



Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

UNIVERSITY COURT

CONFIRMED Minutes of meeting held on 4 February 2016

PRESENT

Keir Bloomer (Chair)	Mark Laing
Jim Bradshaw	Jackie Macdonald
Professor Graham Caie CBE	Miller McLean
Ian Calder	Linda McPherson
Craig Cathcart	Margaret O'Connor
Professor Bob Cormack	Robert Rae
Dr Anthony Falconer OBE	Adam Roe
Professor Alan Gilloran	Judith Sischy OBE
Dr Anna Gregor CBE	Heidi Vistisen
Cynthia Guthrie	Professor Petra Wend
Dr Lindsay Irvine	

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Richard Butt	Dean of School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management
Dr Fiona Coutts	Dean of School of Health Sciences
Gordon Craig	Head of Planning
Malcolm Cutt	Director of Operations and Finance
Dr Frances Dow CBE	Chair Designate
Irene Hynd	University Secretary (Secretary)
Gerry O'Hare	Governance Adviser (Minute Secretary)
Steve Scott	Director of Campus and Commercial Services

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed members and those in attendance to the meeting.

2 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3 DETERMINATION OF OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was no other competent business.

4 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The members RECEIVED a report from the Principal (COURT (16) 01) which highlighted academic developments, staff and student news and a range of external engagements.

The Principal reported also on the following matters not specifically highlighted in the report:

- The Staff Survey Working Group had issued a message to all staff with a summary of the staff survey results. The approach being taken by the Working Group was to highlight three areas for the University to celebrate, three areas to improve and three to investigate. The Staff Survey Working Group's initial view on 3x3 priorities was to celebrate high levels of job satisfaction; the quality of service offered to students, partners, the community and other stakeholders and the support from line managers and team members. Areas identified for improvement included matters relating to workload and bureaucracy, responsiveness of the Senior Management Team and feeling valued by the 'University'. The last item was also suggested as an area for investigation given the extent to which it appeared that staff felt supported in their immediate team environment. Other areas for investigation were the management of poor performance and communication, engagement and change management issues. A report would be provided to Court when the full analysis was available.
- The Commission on Widening Access (COWA), of which the Principal was a member, would publish its final report in the Spring, the contents of which were likely to be hard-hitting.

5 MINUTES

- (a) The minutes of the meeting of Court held on 2 December 2015 (COURT (15) MINS 05) were APPROVED as a true record, subject to Dr Lindesay Irvine being noted as present.
- (b) There were no other matters arising.

6 FINANCIAL UPDATE

Members RECEIVED a report from the Director of Operations and Finance (COURT (16) 02). The Director of Operations and Finance highlighted in particular the following matters:

- The Scottish Government had announced its budget proposals on 16 December 2015. The SFC draft budget for Higher Education for 2016-17 had been set at £1,027.2 million, which represented a reduction in the sector allocation of 1.3% in cash terms (or 3.3% in cash terms against the originally announced draft allocation for 2015/16). This was towards the more optimistic end of what had been anticipated, and demonstrated the value of engaging at sector level with Scottish Government ministers and officials.
- Conversations were continuing at sector level, as it was important now to understand, and if possible, influence, how the SFC intended to allocate the reduction in funding across individual institutions.
- As suggested in the paper to Court, there was a concern that funding cuts in subsequent years may be greater, and it was likely that the reduction in funding for QMU for 2016/17 may be greater than the headline figure. Information on indicative funding levels for individual institutions for 2016-17 would be not available until early February at the earliest.

- Coupled with the SFC funding reduction, there were a number of significant external cost pressures, including a 3.4% increase in Employers' National Insurance costs and increases of 2.3% and 2% respectively in employers' pension contributions for staff in STSS and the USS.
- Three possible scenarios for a cash terms reduction in funding had been modelled ie 1.3%, 3% and 5%. The likely financial implications had calculated and a number of options for actions to increase levels of income and to reduce levels of expenditure were being considered. These would be fed into the 2016-17 budget and operational planning process and an update would be provided to the Finance and Estates Committee in March 2016.

Members queried how certain the future funding position was beyond 15/16. The Director of Operations and Finance advised that there was no certainty, especially as there was an election in 2016, but the financial modelling to date had been developed on the best available information.

Members discussed the capacity for the University to invest funds with a view to generating non-public income or savings ie spend to save. The Director of Operations and Finance confirmed that this would be considered as part of the forthcoming operational planning round, but reminded members that investment in the Scottish Centre for Food and Drink had been approved on that basis.

