

Glasgow Caledonian University Court

Minutes of the University Court held at 9 am on Thursday 8th February 2024 in person in the Lantern, Annie Lennox Building.

Present: Rob Woodward (Chair), Jennifer Abali, Amit Bhargava, Professor Steve Decent, Alan Dickson, Sylvie Freund Pickavance, Daniel Gallacher, Ellen Gibson, Dr Lyle Gray, David Halliday, Ian Kerr, Sharon Lowrie (by Spiderphone until 10.30), Meg Lustman, Neena Mahal, Bill McDonald, Dr Nick McKerrell, Professor Catriona Miller, Chidozie Nwaigwe and Austin Sweeney.

Apologies Asif Haseeb, Jane Wilson and Professor Alastair Robertson

In attendance Jan Hulme, University Secretary and Vice Principal Governance
Professor Ehsan Mesbahi, Provost and DVC
Susan Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer & DVC
Professor Andrea Nelson, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research
Fiona Campbell, Vice Principal, People and Student Wellbeing
Claire Hulsen, Vice Principal Strategy and Planning
Caroline Bysh, Pro Vice-Chancellor Engagement
Professor Mike Mannion, Pro Vice-Chancellor and President GCNYC
Dawn Anderson Pro Vice-Chancellor International
Paul Queen, Chief Finance Officer
Paul Brown, Director of Governance & Legal Services

Chair's opening remarks

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Caroline Bysh (PVC Engagement) to her first Court meeting and advised that, exceptionally, Sharon Lowrie would be joining the meeting remotely. Apologies were as noted, and the Chair observed that this would have been the last Court meeting attended by Professor Robertson in his role as VP Learning and Teaching. He extended the Court's thanks and good wishes to Professor Robertson in his new role.

1. Minutes

- 1.1 Court noted that the minutes of the Court meeting held on 14th December 2023 had been approved by prior circulation.

2. Matters arising

- 2.1 The Court noted a report on the matters arising from the Court meeting on 14th December 2023 and the actions taken to address them. The Chair informed governors that cyber security training is now available and that the University Information Services team will contact each of the governors to assist them to access the training using their GCU accounts.
- 2.2 The Chair confirmed that the Court briefing on 9th May, will be on GBV and the University's approach to addressing this.
- 2.3 The VP People and Student Wellbeing presented her note on the local pay position at other Scottish institutions. She explained that the sector is currently awaiting UCEA's proposals but that modernising the pay spine is anticipated to be part of future sector negotiations.
- 2.4 Following a previous question about the governance framework within which funding had been identified in 2022 for a research programme, the Chair of the Audit Committee, Bill McDonald,

explained he had reviewed this in detail and was satisfied that due process had been followed. However, as part of the Audit Committee's annual review of financial procedures and policies he would seek discussion of existing policy in respect of funding decisions spanning multiple years. A governor sought more detail and the Chair agreed that this could be provided

3. Declaration of interest

- 3.1 A summary of the register of interests was included with the court papers. There was no update but Court members were reminded 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 reminded Court that his current tenure as Chair was scheduled to come to an end in February 2025 and he confirmed his wish to step down at that time. He confirmed that the process to appoint his successor will now begin and that, as prescribed by the CGNC's remit, Meg Lustman, Vice-Chair of Court would chair the CGNC in its role as the search committee for his successor. Reports will be provided to Court on progress.
- 4.2 The Chair advised members that Governance and Legal Services has managed to organise a further opportunity for governors to watch the video of the Health & Safety training that was provided in person last year to the People Committee and had been very well received. For those who were not able to attend, this will give them a chance to view the training. This will only be available for a short time and details will be circulated following this Court meeting.
- 4.3 The Chair provided Court with an update on the work that had been undertaken and the process that had been followed in the search for a new Chancellor. The Chair of Court confirmed that he was delighted to present the CGNC's recommendation that Dr Anne- Marie Imafidon MBE, an honorary graduate of the University, should be appointed as the University's sixth Chancellor. Dr Imafidon's installation would take place at the first of the summer graduation ceremonies. She was keen to meet Court, and an invitation would be extended to her to attend one of the Court dinners in the autumn.
- 4.4 The Chair informed Court that the Court meeting due to take place on 18th September 2024 would be postponed and would now take place in the afternoon of 2nd October, following the Court strategy event already scheduled for that day.
- 4.5 The Chair informed Court that due to a technical delay on the part of the auditors of GCNYC, the letter of support for GCNYC required to be updated to extend the date from 31st December 2024 to 31st January 2025. Court was asked to approve this.

