

## **Glasgow Caledonian University Court**

### **Minutes of the University Court held at 9am on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021 via Online Conferencing Facilities**

**Present:** Rob Woodward (Chair), Dr Douglas Chalmers, Dr Morag Ferguson, 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, Dr Nick McKerrell, Tabitha Nyariki, Adil Rahoo, Jane Wilson, Alistair Webster and Stephanie Young.

**Apology:** Peter Baguley, Ellen Gibson, Professor Ann Priest and Austin Sweeney.

**In attendance:** Jan Hulme, University Secretary and Vice Principal (Governance)  
Professor James Miller, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Strategy)  
Susan Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer  
Paul Queen, Director of Finance  
Professor Valerie Webster, Deputy Vice Chancellor (LTSE)  
Professor Andrea Nelson, Pro Vice Chancellor (Research)  
Fiona Campbell, Director of People Services  
Claire Hulsen, Director of Strategy  
Deborah Donnet, Acting Head of Governance (Secretary)

#### **Chair's opening remarks**

The Court extended a welcome to the new Student President, Adil Rahoo, as a student governor, to new lay governor, Jane Wilson, and to Professor Andrea Nelson, PVC Research. All were attending their first Court meeting in these roles. Tabitha Nyariki was welcomed back for a further year as the second nominated student governor to Court.

#### **1. Minutes**

- 1.1 Court noted that the minutes of the Court meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021 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 22<sup>nd</sup> April and the actions taken since that meeting to address them.
- 2.2 It was noted that in addition to the information appended to the report on the attendees at the stakeholder event in February, more detailed information on attendees and their affiliations would be circulated to all Court members.

**ACTION: Secretary to circulate information on stakeholder event attendees, on a confidential basis, to Court.**

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

- 3.1 A summary of the register of interests was included with the court papers. Court members were invited to advise the University Secretary or the Acting Head of Governance if any agenda items gave rise to a conflict of interest.

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

- 4.1 On behalf of Court, Neena Mahal was warmly congratulated on being awarded an MBE for services to healthcare in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.
- 4.2 Members will shortly be sent the annual Court evaluation questionnaire. Following completion of the questionnaire, Governors will be invited to attend one to one meetings with the Chair of Court.
- 4.3 The Chair reminded members of the seminar on pensions scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> July. For those members who were unable to attend the seminar on the day, a recording would be available for a limited time afterwards.
- 4.4 As noted in the Matters Arising Report, a Court briefing session on sexual misconduct will be held in the coming months.

*Secretary's Note: Subsequent to the meeting, the Court seminar on sexual misconduct was scheduled for 14th September 2021 and an invitation extended to Court members.*

#### 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 and oral updates where there were very recent issues or developments.
- 5.2 Court was reminded that Professor Webster would be retiring in the near future. Against that background and the demands of the 2030 strategy a review of executive portfolios would take place over the summer and proposed arrangements would be submitted to Court's September meeting. In the meantime, and until the new executive portfolio details were agreed, the following interim arrangements to address the gap left by Professor Webster's departure were **endorsed** by Court
  - Professor Alastair Robertson, Director of Academic Development and Student Learning, to be acting PVC (Learning and Teaching);
  - The PVC Research role to include civic engagement; and
  - COO to assume responsibility for Student Life.
- 5.3 The SFC review was due to be published at the end of June. The Principal advised that the SFC recognised that Covid had significantly impacted HE, and that pressures and additional funding needs would continue for the next two years. The SFC would seek to support the sector while requiring assurances and accountability on impact and delivery. The Court discussed likely avenues and noted the timetable for publication of the final phase of the SFC's review. The Court awaited the report with interest.

#### 6. Chief Operating Officer's report

- 6.1 Court **noted** the Chief Operating Officer's report that referred to managing the impact of Covid and associated government guidance; finance; staffing; IT and the estate.
- 6.2 The Chief Operating Officer gave an update on the cyber incident, noting the full report that had gone to the Audit Committee. She outlined the steps that had been taken and that were underway and planned and reported that all systems were now back up and running. Sharon Lowrie indicated that the University's response to the incident had been very swift and professional and all staff involved were commended. The Chair requested a report to Court in due course on the lessons learned and developments put in place as a result.

**ACTION: COO to report to Court in due course on the lessons learned from the cyber incident.**

- 6.3 The report highlighted that the SIMS release 2 go live scheduled for mid-August had been postponed. The Chief Operating Officer reported that this was in part due to the staffing challenges and in part due to the outages following the cyber incident. A report on revised scheduling for the project would be submitted to Finance and General Purposes Committee.

**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 the incoming Full Time Officers for 2021/22 took up office on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021. The report outlined the work that was being undertaken to develop the Students' Association Strategic Plan 2025 that would be launched in August 2021.
- 7.2 The Student President also presented a report on the activities of the Students' Association in Trimester 2 of the 2020/21 academic year.
- 7.3 In discussion, the sharper focus of the Association's mission, vision and values contained within the Draft Strategic Plan was welcomed and it was noted that once the Strategic Plan had been agreed by the Students' Association it would be circulated to Court for information. Following discussions around hardship funding for students and the role of the Students' Association, Court was informed there were a number of internal and external sources of funding for students, including the Scottish Welfare Fund. The Students' Association was also able to provide small amounts of emergency funding for students to buy food and other essentials, and whilst this was not actively advertised this was made available to eligible students who approached the Association for help.

**8. University Secretary's Report**

- 8.1 Court noted the report from the University Secretary including the summary of requests made under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) 2002 Act.
- 8.2 Court **approved** the request to grant delegated authority to the Chair of Court during the summer vacation and the Court forward work plan for 2021/22.

**9. GCNYC Draft Budget 2021/22**

- 9.1 The Chief Operating Officer presented the GCNYC Draft Budget 2021/22 with financial projections up to 2027/28. It was highlighted that the draft position took account of the current environment and set prudent recruitment targets for the academic year ahead. Additional staff recruitment had also been minimised in 2021/22 in cognisance of modest anticipated student recruitment.
- 9.2 The Chair of the Board of Trustees informed Court that student recruitment consultants had been engaged to evaluate the projected growth and to advise on local recruitment tactics and the position would be reviewed following receipt of their report early in 2022.
- 9.3 Court **noted** the GCNYC Draft Budget 2021/22 which would be submitted to the GCNYC Board of Trustees for approval.

## **10. University Budget 2021/22**

- 10.1 Court received the Draft University Budget 2021/22. The Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee described the work that his Committee had undertaken at its meetings on 26 April and 24 May in examining and providing feedback on the development of the budget. This had culminated in the Court briefing and discussion of the draft budget on 7 June 2021.
- 10.2 The Chief Operating Officer highlighted the key elements of the Budget. The financial plan was for growth to deliver a high quality student experience to an already increased student body, home and international, while enabling additional investment to grow further the key areas identified for income generation.
- 10.3 Contained within the budget was a request for Court approval of a \$2.3m increase to the upper limit for funding to GCNYC from \$35.5 to \$37.8m to support the GCNYC phased recovery plan. Dr Chalmers and Dr McKerrell stated their opposition to this element.
- 10.4 The Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee highlighted the Budget's significant investment in people and the expectation that this would contribute to an increase in income. Whilst it was a prudent budget it was appropriate in light of the current circumstances and he commended the budget to Court.
- 10.5 Court **approved** the draft University Budget 2021/22.

## **11. Overview of 2020/21 University Rankings and League Tables**

- 11.1 The Court noted a report from DVC Strategy which provided a summary of the key university rankings and league tables released to date in academic year 2020/21. The Court was pleased to see the University's enhanced position in three significant tables published during this academic year. Improvements in student satisfaction, as well as high scores in completion, entry tariffs, and graduate prospects, contributed to positive outcomes in these league tables. While positioning in international tables remained largely unchanged, the Court noted that modern universities as a category tended to be disadvantaged in these because of the privileging of research in the algorithms used.

## **12. 2021-22 Student Recruitment Update**

- 12.1 Court **noted** an early view of the recruitment position for Trimester A 2021-22, for undergraduate and taught postgraduate entry, as at 9 June 2021. While recognising the inevitable caveats at this still early stage, the Court was very pleased to note the positive trajectory.

## **13. Student /Staff Ratios**

- 13.1 Court noted a paper that provided a high level overview of Student/Staff Ratios (SSRs) within the Scottish university sector, based on 2019-20 HESA data released in April 2021.
- 13.2 Noting that the University had the second highest SSR within the Scottish sector, the DVC Strategy reminded Court of the more detailed analysis of SSR data seen previously and that SSRs were open to interpretation. Further, they held little meaning when viewed in isolation and there was no direct relationship between SSRs and student satisfaction as measured via the NSS or in staff workload concerns.

- 13.3 In discussion, the current substantial investment to increase academic staff in areas of student growth was noted as was the strategic impact that this investment was designed to have directly and indirectly on staff.
- 13.4 Court noted the report and requested that consideration be given to revisiting this subject with more clarity around the objectives and appropriate analysis.

