



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

UNIVERSITY COURT

CONFIRMED minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2020 by Video Conference.

PRESENT

Linda McPherson (Acting Chair)	Ruth Magowan
Elaine Acaster OBE	Ken McGarrity
Carolyn Bell	Chiara Menozzi
Dr Richard Butt	Melanie Moreland
Professor Graham Caie CBE	Robert Pattullo
Colin Cox	Sarah Phillips
Karen Cullen	Elizabeth Porter
Dr Maria Giatsi-Clausen	Dr Eurig Scandrett
Sir Paul Grice	Dr Andrew Scott
Cynthia Guthrie	Andy White
Dr Arturo Langa	

IN ATTENDANCE

Gordon Craig	Head of Planning
Malcolm Cutt	Director of Operations and Finance
Professor Brigid Daniel	Dean, Arts Social Sciences and Management
Irene Hynd	University Secretary (Secretary)
Dawn Martin	Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality Enhancement (Minute Secretary)
Ian Robertson	Head of Finance
Steve Scott	Director of Campus and Commercial Services

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the University Court, which had been rescheduled from 1 April 2020, and was being conducted virtually due to restrictions in place during the Coronavirus Emergency. Members noted that the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator had stated that charities may hold their meetings in this way, including where the governing document was silent on the matter. In line with good governance, Court discussion and decisions would be recorded in the usual form of confirmed minutes, approved by members.

An apology was noted for Francis Lennon. On behalf of the University Court, the Chair expressed her very best wishes to Frank for a speedy recovery.

2 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3 DETERMINATION OF OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

No other items of competent business had been identified, and there was no business arising from the items provided for information.

4 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair reported on her attendance at the most recent meeting of the Committee of Scottish Chairs (CSC), where there had been early consideration of the sector response to the coronavirus emergency. The Chair of CSC had written to the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, setting out the sector's commitment to supporting Scotland's recovery post COVID-19. The Minister had arranged a meeting with the University Chairs on 6 May 2020, where there would be further opportunity to discuss the individual and collective potential for HEIs to contribute to the economy and wider recovery efforts. The Committee had also discussed the process and significant challenges associated with the appointment process for the senior lay member, as set out in the provisions of the Higher Education Governance Act (Scotland) 2016.

5 MINUTES

5.1 Minutes of the previous meeting

The unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2020 (COURT (20) MINS 01) were APPROVED as an accurate record subject to the following rewording of minute 9:

'Following detailed discussion, Court agreed that the contract, due to its materiality, should have been presented to, and approved by, the Finance and Estates Committee (FEC) in the first instance. The Finance and Estates Committee was asked to review its role within procurement as part of a general review of the Scheme of Delegation.'

5.2 Workshop sessions (Strategy Days)

Court RECEIVED the notes of the workshop sessions held on 5 and 6 February 2020 (Court Strategy Days) (COURT (20) 07). The Chair encouraged members not to lose sight of the positivity generated by the workshop sessions, and captured in the notes. Discussion at the Strategy Days had provided helpful feedback to inform the format and content of the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan. A further iteration of both Plans was provided under agenda item 8.

5.3 Matters arising

There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

6 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT: CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY

6.1 Business Continuity, Adaptation and Recovery

Court RECEIVED a paper setting out key matters relating to the University's response to the coronavirus emergency (Court (20) 08). Introducing the paper, the Principal extended his heartfelt thanks to all staff for their hard work and exceptional flexibility under the ongoing very challenging circumstances. QMU students had also responded magnificently, both to the significant changes to their learning environment, and to the

unprecedented pressure in the NHS and social care settings, and within the wider community.

Members were advised that, as an early response to the emerging circumstances, a Business Continuity Group (BCG) had been established in February 2020. Convened by the Principal, its membership included the Senior Leadership Team, academic and professional services staff, Students' Union, and Trades Unions representation. The BCG had overseen the continued operation of the University during the initial period of upheaval and adjustment. The Group had also considered important policy and regulatory matters, including adjustments to student recruitment and admissions, and to student assessment, progression and award. The BCG continued to meet regularly and would remain in place until such time as there was national or other advice that would be regarded as providing assurance that it could stand down.

Following the immediate and necessary adaptations implemented by the BCG, a Recovery Planning Group (RPG) had been established to consider delivery of learning, teaching and other important aspects of business going forward. Taking into consideration the likely on-going restrictions, the RPG had agreed a flexible base planning position for return to campus. The planned start date for learning and teaching delivery remained at mid-September, in line with the currently published academic calendar, with such delivery being a blend of online and on-campus activity.

Eight work streams had been identified to lead on the following key areas:

- Approach to academic delivery and assessment.
- Academic calendar and timetable.
- Financial implications.
- Campus – adaptations required to allow transition back.
- Student recruitment.
- Staff wellbeing – focusing on 'return to work'
- Student experience.
- Research and Innovation

The work streams sat within an overarching governance framework, overseen by the Senior Leadership Team, to facilitate communication and coherence of approach. Project Managers had been appointed to capture decisions and interdependencies and to track progress against agreed actions. Colleagues from across the University, Students' Union, and Trades Unions representatives were involved in this extensive programme of work.

The work streams had an immediate focus on arrangements for the commencement of academic year 2020-21, and the need to provide continued high quality learning, teaching and student support. Consideration was being given also to longer term planning in recognition of the expected far-reaching impact of the pandemic and the possibility of a second and subsequent wave(s). It was expected that the work streams would continue beyond the start of 2020-21, and that membership and scope would adapt to evolving circumstances. Each of the work streams would consider the equality impacts of its proposals

Recovery plans would continue to be informed by sector and other external developments, as well as lessons learned in adapting to the pandemic. The Principal reported on his on-going engagement with the Scottish Government and the Scottish

Funding Council, and his involvement in sector groups and networks. This included his recent appointment as Chair of Universities Scotland's Learning and Teaching Committee (USLTC), where strategic discussions around learning and teaching models were being discussed and progressed.

The Chair thanked the Senior Leadership Team and the wider staff and student community for the timely, thoughtful and innovative response to the circumstances.

In discussion, members considered a range of matters related to recovery planning, including the adaptation to social distancing restrictions on campus, the implications of moving towards blended learning provision, and the importance of staff and student wellbeing. An update on all aspects of recovery planning would come to the June meeting of Court.

6.2 Potential financial impact

COURT RECEIVED a preliminary analysis of the potential impact of the coronavirus emergency on the University's financial position (COURT (20) 09). The paper addressed the short term financial position in financial year 2019-20, setting out the revised forecast outturn position for the year.

Speaking to the paper, the Principal observed that, prior to the pandemic, the forecast for the current financial year had suggested strong inroads had been made in turning round the income position. As a result of further actions undertaken, mainly through a combination of additional tuition fee income (including income from collaborative partners) and a forecast underspend in staff costs, the updated forecast outturn position would have shown a deficit of £847k, an improvement of £112k against the initial budget. However, the coronavirus emergency had impacted significantly on that position.

MINUTE REDACTED – the record of discussion under Minute 6.2 is exempt from disclosure under Section 33 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

Members were advised that recovery planning for Session 2020-21 focused on a base planning scenario, but made reference to three possible alternative scenarios. The base planning scenario assumed that 50% of planned international student applicants would not take up places, and that 30% of existing international students would not return. These assumptions aligned with the assumptions suggested to universities by the SFC when preparing revised financial forecasts. There were base assumptions also about home and EU student numbers, income from international collaboration, and accommodation occupancy. After mitigating actions, these assumptions resulted in a forecast deficit of just over of £3.5 million. Every effort would be made to address this position, including through continued lobbying at senior governmental level, but it was important to note that the University remained financially viable, having a strong cash position.

Members noted that the SFC had brought forward the submission date for financial forecast returns to 24 April in order to provide the SFC and Scottish Government with early indication of the potential impact of Covid-19 on the sector's financial position, and of mitigating actions being taken by universities. The figures set out in the base planning scenario would provide the basis for the University's submission to the SFC. Work continued on investigating additional ways in which the adverse financial impact could be mitigated, without endangering the future productive capacity of the University.

In discussion, members sought clarification of the potential for further public investment. Members were advised that the level of future public funding from the Scottish Government and SFC represented a major uncertainty, although it was certain that public funding would not continue in its current form. Whilst the UK government was spending a significant amount of money in trying to address immediate needs arising from the crisis, of which the Scottish Government would receive a share through consequential funding, this was likely to be a short term injection of funds. There were good communication channels between SFC and the sector, and the SFC would continue to play an important brokerage role in the response to the pandemic. It was incumbent on universities to act responsibly and flexibly and to approach the SFC and Scottish Government with solutions that would support the economy and wider needs of society. In that context, universities continued to press the Scottish and UK Governments for a statement on EU student fees.

