

## Glasgow Caledonian University Court

### Minutes of the University Court held on 9th September at 9am via Online Conferencing Facilities

**Present:** Rob Woodward (Chair), Peter Baguley, Dr Douglas Chalmers, Susan Docherty, Campbell Fitch, Sylvie Freund Pickavance, Daniel Gallacher, Professor Pamela Gillies, David Halliday, Asif Haseeb, Gordon Jack, Ian Kerr, Sharon Lowrie, Meg Lustman, Neena Mahal, Bill McDonald, Professor Ann Priest, Austin Sweeney, Alistair Webster, Stephanie Young.

**Apologies:** Dr Morag Ferguson.

**In attendance:** Jan Hulme, University Secretary and Vice Principal (Governance)  
Professor James Miller, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Strategy)  
Susan Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer  
Ellen Gibson, Careers Advisor  
Dr Nick McKerrell, Senior Lecturer in Law  
Tabitha Nyariki, GCU Students Association  
Paul Queen, Director of Finance  
Professor Valerie Webster, Deputy Vice Chancellor (LTSE)  
Professor Cam Donaldson, Pro Vice Chancellor (Research)  
Lucy Strachan, Head of Governance (Secretary)  
Fiona Campbell, Director of People Services  
Claire Hulsén, Director of Strategy  
Kea Horvers, Interim Head of Governance (Secretary).

#### Chair's opening remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first court meeting of the 20/21 academic year, and in particular, Austin Sweeney and Bill McDonald who were attending their first meeting as Court members.

This was also the first meeting for Dr Nick McKerrell and Ellen Gibson, the first academic Trade Union nominated members, attending as observers before becoming full members of Court on 1st October.

The Chair reminded Court that Tabitha Nyari had also been attending as an observer and she similarly would become a full member of Court as the second Student Governor from 1st October.

The Chair welcomed Kea Horvers, the interim Head of Governance as Lucy Strachan will be leaving the University at the end of the week. The Chair thanked Lucy for her excellent contribution to the University.

#### 1. Minutes

- 1.1 Court noted that the minutes of the Court meeting held on 25th June 2020 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 25th June 2020 and the actions taken since that meeting to address them.

### **3. Declaration of interest**

- 3.1 A summary of the register of interests was included with the court papers. Court members are invited to advise the University Secretary or the interim Head of Governance if any agenda items give rise to a conflict of interest. Bill McDonald's declaration of interest details will be added to the document which will be circulated at the next Court meeting.

### **4. Items brought by the Chair of Court**

- 4.1 A paper setting out the findings of the Annual Court Effectiveness review 2019/20 had been circulated to Court members. The consensus among Court members was that the Court was performing well, and strong commitment to Court was demonstrated by all governors. The universal opinion was that the University was responding positively to the Covid crisis and was in a good position to meet future challenges. Court members remained dedicated to promoting diversity and inclusion within Court. Suggestions for enhancement included the view that Court papers could be more concise and usefully provide more contextualisation including references to previous discussion and positions reached. The Chair and the University Secretary would meet to discuss how to address topics raised in the review and consider what enhancements might be possible to support further the operation of Court with a view to future report to Court.
- 4.2 The agenda for the Court Strategy half day event on Wednesday 23rd September has been circulated.
- 4.3 GCU's first Stakeholder event was held at the beginning of this year. The next Stakeholder event will be virtual and will be held this term. This should provide a great opportunity to enlarge the stakeholder pool and hear a wider range of voices.
- 4.4 An Extraordinary meeting of F&GP would take place immediately after Court. The sole topic for discussion was the proposed additional Revolving Credit Facility of £5m as a fall-back provision if required in line with the 2020/21 budget proposals approved by the Court. The facility would be sought under the Government's Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme. Court would be asked to approve this action via email circulation within 24-48 hours after FGPC had reviewed the proposal and formulated its recommendation.
- 4.5 For the last item on the agenda, the Chair of Court's annual Appraisal, the Chair would withdraw and the Vice Chair of Court, Stephanie Young, would take the chair.

