Glasgow Caledonian University Court

Minutes of the University Court held on 13th November at 9am in the Lantern, Annie Lennox Building

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

Apologies Bill McDonald, Daniel Gallagher, Scott Haldane, Asif Haseeb 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 second meeting of the 25/26 academic year. The Chair welcomed D r. Stephen Breslin to his first meeting as a governor. The Chair also welcomed Professor Mairi Watson, the University's incoming Principal, who was attending the meeting as an observer. The Chair reflected on a successful Court dinner the previous evening and thanked those who had organised it.

The Chair confirmed that the agenda item on the Corporate Risk Register was for noting rather than approval, as indicated on the agenda. The Chair also advised that she had received confirmation from all of those who had submitted their apologies, that they approved each of the items that were for approval. There being no other clarification of the paper classification, the meeting proceeded.

1. Minutes

1.1 Court **approved** that the minutes of the Court meetings held on 18th September 2025 and 9th October 2025.

2. Matters arising

2.1 The Court **noted** a report on the matters arising from the Court meeting on 18th September 2025 and 9th October 2025.

3. Declaration of interest

3.1 A summary of the register of interests was included with the court papers. 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 conclusion of the process for the appointment of the new Principal and the success of the outcome. She thanked all those involved in the process but in particular, Meg Lustman, Jan Hulme, Fiona Campbell and Karen McMillan, each of whom devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to ensure that the process ran smoothly and that the University gained the best candidate.

4.2 The Chair thanked Court for their speed and agility in responding to the request for confirmation of the interim management arrangements between the time of the current Principal's departure and the new Principal starting. She confirmed that an all-staff announcement would be made following the Court meeting.

4.3 The Chair thanked all of the Executive team for their hard work in ensuring that the transition of the DVC/ COO's work and responsibilities worked smoothly and assured Court that arrangements were all in hand. She thanked the DVC/COO for assisting in the handover and also, the current Principal and the incoming Principal, both of whom were working closely together to ensure a smooth transition.

4.4 The Chair provided Court with an update on the investigations into the culture and environment in the London campus and that these were ongoing and that on conclusion, further details would be brought to a future Court meeting.

4.5 The Chair explained that she had now completed her 1:1's with governors as part of the annual effectiveness review process. She thanked governors for their engagement in the process and that she had learned a lot. She acknowledged that there were issues that require to be addressed including the relationship between Court and the Executive and Court's oversight of the Executive work but that she was working on this. She thanked governors for their agility in attending to matters that required to be dealt with urgently and between formal Court meetings. She explained that overall, the feedback is that Court works well and that Court is provided with effective and timely information in order to make informed decisions. She confirmed that the comments raised and required actions were still being collated and would be reported to a future Court.

4.6 The Chair reminded governors of the upcoming graduations in Glasgow on 25th & 26th November and encouraged as many governors as possible to attend.

Action: Clerk to issue a reminder to governors about the upcoming graduations.

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 a summary of the Unviersty's achievements over the past few years and the work that all staff have undertaken in achieving those results. He confirmed that arrangements for the transition to the incoming Principal were underway. He explained that as part of that process, the incoming Principal wished to proceed immediately with the process to begin recruitment of 2 senior staff appointments: a new Provost & DVC and the PVC Research. Court was asked to approve recruitment to these roles.

5.2 In response to a question about the future of the London campus, the Principal confirmed that an options appraisal was currently being finalised and that this would be presented to the F&GPC meeting in December and then subsequently to Court for its consideration and approval.

5.3 The Principal handed over to the Vice Principal (People & Student Wellbeing) who provided an update on the latest MSS programme and that this was still ongoing. She explained that a further update would be provided to Court in due course. In response to a question about the senior appointment recruitment exercise, she explained that at this stage, the COO/ DVC role was not being advertised as it might reflect negatively on the University if too many senior roles were advertised at the same time. She explained that the COO role would be considered in due course once the new Principal had taken up her position.

5.4 Court **noted** the report and approved the recruitment of a new Provst & DVC and a PVC Research.

6. Student' Association Student President's Report

6.1 The court **noted** the report from the Student President which gave an overview of key developments at the Student' Association.

6.2 The Student President explained that the SA had been working closely with other SA's to lobby MSP's on the potential impact of the new Housing Bill in order to ensure that MSP's were aware of the potential impact on students. She explained that they had been lobbying MSP's on the proposed Tertiary Education Bill and the lack of a specific reference to student associations.

6.3 She thanked those governors who were able to attend the recent SA session involving governors and explained that this had been a great opportunity to discuss the theme of "employability" for students

6.4 She explained that the most recent student survey, highlighted the cost of living as students' most important concern but also that mental health and wellbeing were noted as significant issues. She explained that the SA continued to work on ways of encouraging social integration through a variety of diverse events.