On the matter of the longer-term viability of the University, the Principal, and his senior colleagues, recognised that the circumstances represented an unprecedented financial challenge, but the University's response to the pandemic had demonstrated its agility, and its ability to unite for a common purpose. He remained optimistic that the development of the portfolio and other business areas, including Transnational Education, would contribute to longer term financial sustainability, and allow the University not just to survive, but to develop, capitalising on opportunities for collaborative working, whilst retaining individual institutional autonomy. The impact of any structural shifts, for example any loss of international student income, would be monitored and analysed.

In response to query, the Principal advised that the FEC would receive further detail on longer term maintenance plans, but that the current suspension of such work reflected the fact that contractors could not get on site due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The Chair thanked the Director of Operations and Finance and Head of Finance for preparing the detailed forecasts and opened up discussion. A further update would come to the June meeting of the Court.

7 SFC OUTCOME AGREEMENT

7.1 Outcome Agreement Funding allocation

Court RECEIVED an analysis of the University Outcome Agreement Funding allocation 2020-21, which had been published by the SFC on 7 April 2020 (COURT (20) 10). Sector level headlines were as follows:

- The SFC's revenue budget for 2020-21 had increased by 2.7% (£27.9 million) from 2019-20.
- Teaching funding had increased by 3.1% (£20.3 million).
- Research and innovation budgets had received an inflationary increase of 1.8% (£5.2 million).
- Funding for other national investments had increased by £8.8 million.
- Capital maintenance funding had been broadly maintained, in cash terms, at the same level as last year.

The allocations for QMU showed an increase of 7.0% in overall funding for teaching, this being £358k better than anticipated in the June 2019 financial forecasts. Research and

innovation funds were broadly in line with expectation, meaning that overall funding for teaching and research was £353k higher than forecast, and up £965k (6.3%) from the 2019-20 allocation. In addition, funding of £260k has been allocated to abate part of the increase in STSS pension contributions which had taken effect in September 2019.

7.2 Outcome Agreement 2020-23

The University Secretary provided an oral update on the development of the Queen Margaret University Outcome Agreement 2020-23. At its previous meeting, Court had received the draft 'near-final' Queen Margaret University Outcome Agreement for 2020-23, which had been submitted to the SFC on 13 December 2019. Feedback from the SFC on that draft had been very positive, with no substantive changes identified. In recognition of the significant challenge presented to the sector by the coronavirus emergency, the SFC had since committed to keep its returns and reporting requirements to 'an absolute minimum'. In line with this, further Outcome Agreement deadlines, including the planned deadline for submission of the final version had been lifted. The SFC had undertaken a review of near-final Outcome Agreements submitted in December 2019, and it would work from these versions for 2020-21. On that basis, the SFC had published its final funding announcement for universities for Academic Year 2020-21 on 7 April 2020.

The QMU near-final Outcome Agreement would continue to be updated to align with the revised Strategy and Delivery Plan, and to reflect the potential impact of the coronavirus on the outputs and outcomes listed.

8 STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-25 AND SUPPORTING DELIVERY PLAN

8.1 Refreshed strategic plan 2020-25

Court RECEIVED a further iteration of the draft Strategic Plan for the period 2020-25 (COURT (20) 11). The updated Plan reflected the feedback from the Court Strategy Days in February 2020, as well as input from the wider stakeholder consultation process. Key changes from the version presented at the Strategy Days included the following:

- A reworking of the introduction to reference COVID-19 and acknowledge the need to take account of the lessons learned.
- The inclusion of a 'purpose' rather than a 'vision' statement.
- The value of 'education' being replaced by 'intellectual curiosity'.
- The retitling of the strategic goal 'Lead the sector on sustainability' to 'Embed sustainability across our portfolio and practices'.
- Amendment of the text under a number of the strategic goals 'to acknowledge the necessary adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Amendments to presentation and layout, taking into account comments on technology balance and collaboration

It had originally been planned to publish the Strategic Plan in June 2020, following Court in April 2020. However, the intervening coronavirus emergency had impacted on this timeline, and the decision had been taken to delay publication slightly, with a final version due to be considered for approval at the following meeting of Court.

