

Glasgow Caledonian University Court

Minutes of the University Court held at 9am on 22nd April 2021 via Online Conferencing Facilities

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

Apology: Peter Baguley

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 Cam Donaldson, Pro Vice Chancellor (Research)
Fiona Campbell, Director of People Services
Claire Hulsen, Director of Strategy
Douglas Little, Director of Estates (Item 11 only)
Alan O'Neil, Director of Information Technology (Item 11 only)
Deborah Donnet, Acting Head of Governance (Secretary)

Observers: Professor Andrea Nelson, Dean SHLS
Adil Rahoo, VP GSBS and Student President Elect

Chair's opening remarks

The Chair welcomed Professor Andrea Nelson, Dean SHLS, who was observing the meeting prior to assuming the role of PVC (Research) on 1st May 2021 and Adil Rahoo, who had recently been elected Student President for the forthcoming academic year and would be joining Court as a member from 31st May.

1. Minutes

- 1.1 Court noted that the minutes of the Court meeting held on 19th February 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 11th November 2020 and the actions taken since that meeting to address them.
- 2.2 It was agreed to circulate information on the attendees at the stakeholder event held in February 2021.

ACTION: Secretary to circulate information on the stakeholder event attendees.

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 A Court briefing on pensions and the University's pension liability was to be arranged over the summer to inform governors about the issues the that HE sector was facing and the implications for the University. Invitations to Court members would be issued in due course.
- 4.2 The Chair reminded members that there would a preparatory opportunity on 7th June for Court to address the context and the key features of the draft budget 21/22 in more depth than would be possible at its meeting on 17 June when the draft budget would be presented for approval. Prior to this, the Finance and General Purposes Committee would be considering the draft budget at its meetings on 26th April and 24th May 2021.
- 4.3 That afternoon, the Chair would be attending a single topic meeting of the Committee of University Chairs to discuss sexual misconduct, and Court would be briefed as appropriate thereafter.
- 4.4 The Chair referred to correspondence over many years relating to the academic integrity of a member of staff and to the repeated insinuations which had been thoroughly investigated and shown to be without foundation. The Chair noted the unanimous resolution of the Court now to cease communications with the correspondent.

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 University had been ranked 5th in the world, and first in Scotland and the UK, for gender equality in the Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings.
- 5.3 University Principals had met with the SFC to discuss the review of the FE and HE sectors. The SFC was now preparing three thematic papers to submit to the Scottish Government in June, but there were concerns from the sector as there had been no university involvement in preparing the reports and aspects were likely to meet with serious challenge from the sector.
- 5.4 GCNCY had recently undergone a review, as the final stage in achieving full accreditation, by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The result would not be known until September but informal feedback had been encouraging.

- 5.5 The Principal congratulated the Chair of Court on being awarded the UK Non-Executive Director of the Year 2021 award in the FTSE AIM category.
- 5.6 Further to the University being among the many institutions listed as having five or fewer anonymous disclosures of sexual misconduct on the Everyone's Invited website, the Principal assured Court that the University took all allegations of sexual misconduct very seriously, and there had been very few complaints in recent years. It was not apparent from the Everyone's Invited website when, or over what period, the incidents had taken place. All complaints received by the University had been responded to in line with University policy. Led by the University, Fearless Glasgow (a consortium of west of Scotland HE and FE institutions, Police Scotland and other organisations) had secured funding from the Scottish Government towards the cost of an online reporting tool for each participating HEI or FEI, that would support formal and anonymous reporting of sexual misconduct and, in due course, other unacceptable behaviour, such as racism. It was recognised that more individuals might report incidents anonymously than were prepared to do so using the University's complaints procedure. The objective was to understand the possible scope of the problem and give individuals reluctant to use the formal process reassurance that complaints would be handled confidentially and sensitively. It was noted that an opportunity to have a more detailed discussion around sexual misconduct would be welcomed.

ACTION: University Secretary and Chair of Court to consider opportunity for more detailed discussion around sexual misconduct.

