Heriot-Watt University

THE COURT

Minutes: 21 March 2024

In the Chair: Mr Bruce Pritchard, Chair of Court

Present:
Mr Scott Anderson, Student Union (SU) President
Dr Richard Armour, Lay Member
Professor Mark Biggs, Vice-Principal and Provost (*except M24/36*)
Mr Graeme Dickson, Lay Member
Dr Fadi Ghaith, Senate Member
Mr Connel Greenhorn, SU Vice-President (Education)
Mr Steve Heathcote, Lay Member
Dr Brian Henderson, Alumni Member (*from 9.25am*)
Professor David Jenkins, Trade Union Member
Mr Gary Kildare, Lay Member
Mr Paul Lewis, Lay Member *(until 11.55am)*
Dr Bill MacPherson, Senate Member
Ms Morag McNeill, Lay Member
Mr Jürgen Munz, Trade Union Member
Ms Marta Phillips, Lay Member
Mr Chris Pirie, Staff Member
Mr Bruce Roberts, Staff Member
Mr Alan Robertson, Lay Member
Mr Ian Stevenson, Lay Member (*until 11am*)
Mr Mike Tumilty, Lay Member
Professor Richard Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor
Ms Dorothy Wright, Lay Member

In attendance:
Ms Ruth Moir, University Secretary
Professor Mushtak Al-Atabi, Vice-Principal and Provost (Malaysia) (*until 12pm*)
Professor Malcolm Chrisp, Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) (*except M24/36*)
Mr Richard Claughton, Global Director of HR
Ms Sue Collier, Global Director of Governance and Legal Services (GALS)
Ms Lucy Everest, Global Chief Operating Officer (GCOO) (*except M24/36*)
Professor Angus Laing, Executive Dean (Edinburgh Business School (EBS) and the School of Social Sciences (SoSS)) (*for M24/23.7*)
Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer, Deputy Principal (Global Sustainability) (*except M24/36*)
Professor Dame Heather McGregor, Vice-Principal and Provost (Dubai) (*except M24/36*)
Professor Steve McLaughlin, Deputy Principal (Research and Impact) (*except M24/36*)
Professor Gill Murray, Deputy Principal (Enterprise and Business) (*until 11.30am*)
Ms Ruth O'Hanlon, Campaign Director (*for M24/23.3*)
Mr Martin Pringle, Global Finance Director (GFD) (*except M24/36*)
Mr John Rushforth, Advance HE (*for M24/22.1*)
Ms Lisa Herlihy, Clerk to the Court

MINUTE REF

M24/13 WELCOME, APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and noted the following declarations of interest:

- Mr Jürgen Munz, in relation to M24/23.7 *Ambition 2030: Transforming EBS*. Mr Munz was a staff member in SoSS / EBS. It was noted that his interest did not prevent him taking part in the discussion of this item; and

- Mr Paul Lewis, in relation to M24/22, which considered his renewal as a Court member. Mr Lewis exited the meeting during discussion of this item.

M24/14 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF 7 DECEMBER 2023 AND 21 FEBRUARY 2024

The Court received and approved the minutes of the meetings held on 7 December 2023 and 21 February 2024.

M24/15 REPORT FROM THE COURT INTERIM BUSINESS COMMITTEE (CIBC) (Ct2/24/01)

The Court received and noted the report from the CIBC, presented by the Chair. The Committee had approved by correspondence changes to the Constitution of

MINUTE REF

the Watt Club, as well as the appointment of Mr Bruce Roberts to the Governance and Nominations Committee from 1 February 2024 until 31 July 2026.

The Chair reported that the CIBC had held its first advisory meeting on 19 January 2024 and had discussed next steps for the development of Strategy 2035, including convening a Strategy Review Group. The Committee had also received an update on key initiatives and priorities and had provided advice on next steps for progressing the partnership opportunity in Azerbaijan (see M24/21). This included the development of a set of parameters for pursuing TNE opportunities, which was in progress. Finally, the Committee had received an update on the University's financial position as at January 2024.

M24/16 ACTIONS LOG AND MATTERS ARISING

The Court received and noted the Action Log, presented by the Chair, and agreed that those items marked as complete would now be removed from the Log.

The Court noted that the University Secretary would continue to work with other members of the Executive to close off longstanding actions on the Log. It was intended to close these for the June 2024 meeting.