Members discussed the potential for the University to explore sharing of services or collaborations with other universities or the local council. The Principal informed members that such sharing and collaboration already existed, for example in the area of procurement with Edinburgh University. Queen Margaret University was open to collaborations with other Universities and would negotiate from a position of confidence and strength. Work undertaken within the sector over the last 5-6 years by the Efficiencies Task Force suggested that much of the possible efficiency gains had been squeezed out already. An update on the SFC funding allocation would be circulated to Court members just as soon as it was available.

7 SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL – OUTCOME AGREEMENT

Members CONSIDERED the Draft Outcome Agreement 2016-17 (COURT (16) 03).

The University Secretary reminded members that the document was a refresh of the University's existing Outcome Agreement, which was for a 3 year period to 2016-17. As advised previously (Paper Court (15) 56 refers), the clear and consistent advice from the University's OA Manager had been that the University should not revise significantly its existing Outcome Agreement.

The refreshed document incorporated amendments arising from the publication of the University's Strategic Plan, and updates to sections where there had been particular progress of note or relevance. The document also took into account the refreshed guidance issued to the sector by the SFC in September 2015 concerning the need to address gender balance in particular subjects where there is a severe imbalance, and to set out how Public Sector Equality duties are being addressed.

Members NOTED that the University Court had previously provided the Chair with delegated authority to approve the final version of the OA prior to submission.

8 HIGHER EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) GOVERNANCE BILL

Members RECEIVED a report on the progress of the Higher Education (Scotland) Governance Bill, with particular reference to the Scottish Government's response to the Education & Culture Committee's Stage 1 report on the Bill. A copy of that response had been circulated to members.

A joint US/CSC/Secretaries' working group continued to meet to consider how best to influence the content of the Bill as it progressed through the remaining Parliamentary stages ie Stage 2 and Stage 3. Particular concerns remained about the election of chairs by a constituency other than the governing body, the detrimental impact on diversity arising from publicly contested elections, the confusion created by having two elected presiding/chairing members at the ancient universities, and the impact of the Bill on small specialist institutions.

There would be further parliamentary discussion of the Bill at Stage 2 on Tuesday, 9 February 2016, with Stage 3 expected to be discussed on 8 March 2016. If approved at that point, the Bill would proceed to the Scottish Government lawyers and complete its passage after the dissolution of the Parliament on 23 March. It was likely that the Bill would receive Royal Assent in May or June 2016.

9 SENATE

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Senate meeting held on 9 December 2015. There were no specific items brought to the attention of the Court.

10 AUDIT COMMITTEE

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 20 January 2016.

Members NOTED progress in implementing the new Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP 15). The timescale for implementation would allow for appropriate consideration by Court of the required accounting adjustments and accounting policy changes prior to the approval of the 2015/16 accounts. A proposal that training in the new practice be offered to Court members was welcomed.

Members NOTED concerns expressed by the Audit Committee in relation to revised dates for implementation of four high risk recommendations arising from the Information Services audit. The Committee had been assured however that appropriate business continuity arrangements had been put in place, including appointment of external support. A detailed progress report would be presented to the Audit Committee on 25 May 2016.

11 FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Finance and Estates Committee meeting held on 19 January 2016. There were no additional items to report.

12 NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Nominations Committee meeting held on 21 January 2016. The revised shortlist for the position of Chancellor drawn up by the Nominations Committee was tabled.

Members NOTED, with regard to the recruitment of lay members of Court, that the Nominations Committee had agreed to set up a search group to make informal contact with professional bodies or suitable candidates to encourage application to the publicly advertised vacancies. Reference to that would be incorporated in an amendment to the minutes.

13 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Health and Safety Committee meeting held on 17 December 2015. There were no items brought to the attention of the Court.

14 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Equality and Diversity Committee meeting held on 19 January 2016. Members NOTED that the University was organising an event for International Woman's Day to which Court members would be invited.

15 CHAIR APPRECIATION

On behalf of the University Court, the Vice-Chair thanked Keir Bloomer formally for his significant contribution to the Court during his 9 years of dedicated service, and for his skilful stewardship of the Court over the last 5 years as Chair. Members would miss his unfailing good humour and wit as well as his intelligent analysis of HE policy and the wider political environment. His commitment to the work of the University had extended well beyond the formal duties attached to the position of Chair, and the University was undoubtedly in a stronger position as a direct result of that. Members wished him every good wishes for the future.

16 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Court will meet on the following dates:

6 April 2016
22 June 2016