

Lanarkshire, 24th June 2025, being the 82nd meeting of the Court of the University of the West of Scotland

Present: Mrs K Allum (Chair)
Ms O Adebayo
Professor S Carnicelli
Ms L Carroll
Dr A M Craig
Mr R Doherty
Mr A Gubbay (via MS Teams)
Ms K Hedge
Ms M Kennedy (via MS Teams)
Professor R MacIntosh
Professor D MacLean (via MS Teams)
Dr K McQuade
Mr A Miller
Professor J Miller
Mr C Morgan
Mr A Munro
Mr T Oyinpere
Ms R Paterson (via MS Teams)
Ms R Simpson
Mr H Stolkin (via MS Teams)

In attendance: Professor R Cragg
Ms M Liston
Mr A MacIver
Ms D McMillan
Ms F Morton
Ms S Pitticas
Mr M Ross
Mrs A Loudon
Dr T Kennie (Ranmore Consulting) (except item 5)
Mr J Nisbet (Ranmore Consulting) (except item 5)

Observers: Dr C O'Donnell (except item 5)
Dr J Taylor (except item 5)

Apologies for absence were received from Ms A Mitchell and Mr K Murdoch and for early departure from Mr R Doherty.

No Declarations of Interest were notified.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed Dr K McQuade to her first meeting of Court following her appointment to Court as Academic Staff Trade Union Representative with effect from 16th June 2025. In addition, the Chair welcomed Ms M Liston to her first meeting attending Court following her appointment as Interim Vice-Principal (People & Student Wellbeing).

2. Minutes of Meeting held on 28th April 2025

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th April 2025 were approved as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising other than those contained elsewhere in the agenda.

4. **Determination of Any Other Business**

No additional items of business had been notified.

5. **Chair's Statement**

The Chair drew members' attention to two communications received from the University's recognised Trade Unions which related to a vote of no confidence in the Principal & Vice-Chancellor and some members of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE). These had previously been circulated to the members of Court and the Chair confirmed it was imperative that these communications be discussed at Court.

The Chair reminded members that Court was responsible for upholding governance and holding VCE accountable for the effective management of the University through the delivery of the University's Strategic Plan. Throughout her period as Chair of Court, she had ensured that the Court and members of VCE had developed a closer working relationship and there was an open invitation for all members of VCE to attend meetings of the Court. Members of VCE also attended meetings of the Audit & Risk Committee and the Resources & People Committee where appropriate. In response to a question from a trade union representative the Chair indicated that in the spirit of the collaborative and mutually supportive culture of VCE, and in the interests of transparency, it was appropriate for all members of VCE to be present for discussion of this item by Court. The Chair also confirmed that a defining way of working within VCE was one of cabinet responsibility and that it was inappropriate to single out individual members of VCE in implementing collective decisions that had been presented and approved by Court.

The University Court, as governing body, was assisted in discharging its functions by its sub-Committees. To ensure appropriate levels of challenge, support and clarity a holistic review of the terms of reference and memberships of the sub-Committees of Court had been undertaken and changes approved by Court in September 2021. In this connection, the Chairs of the Audit & Risk Committee and the Resources & People Committee outlined the role and work of their respective Committees and confirmed high levels of confidence in the scrutiny, transparency and robust challenge provided to enable the Committees to meet their approved terms of reference. Reports from each sub-Committee meeting were routinely submitted to Court, with the opportunity for all Court members to raise any issues related to the sub-committees' business.

The Chair reminded members that at the April 2023 Strategic Residential Event, the challenges affecting UWS specifically and the HE sector generally had been recognised and Court had agreed that the University had to take responsibility for ensuring its own continued sustainability through an Organisational Change Project (OCP). Since then, significant work had been undertaken to meet various external challenges and protect the UWS financial position. This had included a review of the size and shape of the University's student portfolio and development of the UWS Strategy 2030 and the agreement of new institutional values. Court had been kept updated as matters evolved. UWS staff had been consulted and briefed throughout via Principal's All-Staff meetings and launch events and workshops for Strategy 2030. The Chair of Court reported that since April 2023, there have been 179 touchpoints with the Trade Unions and 26 all staff meetings, open meetings to launch the strategy and annual departmental meetings with the Principal. In addition, the regular and full round of Court and Committee meetings have been held. Noting that a decision had been taken by the recognised Trade Unions to disengage from discussion on the OCP, Court agreed that it was important that both University management and the recognised Trade Unions worked collaboratively to navigate UWS staff and students through these challenging times.

