

Glasgow Caledonian University Court

Minutes of the University Court held on Thursday 18 April 2024 at 9am in person in the Lantern, Annie Lennox Building.

Present: Rob Woodward (Chair), Jennifer Abali, Amit Bhargava, Arlene Cairns, Professor Steve Decent, Alan Dickson, Ellen Gibson, Scott Haldane, David Halliday, Asif Haseeb, Ian Kerr, Sharon Lowrie, Meg Lustman, Bill McDonald, Dr Nick McKerrell, Professor Catriona Miller, Chidozie Nwaigwe and Austin Sweeney.

Apologies Daniel Gallacher, Sylvie Freund Pickavance, Neena Mahal & Dr Lyle Gray.

In attendance Jan Hulme, University Secretary and Vice Principal Governance
Professor Ehsan Mesbahi, Provost and DVC
Susan Mitchell, Chief Operating Officer & DVC
Professor Andrea Nelson, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research
Professor Louise Dixon, Pro-Vice Chancellor Education
Fiona Campbell, Vice Principal, People and Student Wellbeing
Claire Hulsen, Vice Principal Strategy and Planning
Caroline Bysh, Pro Vice-Chancellor Engagement
Professor Mike Mannion, Pro Vice-Chancellor and President GCNYC
Dawn Anderson Pro Vice-Chancellor International
Paul Queen, Chief Finance Officer
Paul Brown, Director of Governance & Legal Services

Chair's opening remarks

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all of those present including Arlene Cairns and Scott Haldane to their first Court meeting. The Chair also welcomed Wilfred Obi, the incoming Student President, who was attending Court as an observer and reminded Court that this would be Chidozie Nwaigwe and Jennifer Abali's last meeting of Court and thanked them for their time on Court.

The Chair mentioned to governors that the annual Stakeholder event will take place in person and virtually on 16th May 2024 (5-7.30 pm) and encouraged governor participation ideally in person if scheduling allowed.

The Chair also reminded governors of the graduations that will take place on 2nd, 3rd and 4th July and again encouraged as many governors as possible to attend. The Chair informed governors that the new Chancellor would be installed at the graduation on 2nd July.

1. Minutes

- 1.1 Court noted that the minutes of the Court meeting held on 8th February 2024 had been **approved** by prior circulation.

2. Matters arising

- 2.1 The Court noted a report on the matters arising from the Court meeting on 8th February 2024 and the actions taken to address them.
- 2.2 In response to a request for clarification of the item relating to levels of authority for certain types of in year expenditure, the University Secretary confirmed that the levels of authority required by the financial regulations and procedures were defined by fixed amounts and were not variables

determined by percentage of the University budget. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the type of expenditure under previous discussion was met from budgeted REG funding.

3. Declaration of interest

- 3.1 A summary of the register of interests was included with the court papers. Court members were reminded to advise the University Secretary or the Director of Governance & Legal Services of any changes to their position or if any agenda items gave rise to a conflict of interest.

4. Items brought by the Chair of Court

- 4.1 The Chair reminded governors of the requirement to complete the cyber security training and the importance of this.
- 4.2 The Chair addressed the issue of the confidentiality of Court business and emphasised the importance of confidentiality being assumed for all Court business unless governors are advised otherwise. This is essential for the open and transparent approach which characterises the way information is shared with Court and which in turn is fundamental to Court's deliberations, decision-making and culture. Court operates in a transparent way, and decisions and information about business addressed by Court is communicated to the university community by various means taking due account of any commercial or other sensitivity. Please respect the requirement for confidentiality at all times.

5. Principal and Executive Board report

- 5.1 The Principal presented his report which included updates on key areas of the University's business including the task set by government for the Migration Advisory Committee; SFC Funding Cuts and Announcements; the University's mandatory TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) return to the SFC; Million Plus Membership; International Student Barometer Results; Changes to Academic Calendar 2025/26; the Court's 2024 Stakeholder Event on 16 May; Mental Health Day and Neurodiversity Celebration Week.
- 5.2 The Principal provided an update to Court on the MSS process and the number of applications that had been received. He explained that the next stage in the process would be to assess the applications and that a panel chaired by him and consisting of other Executive members, would then meet to examine each application and determine the impact on the University before approving any application.
- 5.3 The Principal provided an update on the expected outcome of the SFC's review of the University's funding and that it is expected that the University would receive a small (less than 1%) cash reduction in its funding allocation for next year. The Principal explained that the average sector impact was expected to be significantly greater. The Principal noted the hard work that the University had undertaken in recruiting and teaching new students and explained that it was expected that additional funded student places would be awarded by SFC in light of the University's strong home undergraduate enrollment in 2023. He explained that the SFC had indicated it would remove 1300 funded places across the sector, places which had been awarded to recognise the impact on successive cohorts of applicants of a disrupted school experience during Covid. The plan to withdraw of the places had previously been announced by SFC. The Chair of Court expressed appreciation for the work

