

## **University Court**

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### **Minutes**

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19 February 2025 from 14:00 to 17:00 in the Boardroom, Kydd Building

\*attended via MS Teams

### **Members**

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Mr David Brew (Chair)

Ms Dounia Allaiouti

Professor Liz Bacon

Mr Andrew Bailey\*

Ms Liz Blackburn\*

Dr Scott Cameron

Col. Iain Davidson

Ms Fiona Drysdale KC

Professor Ruth Falconer

Ms Kerith George-Briant

Professor Alastair Irons

Ms Lynne Hamilton

Ms Pam Herries

Mr Fraser Keir\*

Ms Veronica Lynch

Mr Antony Marks\*

Dr Hadi Mehrpouya

Mr Thomas Sloan

Professor Edith Sim\*

Mr Steven Traynor

Mr Luke Webster

### **In Attendance**

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Dr Hannah Coutts (items 66 & 67)

Ms Eilidh Fraser

Mr Andrew Menzies

Professor Luke Millard (item 66)

### **Apologies**

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Ms Heather Dunk (Vice-Chair)

Mr Jim MacGregor

### **Secretariat**

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Ms Caroline Summers

(Secretary to Court)

Dr Dianne Peden

Ms Vanessa Kind

## **Open Business**

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### **Preliminary Matters**

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#### **60. Declaration of Potential Conflicts of Interest Oral Report**

- (i). The Chair reminded members of their responsibility to indicate if they had, or could be perceived to have, a conflict of interest in relation to the items for discussion. None were declared.

#### **61. Feedback on Pre-Court Session Oral Report**

- (i). Court noted thanks to the Chief Estates Officer, Mr Cullen Warnock and the Director of Student and Academic Services, Mr James Nicholson for the tour of the newly refurbished ground floor of the library and the new Students' Association space prior to the Court meeting. Court welcomed the opportunity to view the space and agreed that it was an excellent addition to the campus.

### **Court and Governance Matters**

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#### **62. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2024 CT/0225/046**

- (i). The Chair drew Court's attention to the fact that the approved minutes would be published on the University website and the meeting book (containing the agenda, approved minutes and enclosures (with any required redactions relating to confidential information)) would be published on the University intranet following the meeting.

**Outcome:** Court received and considered the minutes of its meeting held on 28 November 2024, submitted as enclosure 46, and approved them as an accurate record.

#### **63. Action List and Matters Arising from these Minutes CT/0225/047**

- (i). The Chair confirmed that the action list, submitted as enclosure 47, contained updates on two actions which were due at this meeting.

**Outcome:** Court noted that an update relating to action 0424/83 would be provided to Court in due course.

**Outcome:** Court agreed that action 0624/89.3 be incorporated into the parallel action held by the Finance and Corporate Performance Committee and therefore marked it as closed.

**64. Report from the Chair of Court****Oral Report**

- (i). The Chair highlighted that Court may wish to review the recent [Welsh government announcement](#) on Higher Education which suggested a UK-wide review of University governance although this is unlikely to include Scotland.

**Matters for Discussion**

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**65. Strategic Plan Refresh****CT/0225/048**

- (i). Vice-Principal and University Secretary, Ms C. Summers, introduced the Strategic Plan Refresh, submitted as enclosure 48, highlighting that progress in developing the plan had been slower than anticipated due to competing priorities, but that this had allowed time for wider consultation on the strategic priorities. Court was advised that the draft plan would be shared with the Senior Management Team (SMT) in early March, then with the University community prior to submission to Court at its meeting to be held on 30 April 2025.

**Consultation Process and Feedback**

- (ii). Court was advised that during autumn 2024 and early 2025 a range of engagement activities had been undertaken including all staff sessions led by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor L. Bacon. These were complemented by a online feedback form; the inclusion of specific questions relating to strategic plan refresh in the staff engagement survey; discussions with students and the Students' Association including discussion at the Student Representative Council and Societies Council meetings; and a series of engagements with external stakeholders in January and February 2025, including local politicians, key contacts in Dundee City Council and Dundee and Angus College.
- (iii). Court was advised that there had been broad support for the evolving strategic priorities, and reasonable consistency in the themes emerging from the different consultation routes. Court noted that there was support for the new strategy to be an evolution of the current strategy. It was highlighted that the new strategy would ensure the University's ongoing commitment to Dundee and its contribution to the city while ensuring an excellent student experience and that research and knowledge exchange activities were appropriately reflected. Court discussed the

importance that there should be clear, and robust implementation plans in place to deliver on the strategy while recognising the challenges and opportunities in the current environment.

