

Glasgow Caledonian University Court

Minutes of the University Court held on 16 June 2022 at 9am in The Lantern at GCU

Present: Rob Woodward (Chair), Dr Douglas Chalmers, Chukwuma Egbujor, Dr Morag Ferguson, Campbell Fitch, Daniel Gallacher, Ellen Gibson, Professor Pamela Gillies, David Halliday, Asif Haseeb, Ian Kerr, Sharon Lowrie, Meg Lustman, Neena Mahal, Dr Nick McKerrell, Austin Sweeney, Laiba Tareen and Jane Wilson.

Apology: Amit Bhargava, Sylvie Freund Pickavance and Bill McDonald.

In attendance: Jan Hulme, University Secretary and Vice Principal (Governance)
Professor James Miller, Deputy Vice Chancellor
Susan Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer
Professor Andrea Nelson, Pro Vice Chancellor (Research)
Professor Alastair Robertson, Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)
Fiona Campbell, VP People and Student Wellbeing
Paul Queen, Director of Finance
Claire Hulsen, Director of Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence
Paul Brown, Director of Governance and Legal Services (Secretary)

Chair's opening remarks

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and expressed his delight that the meeting was able to take place in person. The Chair welcomed the new Student Vice President, Chukwuma Egbujor to his first Court meeting and invited Chukwuma to say a few words about himself and his aspirations for his time as a student representative.

The Chair also reminded governors that this would be the last Court meeting for Dr Douglas Chalmers and Dr Morag Ferguson as their tenure on Court had now come to an end. The Chair also confirmed that David Halliday had reached the end of his current term as a governor but that he is standing for re-election. The Chair thanked them all for their contribution to the work of the Court and its committees.

The Chair also confirmed that Professor Ann Priest had stepped down as a governor of the University on her recent appointment as Chair of the Board of the GSA. The Chair recorded the Court's warm congratulations on her appointment and wished to record his thanks for her considerable work and commitment to GCU and the Court over the past seven years.

The Chair congratulated Jan Hulme, University Secretary and VP Governance on being awarded an MBE in the recent Queen's Honours List for services to Higher Education in Scotland, and Professor Jacqui Reilly, who held the chair in Infection Prevention and Control, who received a CBE for services to healthcare and public health.

1. Minutes

- 1.1 Court noted that the minutes of the Court meetings held on 21st April 2022 and the Special Meeting of 6th June 2022 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 21st April 2022 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 were reminded to advise the University Secretary or the Director of Governance and Legal Services if any agenda items give rise to a conflict of interest, and of any changes to their circumstances which would require to be noted in the register.

4. Items brought by the Chair of Court

- 4.1 The Chair advised Court that following the approval of Court at the meeting on 6th June, the formalities for the appointment of Professor Stephen Decent had all now been completed and that he was working closely with Professor Decent and the University Secretary to assist with Professor Decent's induction into the role of Principal. The Chair explained that it is proposed to give Professor Decent access to Court and Senate papers at an early date to support his induction. The Chair explained that he had invited Professor Decent to attend a meeting of the Committee Chairs and that he was also planning to arrange a meeting in each of Glasgow and London in the autumn to give governors who had not already met him by virtue of being on the Search Committee, a chance to do so.
- 4.2 The Chair discussed the Court briefing on GBV and thanked governors for their attendance and engagement with this. He also thanked those presenting it for their excellent presentation and insight. The Chair confirmed that this was an important issue and proposed that further awareness training should be provided for governors.
- 4.3 Court was reminded that the quinquennial externally facilitated Court effectiveness review had been due to take place in summer 2022 but that in view of the transition from the Principal to her successor he proposed that the postponement of this review by about 12 months was readily justified so that it could take place after the new Principal had assumed office and had joined the Court as an ex officio member. Court **approved** deferring the Quinquennial review until summer 2023.
- 4.4 The Chair reminded Court that, notwithstanding the deferral of the quinquennial effectiveness review, this was the time of year when the Chair conducted an annual review of Court and its effectiveness. As with previous years, a questionnaire would be issued to governors and the Chair would arrange individual meetings with governors to discuss their feedback. Following that, the information would be collated and feedback would be provided to Court with any recommendations that would enhance the effectiveness of Court.

ACTION: Director of G & LS to arrange for Court Effectiveness questionnaires to be issued to Governors. Director of G & LS to organise GBV training for Governors.

