

UHI Court Meeting

Tue 22 August 2023, 13:00 - 15:00

LSIC, Inverness Campus



Attendees

Board members

Alastair MacColl (Chair), Vicki Nairn (Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor), Andrea Robertson, Rosemary McCormack, Derek Lewis (West Highland College), Angus Campbell, Malcolm Burr, Sara O'Hagan, Heather Offord, Calum Ross, Mei-Li Roberts, Helen MacInnes, Alex Paterson, Allan Clow, Fiona McLean, Neil Simco (Vice Principal Research & Impact), Sheena Stewart (University Secretary), Lorna Walker, Roger Sendall, Scott Rhynas in part, Gary I Campbell in part, Iain Morrison - in part, David Paterson - in part

Meeting minutes

1. Preliminary Items

The Chair reported that Murray Easton had resigned as an independent member of the University Court in July. Court recorded thanks to Mr Easton for his valuable contributions and service to Court and to the Finance and General Purposes and Audit committees and as former member of the board of UHI Moray.

1.1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Sandison Mr W Campbell and Dr Malik.

1.2. Declarations of interest

- Mrs Robertson advised that her husband was an employee of the University and therefore she had a potential conflict of interest in relation to the Executive Office restructure.
- Mr Campbell advised that he was also a member of the Board of Highlands and Islands Enterprise.
- Mr Lewis advised that as Chair of UHI North West and Hebrides he held an interest in agenda item 5.4.

1.3. Notification of other business

None.

1.4. *Starring

Starred System

1. All items unstarred will be approved/noted in terms of the recommendation set out in the relevant papers without discussion.
2. Members are invited at the outset of the meeting to request starring any unstarred item which the member wishes to be discussed.

2. *Minutes of meetings

2.1. *Approval of the minutes of:

2.1.1. 21st June 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2023 were reviewed and approved as an accurate record.

 UC230822-01 21 June 2023 Court Draft Minutes.pdf

2.1.2. 3rd July 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd July 2023 were reviewed and approved as an accurate record subject to the addition of Ms Lorna Walker as being in attendance throughout the meeting.

 UC230822-02 Draft UHI Court minutes 3 July 2023.pdf

2.2. *Matters arising

Court considered paper UC230822-03 providing a summary of actions and matters arising from previous meetings. The following points were noted and agreed:

- Item 1 relating to the development of a clear policy and procedures around the payment of cash advances, other financial support and associated conditions to Academic Partners was ongoing. Court noted that a paper would be presented to the Finance and General Purposes Committee in due course.
- Item 2 - Court agreed to close this action as the Court is accountable for all key decisions and strategy and all such key decisions are progressed via Court as per core business.
- Item 3 - complete.
- Items 4 and 5 relating to economic development will be consolidated into one action with a report presented to the next meeting of Court.

 UC230822-03 Matters Arising.pdf

2.3. * Delegated decisions

Court homologated the following delegated decisions:

- Nomination Committee decision to appoint Mr Allan Clow as Chair of the University Audit Committee. It was noted that Mr Clow would now step down from the Finance and General Purposes Committee.
 - Nomination Committee decision to invite Mr Paul Travill to become an independent member of Court and an independent member of FGPC.
 - Nomination Committee decision to invite Mr Graham Watson Chair of UHI Perth to join FGPC as an Academic Partner representative.
 - Nomination committee decision to appoint Mr Alex Patterson as an independent member of the Remuneration and FGPC committees.
-

3. * Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor Update

Court received a report from the interim Principal and Vice Chancellor setting out a summary of key developments and activities that had occurred since Court's last meeting at the beginning of July. The following points were noted:


- The University had achieved excellent results in both the Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey 2023 and the National Student Survey 2023.
- The UHI North West and Hebrides merger had completed on 1st August 2023. Whereas, this was a moment to celebrate and would provide an opportunity to develop a more sustainable institution, the merger had not been achieved without difficulty and staff had been actively engaged in negotiations with the SFC right up to the point of merger in order to address severe emerging financial sustainability issues including provision of emergency funding. The iPVC thanked colleagues, the SFC and members of Court for their proactive and constructive engagement throughout this process.
- Court noted the need to maintain scrutiny and regular monitoring of the financial performance of the new college and agreed to progress a thorough review of the merger proposal and approval processes including financial due diligence controls to identify and capture lessons learned.
- The Executive Office restructure is progressing. An all staff forum had been held on 17th August and a required period of staff consultation that would last a minimum of 30 days had started.
- Notification had been received from UHI Shetland that they were continuing to experience financial challenges and would likely be seeking additional financial support from the University as the Regional Strategic Body.
- UHI2024 - the majority of the workstreams are progressing to plan. The Programme Board Chair undertook to work with the Director of Transformation to prepare a briefing note and overview document on the UHI2024 workstreams for the benefit of new Court members.
- Court requires sight of individual Academic Partner financial sustainability plans as a matter of priority.

 UC230822-04 iPVC report to Court Aug 23.pdf

4. Students' Association Report

Court noted paper UC230822-05 providing a summary of the Students Associations' activities during the period June - August 2023.

Court was pleased to note the imminent appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer subject to their acceptance of terms.

 UC230822-05 Students Association Court Report.pdf

5. *Strategic Items for discussion

5.1. * National Student Survey/Postgraduate Taught Student Survey Results

Iain Morrison In Attendance.

Court received a brief presentation from the Dean of Student Experience in connection with recent excellent institutional results achieved in both the Post Graduate Taught Education Survey and the National Student Survey.


