Glasgow Caledonian University Court

Minutes of the University Court held on 18th September at 9am in the Boardroom, Britannia Building

Present: Yvette Hopkins (Chair), Amit Bhargava, Arlene Cairns, Professor Steve Decent, Alan Dickson Daniel Gallacher, Ellen Gibson, Asif Haseeb, Sharon Lowrie, Meg Lustman, Bill McDonald, Dr Nick McKerrell, Professor Catriona Miller, Oluwatomisin (Tom Tom) Osinubi, Osman Rafiq, Sylvie Freund Pickavance, Hamza Siddiqi, Anita Volkert and Jane Wilson.

Apologies Scott Haldane, Gavin Munn and Austin Sweeney.

In attendance: Jan Hulme, University Secretary & Vice Principal (Governance)
Susan Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer & Deputy Vice Chancellor
Professor Louise Dixon, Pro Vice Chancellor (Education)
Paul Queen, Chief Financial Officer
Fiona Campbell, Vice Principal (People & Student Wellbeing)
Claire Hulsen, Vice Principal (Strategy & Planning)
Caroline Bysh, Pro Vice Chancellor (Engagement)
Dawn Anderson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)
Professor John Connolly PVCR(Interim)
Professor Sharron Dolan PVCR (Interim)
Paul Brown, Director of Governance & Legal Services

Chair's opening remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the 25/26 academic year. The Chair thanked those who were able to attend dinner the previous evening and in particular, the fascinating insight into the transformative power of education by the guest speaker.

1. Minutes

1.1 Court **approved** that the minutes of the Court meetings held on 13th June 2025 and 23rd June 2025.

2. Matters arising

2.1 The Court **noted** a report on the matters arising from the Court meeting on 12th June 2025 and 23rd June 2025.

3. Declaration of interest

3.1 A summary of the register of interests was included with the court papers. The Chair confirmed that some Court members had provided updates and that these would be incorporated into the revised Register. Court members were reminded of the importance of this being kept up to date and were invited to advise the University Secretary or the Director of Governance & Legal Services of any changes to their position or if any agenda items gave rise to a conflict of interest.

4. Items brought by the Chair of Court

4.1 The Chair referred to the University Stakeholder Event which had taken place on 17th September and the thought-provoking discussion about Technology, Talent & Tomorrow's Workforce. Special thanks to Chancellor Dr Anne-Marie Imafidon, Dr Jonathan Chippindale, Dr Jim Rowan and PVC Education, Professor Louise Dixon as well as Jill Watt and Julie Duncan for meticulous organisation.

4.2 The Chair explained that the VC Search Committee has identified a shortlist of candidates to take forward to interview. Before then there are opportunities for Court members to meet the candidates through specific meetings organised with lay governors and also at the stakeholder group meetings which would take place on 3rd October. She confirmed that the interviews would take place on 6th October and the steps that would follow thereafter in order to confirm the appointment by Court, of the preferred candidate.

4.3 The Chair reminded Court that she had now been in post for 6 months and wanted to convey her appreciation to the management but also her gratitude to all governors for their dedication and time commitment to the University, as well as welcoming and supporting her in the role.

5. Principal and Executive Board Report

5.1 The Principal presented his report which provided a summary of items arising since the previous Court meeting, including the University's success in the Daily Mail University Guide, being named the UK's University of the Year for Graduate Jobs 2026 – and once again securing its position as the top-ranked modern university in the UK. The University has climbed to 36th equal in the overall UK rankings, rising four places from last year and continuing to lead the 71 modern universities across the UK – those institutions established since 1992. The report also provided an update on the Scottish Sector Funding Model and the impact of the UKVI white paper on the University and its future finances; the University's international strategy and developments on this and also the excellent National Students Survey(NSS) results for the University.