ACTION: Court **approved** the appointment of Dr Anne Marie Imafidon MBE as Chancellor with immediate effect for a period of five years.

Court **approved** the alteration of the letter of support for GCNYC.

5. Principal and Executive Board report

- 5.1 The Principal presented his report which included a summary of the PwC sustainability report on the UK university sector, an update on the Scottish Government proposals for educational reform, new skilled worker visa rules, a Scottish budget update and the delay of the Research Excellence Framework until 2029.
- 5.2 The Principal expanded on the PwC report and the Scottish Government budget and the impact of funding cuts on the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and how this will affect all universities in Scotland.

The Principal explained that the University's strong recruitment last year means that it has met its SFC targets which should stand the University in good stead but that at present, it is uncertain as to just how the Scottish Government budget cuts will affect the SFC and individual institutions.

- 5.3 There was discussion about the University's entry tariff and the potential impact of its reduction. The Principal confirmed that the University's tariff continues to sit at the high end in comparison with other Scottish universities and was more comparable to the tariff of pre-Covid years. He proposed that more granular understanding of the role of tariff was, however, needed at discipline level. The increased number of international students registered in Glasgow and London was raised, although this was against the background of new volatility in international student recruitment and visa issues which were having an impact particularly in Glasgow. The Principal noted that the entry requirements for international and home students were the same. The University's financial exposure as a result of the current volatility was less than some as the University's international fee income, currently around 25% of income, was slightly below the Scottish average. In response to an observation that the sector should be driving more public focus on the underfunding of home students, he advised that in conjunction with UUK and Universities Scotland, the University will continue to work with politicians of all parties to improve university funding.

6. COO/DVC Report

- 6.1 The Court noted a report from the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and DVC that gave an overview of key issues arising in her portfolio since the last Court meeting in December 2023.
- 6.2 The COO/DVC explained the steps that were being taken to mitigate the effects of the volatility in the international markets. She noted too that debt management is increasingly difficult due to the number of students wishing to delay payments but that this is being addressed intensively by the Finance Office. The Chief Finance Officer explained that debt management is done internally and it would only be after a student had withdrawn from the University that an external agency would be used for debt recovery.
- 6.3 Addressing estates developments, the COO/ DVC informed Court that: a contract with Siemens for improving the University's Building Management System (BMS) is about to commence and that this will help the University to achieve its sustainability and carbon reduction targets; the new building at Vallance Road in London had opened on time; in view of the increased number of students at GCUL the Royal Festival Hall has been secured as the new venue for London graduations. In response to a question from a governor, she described the infrastructure project that would create lecturing space in the CCEE building.
- 6.4 The COO/ DVC explained that as with the previous year, due to numerous external factors, the University budget is becoming increasingly difficult to project and that the budget for this year will be based on a number of 3 possible scenarios but that the University currently remains in a good financial position.

7. Mutual Severance Scheme Proposal (Strictly Confidential to members of court and attendees only)

- 7.1 The COO/ DVC presented the paper detailing the proposals that have been developed to ensure the ongoing growth and financial sustainability of the University which seeks to address the projected 2026/27 deficit, and associated variance to the Court KPI of 3% surplus.

- 7.2 The COO/DVC explained that in preparing the paper for Court, consultation had taken place with the staff governors and that the clear rationale was to rebalance and invest in staffing to address the impact of recent strong recruitment of home and international students and support those areas which had experienced increases in student numbers. While this work was already underway incrementally, the MSS would expedite it and get the resources more swiftly to areas of greatest need. A staff governor questioned the KPI requiring a surplus of 3% annually. The COO pointed out that the Court agreed KPI reflected the fact that drivers included the need to invest in the campus (emerging as the priority for our students) and the worrying economic climate the sector was facing.
- 7.3 There was predominantly strong support among governors for acting now and from a position of strength to create headroom to secure the future while the University's financial position was robust. The importance of a well-developed communications strategy was highlighted to ensure that the purpose of the Scheme was clear to staff, and it was suggested that the value and purpose of the scheme would be demonstrated through swift evidence of investment. While it was recognised that opportunities offered by the MSS might be welcome among staff members, some governors questioned the rationale for the scheme being launched in advance of the refreshed strategy and perceived a tension between the introduction of a scheme that would facilitate staff departures and the University's strong financial position. The Principal explained that the Scheme was not targeted at particular areas but was an important step to address the fact that, while the University's staff numbers had never been higher, albeit with strong student growth, the wide disparity in the SSRs, obscured by the average SSR, needed urgent attention. The objective was to rebalance staffing to the benefit of staff and students and put the University in the best possible position to grow income as public funding came under ever greater pressure. In response to questions about the timing of the MSS and the ongoing review of the University strategy, the Principal explained that the current review of strategy is not designed to look at the operation of the University at an individual discipline level but rather the future shape and direction of the University in order to maintain the recent successes of the University and that the MSS process is designed to better align the University workforce with its future needs. It was recognised that this does not only affect the academic staff at the University but also the professional services staff. The Principal reminded Court of the number of posts that had already been released in recent months.
- 7.4 The Chair of Court thanked the COO/DVC and the Principal for their explanation of the proposal and noted that it is designed to proactively ensure the future of the University and that he was sure that this would be implemented appropriately, given the potential impact on staff.
- 7.5 The Court **approved** the proposal. The union nominated governors abstained.