### **5. Principal and Executive Board Report**

- 5.1 The Principal presented her report which provided a summary of items arising since the previous Court meeting.
- 5.2 The Scottish Funding Council report on the first phase of its work had been pushed back to at least the end of September and the focus of this phase remained the financial health of the sector and its ability to meet immediate challenges. The estimated HE deficit of >£600m had been revised to £191m. While the Scottish Government was asking Westminster to help fill the gap, this request was unlikely to be fulfilled. Moreover, the Scottish Government had rejected loan funding offered by Westminster as this was contingent on the Scottish Government ceding powers to Westminster and its agencies in respect of Scottish universities. The Principal emphasised the importance of securing funding for the sector to ensure that quality was sustained and outlined issues likely to be addressed in the SFC's final report, which would not appear until after the Holyrood elections in May 2021.
- 5.3 Despite the uncertain times and the UK's departure from the EU the University had continued to demonstrate success in attracting research funding. The Principal emphasised the economic and

societal value of continuing to fund the University's research and it was important that pressure to concentrate all research funding to research intensive universities was countered.

- 5.4 GCU's performance in the Guardian's League table had improved. The Guardian also highlighted 3 university welfare groups which had responded particularly well to the Covid crisis. GCU was included for its work with a local food bank.
- 5.5 The Principal was continuing her programme of visits to academic and professional service departments. There was considerable focus on the staff response to lockdown and the radically different way of working triggered by the pandemic. Common themes were emerging which included positive developments precipitated by lockdown such as mutual support and strengthened cohesion and the accelerated use of technology to enhance learning, as well the negative aspects which included, for some, coping with multiple domestic pressures and a sense of social isolation as a result of home working.

## **6. Chief Operating Officer report**

- 6.1 The court noted the report from the Chief Operating Officer which focused on the Safe Return to Campus plan for the University, addressing matters such as: the high level overarching plan; physical changes on campus; people implications; students' behaviour; Covid testing; communications and looking forward to trimester B. The report also provided court with an update on the financial position of the University and the rebased Budget for 2020/21. Other topics covered included the proposal to rebase the University's relationship with INTO, which had already been approved by Court, and the delay on the claimants' side to finally settling the equal pay matter which the University had inherited in respect of certain Baxter Storey staff.
- 6.2 The COO described the approach made to the University by the Scottish Government to lease University premises for one of the national Covid testing centres. This had been subject to rigorous risk assessment by the planners and would result in a facility that was wholly segregated from the University's own operations and would be set up and managed by the Scottish Government appointed contractors in partnership with the City Council and the NHS. It would provide a convenient on campus facility for the university community among others.
- 6.3 The COO briefed Court on developments in respect of pensions and explained that a detailed paper would be submitted to the FGPC and Audit Committees to complement the draft Financial Reports for 2019/20 which would be scrutinised by these Committees in October on completion of the external audit. This would set out and explain the University's liabilities. The external audit would be conducted remotely by KPMG and, while it was anticipated that it might take somewhat longer than usual, to date all audit targets had been met.
- 6.4 The COO described the debate in the sector over the provision of blended learning as part of the response to Covid. She outlined the University's careful and cautious stance, noting that there would be only a small percentage of the University's students on campus at any one time. Initial estimates suggested that this would be 10% and this would be further refined as the student timetable became more fully populated and essential activities on campus progressed through the University's stringent assessment regime. It was noted that this number referred to the totality of students who might be on campus on any one day – not necessarily all at the same time. In line with Scottish Government guidance for phase 3, the University is committed to ensuring online teaching and learning as well as on campus provision for modules that cannot be taught online and activity designed to support new students in becoming independent learners.