### **Our Purpose**

- (iv). Court was advised that feedback from staff had showed broad support for the current purpose whilst emphasising the need to ensure implementation plans, resources and systems supported staff to reach their full potential and the need to include reference to research, widening access, and the impact the University can have on the local community in Dundee.
- (v). Court acknowledged the importance of reflecting the University's ongoing commitment to Dundee and its role in the city and balancing this with other strategic developments, including new partnerships. Court was advised that the statement "To offer transformational opportunities to everyone who has the potential to benefit from Abertay's approach to university education" related to opportunities for students via existing and new routes.
- (vi). Court discussed the proposed refreshed purpose statements and whether a more memorable strap line would be useful. It was agreed that this would be discussed further.

### **Our Values**

- (vii). Court was advised that the University's values were articulated in the People Strategy which had been agreed in 2022 and that, as previously agreed, these would be incorporated into the new strategic plan. Court noted that this was also an opportunity to embed the values into the supporting plans and activities and indeed place them at the centre of all activities. Court was advised that, in considering how to this, SMT had recommended that the current eight values should be combined and reduced to four values which would be easier for people to remember and to engage with.
- (viii). Court supported the adoption of four values as outlined in enclosure 48 although queried whether the descriptor for "Caring" should be widened to promoting wellbeing as well as recognising that caring is wider than people, such as caring for the planet. Court was advised that any further comments would be welcomed and should be submitted to Ms C. Summers via email.

**Outcome:** Court noted the update on the development of the strategic plan.

[Dr H. Coutts and Professor L. Millard joined the meeting]

**66. Retention, Progression and Module Performance Update****CT/0225/049**

- (i). Dean of Learning and Teaching, Professor L. Millard, introduced the Retention, Progression and Module Performance Update, submitted as enclosure 49, advising that it detailed the institutional performance with regard to retention, progression, and module performance and provided recommendations to address issues of concern. Court was advised that the University-level undergraduate retention rate for students registered in 2023-24 was 84%, with progression at 82% and module performance at 91%, all of which were close to the six-year averages. In addition, these rates were consistent with the 2022-23 data, with the exception that module performance had improved from 90% in the previous year.
- (ii). Court noted that 15 % of stage 1 students and 13% of stage 2 students who had left University had permission to progress or re-enrol but had chosen to leave. It was recognised that, due to the size of Abertay and the small size of some of its programmes, there can be significant swings in percentages through one or two students dropping out. Court was advised that retention remains a focus for Heads of Department and Deans.
- (iii). Court welcomed the report and in particular the deep dives into areas such as early withdrawals. Court discussed whether there was an impact of students not being ready for University-level programmes and the importance of working with partner colleges to prepare students for university life. Court was advised of a current project with Dundee and Angus College to explore student expectations prior to commencing their studies at Abertay.
- (iv). Court raised concerns regarding retention on programmes within the Dundee Business School. Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor A. Irons, emphasised that there had been changes to address these. The academic restructure with the Dundee Business School now being part of the Faculty of Design, Informatics and Business was allowing for new and innovative ideas to be taken forward, led by the new Head of the Dundee Business School.

**Outcome:** Court noted the Retention, Progression and Module Performance Update.

[Professor L. Millard left the meeting]

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**Matters for Approval****67. Key Performance Indicator Update****CT/0225/050**

- (i). Head of Planning and Insight, Dr H. Coutts, introduced the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Update, submitted as enclosure 50, highlighting that the

institutional KPIs would be updated as part of the strategic plan refresh. Court was advised that fourteen of the fifteen measures had been updated since the last report to Court in February 2024. It was noted that KPIs 4 and 5 around student continuation and completion would in future need to be measured in a different way from previous years, as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) no longer produced the UK Performance Indicators on which these were based. An alternative Scottish Funding Council (SFC) measure had been used for KPI 4 in the meantime.

- (ii). In addition, one KPI had improved in RAG rating, four had worsened and one KPI had changed trajectory from positive to negative but had retained its amber rating. Court noted that Finance and Corporate Performance Committee (FCPC) had considered a previous version of this paper at its meeting held on 10 December 2024. Following that meeting, KPIs 1, 2 and 4 had been updated and a section added at the Committee's request with additional analysis on KPI 6.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Key Performance Indicator Update.

[Dr H. Coutts left the meeting]

#### **68. Scottish Funding Council Return: Knowledge Exchange Innovation Fund Strategy**

**CT/0225/051**

- (i). Professor A. Irons introduced the Knowledge Exchange Innovation Fund (KEIF) Strategy, submitted as enclosure 51, highlighting that the University was required to develop and submit to the SFC a new KEIF Strategy for 2025-30, which replaced the previous University Innovation Fund Outcome Agreement reporting framework. Court was advised that the University would be expected to report on its delivery and would be able to revise the strategy/metrics annually. Court noted that it was not yet clear how SFC would use this information and how it might impact the allocation of KEIF funding. Court noted that metrics data were used to inform annual KEIF funding allocations to Higher Education Institutions and that the University's current and five-year predictions of income generation were included as part of the submission. Court noted that a completed Equality Impact Assessment for the KEIF Strategy had been provided in Appendix 1.
- (ii). Court was advised that the Dean of Research and the Graduate School, Professor Nia White, had led on its development and the strategy had been discussed at the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, SMT and Senate prior to its submission. Court noted that as per the SFC deadline and guidance, the Strategy had been submitted to SFC on 31 January 2025, on the understanding that the Strategy would be approved at the next meeting of Court.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Scottish Funding Council Return: Knowledge Exchange Innovation Fund Strategy.