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 Principal confirmed that all of the metrics by which the University has recently been measured showed strong performance and she wished to congratulate everyone at GCU for this achievement.
- 5.3 The Principal discussed the issue of funding for HE and FE in Scotland, and in particular the flat cash position this year and possibly next year. The Principal confirmed that this is an issue that causes concern for all university VC s and that they are all aware of the need to diversify income streams to secure sustainability.
- 5.4 The Principal referred to the University's strong REF results which will hopefully have a positive impact on funding but that this is tempered with a lack of commitment by the UK Government to the Horizon Programme which will inevitably have an adverse impact on the UK HE Sector.
- 5.5 In response to a question about the Tertiary Pathfinder Pilot, the Principal explained that this was not a new initiative but essentially the renaming of an existing exercise of cooperation between the HE & FE sectors in certain geographies. She referred to the University's own long-standing and very substantial work with Colleges to promote and support student progression from college to the University.
- 5.6 In response to further questions, the Principal confirmed that Universities Scotland was monitoring any suggestion of a restriction on the autonomy of universities and that OECD data confirms that universities perform better when they are more autonomous, albeit recognising that they have to be accountable for any public funding that they receive. The Principal also confirmed that the lack of clarity on funding for international exchanges remains a cause for concern and that as yet, there is no clarity from the SFC on that. She responded to other questions relating to the level of research investment by the Scottish sector and the potential impact on Scottish universities of another referendum on Scottish independence.
- 5.7 The Chair **noted** that Court will keep a watching brief on the narrative surrounding a referendum in order to make sure that Scottish universities are properly represented in any discussion.

6. Chief Operating Officer report

- 6.1 Court **noted** the Chief Operating Officer's report which set out the key issues which have been addressed since the last meeting of the University Court in April 2022. The predominant focus over the period has been:
- Preparation of the Q3 financial forecasts for 2021/22, which have been considered twice by Finance & General Purposes Committee in April and May 2022;
 - Delivering major IT infrastructure and digital projects: rolling out the Go digital project across our teaching & learning spaces; building cyber resilience, in the continuing high threat levels for the sector; implementing Release 3 of the Student Information Management System; rolling out new staff IT kit and full email system migration;
 - Launching the new website in May 2022;
 - Continuing to liaise with Scottish Government on the changing Covid landscape and current prevalence of Covid cases nationally, and maintaining a watching brief on any other emerging public health concerns; and
 - Leading and supporting extensive Estates projects across the University, including an update on the return to campus and the safe running of the academic session as well as updates on financial forecasts for Q1, the GO Digital project, improvement of cyber

resilience and the progress of the Student Information Management System (SIMS) project.

- 6.2 The COO reported that the financial position of the University was excellent and that the next significant release of the SIMS project was on target and that the team were working extremely hard on this. The COO and the whole team were congratulated on the strong financial position and the roll out of the SIMS project which is a very complex project.
- 6.3 In response to a question about cyber security insurance, the Director of Finance confirmed that due to market conditions and the rise in such incidents, it is extremely hard to get effective cyber security insurance in place but that this is something that the Finance team were working on. Following a suggestion from a governor, the COO confirmed that she would look into a retainer arrangement for a base line cover for such events.
- 6.4 In response to a question about the increased level of student debt, the COO confirmed that this was in proportion to the significant increase in the number of international students. The debt was being managed closely and was not of significant concern.

ACTION: COO to examine the possibility of a retainer arrangement to offer some continuing basic level of cover for cyber threats.

7. Student President's Report

- 7.1 The Student President reported on the activities of the Student's Association since the previous Court meeting and in particular the appointment of the new recently elected full time officers who took office on 30th May 2022 and their respective policy remits. John Mavileth was the first student from the London campus to be elected to one of the sabbatical positions.
- 7.2 On hearing of her success, the Court congratulated Tabitha Nyariki, a recent Student Vice President and Court governor, on her Equality & Diversity Award in the NUS Scotland Awards 2022. The Student President also provided an update on the Student Partnership agreement, the Sustainability Policy and the Common Good fund.
- 7.3 In response to questions, the Student President explained the continuing work that the Student Association was doing to support students' mental health awareness and issues.
- 7.4 Court **noted** the Student President's update.

