and the Vice-

Principal and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Planning) had circulated to Court members a summary of the key points of the SFC announcement and its impact on the University. He asked Court to note that the Committee had received an update on the University's Operational Planning and Budgeting and approved a change to the profile of the spend of the allocated £5M Capital and Expenditure plan for Digital Strategy.

Referring to the update on Capital and Infrastructure and Projects he advised that there had been significant work done to manage costs when there had been an increase in building materials cost of some 20%. Court noted that there had been an overspend on the Kydd Building Cladding Project which was showing a negative budget variance. However there had been discussions with SFC and they were content with the situation.

Court noted the preparations for the submission of the TRAC return and the major improvements in procurement, particularly in regulated spending. In response to a question about the likely impact of the budget variance of the Kydd Building Cladding Project on other capital projects, Mr Weir, the Director of FICS, explained that the capital budget was under review continually. He added that the overspend would result in a reduction in funds, but not in manner outside of normal expectations. It was clarified also that the reprofiling of the spend on the Capital and Expenditure plan for Digital Strategy would not have an impact on the EBITDA.

Finally, Mr McDonald advised Court that Mr A Marks had taken over the role of Vice-Chair of the Committee following the departure of Ms Robertson earlier in the year.

Thereafter Court approved the minutes.

66 GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 MARCH 2022

CT/0422/50

Dr Ingram, the Chair of the Governance and Nominations Committee referred to the arrangements in place for the Court Effectiveness Review and advised Court that members would be contacted by Advance HE to participate in focus group meetings and encouraged members to attend a meeting if they had not already done so.

Thereafter Court approved the minutes.

67 PEOPLE, HEALTH, AND EQUALITY COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 09 MARCH 2022

CT/0422/51

Ms Ghafoor, the Chair of the People, Health, and Equality Committee introduced the minutes, and advised Court that there was one item for approval, the Committee's Revised Remit and Membership, which was being dealt with separately as the next item on the agenda. She invited Court to note that the Committee had received a Draft Revised Workplan, and a Development Update on the People Strategy and highlighted the SMT

workshop held to discuss priorities and themes and the planned workshop with unions on the People Strategy and Values.

Court noted that the Equality and Diversity Update was being dealt with separately on the agenda. Ms Ghafoor added that the Committee had received the Occupational Health Annual Report and had noted the excellent work done by Occupational Health in supporting staff through the pandemic, and the ongoing requirement to support staff facing challenges in the transition to the workplace again. The Committee had received also the Revised Travel Risk Assessment Policy and Guidance and had noted that it was important to have a robust process in place for travel approval, with appropriate controls to minimise the risks.

Finally, Ms Ghafoor asked Court to note that the Committee approved revisions to the Code of Student Discipline: Non-Academic Misconduct. In the discussion that followed, it was agreed (in the absence of any specific delegation to the Committee to approve changes no matter how modest) that that the proposals or amendments to the Code of Student Discipline should come to Court approval by way of electronic circulation after the meeting.

***Action: Mr Henry to circulate the proposed amendments to the Student Discipline Code to Court Members for approval.***

Thereafter Court approved the minutes.

#### 67.1 REVISED REMIT AND MEMBERSHIP

CT/0422/52

Ms Ghafoor introduced the Revised Remit and Membership paper and invited Court to consider it for approval adding that it was being presented with tracked changes for clarity. She advised Court that there had been a separate meeting to discuss and clarify the role of the Committee and the expectations of new members of the Committee.

Dr Ingram added that it was important to get the remit right to reflect all that the Committee oversaw and had responsibility for and that these revisions incorporated the clarifications and expectations expressed by the Committee.

***Thereafter Court APPROVED the Revised Remit and Membership of the Committee.***

### **MATTERS FOR INFORMATION**

*[Secretary's note: Mr J Nicholson joined the meeting at this point]*

#### 68 STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION REPORT TO COURT

CT/0422/53

Ms Thiel introduced the report and advised Court that the Students' Association had recently provided food to 109 to students in need, compared to the 60 students reported at the previous Court meeting. She explained that

the Student Association received food from Fair Share (funded from the Students' Association's own budget), which was then provided to students on a weekly basis. Ms Thiel advised Court that she met with one of the Student Space architects to discuss the plans, and that she was very pleased with them.