Court commended staff on the fantastic results and highlighted the importance of maximising visibility of the results as part of a coordinated marketing and recruitment strategy.

 UC230822-06 National Student Surveys Results 2023.pdf

5.2. * HE Student recruitment update

Court received a brief presentation from the directors of Planning and Performance and Student Recruitment and Admissions in connection with current student recruitment activity and forecast student numbers for 2023/24. The following points were noted:

- Student recruitment activity remains below target across the HE sector and whilst there is likely to be a small increase over 2022/23 applications and enrolments it is unlikely that the University will achieve its core targets. Current estimates indicate that HE recruitment activity is 11% below target.
- Clearing is currently ongoing but activity is reported as generally quiet across the Scottish HE sector with a decline in full time applications.
- There has been some growth in part time applications and this is regarded as common in the context of current cost of living challenges with many students looking to work and study part time.
- Competition within the Scottish HE sector is high and some institutions have lowered entry tariffs in an effort to increase market share. As a widening access institution, UHI is vulnerable to this type of competition.
- The student admissions team are still progressing active marketing of places via targeted social media, however, the main focus of recruitment actively is now on converting applications to enrolments and on attracting January starts.
- Future recruitment activities will focus on attracting early applicants with a reduced reliance on clearing.
- Court members queried the current methodology and approach to forecasting demand and setting appropriate and realistically achievable stretched student number targets. It was noted that the existing process was largely driven by academic partner aspirations and that further work was progressing to develop more robust and accurate models.
- It was agreed that future recruitment reports would be amended to include information to demonstrate the direct link between students numbers and secured income.
- It was agreed that Court would receive early sight of all planned future marketing campaigns and recruitment strategies in order that they could be assured that plans were robust, to offer advice and comment and to influence development and investment in activity as necessary.

 UC230822-07 Court Student Recruitment and Numbers update August 2023.pdf

5.3. * Meeting with college chairs and principals 15 August 2023

Court were advised that the interim Principal and the Chair had held a constructive meeting with the Chairs and Principals of all the UHI assigned colleges in Stirling. This meeting had achieved broad agreement and a commitment from these APs on closer integration and collaboration including agreement to consider closer alignment and new governance structures. A record of this meeting was currently being finalised and this would be shared with Court members in due course.


5.4. * UHI North, West and Hebrides merger update and actions

Court discussed and noted the following two papers provided in connection with the UHI North, West and Hebrides merger process.

- i. Paper UC230822-08a comprising an overview of the process and decisions approved by Court between formal meetings to provide emergency funding to support UHI North West and Hebrides and to facilitate the merger on 1st August 2023.
- ii. Paper UC230822-08b - comprising a letter from the Scottish Funding Council to the interim Principal and Vice Chancellor dated 31 July 2023 setting out the terms and conditions associated with emergency funding for the new college.

The following points were noted and agreed:

- Court homologated the decisions as set out within paper UC230822-08a.
- The University Secretary would commission and lead a lessons learned review of the financial aspects that arose late in the merger process and Court members were invited to submit comments to the Secretary in relation to any specific expectations or specific aspects that they would wish to be covered within the scope of such review.
- Broadly, the review scope would include the following; developing a clear understanding of why the deficit position had arisen and why it had not been identified or declared earlier; a review of due diligence and governance processes and how these were monitored by the RSB; and consideration of how the RSB monitors the financial health of assigned colleges and the actions that are currently in place.
- The timescales, format and scope of the review would be developed further and a draft terms of reference and scope would be circulated to Court for comment and endorsement within the next few weeks.
- The Chair of UHI North West and Hebrides thanked the University Court and colleagues within the Scottish Funding Council for their proactive engagement and substantive support and noted that the new college was now working diligently to develop a new operating plan and a sustainable and successful entity.

 UC230822-08a College merger emergency funding overview report.pdf


 UC230822-08b UHI-Merger-Funding-Letter-310723.pdf

5.5. MAATIC briefing

Court considered paper UC230822-09 seeking confirmation for continued financial support and a firm commitment from the University to progress the Moray Aerospace, Advanced Technology & Innovation Campus project in accordance with the Moray Growth Deal.

The following points were noted and agreed:

- The University Court had previously agreed to commit support to the Moray Growth Deal project including acting as the obligant for the development of a new technology campus located adjacent to RAF Lossiemouth that would house an aircraft donated by Boeing to be used for training aircraft engineers.
- The project had developed and changed scope substantially over the past 18-24 months and was now focussed on delivering fully immersive virtual training in Elgin with new training facilities developed via the refurbishment of an existing town centre facility close to the UHI Moray main campus.
- The project is currently at final draft Full Business Case stage and significant efforts have been deployed to control costs and to reduce the University's exposure to associated financial risks.
- The project is likely to require up to £5M cashflow (working capital) from the University by 2031, that may be recovered from income generated by the with a projected net benefit to the University of £3.8M by 2038.
- Members noted that the project was politically very important and they were mindful of previous commitments made, however, they noted that the scope of the project had changed significantly and whilst the financial risks had reduced with the new scope the request for financial support in terms of cashflow was still very significant and not without risk.
- Court agreed to convene a special single item meeting to consider the draft Full Business Case in greater detail before committing to the project and confirming continued support. **Action: University Secretary to convene a special meeting.**

 UC230822-09 Note for Court on MAATIC.pdf

6. *Any Other Business

None.

7. * Reserved Business

RESERVED BUSINESS REDACTED

8. Dates of next Court meetings

- 01 November 2023
- 20-21 November 2023 [Court conference]
- 14 December 2023
- 14 February 2024
- 23 April 2024
- 26 June 2024