

University Court

Minutes of the meeting of the University Court held on 28th April 2016

(Minutes 15.100– 15.135)

Present: Mrs Hazel Brooke (Chair)
Dr Douglas Chalmers, Mr John Chapman, Dr Morag Ferguson, Professor Pamela Gillies, Ms Laura Gordon, Mr Ian Gracie, Mr Tom Halpin, Mr Ian Kerr, Ms Neena Mahal, Dr Neil Partlett, Professor Ann Priest, Miss Davena Rankin, Mr Paul Reynolds, Mr Michael Stephenson, Mr Alistair Webster, Professor Stephanie Young (Vice-Chair)

Apologies: Mr Gordon Jack, Mr David Wallace, Dr Bob Winter

In attendance: Dr Jeanine Gregersen-Hermans, Vice Principal & Pro Vice Chancellor International
Ms Jan Hulme, University Secretary & Vice Principal (Governance)
Mr Alex Killick, Director of People, People Services
Professor Mike Mannion, Vice Principal & Pro Vice Chancellor Research
Professor James Miller, Deputy Vice Chancellor
Mr Gerry Milne, Chief Financial Officer & Vice-Principal Infrastructure
Ms Cara Smyth, Vice-President of GCU NY
Ms Jodie Waite, Student Vice President School Health & Life Sciences
Professor Valerie Webster, Vice-Principal and Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Student Experience

Ms Janice Bruce, Secretary

Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair noted that a number of governors had received some of their Court papers two days prior to the meeting despite these having been circulated electronically the previous Thursday and in hard copy on the Friday. The University Secretary apologised for the late arrival of papers and stated that the Court Secretariat would look into the matter urgently.

The Chair stated that agenda item 12.4, the Staff Policy Committee Report, would be raised for discussion as Court was being invited to consider the results of the Staff Pulse Survey.

The Chair intimated that there would be an additional agenda item. The Deputy Vice Chancellor would give an oral update on the submission of the Outcome Agreement 2016-2017.

Minutes of the meeting of the University Court held on 3rd March 2016

15.100 Agreed Document UC15/46, the unconfirmed draft minutes of the Court meeting held on 3rd March 2016 were an accurate record subject to the inclusion of Mr Lafferty's name in the list of those present.

Matters Arising Status Note

15.102 Noted Document UC15/47, a report on the status of matters arising from the meeting held on 3rd March 2016.

- 15.103 Received The University Secretary tabled a positioning statement to be used only in response to any enquiries concerning the referendum on whether the UK should remain part of the European Union. The statement, which had been revised in light of comments received from Court at its meeting on 3rd March 2016, was agreed to be appropriately factual, and it did not seek to adopt a stance in the debate.
- 15.104 Agreed To approve the revised positioning statement.

Chair's Report

- 15.105 Noted Document UC15/48, a report from the Chair of Court on the activities she had undertaken and meetings she had attended on behalf of Court.
- 15.106 Discussion
- i. The Chair reminded Court that at the beginning of session 2015-2016 members had considered the benefits of changing the time of Court meetings to an earlier afternoon start and had agreed to follow this model for 2015-2016. The Chair sought Court's views on continuing the earlier timings for the 2016/2017 meetings. The consensus was that the earlier start had been beneficial for example in providing enhanced networking opportunities through the lunch and facilitating engagement with the Deans. The short 'insight presentations' had been a useful means of learning at first-hand about the rich diversity of university activities. Moreover, staff members involved had indicated that they valued meeting governors in this way, which in turn helped promote understanding of the Court and its work within the university community. It was appreciated that for a minority of governors whose business commitments could not always be managed flexibly, the earlier start might be less attractive. However, in light of the operational benefits to the Court of the earlier start time, it was hoped that setting the meetings a year in advance would help governors plan their diaries to avoid clashes. Accordingly, it was agreed that the Court meetings for 2016/2017 would continue to be held at 2.00pm.
 - ii. The Chair reminded Court that the next Court visit, the focus of which was the international student experience, would take place on 2nd June 2016 and encouraged members to attend. The site visits were an exceptional opportunity for Court members to gain first hand insight into the University's core activities and were a rich complement to reports and other documentation received by the Court. Staff involved in the visits greatly valued the opportunity to meet governors too. The Chair recognised that this was a further claim on governors' time, however, and she appreciated that governors made time to participate in these visits.