6.5 She reported that a new London officer had been appointed and thanked the Executive for recognising the importance of keeping Wednesday afternoons free of formal education in order to encourage broader activity within the University through sports and other opportunities.

6.6 In response to a question about informing students of issues such as rent control, the Student President explained that the SA was in the process of producing a " Know your Rights " brochure, to assist students and that this would be distributed in due course.

6.7 Court **noted** the report.

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

7.1 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. Those responsible for interim management of the DVC/ COO's portfolio provided an update on each of their areas of responsibility.

7.2 The CFO explained that the surplus for the previous year was in fact higher than forecast and that the final accounts for 2024/25 would be presented to the joint meeting of the Audit and the F&GCP Committees before final approval by the Audit Committee. He provided an update on forecasts for this year and that this would be presented to the F&GPC and Court in due course.

7.3 The CFO explained that the new " Safezone " app which is designed to help staff and students' safety both on campus and when overseas, was being rolled out and had been well received. In response to questions, he explained that the initial roll out had been targeted at particular groups within the University but that it would be rolled out to all, in time.

7.4 The Vice Principal (Strategy & Planning) provided a brief update on student recruitment and that this was a busy time for student recruitment. She also explained that this was the start of celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the University and that a programme of events had been produced. In response to questions from governors, she confirmed there will be follow up communications to governors on the planned activities. The DVC/COO explained that fundraising was a key focus of the activities and that there would be a significant number of opportunities for governors and alumni to get involved in the celebrations. The Chair of Court highlighted that there could be overlap of the celebrations for GCU's 150th and the 850th anniversary celebrations for the city of Glasgow.

7.5 In response to a question about the Govan Mbeki building and scaffolding, the CFO explained that the extensive survey report was being finalised and this was expected soon and that a decision on removal of the scaffolding would be taken at that time.

7.6 In response to questions about payments to international recruitment agents, the Vice Principal (Strategy & Planning) reminded Court that GCU is a signatory to the Agents' Quality Framework and that ensuring that agents are appropriately trained in ours and the UK requirements, is part of that framework.

7.7 The CFO explained, in response to questions, that arrangements for access and egress to the University premises is of paramount importance and is kept under constant review and that an assessment had been undertaken in order to ensure that this was satisfactory with the scaffold in place at the Govan Mbeki building, as well as with all other buildings.

7.8 In response to questions, the CFO explained that the vast majority of student debt comes from international students and that the reduction in the level of debt was partly due to improved recovery processes but was also related to the reduction in the number of international students.

7.9 In response to further questions, the CFO explained that whilst progress on the Estates Masterplan had been paused, the University was still looking out for any property opportunities that might enhance the estate. He also explained that there was an ongoing maintenance programme addressing building improvements and that this would continue despite the pause in the larger Estate Masterplan.

7.10 Court **noted** the report.

8. UKVI Compliance and Action Plan – Progress Report

8.1 The VP S&P provided Court with a report which gave an update on the progress of the action plan and the measures that are being taken to address its terms. She confirmed that UKVI have been informed of the change to the authorising officers, with Claire Hulsen being responsible for students and Fiona Campbell being responsible for staff. She explained that the University had now been given a CAS allocation for Tri B and that this was an increase on the previous allocation. She further explained that this allocation was late in the recruitment process and may affect the number of students that we are able to recruit in Tri B but that this would help with recruitment for Tri C.

8.2 In response to comments from governors, the VP S&P confirmed that her understanding is that the most recent CAS allocation was issued in response to the University's submission of its latest BCA compliance report and that the issue of an increased number of CAS's is a positive indication of the report, but that she cannot be certain of this until we obtain feedback from the UKVI. She further explained that in terms of the action plan, the UKVI have advised that they will continue to monitor the University's progress against the plan but that they have provided us with no indication of how they will do this. She explained that the UKVI have access to data from Government sources that the University does not and therefore, it is difficult for us to know exactly how the University's performance is being judged. The Principal expressed the hope is that the increased CAS allocation, which was issued after submission of the University's BCA report, indicates that the UKVI have viewed the BCA report positively.

8.3 The VP S&P further explained that the group which is managing the action plan meets regularly and reviews the data that has been gathered and is working to ensure compliance with the action plan but that the measures taken to date have improved the quality of applicants and students enrolling and improved the BCA statistics. She further explained that the Executive are in negotiations with UUK, the SFC and other colleagues in the sector in lobbying the UKVI on the implications of the proposed changes to immigration rules.

8.4 Court **noted** the report.

9. Key Performance Indicator Report 2024-25

9.1 The VP (Strategy and Planning) provided a report on the key performance indicators for 2024-25. She explained the purpose of the KPI report and demonstrated the dashboard information that is available to governors.