8. Students' Association Trimester 2 Report

- 8.1 Court **noted** the report from the President of the Students' Association activities for Trimester 2.

9. Revised Schedules to the Students' Association Constitution

- 9.1 The Student President presented a paper outlining the changes that were being proposed to the Student's Association Constitution. She described the extensive consultation process that had been undertaken. Following discussion, it was explained that the changes were required to tidy the constitution, ensure internal consistency and consistency with relevant University policy, and to address certain gaps that had been identified in the current constitution.
- 9.2 Court **approved** the changes to the Students' Association Constitution.

- 9.3 The Chair reminded governors of the open invitation to join the regular catch up that is arranged with the Student representatives and encouraged governors to participate.

10. University Secretary's Report

- 10.1 The University Secretary explained the purpose and arrangements for the Court routinely to grant authority to the Chair of Court to exercise summer vacation powers on its behalf. Court **approved** the delegation of summer powers to the Chair of Court.
- 10.2 The University Secretary presented the Court Annual Programme of Work 2022/23 for approval. She explained that whilst there are new matters that require to be dealt with throughout the year and some matters may require to be altered, the Programme enables the work of the Court to be properly planned. Court **approved** the Annual Programme of Work.
- 10.3 The Court **noted** the report from the University Secretary which included the annual report on the number and nature of FOI requests that the Information Governance Team have dealt with.
- 10.4 Following suggestions from a staff governor about the timing and process for the staff governor elections, it was agreed that these would be referred to the Court Governance and Nominations Committee for consideration.

ACTION: Director of G&LS to include Governor elections on the agenda for the next CG&NC meeting.

11. GCNYC Draft Budget 2022-23

- 11.1 The Chair of Court reminded the Court that in considering the draft budget for GCNYC, there had been an expectation that there would be a review in the autumn of 2022 of GCNYC's performance and prospects and the University's investment. This expectation had pre-dated the knowledge that the University would be transitioning to a new Principal in January 2023. Against this background and following discussions in Finance and General Purposes Committee, it was now clear that any major decisions affecting GCNYC should await the new Principal's tenure. This meant that, although information gathering, analysis and the development of options would continue as planned, the schedule for the Court's review and decision making would allow the new Principal an opportunity to familiarise himself with the project and the investment before proposing the preferred way forward for discussion and agreement with Court. He therefore envisaged Court addressing the matter in late spring 2023.
- 11.2 The Chief Operating Officer then presented the budget for GCNYC. She explained that current performance was in accordance with the 7-year budget plan that had previously been approved by Court and that it was anticipated that by the end of that period, GCNYC would be in surplus. The budgeted deficit for 2022-23 was \$4.6M. This would mean an uplift in the funding requirement from GCU to a total of \$41.9M. The COO confirmed that this budget had been approved by the Board of Trustees of GCNYC and had been recommended by the F&GPC for approval by Court. The DVC described the pipeline and conversion work that was underway to boost numbers for Tri A entry, and the Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee noted that the first year of the plan, albeit modest, had been delivered.
- 11.3 There were expressions of concern about the level of GCNYC funding to date and the requirement for an additional subvention as part of the 2022-23 budget. The Principal

informed Court that the situation in New York was being closely monitored and that GCNYC now had the asset of all accreditations required in order to maximise its scope for success. Against this background, she, together with the Executive Board, would continue actively to explore all options for Court's consideration.

- 11.4 The Chair of Court acknowledged the concerns and confirmed the timetable for addressing those systematically once the information gathering, analysis and options appraisal were complete and the new Principal was in post. Meanwhile, tight monitoring of GCNYC would continue and there was a 2022-23 requirement for a further subvention from the University to ensure that GCNYC remained a going concern.
- 11.5 Court **approved** the GCNYC budget and the associated increase in the level of funding support for GCNYC. Dr Douglas Chalmers, Dr Nick McKerrell and Ellen Gibson wished it noted that they opposed the GCNYC budget and meeting the required funding increase.