8.2 Delivery Plan

Members CONSIDERED the draft Delivery Plan in support of the Strategic Plan (Court (20) 12). The Delivery Plan, which had been updated following the Strategy Days in February 2020, and wider stakeholder consultation process, was designed to be an active document, which would be updated regularly. COVID-19 recovery planning actions had been included upfront in the most recent iteration. Unlike the goals in the rest of the Plan, these were not linked directly to the Strategic Plan. The work in this area would influence the nature and timing of many of the actions in the Plan, and would be reviewed regularly. A baseline column had been added to the KPIs section and the order of the 2022 milestones and 2025 target reversed. KPIs had also been aligned with specific outcomes.

Members welcomed both documents, agreeing that they captured the feedback provided previously. There was particular discussion around the extent to which the plans should refer directly to the coronavirus emergency, with one member suggesting that 'flagging' in each area perhaps given undue prominence, and other members suggesting that it was important to recognise the impact of the situation. It would be important too to capture in the plans some of the 'lessons learned'. The Principal undertook to reflect further on these points.

The finalised Strategic Plan would come to the June meeting of the Court, with a view to it being published digitally, with embedded links, in July. The Delivery Plan would continue to be a work in progress.

9 LAND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Court RECEIVED a presentation on the land development project from the Director of Campus and Commercial Services. Given the limited exposure to the development of some newly appointed members, the presentation covered the governance, history of the project and key milestones since 2012, when the Strategic Development Plan for South East Scotland had been agreed. QMU key interests were the Edinburgh Innovation Park and Commercial Zone. The 2018 City Region Deal had secured funds for the development of the Innovation Park, the aspirations for which were aligned with QMU's strategic priorities. The development was also likely to align with Scottish Government priorities for the sector post COVID-19 i.e. a focus on the development of infrastructure and collaboration with local authorities and agencies.

Whilst the initial business case had concentrated primarily on the food and drink agenda, this had evolved to span the wider academic and research activities of the University. The outline business case for the Park had been well received by the City Deal, with mostly positive feedback, but a number of areas for further development. A sub group of the FEC had been established to provide additional support in the development of the Full Business Case. The full business case was due to be submitted by the end of June 2020, prior to which it would be considered by the FEC sub-group and by the Finance and Estates Committee at the end of May.

The timescale for the development of the Commercial Zone would depend on progress with the other elements of the development. Importantly, this included the construction of the new A1 junction. Around half of the Commercial Zone land was reserved for a hotel, which would ideally be used for QMU practical learning experiences, and the remainder mostly for retail outlets.

The Chair thanked the Director of Campus and Commercial Services for the informative presentation. A further update would come to the June meeting of the Court. It was not expected that timescales would be adjusted significantly as a result of the coronavirus emergency, but there were likely to be some implications, which would be subject to further consideration as circumstances evolved.

10 FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Court NOTED the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Estates Committee held on 3 March 2020 (FEC (20) MINS 01).

11 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Court NOTED the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 28 January 2020 (AUDIT (20) MINS 01). The following matters were brought to members' attention:

- Scott Moncrieff had delivered a helpful training session on good practice and current frameworks of cyber security.
- Report on UKVI compliance – The report confirmed that QMU was managing its Tier 4 and Tier 2 licenses in compliance with UKVI guidance. No instances of non-compliance had been identified.
- The five-year external audit contract with Ernst and Young was due to come to an end this year. The external tender process would conclude with a recommendation to the following meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee.

12 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Court NOTED the minutes of the meeting of the Health and Safety Committee held on 13 March 2020 (HSC (20) MINS 02).

13 NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Court APPROVED the recommendation (COURT (20) 13) for the reappointment of Elaine Acaster, Sarah Phillips and Dr Andrew Scott to the membership of the University Court, such appointment being for a three year period from 26 June 2020 to 25 June 2023. Under Article 6 (1) of the University's governing instrument, on the expiry of a three year term of office, a Lay member was eligible to be reappointed 'for one further term of a maximum of 3 years'.

14 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Court NOTED the minutes of the Equality and Diversity Committee held on 27 February 2020 (EDC (20) MINS 01).

15 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Court would meet on 24 June 2020 at 3.00 pm.

Dawn Martin
Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality Enhancement
May 2020