

SUMMARY REPORT OF COURT 5th FEBRUARY 2026

The University Court met on campus on Thursday, 5th February. The Chair welcomed Professor Mairi Watson to her first meeting of Court as Principal and Vice-Chancellor. On the evening before, the Chair of Court and the Principal held a fireside chat where the Principal shared with governors her personal story, describing the values and influences which have shaped her leadership.

At the Court's meeting the Chair expressed appreciation to the Executive team for their dedicated work in supporting the transition to Professor Watson's tenure, and thanked Jan Hulme and Claire Hulsen for having acted as Interim Principal & Vice-Chancellor and Interim University Secretary respectively.

Court paid tribute to Jane Wilson for her valued contribution as a Governor as she steps down from the role.

What follows is a high-level summary of the main issues addressed by Court yesterday, which will also appear on the university website. Minutes of the meeting will be published on the university website in due course.

Yvette Hopkins
Chair of Court

1. Principal & Vice Chancellor's Report

The Principal presented her first report to Court, reflecting on her extensive early engagement across the University and with external stakeholders over recent months. Her report outlined key priorities including student outcomes, developing the use of AI, research impact, external engagement, financial sustainability, and reputation as well as covering sector challenges, including international recruitment. She saw the University's future in leading the way in higher education and highlighted opportunities.

2. Finance and Risk Report

The Court noted a report from the Chief Financial Officer which provided an overview of the organisation's financial position, including forward projections, debt and cash status, key financial performance indicators, and the current corporate risk position.

3. Students' Association Student President's Report

The Student President provided an update on recent activities and initiatives of the Students' Association, highlighting the Trimester A report, participation in the Times Higher Education and Uniforce 2025 conferences, Student Governor training, and the Full-Time Officer Elections 2026.

4. Student Recruitment - Trimester B 25-26, UCAS Applications 26-27

The Court noted the report, which provided an overview of key recruitment activity for Trimester B 2025–26, an update on applications for Trimester C, and a summary of undergraduate applications received by the UCAS equal consideration deadline for the 2026–27 cycle.

5. UKVI Compliance and Action Plan Report

Court received an update on action to address the UKVI Action Plan and associated matters.

6. International Strategy

The Court noted the report, which outlined the strategic direction mapped out for high quality, compliant, international student recruitment.

Court also approved a significant TNE initiative, a Joint Education Institute with the University's long-standing partner, the University of Jinan.

7. 2025-26 Research Report: Quarter 1 & 2

The Court noted the report which summarises key developments in the University's research and innovation activity across Quarters 1 and 2 of 2025/26. The report outlined progress on REF2029 preparations, implementation of major research policies, trends in submissions and awards, and activity designed to strengthen research culture, PGR support, and commercialisation.

8. Standing Committee Business

Court noted reports from the People Committee, Audit and Risk Committee and Finance & General Purposes Committee.

9. University Secretary's Report

The Court noted a report from the University Secretary which covered: governor recruitment, GCU's 150th anniversary programme, the Court's annual effectiveness review, the 2026 graduations, the 2025 Court Effectiveness Review, Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing), and the launch of this session's Cyber Security and Data Protection training.

10. Operations and Communications Update

The Court noted the report, which provided an update on operations across Executive portfolios, focusing on issues of strategic significance. The report covered estates and land strategy; security, safety and resilience; the virtual learning environment; cyber security and data protection training; and the recent examination period aligned with the new academic calendar. It also highlighted the quarterly media coverage received by the University during October, November and December 2025.

11. Date of next Court meeting

The next meeting of Court will take place on Thursday, 16 April 2026, with the Court Strategy Session taking place on Wednesday, 15 April 2026.