M24/17 BUSINESS REPORTED BY THE CHAIR (VERBAL)

Court Effectiveness: Papers
The Chair observed that the Court and Senate Effectiveness Review recommendations (see M24/22.1) included advice to reduce the volume of committee papers. There had been a considerable volume of papers for this meeting and it was recognised that this needed improvement in future. Members were welcome to provide comments and concerns about the papers to the Chair and the University Secretary outwith the meeting. The Chair requested that the GFD provide comfort, at relevant points within the meeting, that the proposals submitted for approval had been included within the incremental costs in the Financial Forecast.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Training for Court and Court Committee members
The Court noted that members had been invited to complete a Board EDI module, which would be mandatory going forward (in line with an internal audit recommendation for the University). Members should contact the Secretariat if they had any problems completing the training.

Senior Non-Executive Appointments
The Chair reported that the University was currently progressing appointments for a Pro-Chancellor in Malaysia, and for the Chair of the HWUM Board.

M24/18 STRATEGIC SUMMARY REPORT (PRESENTATION)

The Court received a Strategic Summary Report, focused on current issues for the University, presented by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor.

The Principal reported that communications across the University had focused on three practical areas for 2023-24: delivering excellence, assuring sustainable growth, and aligning people, systems and processes. As part of this focus, the University was working on developing partnership working with staff and ensuring dialogue during change management, learning lessons from the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation and the Finance Improvement Plan (FIP). The Court agreed that it would be helpful to demonstrate how the actions within the 2023-24 areas of focus were being turned into outcomes, and to receive an update on work on the Schools and the Global Research Institutes.

A number of initiatives were highlighted, including the delivery of live information on student attainment, progression and retention, with work now to be done to support staff in utilising that data. The Court also noted that the University had

been successful in creating six Centres for Doctoral Training, securing funding for 250 PhD students, with up to 600 PhD students expected over the next five years.

The Court noted that benchmarking had been completed for perceptions of service effectiveness and the University had seen improvements in Information Services, management reporting and teaching administration. Heriot-Watt had moved from the bottom of the table to mid-table based on these changes. The Court agreed that it would receive a further update on the Service Effectiveness Programme at a future meeting.

Ambassadorial Topics for Court members
The Principal highlighted topics where Court members could contribute to wider sector discussions, and the key messages for each topic. In Scotland, the Government had plans to reduce the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) budget and to control subject access. Universities were therefore indicating to Government that the sector needed pathways that increased the unit of support available per student and gave institutions the ability to make subject allocations.

In addition, the Government was seeking HE involvement in plans for devolution, and universities were communicating to the Government the importance of assuring research funding from the UKRI, and to ensure confidence in the sector so that there was no loss of key staff. The ability to access new opportunities in Europe would also be beneficial. The Court discussed HE involvement in devolution planning, noting that it was not appropriate for universities, as charitable bodies, to be involved in policy development. The Principal noted that a cross-university response from Universities Scotland was being developed and that this would be focused on specific facts that affected universities. Separately, universities were providing feedback on the future needs of the Scottish sector.

In the UK sector, Universities UK (UUK) and the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) were reviewing processes around admissions and visas for international students. UUK's message was that restrictions on international students should not be a method of immigration control because student talent was essential to the growth of the UK and Scottish economies. Transnational Education (TNE) was a key opportunity for UK universities. In addition, Heriot-Watt was keen to see UK research grant funding that could be used for its Dubai Campus. The Court noted that UUK was preparing a campaign to explain the impact of education on the lives of 100 students and that this would benefit all institutions.

The University was communicating to the UAE government that research funding should be available to all Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) accredited universities, and that a larger pool of research funding was required to drive excellence. The University was reinforcing with the CAA the headline principle that programmes in Dubai would continue to be delivered in the same way as in Scotland.

In Malaysia, the key item at present was ensuring proficient operation of the national visa agency and promoting education of international students in Malaysia.

The Court agreed that there was a great deal to unpack in these topics and that a more detailed briefing on these matters would be organised for a future meeting. The Chair reported that an education programme for Court members, which could help members develop in their roles, was being considered and these key topics could form part of that education programme. The University would be considering the most appropriate way for Court members to fulfil their ambassadorial role in future, which would involve continuing to provide key messages.

The Court observed that there had been high profile media coverage around the HE sector recently and queried whether the University was part of managing the response to this coverage. The GCOO confirmed that Heriot-Watt was working closely with UUK International on the required messaging and that this could form part of the more detailed briefing agreed above.