**ACTION: DVC (Strategy) to report back to Court with further report in due course.**

#### **14. Draft Outcome Agreement**

- 14.1 The DVC (Strategy) informed Court that the Letter of Guidance from the SFC, that was expected in March, had not yet been received so there was no update on this matter to report. It was noted that there were indications that a new approach might emerge from the final stage of the SFC review, but it was not known when this might have an impact on Outcome Agreements.

#### **15. Annual Statement on Research Integrity**

- 15.1 Court approved the Annual Statement on Research Integrity presented by PVC Research which was prepared as part of the commitment of the University to meeting the commitments of the Universities UK Concordat to support Research Integrity.

#### **16. Research Update Trimester B**

- 16.1 Court **noted** a report by the PVC Research that highlighted good news stories in relation to research demonstrating the University's continued successes in large and small grants as well as some aspects of esteem and funding for postgraduate research.

#### **17. University Senate Report**

- 17.1 Court **noted** the report from the meeting of the University Senate held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021.
- 17.2 The report outlined that universities in the UK had been urged by the UK government to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. Following a robust debate and with broad consensus around the acceptability of the core definition and the problematic nature of some of the accompanying examples, Senate had agreed to recommend to Court that the University adopt the declaration, subject to caveat, as had been the approach in some other HEIs.
- 17.3 The request was discussed in detail and it was noted that this was a complex subject and one that had aroused controversy in the sector and beyond. Court considered that the University's existing policies already offered robust defence against, and challenge to, anti-Semitism. However, and on balance and recognising that declining to sign could be used to misrepresent the University's position, it was considered the University might adopt this definition which was being heavily promoted by the UK government, albeit only if this was tied to a complementary statement which was acceptable to the Court and prevented the definition being misused within the University to undermine academic freedom or freedom of speech within the law.
- 17.4 Court **noted** Dr Chalmers's objections, and agreed that the adoption of the definition would be feasible only if tied to a statement with due caveat. It was agreed that this statement should be submitted to Senate for discussion and endorsement prior to consideration and approval by Court.

**ACTION: University Secretary to draft caveat to accompany IHRA definition for submission to Senate in the first instance.**

## **18. Standing Committee Business**

- 18.1 Remuneration Committee Court noted a report from the Remuneration Committee which updated Court on the issues discussed and decisions taken by the Remuneration Committee at its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021 and **approved**
- a) University's Remuneration Philosophy; and
  - b) The amendments to the Committee's Terms of Reference, Composition and Quorum.
- 18.2 Finance and General Purposes Committee: - Court considered the report from the Finance and General Purposes Committee which gave an account of the issues
- discussed and decisions taken/recommendations made by the Committee at its meetings on 26<sup>th</sup> April and 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- 18.3 People Committee: Court considered the report from the People Committee which gave an account of the issues discussed and decisions taken/recommendations made by the Committee at its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- 18.4 Audit Committee: Court considered the report from the Audit Committee which gave an account of the issues discussed and decisions taken/recommendations made by the Committee at its meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021, and **approved** the Procurement Strategy and Action Plan.

## **19. Media Report**

The Court noted the Media Coverage Analysis Update Report for April 2021.

## **20. Date of next meeting**

- 20.2 The next Court meeting will take place on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

## **21. Chair's Closing Remarks**

- 21.2 Good wishes and thanks were extended to Professor Valerie Webster who would be retiring in the summer after 28 years at the University. Her significant contribution to the University, most recently in relation to the highly successful ELIR, the Development of the Strategy 2030 Learning and Teaching Strategy and the successful Athena Swan awards, was warmly acknowledged.
- 21.3 Thanks were also extended to Dr Morag Ferguson who was completing her second term as the Senate representative on Court. Dr Ferguson was standing for reappointment, and Court would be informed in due course of the outcome of the election for the Senate appointed governor on Court.
- 21.4 Warm thanks and appreciation were also extended to Stephanie Young, Gordon Jack, and Alistair Webster, who were all stepping down as lay governors, each having served the maximum three terms of office. Each had shown exemplary dedication in their roles as governors, chairs of committees and boards and, in the case of Stephanie, as Vice-Chair of

Court. Each governor had made unstinting contributions to the work of Court and shared their expertise and experience generously with both the Court and the Executive Board.

- 21.5 The Chair wished everyone well for the summer break and hoped that it would be possible to resume in person meetings in the new academic year.