



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 9 October 2013

PRESENT

Keir Bloomer (Chair)	Mark Laing
Fergus Boden	Jackie Macdonald
Robin Burley MBE	Miller McLean
Ian Calder	Ian McMillan
Craig Cathcart	Margaret McPhail
Professor Bob Cormack	Robert Rae
Johnny Elmer	Judith Sischy OBE
Professor Anthony Gilloran	Professor Petra Wend (Principal)
Dr Anna Gregor CBE	Olga Wojtas
Roger Knox	Sheila Williams

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Fiona Coutts	Dean of School of Health Sciences
Gordon Craig	Head of Planning (for items 15 and 16)
Malcolm Cutt	Director of Operations and Finance
Irene Hynd	University Secretary (Secretary)
Riley Power	Governance Officer
Jane Scott	Director of Marketing and Communications (Minute Secretary)
Steve Scott	Director of Campus and Commercial Services

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed new member Jackie Macdonald to her first meeting of Court.

Apologies were received from Jim Bradshaw and Brian Leggatt, and from new Court member Dr Anthony Falconer (minute 4 refers).

2 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3 DETERMINATION OF OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was no other competent business.

4 MEMBERSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY COURT

- 4.1 Members NOTED two appointments to the University Court, Jackie Macdonald and Dr Anthony Falconer, under powers delegated by Court to the Nominations Committee (COURT (13) 25).
- 4.2 Members DISCUSSED a recommendation for a further appointment arising from the recent recruitment round but AGREED to delay a decision pending the outcome of a further public recruitment round.

In coming to that view, members recognised the significant experience and expertise of the candidate but recognised too the demands placed on Court to ensure that there was a good mix of skills amongst its membership. By delaying a decision until a number of current members demitted office in 2014, it was anticipated that it would be easier to ensure the appointment of candidates who would make an appropriate contribution to the overall skills mix.

5. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

- 5.1 Members RECEIVED a verbal report from the Chair covering the points below.
- 5.2 Discussion at meetings of the Scottish Committee of Chairs over the last six months had been dominated by the new Governance Code. This issue had now been resolved satisfactorily.
- 5.3 The upcoming UCEA meeting would be critical in taking forward current pay negotiations. There was a possibility of industrial action related to these negotiations

6 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

- 6.1 Members RECEIVED a detailed report from the Principal (COURT (13) 26), which highlighted the following points in particular.
- 6.2 QMU had moved up 12 places in the *Times* Good University Guide. No other Scottish university had moved up so many places and Robert Gordon University was the only Scottish post-92 with a higher ranking.
- 6.3 Internal statistics suggested that there had been a 1.2% improvement in QMU's student retention compared to the previous academic year. QMU's graduate employment rate was now 93.8%, putting it in joint 5th place amongst the 17 higher education institutions in Scotland. Student recruitment for Session 2013/14 was broadly on target.
- 6.4 Under revised arrangements agreed with the sector, the next version of the Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council would cover a three year period.
- 6.5 There had been many conferences and events on campus since the last meeting of Court. In addition, the graduation ceremony, held at the Usher Hall for the first time, had received excellent feedback from graduates, parents and staff.
- 6.6 Good progress continued to be made on QM150. Follow up work on the staff survey had continued and was now drawing to a conclusion.
- 6.7 Final preparations were being made for the University's REF 2014 submission.

- 6.8 Court welcomed the appointment of Professor Alice Brown as Chair of the Scottish Funding Council.

7 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Court held on 19 June 2013 (COURT (13) MINS 02) were APPROVED.

8 SENATE

- 8.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Senate meeting held on 26 June 2013 (SENATE (13) MINS 04).

- 8.2 The Principal reported that she had been heartened by the level of interest in KPIs amongst the academic community as demonstrated by discussion of KPIs at this meeting of Senate. Court member Mark Laing had also attended the meeting and had been impressed by the quality of debate and discussion.

9 AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 9.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 18 September 2013 (AUDIT (13) MINS 03) and NOTED the following in particular.