In the discussion on the provision of food to students that followed, Court noted that funding was available to students in financial hardship though not all students were aware of these funds. Further, Court noted that there was a relationship between financial problems and students leaving the University. Court noted the impact of the current energy crisis on the difficult choices some students were having to make.

Mr Nicolson advised Court that applications from students for discretionary funds had risen from 308 in 2016/17 to 825 in 2020/21; a clear indication that more students were struggling financially.

The Chair advised Ms Thiel that Court was keen to support any initiatives to assist students through a particularly challenging period and asked her to inform Mr Nicholson or Professor Bacon if the situation became any worse and/or further assistance was necessary.

Thereafter, the Committee noted the report.

69 ACADEMIC MATTERS REPORT

CT/0422/54

Professor Bacon introduced the report and advised Court that the length of the Report reflected the fantastic work the academic staff were doing. Court welcomed the report and offered its congratulations to Dr Rebecca Wade on winning the 2022 Action for Children Scotland's Woman of Influence award and being named as the Institute of Civil Engineers Scotland's STEM Ambassador of the Year for her outreach work in schools.

Thereafter, the Committee noted the report.

70 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY REPORT: UPDATE

CT/0422/55

Court noted that the report was an update on the statutory biennial report and was intended to give an indication of the current direction of travel for the University in terms of Equality and Diversity. Ms Fraser referred to the updated pay gap information in the report and advised Court that the University provided more information than other institutions, reflecting its approach to equality to provide transparency.

In response to a question about the way lower pay grades were used, Ms Fraser advised Court that the University's pay structure was underpinned by an analytical job evaluation system, and that she was confident people were being graded and paid appropriately and fairly. Court noted that another Diversity Fest was scheduled to take place on the week beginning 14 November 2022.

The steep incline of students reporting mental health was also raised, the cause of which was suggested to be (at least in part) a greater willingness of students to speak out and report their conditions.

Court noted that although the proportion of BAME students was increasing, the proportion of BAME staff remained static. Ms Fraser advised Court that the University is engaged in a Race Equality Charter and a BAME staff network had been formed. In addition, arrangements were being made to enable staff to mix with various student representatives to establish how they can support each other. Court noted that the reason for the ethnicity pay gap was the higher proportion of international academics coming to the University from ethnic minority backgrounds. Further, Court noted that the turnover of students was much faster than that of staff and, consequently, it was easier to change the balance of students than staff.

In response to a question about the distribution of staff by age and steps being taken to bring younger people to work, particularly via apprenticeships, Ms Fraser explained that the University did not have a large pool of candidates under the age of 24. This was because most posts were at a graduate-level.

Thereafter, the Committee noted the report.

*[Secretary's note: Mr J Nicholson left the meeting at this point]*

71 KPI UPDATE

CT/0422/55

Court noted the updated KPI report which confirmed the current position in respect of those KPIs where up to date information had not been available at the time of the last report.

72 SUMMER GRADUATION CELEBRATION

Oral Report

Court noted that the main graduation day would be on Wednesday 13 July for 2022 graduands, when the Professor Bacon would be installed as Principal. The Chair advised Court that there would be two further days of celebration on Thursday 14 July for 2021 graduates and on Friday 15 July for 2020 graduates. He explained that the attendance numbers would not be known until early June and the specific arrangements for these would be confirmed at the June meeting of Court. He encouraged Court members to attend all the ceremonies as far as possible.

Thereafter, the Committee noted the update.

73 DEPARTURE OF MEMBER

Oral Report

The Chair advised Court that it was Professor Seaton's final Court meeting after almost ten years as Principal and Vice-Chancellor. On behalf of Court, he warmly thanked Professor Seaton for his hard work and effective leadership, especially during the challenging times of COVID-19 pandemic.

Approved

The Chair particularly acknowledged Professor Seaton's commitment to maintaining a positive relationship with Court and its members.

74 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Professor Bacon advised Court that she intended to arrange individual catch-up meetings with Court members to gain some insight on their perspective of Court. The Executive Office would make the arrangements.

The Chair advised Court that, in advance of the discussions on the Calendar of meetings at the next Court meeting, it would be helpful for members to form a view about returning to face to face committee meetings.

Thereafter, no other business was declared. The Chair thanked members for their contributions.

*[Secretary's note: at this point Ms Summers and Mr Weir left the meeting]*

81 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next scheduled meeting is Wednesday 29th June 2022.

Mr M Shaw  
**Chair**