

Approved



## **UNIVERSITY COURT**

### **MINUTES**

of the meeting of the University Court held on 15 September 2021 at 2.00pm in the City Suite of the Apex Hotel, Dundee.

Chair: Mr M Shaw  
Vice-Chair: Dr A Ingram

Ms N Ahmed	Ms L Hamilton	Mr A Marks
Professor L Bacon	Professor T Inns	Mr I McDonald
Mr A Bailey	Mr F Keir	Dr H Mehrpouya
Mr J Barnett	Ms V Lynch	Professor N Seaton
Mrs A Duffy	Mr F Jakimow	Dr K Smith
Ms H Dunk	Ms C MacEachen	Ms C Summers
Ms G Ghafoor	Mr J Macgregor	Ms R Thiel

Secretary: Dr A Ramsay  
In attendance: Ms G Bell  
Ms E Fraser  
Ms L Jack  
Mr E McCubbin  
Mr G Weir

### **NON-RESERVED AREAS OF BUSINESS**

#### **1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and, most especially, welcomed Ms R Thiel, Mr F Jakimow and Dr Hadi Mehrpouya to their first meeting of Court. Those in attendance were noted as Ms E Fraser, Ms G Bell, Ms L Jack and Mr G Weir.

Apologies were received from Mr G MacDougall, Ms F Robertson and Mrs S Stewart. Ms L Hamilton, Ms V Lynch and Mr E McCubbin joined the meeting *via* Microsoft Teams.

#### **2 DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

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 non-reserved items for discussion. No declaration was made.

#### **3 MINUTES OF THE CHAIR'S COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 AUGUST 2021 (for information)**

Court noted the above minute, submitted as Enclosure 01, for information.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COURT HELD ON 23 JUNE 2021:  
UNRESERVED

CT/0921/02

Court received and considered the above minutes, submitted as Enclosure 02 and approved them as an accurate record.

5 MATTERS ARISING FROM THESE MINUTES

Oral report

5.1 Performance Management

(paragraph 97 refers)

The Head of Governance advised members that a meeting had been held with those Court members who had expressed their interest in discussing performance management within the University.

5.2 Review of the Effectiveness of Court

(paragraph 100.2 refers)

The Head of Governance advised members that the Governance & Nominations Committee had agreed the format for the quinquennial review of the effectiveness of Court, which would take place during 2021/2022.

Thereafter, there were no further matters arising that were not already on the agenda.

6 COVID-19: UPDATE ON UNIVERSITY OPERATIONS DURING THE  
PANDEMIC

CT/0921/03

The Principal introduced the above report, intended to provide Court with an overview of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the University's staff and actions taken to support staff. Professor Seaton noted that, since the last meeting of Court in June, the University had carried out extensive planning for the new academic session and a number of scenarios for the delivery of academic programmes in Term 1 had been developed. In total, five scenarios had been established, all involving blended learning or, should restrictions be re-introduced, fully online learning. This scenario-planning had created a significantly-increased workload for timetabling staff and Professor Seaton commended the work of colleagues in Student and Academic Services.

Court was advised that Management had chosen to implement the scenario in which students would be on-campus one day per week, with room occupancy corresponding to a one-metre physical distance between individuals. Members noted that this would require additional teaching but at a level far lower than when the scheduling of classes was based on two-metre separation. Contingency plans were in place to move between different modes of teaching, and to change health & safety measures rapidly should Scottish Government guidance or the University's own risk assessments require it. Professor Seaton advised Court that, despite Universities Scotland lobbying the Scottish Government to conduct their business under normal health & safety regulations and frameworks, no relaxation had been forthcoming for the HE sector. The Chair further advised members that the Scottish Committee of University Chairs would continue to press the Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training at its next meeting in October.

In discussion, Court questioned to what extent the global pandemic had affected recruitment, attainment and progression and were advised that progression had not been noticeably different from previous years. Changes

to assessment arrangements had seen only a minor increase in the number of students achieving good degree classifications, which suggested that management had struck the right balance in the flexibility of its academic regulations and assessment practices.