9.2 In response to questions, the VP S&P explained the steps that the University is taking to assist graduates in getting into employment and have prepared a Graduates Outcome Plan to monitor and assist graduates and to monitor the University's performance in that area. She explained that the method of monitoring graduate employment had changed and that it is more difficult for the University to keep track of students but that the University does all that it can to assist graduates through the employability team. She further explained that the student experience and satisfaction is also a key KPI and that the Executive work closely with the Students' Association and that the student engagement survey is carefully analysed and together with the student employability, the University works hard to ensure that best experience and outcome for e studnets.

9.3 In response to a comment from a governor, the VP S&P explained that the University continues to have the best statistics on widening access for students and that this will continue as a key aim for the University and that the Executive are working closely with the SFC regarding levels of funding.

9.4 In response to questions, the CFO explained that the KPI on environmental sustainability had not been achieved as a result of one particular problem with a refrigeration unit but that this had been resolved.

9.5 Court **approved** the annual Strategy 2030 KPI report for academic year 2024-25.

10. Student Recruitment Report

10.1 The Court noted a report from the VP (Strategy and Planning) detailing summary view of student numbers at the Glasgow and London campuses in Trimester A 2025-26.

10.2 In response to questions, she confirmed that international student recruitment may not build back fully during Tri B but that the University aims to achieve this over the full academic year.

10.3 Court **noted** the report.

11. International Student Recruitment

11.1 The Court received a report from the Vice Principal (International) who presented the paper which provided an update on the work that is underway for expanding international recruitment and the new markets that are being targeted.

11.2 In response to comments from governors, she explained that some of the existing markets have caused problems and that those were being reviewed as part of the work being undertaken with a careful analysis of potential new markets being undertaken.

11.3 Court **noted** the report.

12. TNE Update

12.1 The Court noted a report from the Vice Principal (International) presented a paper which set out the University's current TNE position. She explained the change in the approach to TNE and how this would be better focused and targeted in future. She explained the lessons that had been learned from previous and existing TNE projects and the work of the group that has been set up in order to better engage with and manage TNE partners in order that they continue to reflect our mission and values.

12.2 Court **noted** the report.

13. University of Jinan Joint Education Institute business case

13.1 The Vice Principal (International) presented the business case to Court for taking the proposal regarding a a Joint Institute with a Chinese University forward to the next stage of engaging in contractual negotiations with a view to finalising the agreement. She reminded Court that the proposal for engaging with a Chinese TNE partner had previously been considered by Court. She explained that the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) has indicated that this is the manner in which they want all international arrangements proceeding in the future and the University has an opportunity to achieve that aim with an already existing partner in China. She outlined the potential risks and how these would be addressed or mitigated. She reminded governors that many of the potential risks associated with Jinan are not unique to China and that any TNE partner with whom the University might be likely to engage, will also have political and other pressures to bear. She explained that the Executive are aware of the geopolitical concerns that governors may have and that what would be crucial in entering the agreement is the provisions which deal with the University's exit arrangements, should we have to withdraw from the contract.

13.2 The Vice Principal (International) further explained that the current proposal does not include research and that given concerns about trusted research, any future consideration of collaboration on research would be carefully scrutinised before progressing. She explained that any potential cyber security risk was being considered and that specialist advice on this risk was being sought, but that staff would be provided with specific training on this. She explained that most of the staff involved would be employed by the Chinese university but that the three most senior staff would be employed by the University and their employment would be covered by the University's terms and conditions of employment.

13.3 She reminded Court that this university has been one of our TNE partners for a number of years and that this proposal is an extension of that relationship and that all business and academic considerations as well as the potential impact on studnets were being considered and reviewed as part of the process but that what Court were being asked is to grant authority to continue negotiations with the Chinese university with a view to establishing the full proposed terms on which the contract for the joint institute(JEI) would proceed, building in appropriate protections for GCU, its staff and students.

13.4 In response to concerns raised by governors, the VP (International) explained that the Executive were aware of these concerns and that these would influence how the University would engage in the contract negotiations and that the Executive would seek assurances on issues of concern. In response to a question about another UK university's relationship with its Chinese partner, the Principal explained that GCU would not let any TNE partner dictate terms on which GCU would conduct its business or which would contravene the University's mission or values. He explained that an essential element of the contract negotiations would be outlining the exit arrangements for GCU in the event that we had any concerns about any aspect of the partnership or its impact on GCU.

13.5 Governors expressed both support for and concerns about entering into the agreement and the requirement to understand what the implications of entering into the contract would be. They expressed the need to have the concerns clarified and addressed before they could approve the contract. The VP (International) explained that at this stage Court was simply being asked to consider approval of the JEI to progress with development and negotiation of the contractual agreement. She explained that the concerns that governors had raised would be addressed as part of those negotiations and assuming that they are, the contract would be brought back to Court for consideration and approval.

13.6 Dr Nick McKerrell indicated that he opposed the proposal. He requested that the paper be withdrawn from the meeting. It was explained that the paper simply provided the background information to the decision that the Court was being asked to make. The paper itself is not the proposal to Court. The request to Court was for approval of authority to continue with negotiations and contractual terms in order that the possible JEI could be progressed. It was explained that if negotiations progressed, this would enable the Executive to address the concerns and further questions that governors had raised but that without progressing detailed negotiations and contractual arrangements, those questions would not be able to be answered.

13.7 It was made clear that Court was not at this time being asked to approve the final contractual terms of the arrangement with the JEI partner, but to confirm approval to enter into detailed contract negotiations. These contractual negotiations would determine what the terms of the relationship would be and would seek to answer all of the questions and concerns that Court has raised. This will be brought back to Court once there is a clearer picture of the proposed final contract terms.

13.8 Court confirmed that it was content to proceed to a vote. In view of the discussion that had taken place and the variety of views expressed, the Chair sought the views of each individual governor. Court approved the proposal to continue with negotiations and the contractual terms. The following governors wish their opposition to the proposal to be noted: Ellen Gibson, Sharon Lowrie, Osman Rafiq, Professor Catriona Miller and Dr Nick McKerrell.

13.9 **Action:** Court approved that the JEI to progress with development and negotiation of the contractual agreement.

14. University Secretary's Report

14.1 The Court **noted** a report from the University Secretary

14.2 Court **noted** the report.

15. Overview of UK and International 2026 League Tables

15.1 The Court **noted** a report from the Vice Principal (Strategy and Panning) which provided a detailed summary of the University's performance in the most recent UK league tables and a summary of its position in the international rankings, published in 2026.

15.2 Court **noted** the report

16. GCU Corporate Risk Register

16.1 The Court **noted** a report from the Chief Financial Officer which gave an update on the University's Corporate Risk Register following a dedicated session on risk for Court members in October. He confirmed that this is now a standing item on the Court agenda.

16.2 Court **noted** the report.

17. University Senate – 24th September 2025

17.1 The Court **noted** a report from the Vice Principal (Strategy and Panning) A detailed summary of our performance in the most recent UK league tables and a summary of our position in the international rankings, published in 2026.

17.2 Court **noted** the report

18. Media Report

18.1 The Court noted the Media Coverage Analysis Update Report for the period of August and September 2025.

19. Standing Committee reports

19.1 People Committee – 25th September 2025

18.1.1 The Vice-Chair of Court introduced the report. She explained that among the other items contained in the report, the Committee had considered and recommended the Reasonable Adjustments Policy.
18.1.2 Court **approved** the following:
18.1.3 the Reasonable Adjustments Policy and Process.
18.1.4 an update to the Committee's composition to have a minimum of six lay governor members.

19.2 Court Governance & Nominations Committee – 7th October 2025

18.2.1 The Chair of the Committee presented the report.
18.2.2 Court **approved** the following:

18.2.3 the reappointment of Austin Sweeney as a governor for a further 3 year term to take effect on 1 August 2026 and approve his partial sabbatical through March 2026.

18.2.4 the reappointment of Bill McDonald as a governor for a further 3 year term to take effect from 1 August 2026.

18.2.5 the revised Terms of Reference for the Court Governance and Nominations Committee

18.2.6 changes to Court Standing Committee membership, noting that these have been agreed electronically by the Committees:

18.2.7 Sylvie Freund Pickavance to come off CG&NC and join People Committee; and

18.2.8 Dr Stephen Breslin to join Court Governance and Nominations Committee.

19.3 Audit Committee – 20th October 2025

18.3.1 Alan Dickson presented the report in the absence of the Chair of the Committee. He provided an explanation of the work of the Committee and the terms of the Annual Report of the Committee. He explained that it was proposed to rename the Committee to the Audit & Risk Committee as this better reflected the actual work of the Committee and was in line with the sector.

18.3.2 Court **approved** the Audit Committee Annual Report.

19.4 Finance and General Purposes Committee – 30th October 2025

18.4.1 The Chair of the Committee presented the report.

18.4.2 Court **noted** the report.

19.5 Remuneration Committee – Annual Report and note of meeting on 9th October 2025

18.5.1 The Chair of the Committee presented the report.

18.5.2 Court **approved** the following:

18.5.3 the recommendation for the 1.4% cost of living update be applied to the Principal's remuneration.

18.5.4 the Terms of Reference for the Remuneration Committee for the year 2025/26.

20. Date of next meeting

20.1 The next Court meeting will take place on **Thursday 11th December 2025**.