

University Court

Wed 22 March 2023, 14:00 - 17:00

By VC (Microsoft Teams)

Board members

Alastair MacColl (Chair), Andrea Robertson, Angus Campbell, Calum Ross, David Sandison, Derek Lewis, Duncan Macaulay, Fiona McLean, Heather Innes, Mei-Li Roberts, Murray Easton, Rosemary McCormack, Vicki Nairn

In attendance

Lorna Walker, Neil Simco, Niall McArthur, Roger Sendall, Sheena Stewart, Nicholas Oakley (Clerk)

Meeting minutes

1. Preliminary Items

1.1. *Welcome and apologies

The Chair opened the meeting and noted the apologies from Sara O'Hagan, Poonam Malik, Jo de Sylva, and Malcolm Burr. The Chair and members extended thanks to Duncan Macaulay, attending his last meeting of Court, for his service as a Court member. Other matters were also noted:

- Future Court meetings would be primarily in person, although a hybrid option would continue to be available for members unable to attend in person.
- Court noted that an invitation would be extended to a small number of students and staff to attend the lunch before each Court meeting.
- Three Court positions were being recruited for, overseen by nominations committee, with a closing date of 17 April. The Chair encouraged members to disseminate the recruitment information across their networks.
- Peter Graham, Chair of UHI Moray, was resigning at the end of March. An interim Chair will be appointed.
- The recent UHI Foundation Conference had been very successful; members thanked the organisers for holding an inspiring event.

1.2. *Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1.3. *Notification of other business

There was no other business notified.

1.4. *Starring

No changes to the starring were requested.

2. *Minutes of Court meetings

2.1. *Approval of the minutes of 08 February 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 08 February 2023 were **approved** as an accurate record.

2.2. *Matters arising

The matters arising were **noted**.

2.3. *Delegated decisions

The University Secretary reported that the Chair had agreed that the nominations committee would be given delegated authority from Court to conduct the search and interview process of new independent Court members.

3. *Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor Update

Vicki Nairn, Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor, gave an update. The following key points were noted:

- Thanks to the hard work of UHI colleagues on a submission to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), SFC had agreed there would be no reduction in further education credits for the forthcoming year.
- Pressures remain around higher education recruitment as well as correcting executive office (EO) pay disparities. A one-off goodwill payment had been made to EO staff.
- Work was currently underway on the budget and a substantive update was on the Court agenda.
- Members had requested MAATIC as a standing item on Court agendas; this update was included in the Vice Chancellor's report, and UHI were awaiting Boeing's position statement on the matter.
- On the freeport and renewables agenda, members noted that the opportunities were vast but that this required investment to ensure success. It would therefore be helpful for Court to be provided an indicative proposal for investment in capacity to ensure a dedicated resource, linking up renewables opportunity and Freeport, as this was a huge opportunity with national significance. Members heard that Roger Sendall, Deputy Secretary, was on the Board for Freeport, and that resource from UHI North Highland (Giles Huby) had been secured to assist develop the business case.

4. *HISA Report

Heather Innes, HISA President, reported that the new interim CEO, Antony Blackshaw, was in post. Court **noted** the HISA report.

5. *Strategic Items for discussion

5.1. *UHI strategy development update

Court discussed the UHI strategy. Feedback on the draft included the following key points:

1. Further consultation around the expansion of the internal vision and 10-year time period allowed scope and opportunity and was welcomed.
2. There would be benefit in being more specific and focused. More clarity was needed to reflect UHI's distinctiveness.
3. Collective commitments – reference staff and the value they bring, embrace values driven culture, and this should be more enabling in tone (not being 'imposed').
4. Partners have agreed the internal/ external vision dichotomy, but SET will hone and refine based on Court's feedback.

Court **noted** the strategy update and were encouraged by the progress. Court **requested** that further consultation and work progress in liaison with Partnership Council before the strategy returned to the next Court meeting in June for approval.

Action: Conduct further consultation with Partnership Council on the revised strategy

5.2. *Financial Sustainability Update

Vicki Nairn, Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor, reported on the financial sustainability update. She reported major issues facing partners around national bargaining and cost of living increases, with no indication of funding forthcoming for these. SFC had been invited to Partnership Council, and sustainability would be a discussion topic. On the academic partner financial forecast returns (FFRs), whilst these projections were snapshots, UHI will be formally asking partners for statements on financial sustainability.

Court **noted** the financial sustainability update.

5.3 *UHI Shetland and UHI Outer Hebrides

[Davie Sandison joined the meeting]

Niall McArthur, Director of Finance, provided an update on UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI Shetland. Court heard that Finance and General Purposes Committee had required various conditions before further cash advances would be made, and that the impact on the financial position on the merged college post vesting would be determined. Discussions were also ongoing with SFC on UHI's role to provide cash advances to partners, and further confirmation of the position would be provided in due course via FGPC. Court reinforced FGPC's conditions and requested that the Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor work with the partner principals to understand these conditions, the respective liabilities (including of the merged college), and UHI's ability to provide ongoing support via cash advances.

Action: IPVC to continue to work with UHI Shetland and UHI Outer Hebrides on cash positions and recovery plans.

Court **noted** the UHI Shetland and UHI Outer Hebrides updates.

5.4. *UHI 2024 programme update

Max Brown and Rachel Cumberland provided an update on the UHI 2024 programme. Members heard that progress was continuing on the development of the business plan, but that delays to data sharing underpinning risk delivery of this. An ongoing issue around data sharing would be escalated to the Programme Board for further action. Members heard that the shared services group was moving to identify priority areas at pace. On communications, it was reported that engagement with staff and other stakeholders could not progress beyond existing updates until firmer progress and deliverables were identified and agreed.

Members **noted** the update and requested that via Programme Board they be kept updated on any slippages or variances in UHI 2024's workstreams.

[Max Brown and Rachel Cumberland left the meeting]

5.5. *Student recruitment update

Charlotte Wheatland, Director of Student Recruitment, introduced the student recruitment update. She reported that there were particular issues around HE recruitment to professional subjects that are sector wide problems (e.g. teaching, nursing). The downturn in HE applications for UHI is a Scottish sector issue, with all but one HEI seeing a reduction in applications via UCAS in this cycle.

For the 2022-23 cycle, FE had shown strong growth, already over-recruited by 2,000 credits. On HE, only 89% of target for SFC funded places reached.

For the 2023-24 cycle, FE is predicting further growth, particularly in part time students. An evidence base presented to SFC outlines clearly why they should support UHI's continued growth. HE applications are down a further 5% year-on-year, with particular issues for nursing, teacher education and business and leisure. There are growth targets for Scottish, RUK and International students and additional plans and funding in place to enhance late recruitment activity.

The focus on international has been unexpectedly positive and genuine interest expressed from the North American market, and then focus on EU and conversion of existing students and build relationships with agents.

The targeted 25% increase specified in the paper is linked to the UHI 2024 curriculum review workstream, initially to give consultants the scale of challenge to be tackled for Scottish, RUK, and international students. These have been adopted as they are stretching, but realisable.

Action: Comprehensive international student recruitment plan to June Court.

[Charlotte Wheatland left the meeting]

6. Items for noting

6.1. *Education review update

Neil Simco provided an update on the education review. Two tertiary faculties would be created, and matching interviews and open competition within the partnership to fill the Deans and Associate Dean posts, with the launch of new structures on 1 August 2023.

Court **noted** the education review update.

6.2. *Changes to assigned college boards

Noted without discussion.

6.3. *AP Financial Monitoring Reports

Members noted the AP financial monitoring reports, and expressed concern that the partnership was projecting a loss of up to £16m or £300k per week.

6.4. Court meeting arrangements 2023/2024

Court approved the 23/24 meeting schedule, and to extend the next meeting.

6.5. Responsibilities of the Regional Strategic Body (RSB)

Noted without discussion.

6.6. Ness Walk Implementation Plan

Noted without discussion.

6.7. Quarterly Status Reports

Noted without discussion.

6.8. Risk Management and High Level Risk Register

Noted without discussion.

7. Minutes from Committees of Court

7.1. Partnership Forum 9 February 2023

Noted without discussion.

7.2. Audit Committee 20 February 2023

Noted without discussion.

7.3. Finance and General Purposes Committee 23 February 2023

Noted without discussion.

7.4. Remuneration Committee 28 February 2023

Noted without discussion.

8. *Any Other Business

No other business and the Chair closed the main, non-reserved section of the meeting.

[Reserved Session declared open/ unrestricted June 2023]

9.1. FGPC Minutes 23 February 2023 - Reserved.

Court noted the above minutes.

9.2 UHI Financial shared services

The Interim PVC introduced the above which was approved by Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting in February 2023. The paper provided an overview of the current issues across UHI's financial services and proposals to strengthen resources and promote a UHI 2024 shared services approach.

Court members fully supported the recommendations of the committee, which were that (a) an executive senior level resource be recruited at CFO level on an interim basis for a period up to 18 months; and that (b) the shared services approach between Inverness and North Highland be strengthened with the support of the secondment of the EO Director of Finance for 12 months to the UHI North Highland and Inverness Shared Service, noting a review after 6 months (Full budget/costs to be provided by UHI Inverness and North).

9.3 Any other business

The Chair noted that a special meeting of Court would be arranged for May to provide Court with an opportunity to input into the new strategy ahead of being asked to approve it in June 2023.