When asked how the previous year has affected the student experience, the SA President advised members that students had acknowledged that the University had done the best they possibly could in exceptional circumstances. The lack of social interaction and access to the library had been difficult and some students had experienced issues working from home, whether because of IT equipment or caring responsibilities and the use of counselling services by students had increased. Ms Thiel noted that it would be beneficial to ensure that all recommended reading be made available online. One staff member of Court advised members that library staff had been extremely helpful in identifying online texts and that staff were in the process of reviewing their required reading lists. Noting that staff were keen to alleviate student anxieties and make them feel comfortable on campus, members were advised that students were enjoying more face-to-face activities that in previous years.

Thereafter, Court noted the report and commended the staff and management of the University.

## 7 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2021

CT/0921/04

The Deputy Principal introduced the above paper, intended to provide Court with a high-level summary of the University's performance in the 2021 National Student Survey (NSS) and actions taken to date. Professor Bacon reminded members that, within the NSS there were scores for a range of areas and that a far more detailed analysis would be provided to Court's meeting in November. In terms of the overall satisfaction scores, which are typically used in external rankings, the University continued to compare favourably with the sector for overall satisfaction, although its ranking had dipped.

Court noted that the coronavirus crisis had impacted the student experience and that the University would learn from this, both to continue the delivery of programmes under pandemic conditions and to contribute to the continuous improvement of the student experience. A noticeable decline in the overall satisfaction score for the School of Design and Informatics was being investigated.

In discussion, members considered how best the University could capture student feedback in order to make in-year improvements, through the use of pulse surveys and more discursive methods. It was noted that students required to have completed the majority of the course content before being in a position to provide an informed opinion, which necessarily required them to be undertaken around week 10. The timing of these surveys had the advantage of permitting staff to make appropriate adjustments to the assessments, where issues had been identified.

Thereafter, Court noted the report and looked forward to receiving a more detailed analysis at its next meeting.

8 STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION REPORT TO COURT

CT/0921/05

The President of the Abertay Students' Association (SA) introduced the above paper, intended to apprise Court of activities undertaken by the SA over the summer months. Ms Thiel noted that the first three months of her tenure had been challenging but that members of the Executive had been supportive. Both Ms Thiel and Mr Jakimow, the Vice-President, had enrolled on the Graduate Careers Professional Development Course at Dundee University, which they found to be both interesting and stimulating.

Reflecting on the activities of Freshers' Week, which was underway at the time of the Court Conference, Ms Thiel noted that it had been difficult to secure suitable rooms for events. The Chair requested that the Principal conduct a review of the issues involved.

Members expressed interest in the format of the report, which provided an update to Court on progress made towards achieving manifesto aims and commended the SA Executive Officers' desire to be held accountable by the student body for their actions.

Thereafter, Court thanked Ms Thiel and noted the report.

9 ACADEMIC MATTERS REPORT

CT/0921/06

The Deputy Principal introduced the above report on current academic business for information which also included a summary of current academic business. Professor Bacon advised members that the institution was beginning to experience the impact of Covid-19 on research and income generation but that every effort would be made to recover its position.

In discussion, Court encouraged management to publicise the successes of academic colleagues as widely as possible and to give consideration to matching achievements to the University's strategic aims. Members, in particular welcomed in the appointment of Student Success Officers further to a successful bid to the Northwood Trust. It was noted that Court could expect a significant report on retention to its next meeting in November 2021.

Thereafter, Court noted the report and congratulated Professor Bacon on being made a National Teaching Fellow by AdvanceHE.

10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair invited members to give their opinions on attending future meetings of Court and its committees, noting that the fact the Conference had been held in person was not to be taken as an indication that all meetings should be held in person. Members noted the value of occasional in-person meetings whilst seeking to maintain the health and safety of University staff and Court members themselves. It was agreed that the next meeting of Court would be held on campus and in person but that all other committee meetings would be held *via* Microsoft Teams.

Thereafter, no other business was declared.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions and invited those in attendance to depart.

*[Secretary's note: Professor Bacon declared a conflict of interest in relation to the reserved business and withdrew. Mr Shaw intimated his intention to request that the Principal and the Vice-Principal (Strategy & Planning) remain in attendance for the reserved part of the agenda and Court approved his request]*

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Court noted that the date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

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**CHAIR**