that had been undertaken to secure what is expected to be an exceptionally positive SFC settlement against a background of severe financial constraints on government and the SFC. The Principal noted that he would provide an update to Court members following publication of the SFC funding allocation that afternoon.

- 5.4 The Principal explained that he had attended a meeting with other Vice Chancellors regarding the possible changes being considered by the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). He explained that despite the sector having expressed the benefits to the UK economy, it is feared that the MAC review will lead to a reduction in international student numbers which will have an adverse effect on the whole sector but that the Executive were looking carefully at measure to address the potential impact on the University. The Principal explained that he had had constructive meeting with trade union representatives on options and measures that the University might consider to manage the major impact of a severely reduced international student constituency.

6. COO/DVC Report

- 6.1 The Court noted a report from the Chief Operating Officer/ Deputy Vice Chancellor that gave an overview of key issues in Finance; Estates; IT; Future Students, Marketing & Communications; Foundation, Alumni & Event; and Registry & School Professional Services, since the last Court meeting in February 2024.
- 6.2 The COO/DVC explained that the budget process was currently underway and that the draft budget would be discussed at the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting on 22nd April and in May and then presented to Court at a briefing before formal approval is sought at the June meeting of Court. She explained that in view of the reduction in SFC funding, the risks associated with the MAC report and other factors affecting the University and the rest of the sector, as with last year, the budget would present 3 possible scenarios covering various eventualities in order to ensure prudent management depending on the outcomes of the funding reviews. She explained however that following last year's success with home student recruitment, the projections for this year are also strong. The Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee advised Court that it was clear that reduced Scottish Government funding over the next few years was inevitable and that action requires to be taken now in order to ensure the continuing success and strength of the University and that the budget proposals are designed to assess and address the risks.
- 6.3 In response to questions, the COO/DVC explained that the carbon reduction programme was primarily about a new Building Management System which would better manage the University's use and consumption of energy and lead to an improvement in energy efficiency and a reduction in carbon output.
- 6.4 In response to questions, the COO/DVC explained that the anticipated impact of the MSS scheme had been budgeted for in this year's budget and that in assessing the numbers and identifying those applicants who would be granted MSS, all of the relevant data would be made available to the decision making panel and that the impact on departments and students will be a key factor in those decisions.

7. Student President's report

- 7.1 Prior to presentation of this report, the Chair of Court expressed his thanks to the President and Vice President for their hard work in support of the Students' Association, the University and the Court

during their time in post. The Chair commented on the successes that the Students' Association had achieved during their tenure and that their positive attitude and commitment has been of significant benefit to the University and the Court. On behalf of the Court and the University, he wished them every success for their futures.

- 7.2 The Court noted a report from the Student President highlighting recent activities and initiatives undertaken by the Students' Association. He referred to the various successes of the Student Association including the recent "Campaigns Award" from NUS Scotland for the work that the Association has undertaken to support students in the current cost of living crisis and in particular, the Winter Warmer Campaign. He confirmed that the University has achieved positive results in the International Student Barometer survey results achieving higher than UK and Scottish average results on engagement. The President and his Executive were also thanked for their support in the success of the BAME Festival.
- 7.3 In response to questions, the President explained that there remains a difficulty in engaging undergraduate students in the work of the Student Association but that the current Student executive have been working hard on this and that home student engagement is now increasing and that this year, there were home student candidates who stood in the elections and there had been a higher number of votes cast than in the previous few years.
- 7.4 The President and Vice President in turn thanked Court and the Executive of the University for the support and assistance that they had received in carrying out their work and wished the University continuing success.