8. Student President's Report

- 8.1 The Court noted a report from the Student President highlighting recent activities and initiatives undertaken by the Student's Association.
- 8.2 He highlighted that the new Student Partnership Agreement between the University and the Students Association had now been signed and demonstrated the support that the University provided to students. He explained that the refurbished Reunion Bar is now being used by a greater number of students for organising and engaging in various sporting and other on campus activities and that student engagement is slowly increasing, following the pandemic.
- 8.3 He explained that the Student Association were actively encouraging students to get involved in the upcoming Student Association elections. He explained that the current Full Time Officers are working

with the University's communications team in order to raise awareness of the elections and encourage wider and diverse participation.

9. Students' Association Trimester 1 Report

- 9.1 The Court noted the report from the Student President, that provided an update on Students' Association activities for Trimester A in the academic year 2023/24.

10. University Secretary's Report

The University Secretary presented the proposed dates for the calendar of Court and Standing Committee for 2025/26 and reminded Court that the dates for 2024/25 had been approved at the Court meeting in April 2023. However, rather than asking Court to approve the schedule of 25/26 dates set out in the appendix, she referred to the Effectiveness Review recommendation and invited governors, as well as colleagues responsible for presenting regular reports on key business, to review the 25/26 draft schedule and advise of any desirable changes and rationale. She explained that the draft dates had already been prepared taking account of previous feedback from staff and governors and recognising school holiday periods during term time but that there was no perfect solution. However, if further steps could be taken to make the schedule more efficient and supportive of individual commitments, efforts would be made to do so. Court **noted** the amended calendar would be brought to the April Court for approval.

Action: Governors and attendees to contact G & LS with any suggested changes to the 25/26 draft schedule now.

11. Strategy 2030 Refresh

- 11.1 The VP Strategy and Planning presented the Refreshing our Strategy background paper and provided an update on the feedback from staff and students gathered through a series of strategy engagement sessions and the draft Strategy Document. She noted that the feedback had demonstrated strong support for the University's mission but that the vision statement needs to change to better reflect the University's aims.
- 11.2 Court members discussed the early draft of the Strategy document. In response to comments from governors, the VP Strategy and Planning explained that teaching and research are both considered to be essential elements of the purpose, future work and focus of the University, building on our growing reputation for research and therefore both are considered to be important elements of the strategy and vision. Court members also felt that the strategy could be even more ambitious but also that the vision was unduly restrictive in its references to Glasgow.
- 11.3 The VP Strategy and Planning welcomed input from Court members on issues including the SDGs and future-proofing the strategy, suggestions for a higher profile for employability as a standalone enabler, inclusion of transparency in the enabler on governance, and reflection on the ambitions as set out in the draft strategy.
- 11.4 The Principal and the Provost and DVC explained that the strategy document is designed to provide a framework for the vision and direction of the University going forward but that it would not provide granular detail of how the strategy would be put into effect. That would be the ongoing work of Court and the Executive Group, as well as everyone at the University, to see that vision realised.

- 11.5 Court noted the suggested next steps in the process of refreshing our strategy including taking on board the feedback from Court, discussion at Senate, engagement with external stakeholders, refining of the strategy, development of KPIs (which would be the subject of a special court event), and proposals to bring a further draft strategy to Court for approval in due course.

12. Student Recruitment Report

- 12.1 The Court received a report from the VP Strategy and Planning on student recruitment to Trimester B in the academic year 2023-24 as at 29 January 2024. The paper also included a high-level overview of taught postgraduate full-time student recruitment to show a combined Trimester A and B view to date. She explained that registration is still ongoing for a variety of reasons outwith the University's control but that staff are working to assist students to mitigate any impact. She explained that the UCAS January deadline for Home students' applications for 2024-25 had now passed and that applications at this point are up 10% on this time last year.
- 12.2 In response to questions, the VP S&P, explained that recruitment and deposits levels for international students were below target. The targets, which had been set last year, were based on significant year on year growth in international student numbers but the impact of changes to immigration rules, which post date the setting of the targets, has had an impact on student numbers. In immediately previous years, the University had been consistently exceeding the targets and last year as a result it had sought an increase in its CAS allocation and set increased targets. However, due to the new volatility and downward pressures, which have affected the whole sector, recruitment is falling below targets. The CFO confirmed that in respect of agents' fees, these are only paid when a student actually enrolls at the University.

13. Update on GCNYC

- 13.1 The Court **noted** an update on the progress of the GCNYC Transition Project.

14. Senate Disciplinary Committee (SDC) Annual Report

- 14.1 The University Secretary presented a report on student misconduct offences considered under the terms of the Code of Student Conduct during Session 2022/23. She explained that the report provided an overview of these issues in order that Court can fully understand any areas of concern. She explained that the number of disciplinary cases remained small in comparison with the number of students. There are some areas of particular concern which featured in the statistics across the sector such as plagiarism and the use of AI and ghost writers. She explained that work was ongoing to address the inappropriate use of AI and to ensure that students understood their responsibilities in working in accordance with the University's standards and expectations. It was recognised that in large classes where it was difficult for lecturers to have a close knowledge of each individual student's work and style, uncharacteristic work submitted for assessments was less immediately obvious.
- 14.2 Court **noted** the terms of the report.

15. Complaints Handling Procedure Annual Report

15.1 The University Secretary presented the prescribed annual report which provided an overview of the complaints received by the University in the period 1st August 2022 to 31st July 2023 and any learning points which derived from them. She pointed out that many complaints were successfully resolved at a local level. The ultimate body to whom complaints can be referred is the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO) and that there have been only two such referrals in that timeframe and in both cases, the SPSO upheld the University's position.

15.2 Court **noted** the terms of the report which would be published on the University's website.

16. Research Update Trimester A

16.1 The court **noted** a report providing updates on the Research report for Q2 in academic year 2023/24, summarising research and innovation applications, awards and 'success' rates by volume and value to GCU, by School.

17. University Senate: Report from meeting of Senate held on 13th December 2023

17.1 The Court **noted** a report that provided a summary of the business discussed by Senate at its meeting on the 13th December.

18. Standing Committee Business

18.1 People Committee – 30th November 2023

18.1.1 The Chair of the Committee Court, Neena Mahal, presented the Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Response Policy and Suspected Student Suicide Response Guide and Resources and asked that members approved its contents.

18.1.2 Court **approved** the policy.

18.2 Audit Committee – 23rd January 2024

18.2.1 The Chair of the Committee, Bill McDonald, presented the report. Court **noted** the report of the issues discussed at the Committee meeting held on 23rd January 2024.

18.3 Court Governance and Nominations Committee 14th December and 30th January 2024

18.3.1 The Chair of the Committee, Rob Woodward, presented the paper which provided a report of the issues discussed, decisions taken by, and recommendations from the Court Governance and Nominations Committee meetings held on 14th December 2023 and 30th January 2024 including matters to be approved by Court and an update on the progress of appointing a new Chancellor.

18.3.2 Court **approved** the appointment of Arlene Cairns as a governor and as Chair Designate of the F&GPC wef 1 March 2024.

18.3.3 Court **approved** the appointment of Scott Haldane as a governor and as a member of the F&GPC. wef 1st March 2024.

18.3.4 Court **approved** the Committee's proposed response to the report of the externally commissioned Governance Effectiveness Review ('Quinquennial Review') 2023 and its

recommendations and suggestions. The response would be published on the University's website alongside the Review document.

18.3.5 Court **approved** the Committee's recommendations arising from its review of the suggestions which emerged from the Court Annual Effectiveness review 2023.

18.3.6

18.4 Finance & General Purposes Committee – 4th December 2023

18.4.1 The Chair of the Committee, Ian Kerr, presented the report. Court **noted** the report of the issues discussed at the Committee meeting held on 4th December 2023

19. GCNYC Board of Trustees Report from Meeting on 15th December 2023

19.1 The Court noted a report presented by Sylvie Freund-Pickavance from the last meeting of the GCNYC Board of Trustees held on the 15th December 2023.

20. Media Coverage Analysis

20.1 The Court noted the report that highlighted the media coverage received by GCU in November & December 2023.

21. Date of Next Meeting

21.1 The Court noted that the next scheduled meeting would take place in person on Thursday 18th April 2024 at 9.00am with dinner taking place the evening before on 17th April at which Michael Marra MSP would be the guest speaker.