Having reviewed the communications submitted by the recognised Trade Unions, and having had the opportunity to raise questions within the meeting, members of Court

concluded that neither the written communications nor the responses to questions provided any level of detail or specific examples to evidence the concerns being raised.

The Chair reminded members that at its April 2025 meeting, Court had confirmed confidence and strong support in the University's approach to the OCP and its aims to achieve financial sustainability. After discussion, Court confirmed full confidence in the leadership of the Principal & Vice-Chancellor and VCE, with no member demurring from that conclusion. Support for the OCP had already been confirmed by Court and was reaffirmed as a necessary set of actions to proactively secure and maintain the University's financial sustainability. Members would continue to challenge, scrutinise and to hold the Principal & Vice-Chancellor and VCE to account for delivery of the approved Strategy and financial sustainability of UWS and a strong and supportive working relationship between Court and VCE was fundamental to its success.

Noting concerns raised elsewhere in relation to the operationalisation of the OCP, Court agreed that these should be treated as a separate matter and referred them to VCE for action.

The Academic Staff Trade Union member of Court highlighted that the dispute with the Trade Unions related to the decision by the University not to remove the possibility of compulsory redundancy. In this connection, the Principal & Vice-Chancellor emphasised that, while compulsory redundancies could not be ruled out, these would only be used as an action of last resort. The Principal and Vice-Chancellor reiterated that no compulsory redundancies were currently being proposed. Discussions with the recognised Trade Unions had resumed in relation to the development of a revised voluntary severance scheme and this was welcomed by Court.

In reporting on other matters, the Chair referenced the recently published independent report into the financial collapse of the University of Dundee and a meeting of the Committee of Scottish Chairs she had attended to discuss the report. A review of the outcome and lessons learned would be progressed in due course.

6. Principal & Vice-Chancellor's Report

The Principal & Vice-Chancellor spoke to the report which provided Court with an update on issues related to HE in Scotland, the UK and key information on the UWS environment and projects.

Court noted that the Scottish Funding Council's annual financial sustainability report on the University sector had been delayed until September and the Principal also referenced the independent report on the financial collapse of the University of Dundee.

Preparations were well underway for the University's forthcoming Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) being organised by the Scottish Quality Assurance Agency for HE. The main review, which would take place in autumn 2025 by an external peer review panel, would comprise a full evaluation of the University's effectiveness in managing academic standards, enhancing the quality of the learning experience and enabling student success.

Court was delighted to note the success of UWS nursing and midwifery students at recent external awards.

In response to a question, the Vice-Principal (People & Student Wellbeing) outlined the ongoing work to respond to the UK Supreme Court ruling on the definition of a woman under equalities law. Formal guidance was still awaited, but a dynamic risk assessment had been developed to reflect the impact on institutional EDI policy and staff and student data reporting.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

7. **Students' Union**

7.1 **Students' Union – Review of Code of Practice**

Court approved the revised UWS Code of Practice relating to the operation of the UWS Students' Union noting that this had been updated to reflect clarification around Associate Membership, change to Student Officers rather than Sabbatical Officers and clarification of the process for approval of the Union budget.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

7.2 **Students' Union Report**

The President of the Students' Union spoke to the report which highlighted progress, challenges and strategic initiatives to enhance student engagement and support at UWS. She drew members' attention in particular to the key priority areas for 2025/2026 which included implementation of the Democracy Review changes, development of a new Strategic Plan and a review of Union effectiveness aligned with the national enhancement framework.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

8. **Senate**

8.1 **Report from Meeting of Senate held on 11th June 2025**

Court noted for information the report from the meeting of Senate held on 11th June 2025.

9. **Sub Committee Reports**

9.1 **Report from Meeting of the Governance & Nominations Committee held on 10th June 2025 (Part 1)**

The Chair spoke to the report from the meeting of the Governance & Nominations Committee held on 10th June 2025.

Court noted that following changes to OSCR reporting regulations, additional information was required from members of Court as charity trustees. This would be held by OSCR but not published. The Court Office would be contacting members with more detail over the summer on the new requirements.

Court approved the revised Scheme of Delegation which set out those matters which were reserved for Court and those where Court had delegated authority or allocated to other Committees.