Principal's and Executive Board Report

- 15.107 Received Document UC15/49, the Principal's and Executive Board Report to Court.
- 15.108 Reported
- i. The Principal referred to the Scottish Funding Council Strategic Dialogue meeting which had taken place on 25th April 2016 and thanked those governors and members of staff who had been involved. The Principal advised that the visit had been very positive with the SFC commending the University on its focussed and evidenced based Strategy 2020.
 - ii. The Principal gave Court a brief update on activities at GCUNY including the

application for the educational licence. The Vice President GCUNY advised that there had been confirmation that an important and specific phase, the canvassing of opinion of other universities in New York, was underway with a defined end point of 9 May 2016 for this phase. A positive signal so far was that SUNY, one of the largest players, had apparently already indicated that it had no objections. The University would receive feedback on whether any challenges to the licence application had emerged from the canvassing process. It was expected that, if no objections were raised, or assuming any objections received were satisfactorily addressed, the next step would be review of the application by the Board of Regents, the decision making body.

- iii. Noting the progress with the African Leadership College, the Principal advised that she had spoken to Mary Robinson of the Mary Robinson Foundation, who had indicated that she would be keen to partner with the University to promote the development of leadership skills throughout Africa. The Principal stated that an evidence-based proposition would be submitted to the Executive Board and Court in due course.

University Secretary's Report

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| 15.109 | Received | Document UC15/50, a report from the University Secretary on governance and legislative issues. |
| 15.110 | Reported | The University Secretary advised that planning for the next governor induction programme was underway. In order to ensure that the programme continued to meet the needs of newly appointed and elected governors it would be helpful to receive feedback especially from those Court members who had completed the induction the previous year. |
| 15.111 | Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. It was noted that members of the Governance Department had recently attended demonstrations by external providers on electronic board portals. The demonstrations had highlighted key benefits for governors which included ease of use, security, accessibility and searchability of Court documentation including agendas and papers. The Academic Staff Governor suggested that it might be worth considering the University's existing Blackboard site which was both secure and flexible to use. The University Secretary stated that no decision had yet been made about which platform to use. The Court Secretariat would look at the potential of Blackboard. <i>(Secretary's note: Blackboard had previously been used for this purpose but did not find favour with Court members and was not used by them. Blackboard's attractiveness for this purpose may have improved and this will be checked.)</i> ii. With reference to the schedule of key dates, it was agreed that in future the dates of the GCU New York Board meetings would be included. |
| 15.112 | Agreed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Court Secretariat would explore the potential of using Blackboard for the management of Court and committee papers. ii. The dates of the GCUNY Board meetings would be included in the schedule of meetings and key dates. |

GCUNY Options

- 15.113 Considered Document UC15/51, received a report setting out different scenarios and options in relation to GCU New York.
- 15.114 Noted
- i. The Principal, in presenting the paper, reminded Court of the background to the initial business plan and the reasons the project had not proceeded in a timeline which reflected those expectations. Nevertheless, invaluable preparatory groundwork had been accomplished during the period that GCUNY had operated from Wooster St, and this was standing the University in good stead for different strands of its activity in New York and would underpin recruitment to the campus assuming award of the licence. It was noted that there had been a significant increase in the recruitment of North American students to Glasgow since the NY campus had opened, although work was underway to examine the extent to which there was cause and effect. The paper acknowledged that, while there were multiple business objectives in establishing a campus in NY, the recruitment of students to the New York campus was and remained an important goal.
 - ii. The Finance & General Purposes Committee had considered at length the paper's two scenarios, A and B, which were based on different assumptions about the timing of the outcome of the licence application, as well as options within scenario B. The Committee had tested assumptions built into the Scenarios and the options. The Committee agreed that it should recommend to Court the acceptance of Scenario A. Recognising that Scenario A was built on an assumption about when the University would have a decision on its licence application and could first admit students, the Committee had agreed that, if this assumption was not met, it would be necessary to examine Scenario B and its associated options later in the year.
- 15.115 Discussion Court discussed the two scenarios at length and sought and received clarification of points of detail. Main points raised included:
- i. The Chair of Court stated that at this stage Court was not being asked to make a decision on options but to consider two scenarios defined by different assumptions about the timing of the licence application outcome. The scenarios were potentially consecutive rather than alternatives.
 - ii. With reference to the financial projections, Court was advised that these would be scrutinised carefully by the Finance & General Purposes Committee during its discussion of the draft budget 2016-2017. Furthermore, the internal auditors were undertaking a review of the GCUNY business model. The income projections would be kept under close review with more detailed information on the underlying assumptions being provided as part of regular updates to both the F&GPC and Court.
 - iii. Court encouraged the Executive to continue to think creatively about the development of activities that were not dependent on the licence in a vigorous and dynamic way to support the financial sustainability of GCUNY. It was suggested that there were opportunities presaged in the original business plan that had not yet been fully exploited. Moreover, further work was needed to develop existing and additional options under Scenario B.
 - iv. Court recognised the positive impact GCUNY had in terms of building esteem and

raising GCU's international profile, both of which were substantial benefits but difficult to quantify.

15.116 Agreed To accept scenario A with its assumptions about the timing of the outcome of the licence application as the current strategically appropriate position.

Overview of Complaints Handling Procedure 2014-2015

15.117 Considered Document UC15/52 an overview of the complaints received by the University for the period 1st August 2014 to 31st July 2015.

15.118 Noted

- i. The report was a requirement of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and would be submitted to the Senate meeting on 3rd June 2016 prior to submission to the SPSO. In line with SPSO requirements, data from the report would be published on the Governance Department pages of the University website.

- ii. A relatively small number of complaints had been received and covered a wide range of constituencies. The University Secretary advised that as the complaints handling process in its current format had only been in operation for two years it was difficult to identify any trends.

- iii. The Academic Staff Governor asked whether there were any support mechanisms in place for staff who were the subject of complaints. The University Secretary stated that the emphasis in the report was on continued training and development to ensure complaints handlers had good investigative skills. However, she recognised that this had been raised as an issue in the sector and suggested that the Academic Staff Governor and the Director of People should discuss the adequacy of current support mechanisms in such circumstances.

- iv. In response to a query about to whom the complaints investigator reported the findings of an investigation, the University Secretary advised that in straightforward, uncontentious cases the investigator would include conclusions and recommendations in his or her report and these would be acted upon with the only review coming from the Governance Office. In more complex or inconclusive cases another independent party would be brought in to review and to seek further information as necessary. It was agreed that it was important to observe the principles of natural justice.

Outcome Agreement Update

15.119 Received An oral update from the Deputy Vice Chancellor on the Outcome Agreement (OA). The DVC reminded Court that the University had agreed a three year OA with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for the period 2015-2016 to 2017-2018 which was reviewed and refreshed each year. Court had endorsed a refreshed draft OA at its meeting on 26th November 2015 which was due to be submitted to the SFC in February 2016. However, following the liaison meetings between the SFC and universities the SFC had suggested that institutions should wait until they received the Indicative Grant Letter before submitting their OAs. The DVC advised that the SFC's timescale for submitting the final OA would not allow Court's endorsement to be delayed until the June Court meeting. It was agreed, therefore, that the final document would be circulated to Court members electronically.

