



Queen Margaret University  
EDINBURGH

**COURT (14)**  
**MINS 03**

**UNIVERSITY COURT**

**Minutes of meeting held on 25 June 2014**

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**PRESENT**

Keir Bloomer (Chair)	Dr Anna Gregor CBE
Fergus Boden	Dr Lindesay Irvine
Jim Bradshaw	Roger Knox
Robin Burley MBE	Mark Laing
Ian Calder	Miller McLean
Craig Cathcart	Margaret McPhail
Johnny Elmer	Judith Sischy OBE
Dr Anthony Falconer OBE	Professor Petra Wend
Prof Alan Gilloran	Olga Wojtas

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Irene Hynd	University Secretary (Secretary)
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
Alasdair Black	Head of Finance
Steve Scott	Director of Campus and Commercial Services
Riley Power	Governance Officer (Minute Secretary)

**1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed members and those in attendance to the meeting and noted that the Court had received apologies from Professor Bob Cormack, Robert Rae, Brian Leggat and Jackie Macdonald.

**2 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

**3 DETERMINATION OF OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

There was no other competent business.

#### **4 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The Chair reported that he had attended a meeting of the Committee of Scottish Chairs which had discussed, among other things, progress with implementation of the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance and the publication of the revised Financial Memorandum by the Scottish Funding Council. There appeared to be general concern around the extent to which the government was exercising greater control over the sector through expansion of the Code and conditions attached to public funding.

The Chair reported that he had also attended a plenary meeting of the Committee of University Chairs where topics discussed included the use of new technology in the higher education sector and the possibility of savings to institutions through the use of back office shared services. The meeting also discussed alternative methods of delivering learning to students.

The Chair noted that a settlement had been reached between UCEA and the trade unions under which all unions had accepted a 2% settlement. Matters which required further consideration included zero hours contracts and gender gap in pay.

#### **5 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

Members RECEIVED a detailed report from the Principal (COURT (14) 05) highlighting recent news and developments that involved or impacted upon the University.

The Principal noted in particular the following matters:

- The league table position of the University had improved in two recent publications (the Guardian League Table and the Good University Guide), with this success attributed to good employment prospects for graduates and improvements undertaken as a result of the NSS.
- The University had successfully launched a series of 'Lunch with the SMT' sessions as part of its internal communications activities.
- There had been a launch of Connected Scotland, a collaboration of industry partners, including Universities Scotland with the objective of developing and promoting overseas the HE sector in Scotland.

#### **6 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Court held on 2 April 2014 (COURT (14) MINS 02) were APPROVED as a correct record.

#### **7 MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

#### **8 SENATE**

8.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Senate meetings held on 26 March 2014 (SENATE (14) MINS 02) and 21 May 2014 (SENATE (14) MINS 03).

8.2 Members noted in particular recent sector-wide movement towards agreed principles which would underpin any statement of academic freedom. Members were advised that the University would monitor ongoing developments so that any statement developed and

recommended to Court by the Senate would be broadly consistent with the approach across the sector.

## **9 NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

9.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Nominations Committee meeting held on 4 June 2014 (NOM (14) MINS 01).

9.2 Members APPROVED the revised Terms of Reference and Membership of the Nominations Committee which incorporated changes to ensure compliance with the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance outlined in minute 9.3 below.

9.3 Members AGREED to the recommendations of the Nomination Committee that:

- The length of tenure on committees should be brought in to line with that of the Court, with members appointed to a Committee for a period of three years with the possibility of an extension to membership for a further period of up to three years (determined by the member's remaining period of membership on the Court);
- Such provision would apply to members appointed to Committee from June 2014 onwards. Members agreed that existing members of Court Committees that had served more than three years would remain in membership until they demitted membership of the Court.

9.4 Members AGREED to the following appointments to vacancies on Court Committees on the recommendation of the Nominations Committee:

- Audit Committee: Convener – Miller McLean; Member – Robert Rae
- Health and Safety Committee: Member – Jackie Macdonald
- Nominations Committee: Member – Professor Bob Cormack

9.5 Members AGREED that the Nominations Committee would consider and make proposals on goals and policies concerning the balance of its independent members in terms of equality and diversity with such proposals to come forward to the Court early in the next academic session.

9.6 On the basis of the information provided, the Nominations Committee AGREED the shortlist of candidates for the vacancies on Court as set out in the Appendix to the Nominations Committee minutes. Candidates would be invited for interview on dates to be determined by the Secretary in consultation with the Chair and members of the Nominations Committee.

## **10 AUDIT COMMITTEE**

10.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 28 May 2014 (AUDIT (14) MINS 02) and NOTED in particular that the University had been dealing effectively with audit recommendations outstanding from previous years, with significant progress having been made.

10.2 Members noted the reappointment of KPMG as the University's internal auditors for a term of five years. Members also noted that feedback had been provided to KPMG in relation to concerns about the late start to internal audit activities in the current year and that this feedback had been taken on board by KPMG.

## **11 FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE**

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Finance and Estates Committee meeting held on 4 June 2014 (FEC (14) MINS 02) and NOTED that all particular items to be highlighted were on the agenda and would be discussed later in the meeting.

## **12 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**

12.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Health and Safety Committee meeting held on 19 June 2014 (HSC (14) MINS 02) and NOTED the phased response to create a smoke free campus proposed by the Committee. Members did not provide any further input at this stage and AGREED that the Health and Safety Committee would take this approach forward and that updates would be provided to the Court on any progress.

12.2 Members NOTED an update on the ongoing correspondence with East Lothian Council with respect to safety concerns around the campus exit slip road.

## **13 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEE**

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Equality and Diversity Committee meeting held on 13 May 2014 (EDC (14) MINS 02) and NOTED ongoing work by the Committee to identify a way that equality and diversity data in relation to staff could be collected more effectively to assist the University in ensuring that it complied with its equality duty. In addition, Members NOTED recent changes to the entitlement for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) in England and Wales. It was noted that these changes could have a knock-on effect in Scotland arising from the availability of funding and increased expectations on Universities to provide technical support.

## **14 MINUTE REDACTED**

The record of discussion under Minute 15 is exempt from disclosure under Section 33 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

## **15 THIRD QUARTER REVIEW – TO APRIL 2014**

15.1 Members CONSIDERED a paper (COURT (14) 17) which reported on the financial performance against budget up to the end of the third quarter of 2013/14. The overall projected full-year surplus as at 30 April 2014 was £500k up from a predicted surplus in January of £100k. This represented an outturn position in line with the original budget. Members noted the detailed analysis of the figures outlined in the paper.

15.2 Members then NOTED a paper (COURT (14) 18) which provided a report on the University's KPIs for the third quarter of 2013/14.

15.3 Members queried progress on the implementation of the revised International Recruitment Strategy referred to in the paper. Members were advised that the University had updated its approach to international recruitment and, among other things, had appointed new expertise and had shifted its focus away from India as a source of international students and had undertaken further work in developing North American markets. In addition, the University had initiated a review of its degree titles and would examine how these could be adjusted to align more directly with market expectations. Members were also advised that the University was exploring potential future markets in China.

- 15.4 Members also sought more information in relation to the Academies programme at the University. The Chair suggested that a presentation on the Academies be provided to members at the next meeting of Court as a strategic theme.

## **16 FINANCIAL FORECASTS AND BUDGET FOR 2014/15**

- 16.1 Members NOTED the SFC final funding announcement for 2014/15 (COURT (14) 19) and that there had been no fundamental changes from the indicative funding announcement made in January 2014.
- 16.2 Members considered a paper (COURT (14) 20) that set out the proposed high-level budget for 2014/15 and the financial projections for the next two years. Members accepted the view of the Finance and Estates Committee that the deficit budget in 2014/15, with a return to surplus thereafter, represented a realistic and sensible strategy, noting in particular the recent strategic investment by the University and the natural time lag between this expenditure and the expected return on investment. Members also emphasised the importance of monitoring expected returns on investments to ensure that the University could manage any variances.
- 16.3 Members requested additional detail concerning investment in staff. The Principal explained that the University had engaged new staff to support the strategic investments in food and drink in addition to staff in areas that generated, or were expected to generate, significant income.
- 16.4 Members AGREED the budget proposal presented to the Court.

## **17 QM150**

- 17.1 Members noted a paper (COURT (14) 21) from the Head of Planning which provided an update on the QM150 project and which included a draft vision that had been presented to the QM150 Project Group at its meeting on 4 June 2014.
- 17.2 Members discussed the draft vision attached to the paper. Members noted and agreed with the comments of the Project Group feedback that the vision had developed in the right direction. However, it still required to be more distinctive and particular to the University and expressed in a more compelling form.
- 17.3 The Head of Planning then outlined the next steps in the project which involved four separate visions drafted by four different authors. These visions would be developed by the end of June and shared with staff. Each author would base their text on the draft vision but would be at liberty to remove some elements and highlight others to develop a compelling text
- 17.4 Members AGREED that Court members should also be invited to attend any staff consultation event arranged for this purpose. The Head of Planning advised that the outcome of the process would be reported to the October meeting of the Court.

## **18 SCOTTISH CODE OF GOOD HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE**

- 18.1 Members considered a paper (COURT (14) 22) which benchmarked the University's compliance with the Main Principles and Supporting Guidelines set out in the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance.

- 18.2 Members NOTED the conclusion in the paper that the University was compliant with the Code save for an outstanding matter which concerned the terms of the Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh (Scotland) Order of Council 2007 and whether these permitted the appointment of a Chair or Vice-Chair of the Court other than from the existing lay members of Court (see minute 18.3)
- 18.3 Members NOTED a paper (COURT (14) 23) which contained proposed amendments to the Court Standing Order and which provided an update on further amendments in relation to which further work was required before an amendment could be made. Members were provided notice of the proposed changes at the meeting of the Court on 2 April 2014.
- 18.4 Members APPROVED the amendments proposed to orders 9, 13 and 16 and NOTED the update provided in relation to order 11 of the Court Standing Orders concerning election of the Chair and Vice-Chair.
- 18.5 Members NOTED legal advice provided to the University which stated that the Order of Council could not be interpreted in a way that would permit the appointment of a Chair or Vice Chair other than from the existing lay members. The advice also indicated that an administrative work-around could be implemented through the Court Standing Orders to achieve the same outcome.
- 18.6 Members AGREED that an amendment to the Order of Council should be pursued in preference to implementing an administrative work-around as it was considered that the Court should be appropriately empowered to comply with the Code.

## **19 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION**

Members NOTED the 2013 compliance report (COURT (14) 24) on Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations, Data Protection and Records Management activity at the University in 2013 which also contained comparative figures from 2012.

## **20 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINT HANDLING**

Members NOTED a paper (COURT (14) 25) which provided an analysis of student complaints that arose during the 2013/13 Academic Session and were heard under the formal Student Complaints procedure of the University in operation during that session.

## **21 RETIRING MEMBERS**

Following the main business of the meeting, the Chair advised members that the meeting would be the final meeting attended by two members, Roger Knox and Robin Burley, both of whom were due to demit office having served as Court members since 1 July 2008.

The Chair commented in particular on the invaluable range of skills and expertise contributed to the Court by these members and expressed the Court's gratitude to both members for their diligent service. As a token of that commitment and contribution, both members were presented with a commemorative gift from the Court and the University. Both Roger Knox and Robin Burley then took some time to thank the Court and share their thoughts and reflections on their time in office.

**22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Court will meet on the following dates

8 October 2014

3 December 2014

4-5 February 2015 (Court Away Days)

1 April 2015

24 June 2015

All meetings commence at 4.00 pm.