## **69. Redacted**

## **Committee Matters**

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### **70. Audit and Risk Committee**

#### **70.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2025** **CT/0225/052**

**Outcome:** Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 28 January 2025.

### **71. Finance and Corporate Performance Committee**

#### **71.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024** **CT/0225/053**

- (i). Court was advised that the Committee had approved the Procurement Annual Report (item 24) and had recommended the Key Performance Indicator Update to Court for approval as discussed under item 66.

**Outcome:** Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Corporate Committee (FCPC) held on 10 December 2024.

### **72. Governance and Nominations Committee**

#### **72.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2025** **CT/0225/054**

- (i). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended several items for approval: Court Role Profiles (item 72.2) and the Revision to the Court Standing Orders (item 72.3)
- (ii). Ms C. Summers highlighted that the Committee had discussed the membership of Court and its Committees. Court noted that a vacancy remained for a lay member of Court on FCPC and on People, Health and Equality Committee, and that a call for a lay member to FCPC had been unsuccessful. Court was content with the proposal that Mr D. Brew be appointed to FCPC from 1 March 2025 on an interim basis until a new lay member of Court is appointed.

**Outcome:** Court approved the appointment of Mr D. Brew to the Finance and Corporate Performance Committee from 1 March 2025.

**72.2. Court Role Profile Review****CT/0225/055**

- (i). The Chair introduced the Court Role Profile Review, submitted as enclosure 55, highlighting that the review of the roles associated with the University Court had been in line with their current review cycle. Court was advised that the Committee had discussed the proposed minor changes to the existing role profiles and the new proposed role profile for a Committee Chair.
- (ii). Court noted that these would move to three-year review cycle in line with the Policy Document Governance Framework although a role profile would be reviewed earlier if a post became vacant.

**Outcome:** Court agreed that no changes were required to the Role of the Chair of Court.

**Outcome:** Court agreed that no changes are required to Role of the Vice-Chair of Court.

**Outcome:** Court approved the revised Role of the Court Intermediary.

**Outcome:** Court approved the revised Role of the Secretary to Court.

**Outcome:** Court approved the revised Role of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor.

**Outcome:** Court approved the new Role of the Committee Chair.

[Mr I. Davidson left the meeting]

**72.3. Revision to Court Standing Orders****CT/0225/056**

- (i). The Committee considered a paper entitled Guidance for Observing Meetings which proposed additional text to be added to the Court Standing Orders in relation to Observers at meetings of Court and Court members attending meetings of committees of which they are not a member.

**Outcome:** Court approved the revised text to section 14 of the Standing Orders.

**Outcome:** Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Nominations Committee held on 30 January 2025.

**73. People, Health and Equality Committee****73.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024****CT/0225/057**

- (i). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended several items for approval: the Health and Safety Policy (item 73.2) the Fire Safety Policy (item 73.3), the Discipline Procedure (item 73.4) and the Grievance Procedure (item 73.5).



Court was advised that the policies had been updated in line with the Policy Document Governance Framework.

**73.2. Health and Safety Policy****CT/0225/058**

- (i). In the absence of the Chair of the Committee, Ms H. Dunk, the Director of People and Organisational Development, Ms E. Fraser introduced the revised Health and Safety Policy submitted as enclosure 58. Court was advised that the policy had been reviewed as part of its regular review cycle and had been considered by SMT and the Health and Safety Sub-Committee prior to its submission to the Committee.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Health and Safety Policy.

**73.3. Fire Safety Policy****CT/0225/059**

- (i). Ms E. Fraser introduced the revised Fire Safety Policy submitted as enclosure 59. Court was advised that the policy had been reviewed as part of its regular review cycle and had been considered by SMT and the Health and Safety Sub-Committee prior to its submission to the Committee.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Fire Safety Policy.

**73.4. Discipline Procedure****CT/0225/060**

- (i). Ms E. Fraser introduced the revised Discipline Procedure submitted as enclosure 60. Court was advised that the procedure had been reviewed as part of its regular review cycle and had been considered by SMT prior to its submission to the Committee. Court noted that Annex A provided the previously approved “Process for Specified Senior Roles”, which would be appended to both the Discipline Procedure and the Grievance Procedure (item 73.5) prior to their publication.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Discipline Procedure.