- 9.2 Good progress had been made on increasing the percentage of expenditure being processed through PECOS, and excellent progress had been made on implanting fully audit recommendations from previous years.

- 9.3 The Committee discussed a proposed risk appetite statement along with the revised risk management template. Both items would be discussed at the October meeting of the Court (Minute 15 below refers). A report on business continuity planning would be discussed at its next meeting.

10 FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

- 10.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Finance and Estates Committee meeting held on 25 September 2013 (FEC (13) MINS 03), and NOTED the following in particular.

- 10.2 MINUTE REDACTED - The record of discussion under Minute 10.2 is exempt from disclosure under Section 33 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

- 10.3 In view of the favourable outturn position, the Committee had been asked to consider potential strategic investment in 2013/14 identified and agreed by the Executive Board. Having noted the opportunities and risks associated with the proposal, the Committee AGREED to recommend strongly to the Court that the proposal be approved.
(Secretary's Note: Minute 15 below refers)

- 10.4 Planning application for a wind turbine had been rejected, but the Director of Campus and Commercial Services was optimistic about a further application.

11 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

- 11.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Health and Safety Committee meeting held on 19 September 2013 (H&S (13) MINS 03).
- 11.2 The Health and Safety Adviser had been pleased to advise that the QMU incident rate was significantly lower than that of many other similar organisations.
- 11.3 The Committee planned to review its terms of reference and membership arrangements. Court would be asked to approve any proposed changes in due course.

12 SENIOR MANAGEMENT REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

- 12.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Senior Management Remuneration Committee meeting held on 9 September 2013 (SMRC (13) MINS 02) and NOTED the following points in particular.
- 12.2 Minutes of the meeting were more detailed than those of previous meetings, following discussion and agreement on the subject at the last meeting of Court.
- 12.3 The Committee had reviewed its terms of reference. However, since the terms of reference were discussed and recommended for approval, further internal review of the published Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance had identified an additional and necessary change. Specifically, the published guidance suggested that the chair of a university remuneration committee should be drawn from the members of that committee, other than the chair of court.
- 12.4 Court APPROVED the revised terms of reference for the committee and, further, APPROVED the appointment of the Vice Chair of Court, Mark Laing, as Chair of the Committee, thus addressing the requirement set out in the published Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance.
- 12.5 In response to a query from a member who had not been present at the previous meeting of the Court, the Chair agreed that there could be further discussion at the next meeting of the suggestion that membership of the Committee be extended to include staff representation.

13 MINUTE REDACTED

The record of discussion under Minute 13 is exempt from disclosure under Section 33 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

14 FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2012/13 AND UPDATE

- 14.1 Members RECEIVED an interim report on the financial outturn for 2012/13 (COURT (13) 27) and NOTED the following points in particular.
 - i. The draft accounts showed a surplus of £2.5 million. This outturn was subject to audit and a valuation of the main campus which took place every five years.

- ii. The reasons for the positive variance against forecast included better than anticipated net income from summer business, lower than anticipated claw-back of student fees from the Scottish Funding Council and unused contingency allowances.
- 14.2 Members considered the recommendation from the Finance and Estates Committee concerning proposed additional strategic investments in 2013/14 totaling £500k. Members NOTED that:
- i. £100k of this sum was allowed for in the budget for 2013/14.
 - ii. The majority of the costs were non-recurrent, and majority of the planned investments related to enhancement of the infrastructure for food and drink. There was also an allowance for enhancement of facilities for film and media and for investment in business-critical supporting infrastructure.
 - ii. Although the intention would be that the investments would become self-financing, there was a degree of risk. However, the University had taken the view that contingency allowances in the budget were likely to be sufficient to cover the costs.
 - iii. Although a full business case for the wider food and drink strategy was not yet complete, there had been good discussion with Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Funding Council on the subject and it appeared that the University was well placed to access further funding for work in this area provided that the planned investment in infrastructure was made.
- 14.3 Members were pleased that the University was in a position to invest. Having been assured that the four projects identified for investment had been subject to internal evaluation, Court APPROVED the proposed investment.
- 14.4 Court AGREED further that the Finance and Estates Committee should consider the target level of future surpluses, with a view to ensuring sufficient funds for strategic investments, reserves and the paying down of debt.
- 14.5 The Director of Operations and Finance advised that members of the Finance team meet regularly with budget holders to assess likely future spending, with a view to freeing up expenditure for other purposes where possible.
- 15 RISK APPETITE**
- 15.1 Members RECEIVED a paper from the Head of Planning (COURT (13) 28).
- 15.2 Members APPROVED the proposed risk appetite statement, including associated tolerances and thresholds and NOTED that work was being undertaken to develop examples of the bespoke nature of risk appetite for individual risks.
- 15.3 Members NOTED that a revised corporate risk register, reflecting the approved proposals above, would be presented to the Court at its next meeting.
- 16 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**
- 16.1 Members RECEIVED the Quarter 4 report on Key Performance Indicators 2012/13 (COURT (13) 29) NOTING that some data would only become available when the annual accounts were finalised. Such data would be presented at the December meeting of Court.

- 16.2 Broadly, KPIs were on target, with changes in the last quarter having been positive.
- 16.3 Members NOTED that the financial figures in the KPI document took account of claw-back, which the SFC had applied at two thirds of its standard range.
- 16.4 Members DISCUSSED key performance indicator targets for the session 2013/14 (COURT (13) 30). In response to a query, members were reminded that the current suite of KPIs had been agreed by Court, based on management recommendations.
- 16.5 The Head of Planning reported that the updated targets reflected KPIs proposed by the UK-wide Financial Sustainability Strategy Group, as well as those set out in outcome agreement targets and featuring in league tables. They also took account of the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance.
- 16.6 Court would be presented at its next meeting with a simplified KPI report, along with the standard, more detailed, KPI report. Work was ongoing on responding to the audit recommendations that there should be KPIs which monitor the progress of social and economic development projects and that there should be qualitative and quantitative KPIs related to HR.
- 16.7 Members were invited to suggest HR KPIs, and suggestions included absence and retention rates, sickness days and the number of Performance Enhancement Review meetings held.
- 16.8 It was suggested that the ratio of student applicants to places might be included as a KPI.
- 16.9 The Principal advised that, in addition to the targets for key league table rankings which appeared in the KPIs, the most significant performance indicators related to league table performance appeared as stand-alone KPI targets (e.g. staff/ student ratio). This should help avoid the situation where too much emphasis is placed on league tables rather than the underlying performance issues.
- 16.10 Some members cautioned against over-simplification of KPIs, and highlighted the value of data showing trends. The Head of Planning confirmed that the simplified KPI report would be linked to supporting analysis with more detailed information. One member commented also on the risk of focusing on what was easy to measure rather than what was important.
- 16.11 The Principal and Deputy Principal advised members that some of the KPI targets were based on external benchmarks and targets set by the SFC and others on internal targets. Targets were balanced well between realism and aspiration, but they were very aware of the danger of setting unrealistic financial targets which could result in negative variances against budgets.
- 16.12 It was AGREED that, in establishing future KPIs, it would be helpful to Court to receive more detailed contextual information so as to allow members to assess the appropriateness of the targets.
- 16.13 Members RECEIVED an analysis of the results of the 2013 National Student Survey (NSS) (COURT (13) 31) and NOTED that:
- i. Overall, QMU's results for 2013 were very positive.

- ii. Since the University had entered the survey in 2011, there had been continuous improvement year on year in QMU's results in the majority of the categories.
- iii. Although overall satisfaction in terms of 'percentage agree' for 'satisfaction overall' remained the same for QMU this year compared with last year, there had been an improvement in QMU's mean score. Scottish and UK performance by this measure had stayed the same.
- iv. Although trends in the scores for 'academic support' and 'teaching' were positive, there was still work to be done in improving the score for 'assessment and feedback'. Ongoing work in this area included arranging for a representative of the University of Strathclyde, where there had been much success in this category, to speak to QMU staff. More work would be undertaken to ensure that students realised when they were receiving feedback through the use of language mirroring that of the NSS. Managing students' expectations was also considered important.