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 Plans were continuing to be made for the safe return of students and staff to campus. The situation was still very fluid and it was not anticipated that there would be more information until after the Scottish Parliament elections on 6th May.
- 6.3 In response to a question about the SIMS project, the Chief Operating Officer reported that there had been some specialised staffing challenges, as was common within this area of work, but that steps were being taken by the project team and the University to address this. While it was still planned to deliver Release 2 in August, it was acknowledged that this was a demanding target.
- 6.4 The "Delay, Drop, Discard" initiative had been well received by staff and had contributed to relieving some work related pressures. In addition to looking at operational changes, work was also underway on what the University could do differently from a longer-term strategic perspective.
- 6.5 The situation in relation to international students remained fluid. The University had supported international students who had arrived via English airports, to quarantine in line with Westminster Government requirements. Sector discussions were ongoing with the Scottish Government on the possibility of students arriving

directly into Scotland quarantining in University accommodation rather than in a government appointed hotel.

- 6.6 In responding to a question about the staff wellbeing survey that was undertaken in December and January, it was clarified that this was not a traditional, detailed staff engagement survey but rather a snapshot relevant to a particular time and intended to test and shape the University's action and support for staff. It was intended that there would be further pulse surveys of this nature in the future. The individual survey results and comments would remain confidential, although the flavour of comments provided by staff would continue to be prepared thematically.

7. Student President's report

- 7.1 The Student President reported on the Students' Association's current issues and activities and the strong partnership working with the University. Key topics highlighted included:-
- Attendances at the NUS Scotland and NUS UK Conferences 2021;
 - The development of the Students' Association Strategic Plan 2025 which was due to be launched in August 2021 and would last four academic years to 2024/25;
 - "Ask the Officer Online" presented by the Student President with the Principal as special guest;
 - The provision of gender neutral toilets as campaigned for by the Associations LGBT+ Group; and
 - The results of the full time officer elections. Adil Rahoo, with the most votes, had accepted the position of Student President, and he would assume office on 31st May 2021, along with the other newly elected student officers.
- 7.2 Court members were invited to attend the online annual Teaching Awards being held on 13th May.

8. University Secretary's Report

- 8.1 The Court received a report from the University Secretary which presented for approval, an updated Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP), in line with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's requirements, together with an Unacceptable Actions Policy that outlined how the University would respond to challenging behaviour from complainants. It was highlighted that the key features of the current CHP were retained, and a new and welcome option to "resolve" complaints was now explicitly adopted in addition to the existing outcomes of upholding or not upholding a complaint.
- 8.2 Court **approved** the revised CHP and the Unacceptable Actions Policy subject to editorial and formatting amendments.

ACTION: Acting Head of Governance to implement new CHP.

- 8.3 Court further **approved** the appointment of Ms Jane Wilson, a GCU alumna, as a new lay Governor with expertise in communications and public relations, with effect from 1st May 2021. It was noted that a refreshed recruitment exercise for a

lay governor with expertise in strategic finance, was underway with applications closing on 14th May 2021.

ACTION: University Secretary to send appointment letter to Ms Wilson.

- 8.4 Court noted that the Vice-Chair of Court appointment process would commence shortly. Arrangements would also be made for the appointment of Senate's representative on Court as the current role holder, Dr Morag Ferguson's, second term of office would come to an end at the end of July 2021.
- 8.5 The report also outlined actions taken to manage and respond to breaches of the Covid-19 regulations that had occurred in Caledonian Court, and the work of the Security staff in particular was warmly acknowledged in ensuring the safety of students in University accommodation, as was the work of the Deans in supporting the disciplinary process in respect of students who had perpetrated breaches.

9. Strategy for Learning 2030

- 9.1 The DVC (Learning Teaching and Student Experience) introduced the Strategy for Learning 2030. The new Strategy for Learning 2030 was intended to be ambitious and dynamic, and able to respond to a changing global context. It sought to deliver "Transformative Education" through excellence in learning, teaching and assessment, an outstanding student experience, with research-led and enquiry-based pedagogies and practice. Through the Strategy the University would continue to embrace technological developments that enhanced interactive, participatory learning and diversify learning opportunities. The Strategy aimed to equip the University's learners from diverse backgrounds, and at different stages of their learner journey, to succeed in a competitive changing world landscape, as active global citizens.
- 9.2 Court welcomed the extensive consultation with staff and students. In response to questions about supporting staff to deliver teaching in an increasing digital and virtual environment, Court was informed that steps included new software being rolled out in May and the recruitment of four additional learning technology staff. Furthermore, if staff were having technological issues associated with working from home, then arrangements could be made to access facilities on campus.
- 9.3 Court **approved** the Strategy for Learning 2030.

10. Strategy 2030 – Research Strategy

- 10.1 The PVC (Research) introduced the Research Strategy 2030. As the top Modern University for research power in Scotland in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) with over a third of academic staff entered into REF2021, the Research Strategy would build on a solid trajectory. The Research Strategy would provide a framework for both discipline-led and inter-disciplinary research within and across all academic units. In line with the University's Common Good mission, the Research Strategy would assist the University to address the changing needs of communities, civil society, governments and industry. This would require the University to call upon its strengths in interdisciplinary, multi-sectoral approaches

to enhanced health, well-being, inclusive growth and sustainability. This would be especially relevant in supporting Post-COVID recovery.

- 10.2 With five broad research goals and seven measurable research outcomes, the 2030 Research Strategy had been developed on a consensual basis with staff and students, and linked very closely with the Strategy for Learning 2030.
- 10.3 It was suggested that stronger reference to the postgraduate research student community would enhance the Strategy, as would the inclusion of more examples that reflected activity in both the Glasgow and London campuses.
- 10.4 Court **approved** the 2030 Research Strategy, subject to incorporation of the points raised at 10.3 above.

ACTION: PVC (R) to make the appropriate amendments to the Research Strategy.

11. Strategy 2030 – Enabling Plans

- 11.1 Douglas Little, Director of Estates, and Alan O’Neil, Director of Information Technology, were welcomed to the meeting for this item only.
- 11.2 The Chief Operating Officer introduced the three Enabling Plans for Finance, People and Infrastructure, that supported the overarching Strategy 2030 and the Learning and Teaching, and Research enabling Strategies. Each of the three plans followed a similar format and progress on the plans would be reported to Court via the Finance and General Purposes Committee (for the Finance and Infrastructure plans) and People Committee. The plans would be flexible and responsive to the changing environment, and annually, a one year forward look plan would be submitted to Court which would give a more detailed set of actions arising from the next stage of the ten year plan.
- 11.3 Finance Enabling Plan: The Director of Finance outlined the key objectives and critical success factors/KPIs of the Finance Plan, highlighting that this was a financial plan that could be delivered only by the whole University and not just the Finance Department, and that this applied in particular to income generation. The need for the University to be more ambitious in relation to income growth was discussed and Court’s attention was drawn to the Income Analysis report appended to the Finance and General Purposes Report to Court (see item 19.3). It was suggested that reference to “Staff Costs as a % of income” be amended to read “staff investment as % of income”.
- 11.4 Infrastructure Enabling Plan: This Plan encompassed two areas:- Estates and Facilities, and GCU Technology. The headline objectives for each area were outlined by the Director of Estates and Director of Information Technology respectively. The key performance measures for both areas had yet to be determined and these would be developed with key stakeholders following the approval of the Plan. In discussion, investment in information technology that would have the biggest impact was seen as crucial, as was ensuring that staff and student capability was appropriately managed, and it was noted that this would be discussed at the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The civic value of the GCU estate was raised, and the Committee was informed of the University’s

involvement in the “Your Cowcaddens” project. It was suggested that the University campus’ role in both communities in which they were situated, should be reflected in the Plan.

- 11.5 **People Enabling Plan:** The Director of People outlined the key elements of the Plan and that it would be delivered in close consultation with Trade Union colleagues. Whilst TU and key stakeholder involvement was apparent in the plan, it was agreed to include more explicit reference to continued and constructive dialogue with campus Trade Unions.
- 11.6 Court **approved** all three enabling plans subject to the amendments raised in discussion.

ACTION: COO to ensure Enabling Plans are updated to reflect Court discussion.

- 11.7 The Chair of Court reported that the Director of the Estates would be retiring at the beginning of May after 35 years’ services, during which time he had overseen many changes in the University campus, and most recently, had made a significant contribution to providing a safe return to campus for students and staff. The Director of IT would also be retiring shortly after two and a half years at the University, a period which had seen a transformation in IT working practice. On behalf of Court, both were thanked for their service to the University and wished well for their retirements.

12. 2020/21 Student Recruitment Summary

- 12.1 Court **noted** an overview of student recruitment in academic year 2020/21 as at 16 March 2021. The report included an overview of five year trends in applications and intake for entrants to full-time programmes in key groups; analysis by Trimester A and B entry for the taught postgraduate groups; and total international enrolments through agents.
- 12.2 Overall there had been an increase in student numbers on taught programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. In particular growth in international and home postgraduate students was significant. There was also growth in the number of Graduate Apprenticeships. It was noted that earlier actions in enhancing the recruitment process, especially in the use of international agents, had contributed to the cost-effective increase in international students.
- 12.3 Early data for September 2021 intake suggested continuation of this positive trend.

13. HESA Performance Indicators 2021

- 13.1 Court noted a report on the 2021 HESA Performance Indicators (PIs) relating to participation of under-represented groups and the teaching quality metrics of projected outcomes and non-continuation. The PIs were based on data returned by universities in the annual HESA submissions, and were drawn upon by external publications, league table compilers and the SFC Outcome Agreement measures.
- 13.2 The University had maintained a very strong performance in key areas.

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.

15. Establishment of a European Foundation

- 15.1 In light of the full agenda and the limited time available for discussion of this important item, it was agreed to defer consideration.

Secretary's Note: A separate Court briefing session is to be held on Wednesday 19th May 2021.

16. REF Final Submission

- 16.1 Court **noted** a report that summarised the University's submission to the 2021 Research Excellence Framework. It set out the overall content of the submission, comprising a common set of data for the nine Units of Assessment (UoA) the University entered into.
- 16.2 It was noted that the preparing the REF submission was a significant piece of work over a sustained period of time for a wide range of staff across the University, and the Chair thanked all those involved and the PVC (Research) for his leadership in this area.

17. University Senate Reports

- 17.1 Court noted the reports from the meeting of the University Senate held on 24th February 2021 and 31st March 2021, and **approved** an amendment to Senate Standing Orders to make explicit reference to the electronic approval of business, in line with a recent amendment to Court's Standing Orders.

ACTION: Clerk to Senate to update Senate Standing Orders

18. Standing Committee Business

- 18.1 People Committee: Court noted a report from the People Committee which updated Court on the issues discussed and decisions taken by the People Committee at its meeting on 18th March 2021. Key items considered at this meeting included a discussion on the outcome of the staff wellbeing survey, and an update on tackling racism. The Committee also considered the University's Public Sector Equality Report and the Equality Outcomes 2021-25, which were submitted to Court for approval. Also referred for approval were amendments to the Committee's Terms of Reference, Composition and Quorum.
- 18.2 Court **approved**

- The University's Public Sector Equality Report and the Equality Outcomes 2021-25; and
- The amendments to the Committee's Terms of Reference, Composition and Quorum.

18.3 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 meeting on 1st March 2021. In particular, Court approved amendments to the Committee's Terms of Reference, Composition and Quorum.

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 29th March 2021. In particular, Court **approved** amendments to the Committee's Terms of Reference, Composition and Quorum.

ACTION: Acting Head of Governance to update Terms of Reference, Composition and Quorum for all three committees.

19. GCNYC Board of Trustees Report from Meeting on 12th March 2021

19.1 Court noted a report on of the issues discussed and decisions taken by the GCNYC Board of Trustees meeting held on 12th March 2021.

20. Media Report

20.1 The Court noted the Media Coverage Analysis Update Report for February 2021, and the very recently published March 2021 report that was available in Convene.

21. Date of next meeting

21.1 The next Court meeting will take place on Thursday 17th June 2021. It will be held virtually in line with the current COVID-19 restrictions. Additional Court briefings will take place earlier as separately notified.

22. Chair's Closing Remarks

22.1 Noting that this was the final meeting before the end of term of the current full time student officers, the Chair thanked Susan Docherty and Tabitha Nyariki, for their contribution to the work of Court and to the University during a challenging and exceptional year.

22.2 Thanks were also extended to Professor Cam Donaldson who was stepping down from the role of PVC (Research) at the end of the month, but would be continuing as Yunus Chair.

22.3 Good wishes were extended to all GCU staff, students and Court members who were participating in the Kiltwalk at the weekend. The GCU team would be raising funds for the GCU Foundation and all funds raised would be topped up by 50% by the Hunter Foundation.