8. University Secretary's Report

- 8.1 The Court noted the report from the University Secretary. The University Secretary reminded Court that, in response to suggestions contained in the last Quinquennial Review, approval of the proposed 25/26 calendar of Court and Standing Committee meetings had been deferred with only a draft having been presented to the February Court for comment and feedback on any awkward scheduling which brought a clash with school holidays and similar. The draft calendar had been prepared with the objective of trying to avoid or minimise such clashes and no comments had been received. The University Secretary therefore asked Court now to approve the 25/26 calendar.
- 8.2 Court **approved** the 25/26 Calendar of Meetings.

9. University Strategy and KPI

- 9.1 The Court received a report from the Vice Principal Strategy and Planning, that provided an update on the draft University Strategy, Key Performance Indicators and strategy implementation. She explained that the latest version followed engagement with a considerable number of stakeholders and incorporated the feedback and suggestions from previous iterations with Court. She explained that the intention was to bring the final version to Court in June for approval but that she wished to discuss changes that have been made so far and welcome further input from Court.
- 9.2 Court commended the evolution of the documents and had an open discussion on various aspects of the proposed strategy and offered guidance and assistance to the Executive on the continuing development of the strategy. The Vice Principal Strategy and Planning, thanked governors for their

input and that this would help the continued development of the strategy ahead of the next meeting of Court.

10. Student Recruitment Report

- 10.1 The Court noted a report from the Vice Principal Strategy and Planning that provided an update on student recruitment for academic year 2023-24 and an early view of Trimester A 2024-25, as at 18th March 2024. She explained that since that time, the University continued to make offers to prospective students. She explained that the University had for the first time offered entry to a cohort of students in Tri C but this has primarily arisen as a result of delays to Tri B students being able to take up their places due to problems with visas being issued.

11. GCU London Strategy

- 11.1 The Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost, Professor Ehsan Mesbahi, introduced a paper that set out the a draft Strategic Plan for GCU London.
- 11.2 He invited the Director of GCU London, Professor Peter Jones to present to members on the key issues identified such as the development of a broad portfolio of programmes, diversification of income streams, financial sustainability, an enhanced student and graduate employability offer, and sustainable civic and commercial engagement.
- 11.3 In response to questions it was explained that there remains capacity in London for further expansion. Whilst consideration was being given to under graduate recruitment, this thinking was at an early stage, and advice on the potential impact of this and the regulatory issues was currently being.
- 11.4 Further to discussion, it was noted that it would be appropriate to incorporate GCU London into the wider University work on future strategic direction and size and shape.

12. University of Jinan Proposal

- 12.1 The Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost, Professor Ehsan Mesbahi, presented a potential opportunity to build on an existing relationship with a university in China. He outlined the nature of education governance in China and the concept of a Joint Institute model that the University was being asked to consider.
- 12.2 He invited the Pro Vice-Principal International to present to members on the key risks, challenges and opportunities to provide some context for discussion. The Pro Vice-Chancellor International explained that the Joint Institute model was favoured by the Chinese government and is being used by other UK universities as this is considered to be most effective way in which to engage with the education market in China. She explained that the University already has a relationship with Jinan and this would represent a strengthening of that relationship. She explained that the University would be responsible for a proportion of the teaching and would ensure that the appropriate quality standards are achieved as Jinan would be awarding Glasgow Caledonian University degrees. Any developed proposal would have to address aspects such as financial sustainability, required standards of education and quality and compatibility with the University's values..

12.3 In response to questions she explained that as a result of the Chinese Ministry of Education requirements for universities in China, Jinan will be required to take this approach in order to expand in this way and that as the University already has an existing relationship with Jinan, this is considered to be the best opportunity for such expansion. The Principal explained that ethical concerns have been considered by Senate and that Senate felt confident that these can be managed but that Court's input and views on this are important in determining if this project should progress. He explained that this and other TNE projects are an important aspect of the future development of the University and diversifying income.

12.4 Following discussion, Court endorsed the recommendation of further development of the proposal but will need to see a worked up business plan paying particular attention to risk.

13. Update on GCNYC

13.1 The Principal provided an oral update on progress in addressing GCNYC and advised Court that he envisaged an imminent Special Court meeting of Court to consider and approve an Agreement which, subject to US regulatory approvals, would allow the transfer of responsibilities for GCNYC from the University to another HEI.

14. University Senate: Report from meeting of the Senate held on 21st February 2024

14.1 The Principal presented a report from the last Senate meeting held on 21st February 2024, including a Research Integrity Annual Statement and Report 2022/3, which was appended to the report for Court's approval following its endorsement by Senate.

14.2 Court **noted** the report and **approved** the Research Integrity Annual Statement and Report 2022/23.

15. Standing Committee Business

15.1 People Committee – 14th March 2024

15.1.1 The report was presented by Austin Sweeney in Neena Mahal, Chair of the Committee's absence. Court **noted** the report of the People Committee highlighting the issues discussed and decisions taken by the People Committee meeting held on 14th March 2024. He drew particular attention to the fact that there had been a significant increase in the number of students declaring a disability and that the Committee was seeking information about resources to support this expansion given the importance of student and staff welfare.

15.1.2 Court **noted** the report.

15.2 Audit Committee – 25th March 2024

15.2.1 The Chair of the Audit Committee, Bill McDonald, presented the report on matters discussed at the Committee meeting held on 25th March 2024.

15.2.2 Court **noted** the report.

15.3 Court Governance & Nominations Committee – 19th March 2024

- 15.3.1 Rob Woodward, Chair of the Committee, presented the report of the Court Governance & Nominations Committee meeting that took place on 19th March 2024. He explained that the meeting had taken place in 2 parts with the first part of the meeting being the regular work of the Committee and the second part being assigned to the work of overseeing the appointment of his successor as Chair of Court. In this latter mode and with somewhat modified membership the Committee would be known as the Chair Appointment Oversight Committee(CAOC), which committee would be chaired by the Vice Chair, Meg Lustman in line with the CGNC’s remit.
- 15.3.2 The Chair reported that the Committee had endorsed the recommendations and was seeking Court’s approval for the appointment of a new governor, Gavin Munn, the reappointment of Sharon Lowrie as a lay governor when her current term comes to an end and the appointment of Austin Sweeney as Chair Designate of the People Committee. The governors being considered for the appointments excused themselves at this point until the Court had considered and approved their appointment.
- 15.3.3 Court **noted** the report and **approved** the following appointments:
- 15.3.4 **Approve** the appointment of Gavin Munn as a governor and as member of the F&GPC.
- 15.3.5 **Approve** the appointment of Austin Sweeney as Chair Designate of the People Committee.
- 15.3.6 **Approve** the reappointment of Sharon Lowrie as a governor for a further 3-year term to take effect on conclusion of her current term on 31st December 2024.

Chair Appointment Oversight Committee

The Vice Chair, Meg Lustman explained that the Chair Appointment Oversight Committee (CAOC) would oversee the process for appointment of the new Chair of Court when Rob Woodward steps down in February 2025. She reminded Court that the process for the appointment had previously been approved by Court. She explained that the current Chair would not be a member of the committee but may be asked to attend meetings from time to time in order to provide any assistance that the committee may require. She explained that Austin Sweeney, a member of the CGNC, had excused himself from the CAOC as he might consider standing for the role. In that regard, Bill McDonald and as previously approved by Court, has been appointed to that committee. Ms Lustman explained that the first step in the process will be appointing recruitment consultants and that she and the University Secretary were progressing that.

Court **noted** the report.

15.4 Finance & General Purposes Committee – 4th March 2024

- 15.4.1 The Chair of the Committee, Ian Kerr, presented the report on matters discussed at the Committee meeting on 4th March 2024.
- 15.4.2 Court **noted** the report.

16. GCNYC Board of Trustees Report from Meeting on 7th March 2024

- 16.1 The President of GCNYC, Professor Mike Mannion, presented the report in the Chair of the Board of GCNYC’s absence. Court noted a report of the Board of Trustees meeting that took place on 7th March 2024.

16.2 Court **noted** the report.

17. Media Coverage Analysis

17.1 The Court noted the report that highlighted the media coverage received by GCU in January & February 2024. The Chair noted that the report demonstrated a significant level of coverage which provided a very positive light on the University and commended everyone at the University for that.

18. Date of Next Meeting

18.1 The Court noted that the next scheduled meeting would take place in person on Thursday 13th June 2024 at 9.00am with dinner taking place the evening before on 12th June.

Closing remarks

The Chair of Court reminded Court that this was the last Court meeting for Chidozie Nwaigwe and Jennifer Abali and wished to express his thanks for himself and on behalf of Court for their contribution to the work of Court and its committees and for their representation of the interests of students which is so important to the work of Court and the University community. He wished them both well for the future.