MINUTE REF

M24/19 PRINCIPALS REPORT TO COURT (Ct2/24/02)

The Court received and noted the Principal's Report, presented by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor. This included updates on delivery of the strategic themes and milestones for each of the University's SPIs, as well as cross-campus news.

M24/20 GLOBAL UPDATE FROM THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE BODIES (SRBs) (PRESENTATION)

The Court received and discussed a global update from the SRBs, presented by the SU President and the SU Vice-President (Education).

Reducing Student Isolation
The Court noted that the Big 6 Student Survey had identified that 7% of Heriot-Watt students in the UK did not have any friends, and there would therefore be a continued focus on reducing student isolation. The Court agreed that addressing this issue would require joint effort from the SRBs and the University, and that the Global Student Life Committee would work with the SRBs and the Executive to identify whether there was broader activity that could be progressed.

The Court noted that neurodiversity could impact on the ability to make friends and queried what support was made available for neurodiverse students. The SU President reported that a transition programme was run by the University for students with neurodiversity when they joined, and that the SRBs would consider touch points with those students to build on this work. The SRBs would also consider re-launching a buddy system for students but noted that there had previously been difficulties in focusing this support where it was truly needed. Events such as the Mid-week Mixers had been developed in part to replace the previous buddy system. The Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) observed that education delivery which focused on connecting students would support the work being done by the SRBs.

Activities were taking place across all campuses, including sporting events such as the Watt Olympics in Dubai, a global day to celebrate international culture, and Mid-week Mixers at the Edinburgh Campus, amongst many others. The first society at the Orkney Campus, a Scuba Society, had recently been developed using the Community Fund provided via the University's Annual Fund. The Sports Union had hosted the annual Sports Ball at the Edinburgh Campus, including awards for clubs and volunteers, and had welcomed Sports Union Presidents from across Scotland.

Relieving Financial Pressure
The SU Vice-President (Education) reported that further discounts for students at the Dubai Campus had been established via the discount card, and a system had been developed to allow students to access free period products from the Reception team as easily as possible. In Malaysia, free sports facilities continued to be provided. Activities in Galashiels and Orkney were being funded by the Community Fund so that these were low-cost for students, and a free meal was being served each month at the Edinburgh Campus. The SU had provided funding for the Muslim Society's Iftar meals during Ramadan.

Limiting Student Confusion
Several initiatives were underway, including a centralised activity calendar and one-stop facilities booking calendar in Malaysia. In Scotland, the SU were working with the University to develop a self-service checkout approach for key processes, retaining the ability for students to speak to staff about complicated issues.

Global Connectivity
The Court noted that a 'Your Voice' review had been held, with 70 student representatives participating globally. Global events had also been held on International Women's Day and on Valentine's Day, with the latter focusing on healthy relationships.

MINUTE REF

M24/21 TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE) OPPORTUNITY IN AZERBAIJAN (Ct2/24/72)

The Court received and considered an update on a TNE opportunity in Azerbaijan, presented by the Vice-Principal and Provost.

The Court noted that this item was being presented as part of a process that had seen engagement with the CIBC, the Finance Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC). Approval was not being sought at this meeting; instead the Executive were seeking agreement that the proposal could be presented to the ARC, for endorsement of the risks, and to the Finance Committee, for approval of the business plan.

The proposal was that the University would re-establish an academic partnership with the Baku Higher Oil School (BHOS), delivering three intakes of a MSc in Renewable Energy Engineering in order to positively impact Azerbaijan's transition towards Net Zero. The partnership with BHOS had previously delivery high calibre students and a very good financial return for the University.

XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.33, s30b

Next Steps
Following a full, detailed discussion, the Court agreed that the University would prioritise developing a TNE Framework that provided parameters within which opportunities would be considered, and that the Court would not make a decision on the Azerbaijan opportunity until this Framework had been approved. Decision-making on TNE opportunities could not be delegated to the ARC and the Finance Committee until this Framework was agreed by the Court. Whilst the Court was sympathetic to the underlying objective of assisting Azerbaijan with a just transition to Net Zero, there were significant concerns around the associated reputational risks. The Court wished to see a stronger set of mitigations that fully addressed each risk before approval of the proposal was sought.

