

Approved



## **UNIVERSITY COURT**

### **MINUTES**

of the meeting of the University Court held on 24 June 2020 at 2.00pm *via* Microsoft Teams.

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

Professor L Bacon	Professor T Inns	Mr I McDonald
Mr A Bailey	Mr F Keir	Mr T Marks
Mr J Barnett	Mr I Lowe	Dr J Rees
Mr M Batho	Ms V Lynch	Dr A Samuel
Mr J Burt	Mr G MacDougall	Professor N Seaton
Mrs M Guild	Ms C MacEachen	Dr K Smith
Ms G Ghafoor	Mr J Macgregor	Mr O Wright

Secretary: Mrs S Stewart  
Clerk to Court: Dr A Ramsay  
In attendance: Mr E Baines  
Ms D Bandeva  
Mr G Bletcher  
Ms E Fraser (Item 90)  
Ms C Summers  
Mr S Uphill

No apologies for absence were intimated.

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

#### **83 WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. Mr Shaw noted that a meeting of the lay members of Chair's Committee had been held with staff members via Microsoft Teams to explore the impact of COVID-19 on staff whilst working remotely.

Members were advised that attendees had expressed anxiety around achieving a work/life balance, particularly for those with caring responsibilities and that an additional meeting of the People, Health & Equality Committee could be convened to further consider the issues raised. Mr Shaw requested that Committee Chairs liaise with the University Secretary or the Head of Governance in the planning and co-ordination of any extra meetings.

#### **84 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. None was declared. Mr Shaw further reminded those in attendance that the matters under discussion should be regarded as confidential.

85 MINUTES OF THE CHAIR'S COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 2020 (for information)

CT/0620/56

Court noted the above minutes, submitted as Enclosure 56, as an accurate record.

86 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF COURT HELD ON 15 APRIL AND ON 20 MAY 2020

CT/0620/57

Court received and considered the above minutes, submitted as Enclosure 57 and approved them as an accurate record.

87 MATTERS ARISING FROM THESE MINUTES

Oral report

Operational Planning & Financial Update (2019/2020 and 2020/2021)

(paragraph 78 refers)

The University Secretary advised Court that the University would receive c£330k of the £75m additional funding for research announced by the Scottish Government.

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

88 OPERATIONAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING: DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2020/2021

CT/0620/58

The Principal introduced the above updated operational and financial plans for 2020/2021, which had been considered by the Finance & Corporate Performance Committee (FCPC) at its meeting on 15 June 2020 and had been recommended to Court for approval. Professor Seaton commended colleagues in the Senior Management Team for their efforts in identifying savings, under the leadership of the Vice-Principal (Strategy & Planning), the Interim Director of FICS and the Director of People Services.

The Vice-Principal (Strategy & Planning) apprised Court that the HE sector faced a period of considerable uncertainty over the coming year and that management had based its planning and budgeting on a set of prudent assumptions tested with Court and others. Ms Summers noted that, in order to deliver the Strategic Plan 2020-2025, current expenditure would require to be reduced by £2.5m by 1 August 2021. Actions had been agreed which would achieve a reduction of £2m with remaining actions to be confirmed by the end of the current calendar year. Significant savings would be realised by reducing staff costs arising from the restructure. Management had no plans to implement a voluntary severance scheme, but it was likely that a small number of redundancies would arise as in any other year. Members were advised that potential new income had not been included but that the University remained committed to generating new income where possible. A Business Development Unit would be formed from existing staff and was expected to rapidly identify and attract new income opportunities.

In the course of a lengthy and involved discussion, members commended management on having identified £2m of savings but sought reassurance that changes required to realise long-term efficiencies would not result in an unsustainable depletion of the University's reserves. Professor Seaton advised Court that improvements in business processes following the

restructure would accrue savings, as would the reduction in academic activities necessitated by the international pandemic. National pay bargaining had been paused until 2021/2022.