Court noted and endorsed for publication on the UWS website, the report which set out a summary of the range of initiatives, activities and actions undertaken to during the 2024/2025 academic year to enhance the effectiveness of the Court.

Members also noted and approved the revised Scheme of Election of Staff Governors to Court which had been updated to clarify the relevant electorate along with some other minor changes to the process for election. It was agreed that the categorisation of staff electorate should be mirrored in other relevant areas, including the Rules for the Appointment of the Chair of Court.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

9.2 Report from Meeting of Resources & People Committee held on 10th June 2025

The Chair of the Resources & People Committee spoke to the report from the meeting held on 10th June.

He drew members' attention in particular to the detailed discussion at the Committee on tuition fees and scholarships for the 2026/2027 academic year. Court noted that, while the Committee had approved the recommendation on 2026/2027 tuition fee levels and the recommendation for international students to pay 75% of the fee prior to CAS issuance, further details had been sought on arrangements for payment of the balance. This would be brought forward to the next meeting of RPC for further consideration.

Progress with the disposal of assets at the former Hamilton Campus and George Street, Paisley was noted.

Court noted that following a period of significant growth the student population at the London Campus had exceeded capacity. In addition, new UKVI regulations would restrict the amount of remote delivery permitted within any programme for students on international visas. As the capacity to grow the number of students at the Campus was integral to the University's multi-year recovery plan, the Committee had approved the recommendation that the University should seek expansion within the existing Campus to maintain the current population and underpin growth. Delegated authority had also been granted to VCE to progress the project within an approved resource envelope.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

9.2 Report from Meeting of Audit & Risk Committee held on 11th June 2025

The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee spoke to the report from the meeting held on 11th June.

He drew members' attention in particular to the detailed scrutiny at the meeting of the draft consolidated budget for 2025/2026 which the Committee had agreed to recommend to Court for approval. The External Audit Plan, which set out the approach and focus of the audit of the University's Financial Statements for year ended 31st July 2025 had been considered and endorsed by the Committee.

Court noted and endorsed the Strategic Risk Register, noting that this had been updated further to reflect discussion at the Committee.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

10. Finance

10.1 Financial Report & Projected Outturn – 2024/2025

The Vice-Principal (Finance & Infrastructure) spoke to the report which set out the management accounts to 30th April 2025 and the Q3 Financial Forecast to 31st July 2025. These had also been scrutinised in detail by the Audit & Risk Committee following which members had confirmed assurance in the actions being taken to maintain scrutiny and ensure a positive trajectory towards recovery.

Court was reassured to note that the forecast remained in line with the budget. Although levels remained high, good progress was being made in driving recovery of student debt. In response to a question, the Vice-Principal (Finance & Infrastructure) confirmed that staff costs remained high despite the ongoing focus on managing vacancies. This was due

primarily to inclusion of the uplift in employers national insurance contributions from April 2025.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

11. **Student Population & SFC Update**

The Vice-Principal (Planning & Recruitment) drew members' attention to the report which provided an update on achievement of intake and population targets for the domestic and international cohort, following T2 enrolment, T3 forecast and applications for the 2025-2026 domestic recruitment cycle.

Court was reassured to note that a return to growth in student numbers for the Scottish SFC population was forecast in the 2024/2025 academic year. Applications for 2025/2026 continued to show recovery compared with 2024/2025 levels. Court was interested to note the range of conversion activities planned over the coming months and offer-making was underway.

Final SFC funding allocations for 2025/2026 had now been published. Court was disappointed to note that the reduction in funded places to UWS had been confirmed. The University had received a modest uplift in research and innovation against a sector average. Widening access and retention funding had been maintained – it was noted that this sum had remained cash flat for a number of years and therefore its value had diminished over time.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

12. **UWS Strategy & Performance**

12.1 **Strategy 2030 – Enabling Plans**

12.2 **Strategy 2030 – Performance Framework**

12.3 **Annual Plan**

The Vice-Principal (Planning & Recruitment) reminded members that in February 2025, Court had approved a new “Strategic Framework” which would underpin Strategy 2030 and would include 3 key, interconnected elements of Enabling Plans, KPIs and Critical Success Factors and an Annual Plan.

Court noted progress with the development of the Enabling Plans informed by cumulative feedback from stakeholders collected throughout the duration of the strategy development process and through workshops hosted across all 5 Campuses as part of the Strategy 2030 launch events. The Enabling Plans, which would be a crucial element in articulating the key priorities over the 5 year period of Strategy 2030, would be further developed and rolled out by the start of the 2025/2026 academic year.