## **7. Student President's report**

- 7.1 The Student President reported on the activities of the Students Association since the previous Court meeting and confirmed that preparations were currently underway for Trimester A delivery of SA activities including moving most activities and services online.
- 7.2 Court congratulated the Students Association on its recent performance in the National Students Survey and other achievements including performance in the Green Impact Awards 2019/20.
- 7.3 Turning to the impact of Covid on students, the President explained that students had mixed views regarding return to campus. Many welcomed the prospect of a return as a means of combatting isolation. Others had embraced online learning, particularly disabled students for whom the extensive on-line provision was facilitative. The Students Association would welcome the possibility of offering physical meetings on campus to promote social cohesion amongst the student body. However, government guidance had to be followed and any requirement to attend campus must first be agreed by GCU's Health and Safety Committee. The President described new provision in place to support students' mental health which was particularly vital as students coped with Covid induced pressures.
- 7.4 As part of the programme of regular meetings between officers of the Students' Association and the Chair, Vice-Chair lay governors and the University Secretary, there had been an excellent recent meeting which covered a great deal of ground. The Chair observed that the Students Association had shown outstanding leadership and engagement throughout the Covid crisis.

## **8. University Secretary's Report**

- 8.1 The Court noted a report from the University Secretary and approved: the Statement of Primary responsibilities for inclusion in the Annual Financial Statements, the Modern Slavery Statement for the financial year ended 31st July 2020, the refreshed presentation of the amended Court Standing Orders prior to the GCU Amendment Order of Council 2020 coming into force on 1st October 2020; and the appointment of the first two trade union nominated governors, Ms Ellen Gibson and Dr Nick McKerrell.
- 8.2 Regarding the Standing Order which referenced the TU nominated governors, it was noted that it was in the nature of the selection process for the TU nominated governors that the TUs had limited control of the outcome and that the contribution of these appointments to promoting the Court's gender balance could be only an aspiration rather than a requirement.

## **9. Strategic Report 2019-20 – Review of progress against Strategy 2020 KPIs**

- 9.1 The Court noted the annual Strategic Report from the DVC Strategy, which provided an overview of progress against the University's 2020 Strategic Indicators, and in particular the University's strong performance in a challenging external environment with a number of 2020 KPI outcomes being maintained or exceeded in the final year of Strategy 2020.
- 9.2 Metrics demonstrate outperformance of ambitious targets for Learning and Teaching, especially with regards to degree completion, and an increase in intake of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is particularly impressive within the context of the Scottish University sector. Other positive outcomes include the attainment of academic staff qualifications across the institution, and the new graduate outcomes survey. There was discussion of the few areas where KPIs had not been met which included consideration of whether the metric was the most meaningful one to use to drive performance and whether some should be revisited when identifying the KPIs for the 2030 strategy. Potential new areas for monitoring were also suggested with appropriate metrics to be devised, for example for internationalising the curriculum. There

was some discussion of the subjectivity that could surround the RAG status assigned to performance in KPIs and it was proposed that when KPIs were next set so as to avoid subjectivity surrounding RAG status.

**ACTION: The University should define what percentage increase/decrease would merit an item's change in status.**

9.3 The Court remarked that the report showcased the excellent work performed by the University. A 5-year overview of progress against Strategy 2020 KPIs would be presented to Court at a later date.

9.4 Further queries regarding this item were raised via the Zoom chat facility at Court. The DVC Strategy and the Director of Strategy and Planning would circulate the questions and responses after the meeting.

## **10. Interim Report on Student Recruitment**

10.1 The Court noted a summary from the DVC Strategy on the unconditional firm acceptances to the undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes in Trimester A as at 28th August 2020. DVC Strategy emphasised that although it was an advanced point in the Trimester A recruitment cycle, there continued to be flux in the recruitment position, and final intake would not be confirmed until students formally registered which they could do up to and during October. In respect of SFC fundable numbers, the University seemed to be on course to meet targets although the SFC fundable numbers which the University had to meet were spread across all years and did not relate only to first entry. Nevertheless, the University had internal targets to manage new entrant numbers in the context of the overall fundable numbers target. It was noted that in controlled subjects these internal targets had been noticeably exceeded as a result of government policy relating to school leaving qualifications in response to Covid.

10.2 It was noted that the Scottish Government had undertaken to fund universities for the resultant surge in numbers and that the SFC were currently considering how additional funding would be allocated to institutions.

## **11. Annual Report on institution-led review of quality and governing body statement of assurance for AY 2019/20**

11.1 The Court noted a report from the DVC Strategy on the Annual Report on Institution-led Review of Quality and the Governing Body Statement of Assurance for the academic year 2019/20 which is part of the University's reporting arrangements to the Scottish Funding Council. The Court approved the report.

## **12. The National Student Survey**

12.1 The Court noted a report from DVC Learning, Teaching and Student Experience, which provided an overview of the National Student Surveys (NSS) 2020 results, with the University achieving improved satisfaction scores across all Schools.

## **13. Graduate outcomes 2017/18**

13.1 The Court noted a report from DVC Strategy which provided a high level summary of the 2017/18 graduate cohort outcomes for the Scottish sector. The University has 91% of graduates in employment and/or further study, above the Scottish rate of 89%, and a proportion of graduates in full-time employment of 66%, compared to the Scottish sector rate of 60% which places the University in second place in Scotland alongside Heriot-Watt and Strathclyde Universities.

- 13.2 This survey replaced the former DLHE survey which collected graduate destination data six months after graduation. Moreover, the new survey was administered externally and not by institutions themselves as previously. Overall, the data showed a very positive outcome for GCU. As this is the first report using the new data system, data results should be regarded as experimental.

**14. Research Trimester C Report 2019-20**

- 14.1 The Court noted a report from the PVC Research which highlighted the continuing strong performance in attracting high-value awards from prestigious sources during a challenging period and, in particular, the success of the University in winning three projects in the competition for 6-month research projects related to Covid-19 which was recently conducted by the Chief Scientist Office.

**15. African Leadership College Partnership: Report on Annual Academic and Contract Review**

- 15.1 The Court noted a report on the progress of the African Leadership College Partnership to end of session 2019/2020. Developments included changes in Mauritian tax legislation. While this would have some financial impact on the University, steps were being taken ensure that there was no personal impact on the decreasing number of individual GCU members of staff who undertook teaching in Mauritius.

**ACTION: Following discussion of the sponsorship obtained by the African Leadership College from Mastercard, the Director of Finance and the COO undertook to circulate responses to questions raised in the Zoom chat function after the meeting.**

**16. Renewal of the Facility Letter and Resolution – Bank of Scotland plc**

- 16.1 The Court approved the Facility Letter for the University, Glasgow Caledonian University Company Limited and Glasgow University Academy Limited with Bank of Scotland plc.

**17. GCNYC Board of Trustees Report from Meeting on 2nd July 2020**

- 17.1 The court noted the report of the meeting which took place on 2nd July 2020 presented by the Chair of the GCNYC Board of Trustees.

**18. Media Report**

- 18.1 The court noted the report submitted by the Interim Director of Communications on Media Coverage- July.

**19. Date of next meeting**

- 19.1 The next Court meeting will take place on Wednesday 11 November 2020.
- 19.2 For the foreseeable future, all Court meetings will remain virtual. This matter will be kept under constant review by the Chair, the Principal and the University Secretary.
- 19.3 Additional events may be organised as appropriate to brief and inform Court and to compensate in some measure for the fact that the Court's usual networking opportunities have been curtailed by the pandemic.

## **20. Chair's Appraisal**

- 20.1 The Chair of Court having left the meeting together with members of the Executive other than the University Secretary, the Vice-Chair took the chair and led discussion of the Chair's performance. After satisfactory conclusion the Vice-Chair undertook to feed back to the Chair of Court.