Student Numbers 2015-2016

- 15.120 Noted
- i. Document UC15/53 an update on student numbers in the academic year 2015/2016.
 - ii. The Finance & General Purposes Committee had reviewed the report at its meeting on 19th April 2016 and had requested future reports include comparative data for previous years, point in time comparisons and emerging trends.
- 15.121 Discussion
- i. It was noted that SFC grant funding in support of RUK students had been progressively phased out and replaced by full cost fees as in England (albeit with a government cap on the maximum that a university could charge). In response to a query about whether consideration might be given to reducing fees for RUK students as way of encouraging more students and increasing income, the DVC advised that the fee structure, including that for RUK students, was being reviewed for 2017-2018 and beyond.
 - ii. In response to a query as to whether stricter UKVI regulations was the main reason for the decrease in international student numbers compared with the same point in 2014-2015, Court was advised that there were various contributory factors, a number of which were outwith the University's control, for example worldwide political and financial volatility. However, there had been an increase in 2016-17 undergraduate applications to date and additional work was being undertaken to secure enrolments for 2016-17. The University was mid-way through the recruitment cycle for 2016/17 international postgraduate taught students and would develop and focus additional marketing and recruitment effort on both those programmes and countries where there was the highest demand.

HESA Performance Indicators 2016

- 15.122 Noted
- Document UC15/54, an overview of the performance of the University and the sector in the HESA indicators published in March 2016.

University's/Principal's Objectives

- 15.123 Noted
- Document UC15/55, an overview of the University's eight key objectives and the set of measures to assess delivery.

Widening Access Report

- 15.124 Noted
- Document UC15/56, which provided an overview of widening participation activity and metrics. The VP and PVC Learning and Student Experience advised that the Scottish Funding Council had commended the University on its holistic approach.
- 15.125 Discussion
- Court commended the range of activities being undertaken and the University's improved performance across all metrics relating to learning and teaching and student outcomes.

With reference to the SFC's decision that the fourth tranche of additional undergraduate places for widening access and articulation schemes would not be allocated to universities in the academic year 2016-17, the Principal advised that the SFC had indicated that they might review the level of support. The Principal also indicated that consideration was being given to approaching Scottish

Enterprise to encourage them to support the University in developing its offer in relation to the Advanced Higher Hub. In response to a suggestion about whether this was an area where support from local business and industry might be sought, the VP and PVC Learning and Student Experience advised that the University already had some philanthropic support. However, it was intended to seek sustainable funding. Work was underway to develop a strong evidence-based offer prior to seeking additional sources of funding and support.

Statement on Student Experience

- 15.126 Noted
- i. Document UC15/57, an overview of the current definition of the GCU student experience.
 - ii. The definition would be formally reviewed in session 2016-2017 as part of the scheduled review of the Student Experience Framework. The Student President suggested that more explicit reference could be made to the wider student experience and engagement in civic life.
 - iii. In response to a query about GCU London, the VP and PVC Learning and Student Experience stated that all students, regardless of where they were studying, would have the same quality of student experience.

Senate Report: 4th March 2016

- 15.127 Noted Document UC15/58, a report on substantive items which Senate had considered at its meeting on 4th March 2016.

Court Membership Committee Report: 29th March 2016

- 15.128 Considered Document UC15/59, a report on the substantive issues discussed at the Court Membership Committee held on 29th March 2016.
- 15.129 Noted
- i. A gap analysis of GCU's existing practice in relation to the recommendations contained within the Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) Report on Governing Body Equality and Diversity had been undertaken. The analysis demonstrated a high level of good practice which aligned with the recommendations set out in the ECU's report.
 - ii. The Court Membership Committee had identified a number of actions which would enhance the University's existing practices.
- 15.130 Agreed The actions proposed in section 2 of document UC15/59 should be implemented.

Health & Safety Committee Report: 7th April 2016

- 15.131 Noted Document UC15/60, a report on the substantive issues discussed at the Health & Safety Committee held on 7th April 2016

Audit Committee Report: 12th April 2016

- 15.132 Noted Document UC15/61, a report on the substantive issues of business discussed at the Audit Committee meeting on 12th April 2016.