Similarly, progress with the development of the Strategy 2030 Performance Framework was noted. Court endorsed the approach undertaken to develop KPIs and targets along with the proposed approach to further develop the framework to include Critical Success Factors, noting that a small set of KPIs aligned to UWS cross-cutting drivers and strategic goals had been proposed with university-level 5 year targets.

The Annual Plan, which sought to build on planning and budgeting activity, Enabling Plans and annual KPI milestones, set out a number of collective priorities for focus during the academic year. The Plan, which was intended to be an active document, which would be referred to throughout the year, would also be flexible and adaptable to changes in the operating environment. Opportunities to diversify income streams and drive efficiency savings would also continue to be explored.

After discussion, members endorsed the direction of travel, noting that regular reports on progress would be submitted to Court.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

12.4 Consolidated Draft Budget – 2025/2026

The Vice-Principal (Finance & Infrastructure) made a presentation to Court on the key highlights and principles in the consolidated draft budget for 2025/2026 and indicative forecasts for the subsequent 2 years.

He reminded members that in June 2024, the budget approved by Court had included a multi-year commitment with the aim to return to an operating surplus in 2026/2027. Since then, although a steady recovery of the student population had been achieved, continued environmental challenges affected the return to surplus resulting in the application of the Organisational Change Project (OCP) to achieve long term financial sustainability. The draft consolidated budget for 2025/2026, which has been informed by submissions from all Schools and Professional Services Departments, included a phased estimate of benefits from the OCP, along with an estimate of its one-off cost. Key risks and opportunities for delivery of the 2025/2026 budget were noted. These included continuation of identification of opportunities to drive income and diversify income streams, continued management of staff costs, improvements in bad debt recovery and research and KTP activity.

The Principal & Vice-Chancellor highlighted that, while consideration had been given to a total freeze on recruitment, it was agreed that this would hamper operations and targeted recruitment to support areas of growth and essential functions would remain.

Noting the reliance on international student income, the Vice-Principal (Finance & Infrastructure) outlined the various mechanisms and mitigations in place to respond to any unforeseen fluctuations in student demand. This included a pricing strategy and availability of scholarships which were discussed and approved at Resources & People Committee on 11th June and which enable a targeted approach in the event of any further volatility with international student recruitment.

The reduced capital expenditure programme was noted. In this connection, Court agreed that continued prioritised investment to support growth was vital. Priority would also be given to essential health and safety expenditure and to strengthen IT defences against any future cyber attack.

In response to a question, the Vice-Principal (Finance & Infrastructure) confirmed that the University's current cash reserves represented 90+ days cover. In this connection, the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee confirmed that this minimum threshold had been approved by the Committee some time ago, highlighting that it was imperative that the University maintained this level of cover to enable it to respond to any unforeseen events and did not seek to utilise these funds for other investments. This would be kept under review by the Audit & Risk Committee.

After careful scrutiny and consideration, Court approved the consolidated budget for 2025/2026, noting that financial performance would continue to be closely monitored by the Audit & Risk Committee.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

13. Annual Legal Compliance Report

Court noted for information the report which provided assurance on UWS compliance with various legislative and regulatory requirements.

14. **UWS Knowledge Exchange & Innovation Fund (KEIF) Strategy 2024/2030 - Updated**

The Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor reminded members that, at its meeting in February 2025, Court approved the UWS Knowledge Exchange & Innovation Fund (KEIF) Strategy 2024-2030 which had been submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Noting that the Strategy had been updated following feedback received from SFC, Court approved the updated KEIF Strategy 2024-2030.

The remainder of the report was noted for information.

15. **Externally Facilitated Review of the Effectiveness of Court – Initial Findings**

The external consultant appointed to support the quinquennial externally facilitated review of the effectiveness of Court made a presentation to Court outlining their process to date, progress being made and future plans.

Noting that not all members had taken up the opportunity to complete the self-evaluation to Court, it was agreed that this would be re-circulated to enable those members that did not take up the initial opportunity to have a further opportunity to participate in this important exercise for the Court.

Work would continue on the development of the final report which would be considered at to the Court Development Day on 1st September 2025.

16. **Graduation Arrangements – Summer 2025**

Arrangements for the summer 2025 graduation ceremonies were noted for information. Members of Court were again encouraged to attend these important celebrations of student -success.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed.