

Glasgow Caledonian University Court

Minutes of the University Court held at 9 am on Thursday 6th February 2025 in person in the Lantern, Annie Lennox Building.

Present: Rob Woodward (Chair), Amit Bhargava, Professor Steve Decent, Alan Dickson, Daniel Gallacher, Scott Haldane, David Halliday, Asif Haseeb, Meg Lustman, Bill McDonald, Dr Nick McKerrell, Professor Catriona Miller, Gavin Munn, Wilfred Obi, Austin Sweeney, Laiba Tareen and Jane Wilson.

Apologies Sylvie Freund Pickavance and Dr Lyle Gray

In attendance Yvette Hopkins, Chair of Court Elect
Jan Hulme, University Secretary & Vice Principal (Governance)
Susan Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer & Deputy Vice Chancellor
Professor Andrea Nelson, Pro Vice Chancellor (Research)
Professor Louise Dixon, Pro Vice Chancellor (Education)
Paul Queen, Chief Financial Officer
Fiona Campbell, Vice Principal (People & Student Wellbeing)
Caroline Bysh, Pro Vice Chancellor (Engagement)
Dawn Anderson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)
Paul Brown, Director of Governance & Legal Services

Chair's opening remarks

The Chair opened the meeting by expressing the Court's appreciation of the Chancellor's attendance at dinner the evening before and for her inspiring insight into her innovative work to promote equality and inclusivity. He hoped there might be an opportunity for small groups of governors to engage with the Chancellor from time to time.

The Chair also welcomed Yvette Hopkins, Chair of Court Elect, who was in attendance as an observer at the meeting before taking up the role on 1 March 2025. He described the steps that he and Ms Hopkins were taking to ensure a smooth handover. In response, Ms Hopkins referred to the Chancellor's talk and the important role played by Court in ensuring that the University's decisions and actions today would serve well those who followed in decades to come. She looked forward to working with Court and supporting the University's success.

1. Minutes

- 1.1 Court noted that the minutes of the Court meeting held on 12th December 2024 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 12th December 2024 and the actions taken 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 & 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 reminded Court of changes to the schedule of Court Briefings and Seminars, with the next event now taking place in April on the topic of the Estate Masterplan which would subsequently be addressed at the Court's scheduled April meeting.
- 4.2 The Chair reminded governors of the high quality events arranged by the University to assist governors with their work and to promote their understanding of the University at a more granular level. He spoke of the importance of governors supporting these events which included Court briefings, Senate (all lay governors were expected to attend at least one of the four Senate meetings annually), discussions regularly scheduled with the Students' Association and other opportunities to connect with the University.

5. Principal and Executive Board report

- 5.1 The Principal presented his report in which Court was briefed in particular on the Scottish Government Budget, Undergraduate Recruitment, International Recruitment, Financial Perspectives, SFC Updates, League Table Performance, International Student Barometer and GCU London, 150th Anniversary, Race Equality Charter.
- 5.2 The Principal reminded Court of the volatile financial situation across the sector. Whilst the University was currently in a good position, there was no room for complacency. He and the Executive team would continue to manage the University's finances carefully and work closely with the SFC to ensure the Council's understanding of the University's strengths and its scope for delivery. The SFC was undergoing leadership changes at present, but the Minister had been clear in setting his expectations that SFC funding should follow students with a particular emphasis on widening participation goals. In response to a question the Principal explained that the rebalancing work of aligning staff investment with students was progressing well but was not yet complete and was being conducted sensitively and at a rate which allowed mitigation of any risk to the academic breadth and operation of University. Following further discussion of the national strategic context of higher education, the University's strong student retention profile, planning variables, and opportunities and risks associated with international recruitment, the Court endorsed the path the Principal and Executive were following and emphasised the importance of agility in an unstable and unpredictable environment.

6. COO/DVC Report

- 6.1 The Court noted a report from the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and DVC that gave an overview of key issues arising in her portfolio since the last Court meeting in December 2024.
- 6.2 The COO/DVC explained the steps that were being taken to mitigate the effects of the volatility in the sector and that the Executive were monitoring this carefully but that she was confident that the University was still in a good financial position.
- 6.3 The COO/DVC informed Court that the April Briefing would be a presentation followed by a discussion on the proposed Estate Masterplan. She explained that the Masterplan would be a framework for the future development of the University but that endorsement of the Masterplan did not in itself bring

any costs. Each project arising from the Masterplan would in due course require its own business case and governance process for approval and funding. In light of some local confusion in a School she explained the distinction between major projects derived from the Masterplan, and maintenance and routine upgrades as part of normal annual budgetary and planning activity.

- 6.4 The Chair noted the report's reference to a number of continuing topics such as the student attendance monitoring system and explained that a meeting had been arranged between staff governors and the Principal with relevant Executive colleagues to explore these matters given their operational aspects.

Action: COO/DVC to meet with the Students' Association to discuss the Estate Masterplan.

7. Student President's Report

- 7.1 The Court noted a report from the Student President highlighting recent activities and initiatives undertaken by the Student's Association. He explained that there had been an increase in the number of student engagements in both Glasgow and London.

8. Students' Association Trimester 1 Report

- 8.1 The Court noted the report from the Student President that provided an update on the Students' Association activities for Trimester A in the academic year 2024/25. The President thanked management for introducing free gym access for all students which will help with students' physical and mental health.
- 8.2 He explained that the Students' Association continues to look at ways to encourage participation from and benefit for the widest group of students. He acknowledged that Home and International students tend to have different needs and that the Association was endeavouring to ensure that each group benefited from the Association's initiatives.
- 8.3 In response to questions, he explained that the Association continues to attempt to improve student engagement and boosting the number of class representatives was part of that. He believed the numbers would recover once the Class Representatives Coordinator role was refilled. He explained that Officers' "lecture shout outs" were designed to promote the work of the Association and encourage members' interest and participation. He explained that the Student Association elections were coming up and that this would be another opportunity to encourage participation.
- 8.4 Noting that this was his last Court meeting, the Chair of Court expressed his thanks for the leadership that the Student President and Vice President had demonstrated and for their thoughtful and considered contributions to the Court as governors.

9. University Secretary's Report

- 9.1 The University Secretary presented her report which covered items including the draft Calendar of Meetings 2026/27; a Wider Sector Insights list of contextual resources prepared by the Internal Auditors; the recent mandatory Data Protection Training rollout which would include governors, and a reminder of the University expenses policy which required the submission of claims within three months of incurring the expenses.

Action: Governors and attendees to contact G & LS with any suggested changes to the 2026/27 draft schedule now with a view to the final 2026/27 calendar being submitted to Court for approval in April.

10. GCNYC: Final post-project appraisal

- 10.1 The Chair of the Audit Committee presented an independent post-project appraisal report prepared by the University's auditors to close the loop following the College's successful transfer to IE University in July 2024. He explained that this was undertaken at the request of the Audit Committee in line with good business practice. Following a full discussion of the report, it was agreed that the work offers a valuable framework for management and Court in future investment decisions, recognising that significant improvements have already taken place in the way that such decisions are taken and managed. The Audit Committee would oversee the next steps of ensuring the work was fully baked into current policy and practices and that the University's risk appetite documentation reflected the Court's position.

11. Student Recruitment Report

- 11.1 Court received a report from the Principal on student recruitment to Trimester B in the academic year 2024-25 as at the end of the induction week. He explained that there had been a small increase in the number of students recruited since the production of the paper and that the situation continues to be closely monitored.

12. Senate Disciplinary Committee (SDC) Annual Report

- 12.1 The University Secretary presented a report on student misconduct offences considered under the terms of the Code of Student Conduct during Session 2023/24. She explained that the report provided an overview of these issues, and that the number of reported disciplinary cases remained small in comparison with the number of students. There were areas of particular concern which featured in the statistics across the sector such as plagiarism and the use of AI and ghost writers. The sector recognised that addressing these challenges would likely require a step change in the way assessments were structured and managed. In the course of discussion, she drew attention to work to address the inappropriate use of AI while recognising the importance of students graduating with an ability to use AI professionally and with integrity in the workplace. In respect of essay mills and ghost-writers, she drew attention to the warnings delivered at student induction and the support offered to students targeted by companies and individuals offering these services as there were cases of use of such services leading to blackmail. A governor referred to the misleading terminology of minor and major misconduct in the Code of Student Conduct. The University Secretary agreed and said this was under review in the forthcoming revision of the Code.
- 12.2 Following further discussion of the use and abuse of AI, the Pro Vice Chancellor (Education) explained that work was focussing at both university and the broader sector level on how to balance the goal of educating students in the legitimate use of AI while discouraging the tool's misuse with attendant scope to undermine academic integrity. She explained that the University was working closely with other universities and had set up its own working group to look at all aspects of the educational use of AI.
- 12.3 Court **noted** the terms of the report.

13. Complaints Handling Procedure Annual Report

- 13.1 The University Secretary presented the annual report, a requirement of the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO), which provided an overview of the complaints received by the University in the period 1st August 2023 to 31st July 2024 and learning points derived from them. Many complaints were successfully resolved at a local level with close cooperation between the G&LS and departments

throughout the University. She explained that complaint handling could be time consuming and required well-developed investigatory skills (as did many student disciplinary cases). The SPSO set a timescale for addressing complaints which was generally recognised as exceptionally difficult to observe for complex cases. However, the G&LS Complaints staff did everything possible to ensure that complaints are handled fairly and compliantly within the required timescales. The ultimate body to which complaints can be referred once institutional procedures have been exhausted is the SPSO. There was only one such referral in 2023/24, and the SPSO upheld the University's position.

13.2 Court **noted** the terms of the report which would be published on the University's website.

14. Senate Effectiveness Review-Report and Action Plan

14.1 The Principal reminded governors that a review of Senate requires to be conducted in a similar way to the Quinquennial Court Effectiveness Review which had taken place in the year before. He presented the PwC report prepared after the periodic Senate Effectiveness Review, the report of the Steering Group and Senate's proposed Action Plan. He explained that the review provided an overall positive report and that Senate had already acted upon its recommendations including facilitating engagement from the student senators; changing the time of meetings and enhancing engagement from the London campus.

14.2 Court **noted** the report and the proposed action plan.

15. Research Update Trimester A

15.1 The Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) presented the January 2025 Research update report which summarised research policy changes, announcements, research submissions and awards. She explained that a key element of all research is to demonstrate the impact of the research and that this is essential to the University's REF submission which is currently in progress. She reminded Court that the University has an excellent record for impactful research.

15.2 Court **noted** the report.

16. University Senate: Report from meeting of Senate held on 11th December 2024

16.1 The Principal provided a summary of the business discussed by Senate at its meeting on the 11th December 2024. Court **noted** the report.

16.2 The Principal also presented the Research Integrity Annual Statement and Report 2023-24. He explained that the report provides a summary of actions to support research integrity and processes, ensuring that this is conducted properly and ethically.

16.3 Court **approved** the Research Integrity Annual Statement and Report and its publication on the University's website.

17. Standing Committee Business

17.1 **People Committee** – 28th November 2024

17.1.1 The Chair of the Committee, Austin Sweeney, explained that this was a full report from the meeting which took place on the 28th November 2024, a summary having previously been presented to Court. He explained that the next meeting of the People Committee would include a discussion on student engagement and he invited any governor to attend and contribute to the

discussion. The invitation would be extended to students other than the SA officers in order to obtain a broader student perspective.

17.1.2 Court **noted** the report.

17.2 **Audit Committee** – 20th January 2025

17.2.1 The Chair of the Committee, Bill McDonald, presented the report. Court **noted** the report of the issues discussed at the Committee meeting held on 20th January 2025.

17.3 **Court Governance and Nominations Committee** -29th January 2025

17.3.1 The Chair of the Committee, Rob Woodward, presented the paper which provided a report of the issues discussed, decisions taken by, and recommendations from the Court Governance and Nominations Committee meeting held on 29th January 2025. These included Court membership and target skills and experience to be reflected in the recruitment as well and the forthcoming need to replace Amit Bhargava who had intimated with regret that he would stand down later in the year. The recruitment activity would be progressed once the Chair Elect took up office and convenorship of the CGNC. He provided an update on various matters which required Court approval including agreement to close further reporting on the Quinquennial Effectiveness Review with recommendations now integrated as appropriate. He drew attention to the refresh of the governor Link scheme which was driven not least because of changes in governors and organisational structure. He emphasised, however, that the Link scheme did not supplant key productive relationships between governors with particular expertise and executives who had cognate responsibilities. These should remain intact, whatever link area governors might have in the interests of an opportunity to deepen their understanding of another area of the University.

17.3.2 Court **approved** all of the following:

17.3.3 the final update on externally commissioned Quinquennial Governance Effectiveness Review 2023.

17.3.4 the actions arising from the Court Annual Effectiveness Review to be prioritised with the new Chair.

17.3.5 the changes to the Governor Link scheme.

17.3.6 the proposed changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference, Composition and Quorum.

17.4 **Finance & General Purposes Committee** – 9th December 2024

17.4.1 The Chair of the Committee, Arlene Cairns, presented the report. Court **noted** the report of the issues discussed at the Committee meeting held on 9th December 2024

18. **Media Coverage Analysis**

18.1 The Court **noted** the report that highlighted the media coverage received by GCU in November & December 2024.

19. **Date of Next Meeting**

- 19.1 The Court noted that the next scheduled meeting would take place in person on Thursday 17th April 2025 at 9.00am. A dinner would take place the evening before, on 16th April, when the Court would have an opportunity to express its appreciation of the immense contribution of the outgoing Chair.
- 19.2 On the afternoon of 16 April there will be a presentation and discussion of the Estate Masterplan in preparation for its consideration by Court on 17 April.

Chair of Court

The Vice-Chair of Court, Meg Lustman, acknowledged that this was Rob Woodward's last meeting as Chair of Court and expressed her thanks on behalf of Court and the University for his excellent stewardship of Court and the support that he has provided to the Executive and to each and every governor that has served Court under his time as Chair. She reflected on the significant achievements of the University during his tenure and the part that Rob has played in those as well as his engagement with the student body and other stakeholders and for his untiring work as an advocate for the University.

She wished him every success in the future.