12. GCU Draft Budget 2022-23

- 12.1 The Chief Operating Officer presented a paper which provided the Draft GCU Budget for 2022/23 following April and May discussions and feedback at Finance and General Purposes Committee, combined with updated assumptions following completion of the 2021/22 Q3 Forecast and receipt of the final funding announcement from SFC, as discussed at the Court Budget briefing on 13th June.
- 12.2 The COO provided a further explanation of the planned infrastructure investment and that the budget was a balanced budget that reflected the investment in people and infrastructure while accounting for future SFC funding uncertainties. She explained to Court that whilst there was an SFC funding increase of 2.6%, this is offset by a reduction in funding for Graduate Apprenticeships (GA) and inflation. The COO also highlighted that the budget does take into consideration inflation and exchange rate fluctuations.
- 12.3 Following a question from a governor, the Director of Finance confirmed that discussions were still ongoing at a sectoral level with the SFC and Scottish Government about increasing funding for GAs but that there was no guarantee of that funding and that the budget allows for a reduced number of supported GAs.
- 12.4 The Chair of Finance and General Purposes Committee drew attention to the considerable scrutiny of the budget in draft form by the Committee and highlighted the favourable position of strong cash balances and low borrowing. It was important to invest in the campus but no less important to be generating cash too. He referred to significant investment in large scale projects, particularly IT projects, and the importance of running these with maximum efficiency and streamlining existing university processes to minimise the costs of system adaptations. He commended the budget to the Court for approval.
- 12.5 Court **approved** the budget.

13. League Table Report

- 13.1 The Deputy Vice Chancellor presented a paper reporting on the University's performance in each of the most recently published university league tables. The DVC also provided the results from the Complete University Guide, which had been published following the distribution of Court papers. In response to questions, the DVC provided more detail on certain metrics and the significant improvement in GCU's metrics and improved comparison with others. The DVC provided an update on GCU's outstanding performance in the latest

HESA Graduate Outcomes survey results which had just been published that morning and would feed into future league tables

13.2 Court **noted** the report.

14. Student Recruitment

14.1 The Deputy Vice Chancellor provided an early view of the recruitment position for Trimester A 2022-23, for undergraduate and taught postgraduate entry. Court was reminded of the advertising campaign “Uncommon people for the common good” which would be utilised for the upcoming clearing exercise among other purposes. The DVC provided further details on the recruitment of the various student categories. In response to questions, the DVC explained that there has been a reduction in the number of FE students articulating to universities and also that the difficulty in funding for EU and ROI students has had an impact on recruitment numbers but in relative terms, GCU is performing broadly in line with the sector average. International postgraduate applications remained buoyant

14.2 Court **noted** the report.

15. Student/ Staff Ratios 2020-21

15.1 The Deputy Vice Chancellor presented a paper which provided a high level overview of Student Staff Ratios (SSRs) across the Scottish university sector, based on 2020-21 HESA data released in April 2022. He highlighted the key points which included the increase in University’s SSR increased to 22.9 from 22.3 and the impact of factors such as the increase in intakes to controlled subjects of nursing and paramedicine, Graduate Apprentices, GSBS UG programmes, a higher proportion of continuing students, and buoyant international recruitment.

15.2 He pointed out that while SSRs varied significantly within and between Schools, and across the sector, and represented a distillation of great complexity and wide variation, they tended to be higher in modern universities. The University had the third highest overall SSR in the sector. Only two Scottish universities had a lower SSR compared to 2019-20 (the University of Edinburgh and the University of Aberdeen with all other universities experiencing an increased SSR.

15.3 In response to a question about the different ways in which the ratios can be interpreted, the Principal explained that the SSR and wider data will continue to be monitored and examined in order to inform resourcing going forward.

15.4 Court **noted** the report.

16. Widening Access Report

16.1 The Deputy Vice Chancellor presented a paper which provided a summary of the SFC Report on Widening Access 2020-21, and internal data on entrants by all SIMD quintiles and in the University’s Schools. The DVC advised that GCU was outperforming the sector on SIMD 20 recruitment but that access was not the only measure to examine and that outcome should also be examined, and that GCU’s outstanding SIMD 20 retention rate and SIMD 20 qualifier rates were above the sector averages.

16.2 Court **noted** the report.

17. Research Update Trimester B

- 17.1 The Pro Vice Chancellor (Research), presented a paper summarising research applications and awards, and the results of the 2021/22 Research Pump Priming scheme. She provided further details, and in response to questions, explained that as a result of the withdrawal of EU funding and the UK's lack of engagement in the Horizon project, in future, UK universities will not be able to lead on EU funded projects although they will continue to be allowed to be involved in supporting such projects. In relation to converting funding applications to actual awards, the PVCR advised that there is no publicly published data on this however, she believed that the University's conversion rate is comparable to other universities.
- 17.2 The Chair thanked the PVCR for the report which was **noted** by Court.