Members considered operational planning priorities and activities, noting the importance of the Digital Strategy to the institution's ambitions. This had been made more important by the need to provide an excellent online experience for students; and the importance of excellent project management in avoiding excess costs was noted. One member sought assurances that management had considered the effects of cultural change on staff in moving to a blended learning approach and was advised that investment would be front-loaded to quickly enable academic staff to develop expertise in online delivery. Court was advised that management would remain vigilant to the effects on staff of the new method of delivery, including any additional teaching burden on academic staff. The student experience remained crucial to the Abertay experience, with core on-campus activities planned to enhance cohort identity.

Thereafter, Court:

- Noted the assumptions upon which the plans were based;
- Approved the financial plan as delineated in Annexe B;
- Approved the approach to project prioritisation and the FY2020/2021 investment plan.

#### 89 ABERTAY STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REPORT

CT/0520/59

The Abertay Students' Association (SA) President introduced the above report, intended to provide Court with a report on the activities of the SA over the last year. Mr Wright advised members that the SA had focussed during the course of a busy academic session on housing, poverty, climate emergency and the lack of student spaces within the University. A new democratic structure for student representation had been introduced, turnout at executive elections continued to grow and work was ongoing to review the SA Constitution.

In discussion, members noted the recent report on the internal audit review of Student Engagement and the Students' Association and commended the change in democratic structures. The SA Vice-President Elect paid tribute to the SA Chief Executive Officer, stating that Ms Petrie had enabled the Association to thrive. Court was advised that Abertay had seen the highest increase in Scotland for overall student satisfaction on the National Student Survey, jumping 9% on the previous year. One member sought clarification on how the SA intended to deliver its digital strategy and was advised that weekly meetings had already commenced.

Thereafter, Court noted the report.

*[Secretary's note: The Director of People Services joined the meeting at this point]*

#### 90 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STAFF: UPDATE

CT/0620/60

The Director of People Services introduced the above report, intended to provide Court with an overview of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the University's staff, including areas which had been identified for action in the coming phases of emerging from lockdown. Ms Fraser advised members that the majority of staff were carrying out most of their job remotely and that

the University was using the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for those staff who could not work remotely and that, to date, 33 staff had been furloughed.

Overall sickness absence rates during the period since closing the University had been no higher than usual, with a total of seven staff who had reported having had COVID-19, based on tests or symptoms. In preparation for staff returning to work on campus in due course, People Services had developed a process for identifying those staff who cannot return to campus and this with health issues which would require to be considered. Thus far, 26 staff had been identified as shielding. Sickness absence management and Occupational Health services and support had continued during lockdown with staff self-referring to the Occupational Health Adviser about anxiety relating to COVID-19 and health concerns in the event of returning to work on campus.

In discussion, Court considered the results of the recent pulse survey and expressed concern that academic staff had experienced an increase in workload which was not sustainable. It was requested that management review policies and procedures to ensure academic staff were not overburdened. The Deputy Principal assured members that work was underway to be more flexible to the needs of academic staff and to manage student expectations going forward. The Director of People Services advised Court that management was considering allowing some leeway in the carry-over of annual leave.

One member noted that little mention had been made of support staff, who had also been expected to modify their work behaviours in order to support the University and was advised that the survey results had indicated that support staff felt they had the necessary equipment to fulfil their roles. Another Court member sought assurances that Senior Management were adequately supported and was apprised of the various mechanisms, both formal and informal, of which management could avail themselves.

Thereafter, Court noted the report

*[Secretary's note: The Director of People Services left the meeting at this point]*

91 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 MAY 2020

CT/0620/61

The minutes of the above meeting, submitted as Enclosure 61, were approved.

The following matters were noted:

91.1 Risk Management and Policy Framework: Update (paragraph 51 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the updated Risk Management and Policy Framework.

91.2 Internal Audit 2019/2020: Report on review of Student Engagement & Students' Association

(paragraph 52 refers)

Court noted that the Committee had received and considered a report on the above review, which had identified a number of areas of good

practice. An overall finding of moderate assurance had been made with two recommendations of moderate significance identified.

91.3 Internal Audit 2019/2020: Report on review of Staff Wellbeing, Sickness & Absence Management

(paragraph 53 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above review of staff wellbeing, sickness & absence management. With an overall finding of moderate assurance, the review had made three recommendations of moderate significance and four recommendations of low significance.

91.4 Internal Audit 2019/2020: Revised Internal Audit Plan

(paragraph 54 refers)

Court noted the Committee's discussion of the above internal audit plan, which had been reviewed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the day-to-day running of the University and which had resulted in three of the originally-planned reviews being postponed at the University's request. Members were advised that the revised plan remained to be agreed, as the Committee had felt the two reviews proposed by BDO to be premature in the absence of any identified best practice.

91.5 Internal Audit 2019/2020: Progress Report

(paragraph 55 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above report on progress made against the Internal Audit Plan for 2019/2020.

91.6 External Audit Planning: Report

(paragraph 58 refers)

Court noted that the Committee had received and considered the above provisional planning report for the year ending 31 July 2020. Members were advised that the coronavirus crisis would have a pervasive impact on the University's 2019/2020 accounts and that any material changes or revisions would be provided to the Committee.

91.7 Professional Services Contracts

(paragraph 67 refers)

Court noted that the Committee had agreed, under the Scheme of Delegation, to approve the extension of the current internal and external contracts plus taxation services for one year.

In discussion, one member reiterated their concerns that a review which concerned staff and welfare issues could be approved by the Audit & Risk Committee without having been considered by the People, Health & Equality Committee. The Chair of PHEC advised Court that the Head of Governance had ensured that PHEC had received and considered the report on the review of staff wellbeing, sickness & absence management and that the transmission of information between committees of Court had been discussed again at a recent meeting of the Chair's Committee. Members were advised that, once the annual workplans for the committees of Court had been aligned, they would be circulated for information.

Thereafter, Court approved the minutes.

92 FINANCE & CORPORATE PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 2020

CT/0620/62

The minutes of the above meeting, submitted as Enclosure 62, were approved.

The following matters were approved:

92.1 Operational Planning 2020/2021 (paragraph 41 refers)

Court noted that this had already been endorsed as a separate agenda item under paragraph 88, above.

92.2 Revised Bad Debt Write-Off Policy (paragraph 43 refers)

Court agreed to endorse the recommendation of the Committee that the above revised Bad Debt Write-Off Policy be approved

The following matter was noted:

92.3 Report on Review of Project Management (paragraph 44 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above report of project management which had been submitted for information following consideration at the Audit & Risk Committee.

The Chair of FCPC advised Court that members had thanked the Head of Governance for ensuring the transmission of an internal audit report of relevance to the Committee.

93 GOVERNANCE & NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2020

CT/0620/63

The minutes of the above meeting, submitted as Enclosure 63, were approved.

The following matters were noted:

93.1 Payment to the former Principal of the University of Aberdeen: Report of a review by SFC. (paragraph 33 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above report, recently published by the SFC as a review of the circumstances relating to the payment made to the former Principal of the University of Aberdeen.

93.2 Discussion on the inter-relationship of the work of Court Committees (paragraph 34 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above paper, intended to promote discussion on the inter-relationship between committees of Court to ensure that Court received an holistic view of matters emerging from its committees. Members were advised that the Committee had considered a number of proposals, including the co-ordination of annual workplans and that the University Secretary and the Head of Governance would be vigilant in ensuring that all

members of Court were apprised of all relevant matters emerging from other committees.

93.3 Court membership update

(paragraph 36 refers)

Court noted that the Committee had received and considered the above report on the current status of the membership of Court. Court noted that two members would come to the end of their maximum periods of office in December 2020. Five other lay members would come to end of their current period of office in December 2020 and would be invited to indicate whether they wished to be reappointed for a further period of office. Discussions would commence with a view to procuring the services of a search agency to assist with the search for new lay members.

94 PEOPLE, HEALTH & EQUALITY COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 JUNE 2020

CT/0620/64

The minutes of the above meeting, submitted as Enclosure 64, were approved.

The following matters were approved:

94.1 Revised Special Leave Policy

CT/0620/65

Court endorsed the Committee's recommendation that the above revised Special Leave Policy be approved.

94.2 Data Classification and Handling Policy

CT/0620/66

Court endorsed the Committee's recommendation that the above revised Data Classification and Handling Policy be approved.

The following matters were noted:

94.3 Equality Mainstreaming Report

(paragraph 50 refers)

Court noted that the Committee had received and considered the above report, intended to apprise members of progress made towards achieving the University's equality outcomes. The Committee was reminded that the University was required to publish this report every two years and that the next would be due for publication in April 2021.

The Chair advised members that the report would be presented to the next meeting of Court as a substantive agenda item.

94.4 Impact of Covid-19 on the University

(paragraph 51 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above overview of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on University staff. Members had been apprised of areas for action in the transition to a return to on-campus working and had commended the work of the Crisis Management Team and the Reoccupation Working Group.

95 REMUNERATION COMMITTEE: REPORT OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2020

CT/0620/67

The following items were noted:

95.1 Annual Report on Severance Arrangements

(paragraph 3 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above annual report on severance arrangements.

95.2 Severance Arrangements in Session 2019/2020

(paragraph 4 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of a report on severance cases from the current session. Members were advised that further information would be provided under the reserved areas of business.

95.3 Payment to the former Principal of the University of Aberdeen: Report of a review by SFC

(paragraph 6 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of the above report.

96 UBS RESOLUTION: AMENDMENT TO AUTHORISED SIGNATORIES

CT/0620/68

The University Secretary introduced the above resolution to remove the Vice-Principal (University Services) as a signatory in relation to the management of the University's accounts with UBS investment. Mrs Stewart advised Court that, as Mr Batho would retire from the University in July, UBS required the University formally to replace Mr Batho with the Principal. Members were advised that a further resolution would be required in due course to include the Director of FICS.

Thereafter, Court accepted the resolution and approved by acclamation the proposal to delegate to the Chair and Secretary the further resolution for action at the appropriate time.

97 ACADEMIC MATTERS, INCLUDING REPORT ON SENATE'S JUNE 2020 MEETING

CT/0620/69

Court received and noted the above report, intended to apprise members of developments and activities in the academic work of the University and of discussions held at Senate's meeting in June 2020.

98 CELEBRATION FOR GRADUATING STUDENTS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Oral report

The University Secretary advised Court that an online event had been organised for 10 July 2020, in lieu of a physical graduation ceremony and encouraged members to attend, if possible.

99 DEPARTURE OF MEMBERS

Oral report

The Chair noted that this would be the last meeting of Court to be attended by Mr Mark Batho, Mr Stephen Uphill and Mr Owen Wright. On behalf of Court, Mr Shaw thanked Mr Batho for his service since 2013, following a long career in public life, and wished him well for his retirement.



Mr Shaw thanked Mr Wright for his term of office as Abertay SA President, noting that he would be returning to his studies and hoped to continue to contribute to the student voice.

Finally, Mr Shaw thanked Mr Uphill for his contribution whilst Interim Director of Finance, Infrastructure & Corporation Services and extended all good wishes for his future success.

Court warmly endorsed Mr Shaw's sentiments.

100 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair advised members that additional meetings of Court and its committees would be convened as required in the period to September. The meeting of Court scheduled for September would not be a residential conference but would be a substantial meeting which would enable Court to give consideration to those matters which had not been subject to robust discussion during the period since lockdown in March 2020.

Thereafter, no other business was declared.

101 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Court noted that the date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 16 September 2020.

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**CHAIR**