**73.5. Grievance Procedure****CT/0225/061**

- (i). Ms E. Fraser introduced the revised Grievance Procedure submitted as enclosure 61. Court was advised that the procedure had been reviewed as part of its regular review cycle and had been considered by SMT prior to its submission to the Committee.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Grievance Procedure.

**Outcome:** Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the People, Health and Equality Committee held on 17 December 2024.

## **Senate Matters**

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### **74. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2025** **CT/0225/062**

- (i). Court noted that the Senate had discussed three items covered on today's agenda: the Strategic Plan Refresh (item 65), the Retention, Progression and Module Performance Update (item 66) and the Honorary Awards Policy (item 75).
- (ii). Court was advised that the Senate had approved changes to the composition of the Partnerships and International Committee, revisions to the Academic Appeals Procedure and minor changes to the Honorary Awards Board Terms of Reference.

**Outcome:** Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 29 January 2025.

### **75. Honorary Awards Policy** **CT/0225/063**

- (i). Chair of the Honorary Awards Board, Professor L. Bacon, introduced the Honorary Awards Policy, submitted as enclosure 63, highlighting that SMT and the Honorary Awards Board had both discussed and supported the development of an Honorary Awards Policy, to formalise existing guidance (shown in the draft policy in black text) and to include provision to revoke an honorary award as there was currently no agreed process for doing so.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Honorary Awards Policy.

### **76. Academic Matters Report** **CT/0225/064**

- (i). Professor A. Irons, introduced the Academic Matters Report, submitted as enclosure 64, highlighting that it provided an overview of the wide range of activities across the University.
- (ii). Court offered its congratulations to all those involved and acknowledged the external recognition of work being undertaken at Abertay.

**Outcome:** Court noted the Academic Matters Report.

**Matters for Information**

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**77. Scottish Funding Council Returns****77.1. Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report 2023-24 (Confidential)****CT/0225/065**

- (i). Court had agreed at its meeting on 18 September 2024 that returns that required to be submitted to the SFC as part of the new Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model would be signed off by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, unless Court sign-off was explicitly required, and that copies would be provided to Court for information.

**Outcome:** Court noted the SFC: Self-Evaluation Report 2023-24 submitted as enclosure 65, which had been submitted to the SFC on 31 January 2025.

**78. Executive Group Report to Court****CT/0225/066**

- (i). The Chair thanked the Executive Group for its report to Court, submitted as enclosure 66. Ms E. Fraser highlighted that since the report had been submitted, the University had been ranked in the top quartile for UK Universities in relation to the Staff Engagement Survey.
- (ii). Mr A. Menzies provided further information relating to the Heat Network application, highlighting that a recent meeting with Scottish Government representatives had been positive and that there remains a commitment to support initiatives such as the heat network. Court noted that the funding is expected to expire in March 2026.
- (iii). Court noted that the CoSTAR Realtime Lab, led by Abertay, had its formal launch on Tuesday 18 February 2025. The cutting-edge programme will bring new opportunities and expert support to UK creative and technology companies working across the breadth of the creative industries. Court was advised that a visit to the facility will be arranged in due course.

[Mr I. Davidson re-joined the meeting]

**79. Students' Association Report to Court****CT/0225/067**

- (i). The Students' Association Vice-President, Mr L. Webster, introduced the Students' Association Report to Court, submitted as enclosure 35, highlighting that the report provided an insight into the work that had been undertaken since the last meeting of Court.

- (ii). Court was advised of a number of activities undertaken by the Students' Association since its last report to Court including taking part in the global campaign of 16 days of activism which ran from 25 November to 10 December 2024; the two week Relax Trolley campaign during exam sessions, where they had served hot drinks, snacks and fresh fruit to over 1000 students around the study spaces and library; and Refreshers week, which included afternoon tea with the Student's Association and a mature students coffee morning. Court noted the Societies update provided within the report.
- (iii). Court noted the concerns raised in the report with regards to the new space within the library, which provides increased visibility of the Students' Association. Court was advised that the Students' Association had been represented on the project board and that discussions were ongoing to try, where possible, to resolve their concerns.
- (iv). Court was advised that there were a number of other activities that had been planned or were coming up, including this year's S.H.A.G. (Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance) week, which had been held from Monday 10 February to Friday 14 February 2025, as well as the regular informal podcast which Professor L. Bacon had recently been a guest on.

**Outcome:** Court noted the Students' Association Report to Court.

## **Concluding Matters**

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### **80. Any Other Competent Business**

### **Oral Report**

- (i). No other competent business was raised.

**Date of Next Meeting: 30 April 2025**

**Chair: Mr David Brew**