Amongst the points raised by members were:

- a request for clarity regarding the nature of the academic relationship and delivery model. The Vice-Principal reported that Academic Quality had been fully involved in developing the delivery model and the proposal was very similar to the previous relationship with BHOS;

- that work was required to identify how reputational risks would be managed if they materialised, including scenario planning and a suite of responses;

- that the University should consider developing its Enterprise Risk Management approach;

- **XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.33**

M24/22 REPORT FROM THE GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE (Ct2/24/04)

The Court received the report from the Governance and Nominations Committee, presented by the Chair, and approved items as below.

The Court **approved**:

i. the renewal of Mr Paul Lewis as a Court member, member of the Staff Committee, and the Finance Improvement Plan Oversight Group from 1 August 2024 until 31 January 2026;

ii. the revised Court and Court Committee Standing Orders;

iii. the Constitutional Framework Guidance Document (previously titled Constitutional Framework Definitions Document); and

iv. the appointment of Mr Martin Pringle as a Director of Heriot-Watt Trading Ltd.

22.1 Court and Senate Effectiveness Review Report

The Court welcomed to the meeting Mr John Rushforth from Advance HE, who had been the Lead Reviewer for the Court and Senate Effectiveness Review.

The Lead Reviewer reported that there were no fundamental issues with the University's governance arrangements and the recommendations were therefore focused on transitioning away from a culture of accountability and checking towards a more strategic approach. The three key areas of focus were: ensuring that papers were centred on outcomes and that less time was spent reviewing past activity; working with the Senate on engagement around their areas of responsibility; and developing support for governors so that they could complete their roles as effectively as possible.

During discussion of the report, the Court observed that actions taken because of feedback provided by staff should be clearly communicated to ensure that the link to staff feedback could be seen. It would also be important to format Senate meetings so they encouraged discussion and debate around important topics.

The Committee queried the likely timescale for developing a strategic approach to governance. The Lead Reviewer observed that he could provide an estimate only, but that it should be possible to make some significant changes within the next two years, with the full culture shift likely to take three to four years. It was noted that it often took time to build comfort amongst staff so that culture change was possible. It would be easier for the Court to adjust its own behaviours because it was a smaller group.

The Court agreed that seeking feedback at the end of Committee meetings would be very important so that paper authors could receive advice on how to improve, and the Court requested that the Chair of each Court Committee implement this for future meetings. A key element in improving papers was focusing very clearly on the reason for providing a paper and explaining requirements to paper authors. It was noted that papers should provide analysis that helped the Court and Senate to understand the decisions required.

The Court thanked the Lead Reviewer for the excellent report and for the collaborative approach to its development. At this stage, the Lead Reviewer departed.

The Court considered the initial implementation plan that had been developed, noting that an early focus would be on the Joint Court and Senate meeting, which would be held in person on 8 May 2024. This would address the recommendation to develop a shared understanding of the responsibilities of the Court and the Senate in challenging the Executive. It would also be an opportunity to begin developing a culture that encouraged debate.

Other actions would include issuing communications after each Court and Senate meeting to explain the business to staff, as well as ensuring that there was an item at Senate meetings for the SRBs to present. There would be continued work to ensure that delegations to Court Committees were working effectively, without repeating discussions at Court level.

The Court **approved** the Report, including the 11 recommendations contained within. The Court also **approved** the initial implementation plan presented within the paper.

M24/23 REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE (Ct2/24/05)

The Court received and considered the report from the Finance Committee, presented by the Chair, and approved items as below.

The Chair of the Finance Committee reported that the Committee had approved the Financial Forecast Update for the SFC, which provided the foundation for the budget assumptions in the Three-Year Financial Plan. The Finance Committee had requested a view of future initiatives and how these fit with the budget planning assumptions.

The Committee had also received the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) and approved the governance arrangements, and had been pleased to receive the Business Case Framework that would be implemented by the University. The Framework would be subject to continuous improvement as it was used.

23.1 Dubai Expansion Investment Proposal (Appendix 1)

XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s33

Following a full discussion, the Court **approved the proposal in principle** and delegated final approval to the Finance Committee.
As part of the wider discussion, the Court requested clarity around how individual proposals fit within the University's financial plan for returning to a surplus position. The GFD indicated that there was sufficient cash to fund the Dubai Expansion Investment Proposal and other capital projects, and that this proposal would contribute to reaching a break-even position. The full Capital Plan would be clearly laid out within the Three-Year Financial Plan scheduled for presentation to the Finance Committee and the Court in June 2024. The Court agreed that the Finance Committee would ensure there was clarity around the ranking of projects within the Three-Year Financial Plan.

23.2 Proposed new Fixed Term Deposit Account in Dubai (Appendix 2)
The Court **approved** the proposal for a new Fixed Term Deposit account for the Dubai Campus.

23.3 Campaign Case for Support (Appendix 3)

The Principal reported that the Case for Support had been presented to the Donations and Investments Committee and the Finance Committee, and that the document would form the basis of a public campaign launch in Autumn 2024. The campaign's theme, Shaping the Future, had been developed with stakeholder groups. Key areas for the Campaign would be Empower through Education; Drive Sustainability; Transform Healthcare; and Innovate with Business and Industry.

The Court queried whether there was a strategy for providing feedback to donors on the impact on their donations, including those who had contributed to the 1821 Appeal. The Principal confirmed that this work would be undertaken, and that the team would also be considering how to build strategic links between donors and the University.

The Court **approved** the Campaign Case for Support.

23.4 Built Environment Development Framework (Appendix 4)
The Chair of the Finance Committee reported that the Committee was supportive of the Framework as a guide to prioritising future projects, including capital expenditure within the Three-Year Financial Plan. The GCOO noted that the five-year Framework would help the University to be flexible and agile in its planning, with each proposed project subject to affordability. The Framework was fully aligned to the Climate Action Framework (M24/23.5).

It was noted that care needed to be taken when communicating the Framework to staff and students, to avoid raising expectations which might not be achievable due to financial constraints. The Court observed that there would be a five-year review of the Framework but that the main elements were likely to remain relevant, and there was an opportunity to weave the Framework into the development of Strategy 2035.

MINUTE REF

The Court **approved** the Built Environment Development Framework.

23.5 **Climate Action Framework** (Appendix 5)
The Chair of the Finance Committee reported that the Committee was supportive of the Framework and the progress already made.

The Deputy Principal (Global Sustainability) highlighted that the Framework had been considered by the Infrastructure Committee, the Finance Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee. Feedback provided by these committees had been incorporated, and there had been engagement with students and staff during development. It was considered important to publish the Framework so that the University community could work together on sustainability, whilst also clarifying that proposed projects were provisional at this stage and subject to formal approvals. The University Secretary was working with the team to ensure that the appropriate governance structure was in place.

The Court observed that there were sustainability league tables which were impacted by published information and it was therefore helpful to have the University's global plans, activity and impact published and clearly communicated.

The Court agreed that the University should develop an overarching sustainability policy that could be used to guide all of the committees and groups that touched on climate issues, ensuring a joined up approach. This would be presented to the Court for approval once it had been developed.

The Court **approved** the Climate Action Framework.

23.6 **Financial Forecast Update to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)**
The GFD provided an update on the Financial Forecast that the Finance Committee had approved for submission to the SFC. The Court noted that the report indicated the shape of the budget for the next three years, which included a return to a surplus position by 2025-26. There was a good liquidity position.

23.7 **EBS Ambition 2030: Transforming Edinburgh Business School** (Appendix 7)
The Executive Dean of EBS and SoSS reported that the paper considered two aspects, setting the School's future direction and planning delivery. This included developing a distinctive position for the School and considering how to compete within the market, then ensuring that there was linkage to the University's strategic themes. The focus would be on growth driven by student numbers, with the additional staff required also driving increases in research and knowledge exchange income. Knowledge exchange would be key to developing programmes based on accessible practice.

The Chair of the Finance Committee reported that the Committee had received and noted the proposal at this stage, with further work to be done before it was presented to the Committee for endorsement. The proposal would be further discussed at the Court Strategy Day in May 2024. The Court observed that investing in areas that would generate return was key and that EBS was a critical brand for the University. The Court agreed that, in advance of the Court Strategy Day, work would be done to identify market needs and how EBS could contribute to the big trends that were currently affecting businesses.

The Court noted that the aim would be to grow student numbers both on campus and online, working closely with Heriot-Watt Online for the latter category. The Dubai Campus would also be integral to student numbers growth. The Executive Dean reported that a case for capital expenditure would be developed as part of the wider proposals.

The Court noted that it was important to ensure that staff were engaged in any future change, with clear communication and development of the culture supported by good change management.

The Court noted the planned transformation of EBS and looked forward to receiving further details in due course.

MINUTE REF

M24/24 UNIVERSITY HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE (UHSC) REPORT, HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY AND POLICY STATEMENT (Ct2/24/06)

The Court received and **approved** the UHSC Report, the Health and Safety Policy and the Policy Statement, presented by the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life) in his role as Chair of the UHSC.

The Court noted that the Annual Report consolidated reports from the three local Health and Safety committees and that the UHSC would work with those committees to ensure consistent styles, content and data analysis in future. In 2022-23, the Scottish Campuses focus had been on ensuring that each School and Professional Service had an engaged Health and Safety Committee. Incidents at these campuses remained below the national average, though there had been a marginal increase across the whole sector. There had been increased work around mental health for the SafeGuarding team, with this being picked up with HR for staff matters and through Student Support for student matters.

It was noted that reporting into the Shield system was standardised at the Dubai and Scottish campuses, with more work to be done to ensure that the Malaysia Campus were gathering data consistently and recording off-campus Health and Safety incidents correctly. In future, each campus would be compared against local sector norms where possible, as well as University best practice.

M24/25 RESEARCHER CONCORDAT ACTION PLAN – ANNUAL REPORT (Ct2/24/07)

The Court received and **approved** the Researcher Concordat Action Plan Annual Report, presented by the Deputy Principal (Research and Impact).

M24/26 REPORT FROM THE SENATE (Ct2/24/08)

The Court received and noted the Report from the Senate, presented by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor (Chair of the Senate).

M24/27 REPORT FROM THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE (Ct2/24/09)

The Court received and noted the report from the Audit and Risk Committee, presented by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.

XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30

M24/28 REPORT FROM THE STAFF COMMITTEE (Ct2/24/10)

The Court received and considered the report from the Staff Committee, presented by the Chair of the Staff Committee.

The Committee Chair provided an update on the Committee's discussions around the Staff Survey Results, noting that there was consistency in the results overall. It was clear that additional focus was required in areas where scores were generally low and not improving. These included a disconnect between staff and senior management, communications and change management. It was also noted that engagement with the Survey was much lower at the Edinburgh Campus, and this needed to be addressed. Recent good practice in change management, including the Finance Improvement Plan, would be built upon.

The Court queried the timeline for developing an action plan. The Global Director of HR clarified that local presentations to Schools, Professional Services and Campuses were currently being undertaken by area leads and the relevant Executive member. Local plans would then be developed by the end of March 2024 for discussion with the University Executive and the Global Operations Executive. These local actions would be combined with University-level actions and presented to the Staff Committee in May 2024.

MINUTE REF

The Court noted that low engagement with the Survey at the Edinburgh Campus was likely because staff felt no action would be taken as a result of the Survey, particularly because problem areas had been recurring for a number of years. The Global Director of HR reported that responses in the Professional Services were generally more positive. It was therefore important that positive, meaningful actions were taken and clearly communicated to all staff, with further work done in the Schools to identify the key issues affecting academic staff.

The Court also noted that the Committee had endorsed recommendations arising from the UK and Dubai Pay Reviews. The financial implications of these recommendations had been reported to the Finance Committee, which had approved the recommendations.

M24/29 REPORT FROM THE GLOBAL STUDENT LIFE COMMITTEE (GSLC) (Ct2/24/11)

The Court received and noted the report from the GSLC, presented by the Chair of the GSLC.

M24/30 REPORT FROM THE BORDERS STRATEGIC REVIEW OVERSIGHT GROUP (Ct2/24/12)

The Court received and considered the report from the Borders Strategic Review Oversight Group (BSROG), presented by the Chair of the BSROG.

XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.33

M24/31 REPORT FROM THE GLOBAL COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP OVERSIGHT GROUP (GCPOG) (Ct2/24/14)

The Court received and noted the report from the GCPOG, presented by the Chair of the GCPOG.

M24/32 REPORT FROM THE FINANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN OVERSIGHT GROUP (FIPOG) (Ct2/24/13)

The Court received and noted the report from the FIPOG, presented by the Chair of the FIPOG.

The Chair of the FIPOG observed that substantial work had been done in the last 18 months to improve finance systems and processes, and that this had resulted in a much smoother approval process for the Group Reports and Financial Statements. There were still challenges to be addressed but there had been a very positive contribution from the FIPOG and the Executive. Criteria for disestablishing the FIPOG continued to be developed and would be presented for approval once finalised.

The Court received the ERP Lessons Learnt report provided by RSM, along with a management introduction which highlighted the key themes and indicated specific actions that would be taken to address these. The actions would be tracked via the ARC. The University Secretary reported that the Executive had accepted responsibility for the programme overrun, both in terms of time and budget, and its impact on the institution. The Executive and the Court would continue to reflect on the findings from the ERP Lessons Learnt report in order to build trust with staff, including carefully considering the capacity for and prioritisation of change.

The Court raised the following points during discussion:

- that project management best practice would include pausing projects if they were Amber or Red at a stage gate, until the underlying issues had been resolved. The University Secretary agreed to embed this within the Project Management Office (PMO) and report onwards to the ARC;

- that the PMO would need to be kept under review to ensure it remained fit for purpose as the University evolved;

- that there had been a missed opportunity, early in the development of the ERP Programme, to take on board input from Court members. This was being addressed for future projects;

- that the role of the PMO could usefully include having an institutional view of the University's priorities, and therefore which projects should be prioritised; and

- that an overarching view of University systems was required, to ensure that these did not become out-of-date. The GCOO confirmed that ongoing investment in enterprise systems was being considered, to ensure that this situation did not arise.

The Court agreed that, unless otherwise stated, these points would be addressed via the FIPOG.

M24/33 PORTFOLIO MODERNISATION ANNUAL UPDATE (Ct2/24/15)

The Court received and considered an annual update on the Portfolio Modernisation project, presented by the GCOO.

The report provided an update on the initial substantial review in 2019, as well as more recent progress and future plans. Future developments would be focused on ensuring programmes were efficient and cost effective, with work in Dubai to be undertaken once CAA accreditation had been completed.

The Court agreed that future reports would indicate the additional contribution delivered as a result of the project.

The Court also agreed that there would be a future opportunity for the Court to discuss the project in more detail.

M24/34 COURT AGENDA TRACKER (Ct8/23/85)

The Court received and noted the Agenda Tracker, presented by the Chair. Court members were invited to provide any comments to the Clerk or the University Secretary. The Chair noted that the Agenda Tracker would be reviewed to ensure an even spread of business throughout the year.

M24/35 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair noted that the Court Strategy Day was scheduled for Thursday 16 May 2024, 9am – 5pm (approx.) on the Edinburgh Campus, with dinner the evening before.

The next regular business meeting of the Court would be on Monday 24 June 2024, 8.30am (UK time); 11.30am (Dubai time); and 3.30pm (Malaysia time), via Microsoft Teams.

At this stage in the meeting, Court attendees withdrew except where specifically invited to remain. The Vice-Principal and Provost also withdrew from the meeting.

M24/36 REPORT FROM THE REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (Ct2/24/16)

The Court received the report from the Remuneration Committee, presented by the Chair of the Remuneration Committee.

The Court noted that the Vice-Principal and Provost would demit office at the end of March 2024 by mutual agreement and would continue in a role in the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences, as well as being appointed as an Associate

MINUTE
REF

Principal on a three-year fixed term basis to provide required academic leadership in TNE.

A governance process had been undertaken regarding a Settlement Agreement, including seeking legal advice, consulting with the SFC, and ensuring that the Vice-Principal and Provost had access to independent legal advice at the University's cost. The Remuneration Committee had unanimously endorsed the Settlement Agreement. In response to a query, the Chair of the Remuneration Committee confirmed that all recommendations from the SFC and Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) reports relating to the University of Aberdeen had been complied with. The Settlement Agreement would be disclosed in the University's 2023-24 Group Reports and Financial Statements.

XXX Reserved Section – Ref. FOI(S)A, s.30b, s.30c, s.33b and s.36b.

In addition, the Remuneration Committee had agreed parameters in relation to the future Vice-Principal and Provost appointment. The appointee would fulfil the remaining term of office of the Vice-Principal, up to 31 July 2025, with the option of renewal for a further term of up to five years thereafter. This role would be advertised internally, so that there was not a long vacancy. Should it not be possible to fill the vacancy internally, then it would be advertised externally.

The Court noted that work on senior leadership succession planning would be undertaken in the coming months.

The Court noted that minor amendments had been made to the Report from the Remuneration Committee that was originally presented to the Court on 16 October 2023.