16.14 Members RECEIVED a copy of the published outcome of the QAA Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (COURT (13) 32).

17 SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL

17.1 Members HOMOLOGATED the Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council on Institutional Review Activity 2012/13 (COURT (13) 33).

17.2 Members HOMOLOGATED the University Court Statement of Assurance to the SFC concerning the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of QMU's learning provision (COURT (13) 34).

17.3 Members NOTED the timetable and process for the negotiation of the 2014/15 outcome agreement (COURT (13) 35). The outcome agreement would cover a three year period and would be updated annually.

17.4 Members were advised that Scottish Funding Council's timetable did not fit well with QMU's scheduled Court meetings. Nevertheless, Court had a further opportunity to contribute to the outcome agreement through discussion at its meeting in December. Members were assured that the outcome agreement would be discussed at various University committees (including Senate) before then, and that members would see minutes of the relevant committee meetings, as usual.

17.5 In response to a query, members were advised that the University's strategic plan, outcome agreement and KPIs were aligned. For example, the KPIs reflected outcome agreement targets. It was suggested that at the Court away-day, time be allocated to examining the linkages between the strategic plan, QM150 and the outcome agreement.

17.6 It was AGREED that discussion of the outcome agreement would be a substantive item on the December Court meeting agenda

18 SCOTTISH CODE OF GOOD HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

18.1 Members RECEIVED the final published version of the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance (COURT (13) 36).

- 18.2 Members CONSIDERED an update on proposals for the implementation of amendments to QMU governance agreed by Court in its review of the draft code (June 2013) (COURT (13) 37).
- 18.3 Members APPROVED further updates to proposals as set out in the paper (COURT (13) 37) including changes to the terms of reference and membership of the Nominations Committee.
- 18.4 In the course of the academic year, Court would be presented with further updates on implementation of amendments to QMU governance agreed by Court, with a view to the University being able to demonstrate full compliance by summer 2014.
- 18.5 The membership of SMRC was discussed and it was noted that, as with other matters relating to the Code, the Court would have the opportunity to discuss relevant issues further as the session progressed.
- 18.6 Members NOTED a short briefing prepared by Court members Olga Wojtas and Sheila Williams on their attendance at the Leadership Foundation seminar.

19 EAST LOTHIAN PLAN

Members NOTED the East Lothian Single Outcome Agreement 2013 (COURT (13) 38).

20 STRATEGIC THEME: QUEEN MARGARET CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITY

- 20.1 Members RECEIVED a presentation from Mary Brittain, CEO, Children's University (CU) Scotland, and Coordinator, Queen Margaret Children's University
- 20.2 Members NOTED the following key features of the Children's University ie that it:
- Provided accreditation for learning outside of normal school hours.
 - Enabled access to high quality, exciting, innovative learning experiences.
 - Was open to children aged 7 to 14 (and 5 to 6 year olds with their parents).
 - Celebrated achievements at 'graduation' ceremonies.
 - Had to be voluntary.
 - Was interactive and engaging.
 - Raised aspirations and broadened horizons.
 - Boosted achievement.
 - Aligned with Curriculum for Excellence in helping children become successful and confident learners.
 - Importantly, was designed to be fun.
- 20.3 Expected benefits to QMU included: support to its widening access agenda; the creation of learning opportunities based on QMU expertise; the involvement of students; and the further development of the University's profile in terms of community engagement.
- 20.4 Mary Brittain advised that she would welcome ideas for learning destinations from the QMU community and for the University to develop its own learning activities for Children's University participants.
- 20.5 The Chair expressed Court's appreciation of a highly interesting and engaging presentation and of the development of the partnership with the University

21 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Court will meet on the following dates:

4 December 2013
5 & 6 February 2014 (Away Days)
2 April 2014
25 June 2014