5.2 In response to questions, the Principal, expanded upon his report and the strength of Home UG recruitment but reflected on the difficulty that the current UKVI uncertainty is causing in International student recruitment. He explained that there are a number of factors which require to be considered and that management is reviewing the countries from which we obtain students, but that the risks associated with this always have to be carefully considered. He explained the hard work that the University staff are doing in order to address the action plan that has been imposed on the University by the UKVI and that our metrics are looking better and that the University's cautious approach to recruiting international students will improve the metrics overall. He further explained that the reduction in the number of international students would have an impact on the University's finances and will have a greater impact on the London campus, but that the situation is being carefully managed with various options being formulated for presentation to the F&GPC and Court in due course.

5.3 In response to comments about the reducing of international students and the opposite approach that some other universities are taking, the Principal explained that in examining the UKVI white paper on proposed legislation and the sentiment in the UK about immigration, it is inevitable that the UK Government will introduce restrictions on the number of international students and that the approach that management are taking at present is designed to future proof our current recruitment and protect our UKVI licence by ensuring that we are able to comply with the proposed new metrics that the UKVI will use to measure compliance. Whilst other universities may be taking a more bullish approach for short term gain, he believed the cautious approach that the University is taking will better protect the licence in due course and that the budget that has been produced by the finance team and approved by the F&GPC recognises the volatility of the international student market and will ensure that the University operates within the regulatory requirements and protects its future financial security.

5.4 The Principal expanded upon the proposal for a further MSS programme to be rolled out and the long term financial benefits that this should bring to the University, but recognised that if there is insufficient interest, the management, with Court's approval, may have to consider a more targeted redundancy programme to achieve the required savings. The Principal confirmed that in any decision about future staffing, the potential impact on students would be considered.

5.5 Governors expressed support for the work that is being done to provide financial sustainability to the University, recognising the savings that require to be made across the University and the flexibility that management and Court require to exercise in order to react to issues as they arise but that they believe that management were cognisant of this and that Court is supportive. The Principal acknowledged this and confirmed that management were monitoring all of the complex factors that were impacting the University and the sector in general and that in view of that, additional F&GPC meetings were taking place to ensure that appropriate scrutiny and support was being provided by governors.

6. Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Vice Chancellor (COO & DVC) report

6.1 The court **noted** the report from the COO & DVC which gave an overview of key developments in Finance; Estates; IT; Future Students, Marketing & Communications; Foundation, Alumni & Events; and Registry & School Professional Services

6.2 She explained that there had been an issue with the Govan Mbeki building but that measures had been taken in order to ensure the health and safety of those using that building and its surrounding environment. She explained that Health & safety is always a primary concern with any building issues. She explained that remedial measures had already been put in place and that further work was being carried out to ensure that any potential issues are identified and addressed.

6.3 In response to positive comments from governors about the recent University Stakeholder Event, the Pro Vice Chancellor (Engagement) explained that the event had been held virtually in order to include a wider number and variety of external stakeholders and that this had been successful with a significant increase in external stakeholders attending compared to previous years.

7. UKVI Report

7.1 The COO/DVC provided Court with a report which outlined the approach that has been taken to addressing the requirements of the UKVI Action Plan. She explained the nature of the report and the measures that the UKVI use in assessing a university's compliance and the improvements that the University has achieved against those metrics.

7.2 In response to comments from governors, the COO/DVC explained that the issue with the UVKI compliance occurred as a result of a number of historic factors regarding international student recruitment and enrolment but that these issues had been raised with Court in the previous year and had been addressed some time ago. She reassured Court that various measures had been put in place to ensure improved compliance by the University and that these had now been in effect for some time.

8. Draft Budget 2025-2026

8.1 The CFO provided a report on the updated budget based on additional information, and incorporating mitigations approved by Court since it approved the original unmitigated budget for SFC purposes in June 2025. He explained that the F&GPC had considered this further revised budget earlier that week and endorsed it for submission to Court for approval. He further explained that the budget assumes that the MSS proposal being put forward in the meeting is approved by Court.

8.2 The CFO explained each budget change in detail and the various mitigations that had considered in preparing the budget, leading to a reduced predicted deficit from that previously presented to Court. He explained the 3 year projected budget and how the University would reasonably make sufficient savings and return to a surplus situation, recognising that a short term deficit was inevitable given the issues affecting student recruitment that had been discussed earlier in the meeting, by the Principal.

8.3 In response to questions, the COO/DVC explained that the incentive that had been offered to international agents was dependent on their success and a demonstrable return on investment, but that this was a contractually agreed one off arrangement and not permanent.

8.4 In response to a comment from a governor, the CFO confirmed that payment to agents does not utilise public funds and is self-funded from student fees and in response to a furtherquestion, the CFO confirmed that the decision on increasing some agents' fees had been taken by the Executive and not Court, as this is a management decision. It was confirmed that the report would clarify this. In response to further questions, the CFO explained that management would continue to monitor how further savings might be achieved including where possible, reducing bureaucracy. The Court discussed possible ways in which efficiencies and reduced bureaucracy might simplify processes and reduce costs to the University, but at the same time complying with its regulatory and financial obligations and commitments. The possible use of AI to reduce repetition and the risk of burdening bureaucracy was discussed and that this would be kept under consideration.

8.5 Court **approved** the revised budget.

8.6 **Action:** The CFO undertook to review the report to clarify that certain decisions were management decisions of the Executive and not Court decisions.

9. Mutual Severance Scheme

9.1 The Vice Principal (People & Student Wellbeing) presented this paper which set out a proposal to launch a Mutual Severance Scheme (MSS) to enable the cost saving required to meet the budget projections. She explained that this is an untargeted scheme however it is recognised that in the event that sufficient savings and efficiencies are not achieved by this, a targeted approach may also be required and that high level and detailed proposals may require to be worked through over the coming months and that these would be brought back to Court in due course.

9.2 In response to comments from governors, the Vice Principal (People & Student Wellbeing) reminded Court that the terms and rationale for any proposed MSS scheme had been changed from previous MSS exercises and that Court had previously approved these revised terms. She acknowledged potential concerns about staff morale and the importance of communications around this. She explained that the current MSS was necessary in order to help achieve the required savings for the University. Court agreed that it would be better to offer the option of MSS rather than have to impose targeted redundancies, which may be necessary in order to achieve the savings that the University must make, If MSS was not successful.

9.3 Court **approved** the relaunch of the scheme. Sylvie Freund Pickavance voted **against** the proposal and Dr Nick McKerrell, Professor Catriona Miller, Ellen Gobson, and Osman Rafiq **abstained**.

10. Interim Management Arrangements: Handover from VC and DVC/COO

10.1 The Vice Principal (People & Student Wellbeing) presented a paper which set out for Court how any gap in leadership between the departure of the current VC and the arrival of his successor would be addressed through the appointment of an interim VC. She explained that until the new VC is identified and their period of notice confirmed, it is not possible to bring forward a definitive proposal but that options envisaged are that the VC's key areas of responsibility, together with the executive lead who is currently responsible, manages these but depending on the length of the gap, an experienced interim VC might be brought in to manage these with support of the relevant executives.

10.2 Court discussed the options and questioned the possibility and benefits of bringing in an interim VC for such a short period of time. The Chair of Court explained that arrangements for existing executives to take on additional responsibilities were already underway and that the situation would continue to be monitored, but that Court could not be certain of the exact requirements until a new VC had been appointed, and their start date confirmed. She confirmed that this would be kept under review and that any further proposal would be brought back to Court for approval.

10.3 Court **noted** the report.

11. Student Recruitment Report

11.1 The Court noted a report from the VP (Strategy and Planning) detailing the indicative student recruitment for Trimester A 2025-26, at undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels. She confirmed the University's success in Scottish undergraduate recruitment and that the University remains the largest recruiter of Graduate Apprentices in Scotland, as well as continuing widening access, having the largest cohort of SIMD 20 students of any Scottish university.

11.2 She explained that international student recruitment was lower than targeted but that we continue to receive applications for Tri B, from our present markets, albeit the proportion from each market is changing.

11.3 In response to questions, she confirmed that the SFC do not only measure student intake in each year but continuing students over the whole University when calculating their numbers and that this is something that the Executive are monitoring carefully in the hope of persuading the SFC to grant the University more funded places.

11.4 Court **noted** the report.

12. Student President's report

12.1 The Student President reported on issues affecting students and on the activities of the Students' Association drawing particular attention to the activities in Freshers' Week; work in developing students' confidence for participating in committees and boards; partnerships with other universities; an NUS campaign for better student housing and the community safety for international students. She reminded governors of the student association sessions to which governors have an open invitation and encouraged as many governors to attend as possible.

12.2 In response to questions from governors, she confirmed that free access for student to the gym had been continued and emphasised how positive this was for students. She highlighted that changes were being proposed to the election process and qualifications for students as well as the appointment of student representatives to Court. She explained that these proposals were currently making their way through the Student Association governance processes and that she would report back to Court on this in due course.

12.3 Court **noted** the report.

13. University Secretary's Report

13.1 The Court **noted** a report from the University Secretary and addressed the Court's fulfilment of its Primary Responsibilities in 24/25 and **approved** the Statement of Primary Responsibilities for 2025/26.

13.2 She explained that the Executive were continuing to consider the implications for the University of the Gillies Report into Dundee University and if and how the University might require to adapt its governance processes to account for any recommendations made in the Gillies Report and any subsequent guidance issued by the SFC. She confirmed that this would be kept under review.

13.3 Governors discussed the report and its recommendations and the need for the Court to be satisfied that changes are only made where these may be necessary for the better operation of Court or to comply with any regulations that might be imposed on Court.

13.4 The Modern Slavery Statement for the financial year ended 31st July 2025 was presented to and **approved** by Court.

13.5 The University Secretary presented details of the proposed new Civic Engagement lay governor, Dr Stephen Breslin and confirmed that if approved, he had agreed to join Court and would do so on 1st October 2025.

13.6 **Action: Court approved the Statement of Primary Responsibilities, the Modern Slavery Statement and the appointment of Dr Stephen Breslin as a new lay governor.**

14. Research Report: Year 2024-2025

14.1 The Court **noted** a report presented by Professor Sharron Dolan, PVC Research (Joint Interim), which shared with Court the Research report for academic year 24/25, summarised research policy context and REF2029 preparations, the 2024/25 Q4 and full year applications and awards, and a provided a summary of the current PhD student population by School, and associated demographic information.

14.2 In response to a concern raised by a governor regarding the potential reduction in unfunded research as a result of financial constraints, Professor John Connolly, PVC Research (Joint Interim) reaffirmed the importance of the research culture within the University. He explained that the creation of the new RKES department within the University recognises the importance of research to the University but also that the University needs to ensure that research is sustainable.

14.3 **Action:** Court **noted** the report

15. Standing Committee reports

15.1 Finance and General Purposes Committee – 14th July and 15th September 2025.
Arlene Cairns, Chair of the Committee, provided an update to Court on the meeting that was held on 14th July and 15th September 2025.

15.2 The Chair explained that work that the Committee had been undertaking in relation to the budget that had been presented to Court by the CFO and the importance of the increased cash KPI. She confirmed that the F&GPC would continue to carefully monitor this and the other finances of the University. She explained a pause in the Estate Masterplan and the reasons for this but assured Court that essential maintenance and improvements to the University estate would continue to be made

15.3 Court **noted** the report.

16. Media Report

16.1 The Court noted the Media Coverage Analysis Update Report for the period of May, June and July 2025.

17. Date of next meeting

17.1 The next Court meeting will take place on **Thursday 13th November 2025**.