18. REF Outcome

- 18.1 The Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) presented a report of the recent REF results and the outstanding success that the University had achieved in these. The PVCR confirmed that every area of research has improved. This could lead to a 13% increase in research funding for next year. The PVCR explained that the results would continue to be analysed over the coming months with a view to establishing what additional support may be required and in which areas.
- 18.2 The Principal reflected on the University's approach to achieving these excellent results and the steps envisaged to address any areas where the level of research was not as high as the leading REF results. The PVCR confirmed that it was the University's ambition to increase levels of research across the whole University.
- 18.3 Court **noted** the report and congratulated the PVCR and everyone involved for the excellent results.

19. Researcher Development Concordant Action Plan

- 19.1 The PVCR presented a paper detailing the Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) and HR Excellence in Research Award plan for 2022-23. She explained the extensive consultative process and that the document had already been reviewed by the University Research Committee, Executive Board and Senate. The Plan includes actions and measures of success arising from the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) Report 2021 which identified areas of strength and areas of improvement in the researcher experience at GCU. The PVCR explained that GCU had signed up to a concordat in relation to research informed and led universities and that this plan was part of that process. Following questions, the PVCR explained that, being part of the concordat will help GCU focus on what further work requires to be done.
- 19.2 Court **Approved** the Concordat.

20 University Senate

- 20.1 The Principal presented the report on the meeting of Senate that was held on 8th June 2022. Court **noted** the report.

21 Standing Committee Business

- 21.1 Audit Committee – 31st May 2022

In the absence of the Chair of the Audit Committee, the COO provided Court with a summary of the issues raised at the meeting on 31st May. Court is asked to approve the Procurement Strategy and Action Plan.

21.2 Court **approved** the Procurement Strategy and Action Plan.

21.3 Finance & General Purposes Committee – 19th April & 23rd May 2022.

The Committee Chair presented an update of the Committee meetings on 19th April & 23rd May. The paper includes a request to approve making amendments to the Financial Regulations and the Treasury and Ethical Investment Policy to enable the University to access loans that are funded or part funded by the government. These proposals provide the drafting that reflects the decision taken previously by Court to broaden the University's borrowing powers.

21.4 Court noted the report and **approved** the amendments to the Financial Regulations and the Treasury and Ethical Investment Policy.

21.5 People Committee – 19th May 2022

The Chair of the Committee presented the paper which provides a report of the issues discussed and decisions taken by the People Committee at its meeting on 19th May 2022.

The VP People and Student Wellbeing provided further explanation of the outcome of the recent staff survey and said that the engagement level and feedback were generally very positive but that there are certain areas arising, not least out of the pandemic, that the University can focus on moving forward.

Court **noted** the report.

21.6 Remuneration Committee – 24th May 2022

The Chair of the Committee provided a report on the issues discussed at the Remuneration Committee on 24th May 2022. Court is asked to note the report and to approve the Committee's recommendation for the Senior Staff Remuneration Philosophy.

21.7 Court **noted** the report and **approved** the Senior Staff Remuneration Philosophy.

22 GCNYC Board of Trustees Report from Meeting on 8th December 2021

22.1 In the absence of Sylvie Freund Pickavance, Chair of the Board of Trustees of GCNYC, Professor James Miller, Secretary to the Board of Trustees of GCNYC presented a report to the Court on the business discussed at the GCNYC Board of Trustees meeting held on 10th May 2022. Court **noted** the report.

22.2 The Chair informed Court that with Professor Ann Priest stepping down, there would be a further vacancy on the GCNYC Board of Trustees (Mr Gordon Jack was standing down at the end of the academic year) which will require to be filled.

23 Media Report

- 23.1 The Court **noted** the Media Coverage Analysis Update Report for April 2022. Feedback from a governor about the approach to the analysis was noted and would be explored.

24 Date of next meeting

- 24.1 The next Court meeting will take place, in person, on Thursday 8th September 2022 with dinner taking place on the 7th September.
- 24.2 The Chair reminded Court of the Corporate Risk Briefing for governors that was taking place on Monday 20th June.