

University Court

Minutes

28 November 2024 from 10:00 to 12:00 in the Boardroom, Kydd Building

*attended via MS Teams

Members

Mr David Brew (Chair)	Ms Heather Dunk (Vice-Chair)
Ms Dounia Allaiouti	Ms Pam Herries
Professor Liz Bacon	Mr Fraser Keir
Mr John Barnett	Ms Veronica Lynch
Dr Scott Cameron	Mr Jim MacGregor
Col. Iain Davidson	Mr Antony Marks
Ms Robyn Donoghue	Dr Hadi Mehrpouya
Professor Ruth Falconer	Mr Thomas Sloan
Ms Kerith George-Briant	Professor Edith Sim
Professor Alastair Irons	Mr Steven Traynor
Ms Lynne Hamilton	Mr Luke Webster

In Attendance

Ms Sally Binnie (item 29)	Ms Eilidh Fraser
Dr Hannah Coutts (item 29)*	Mr James Nicholson (items 27 and 28)

Apologies

Mr Andrew Bailey	Ms Liz Blackburn
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Secretariat

Ms Caroline Summers	Dr Dianne Peden
(Secretary to Court)	Ms Vanessa Kind

Open Business

Preliminary Matters

22. Welcome and Apologies for Absence **Oral Report**

- (i). The Chair welcomed Court to the second meeting of the academic year.
- (ii). Apologies were received as noted above.

23. Declaration of Potential Conflicts of Interest **Oral Report**

- (i). The Chair reminded members of their responsibility to indicate if they had, or could be perceived to have, a conflict of interest in relation to the items for discussion. None were declared.

Court and Governance Matters

24. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2024 **CT/1124/014**

- (i). The Chair drew Court's attention to the fact that the approved minutes would be published on the University website and the meeting book (containing the agenda, approved minutes and enclosures (with any required redactions relating to confidential information)) would be published on the University intranet following the meeting.

Outcome: Court received and considered the minutes, submitted as enclosure 14, and approved them as an accurate record.

25. Action List and Matters Arising from these Minutes **CT/1124/015**

- (i). The Chair confirmed that the action list, submitted as enclosure 2, contained two ongoing actions, neither of which were due at this meeting.

26. Report from the Chair of Court **Oral Report**

- (i). The Chair highlighted that he had attended a recent meeting of the Committee of University Chairs, where it had discussed issues facing in the Higher Education sector including the forthcoming spending review. The role of Governing Bodies was also discussed.

Matters for Discussion

[Mr J. Nicholson joined the meeting]

27. National Student Survey Report

CT/1124/016

- (i). The Director of Student and Academic Services, Mr J. Nicholson introduced the National Student Survey Report, submitted as enclosure 16, highlighting this was an annual survey undertaken by final year undergraduate students and that the survey questions are set externally. Court's attention was drawn to the benchmarking data, noting that Abertay was above the average in Scotland. It was highlighted that the data had also been reviewed with regards to protected characteristics. Court was advised that the report listed recommendations for underperforming programmes and that their completion is monitored by the relevant Faculty Academic Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee. It was highlighted that although students are asked to think about their four years of study, the results are often impacted by their final year experience.
- (ii). Court discussed whether there were any differences in the student feedback versus feedback from industry employing our graduates. It was highlighted that the survey questions relate to satisfaction with their studies rather whether they had prepared students for the world of work. Court was advised that industry partners are involved with the development and delivery of programmes at Abertay. Court queried whether these results may impact on Transnational Education (TNE) opportunities. It was noted that TNE students do not complete the survey, but that the results do impact on league table performance, which is an important factor in university choice by international students.
- (iii). Court raised concerns that some of the themes requiring improvement had been identified over several years and explored what level of confidence there might be that the same actions as implemented previously would be more successful this time. Court was advised that the NSS results were part of the data being considered as input to the portfolio review and it was suggested that it would be useful to understand the link between programmes with low satisfaction scores and current recruitment challenges. Court discussed the importance of focusing on the impact of change as well as celebrating the successes.
- (iv). Court was advised that the key influence on overall satisfaction tends to be Teaching and Learning and discussed the importance of the student voice and engagement. It was highlighted that the Faculties are responsible for preparing their action plans. Court emphasised the importance of ensuring students are involved in the development of the action plans and discussed the role of the Student Voice forums in this. Court recommended consideration of a pulse survey during the year, in particular with students on underperforming programmes, although it was

acknowledged that it can take time for a change to have an impact on the survey results. Court was advised that a working group has been established, led by the Dean of Learning and Teaching, to address low positivity scores received in the survey from students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

- (v). Court highlighted the importance of celebrating the success stories from the survey, including Abertay being ranked above benchmark for 8 of the 9 themes, with the University being placed in the top 5 Scottish Universities and top modern University for overall student satisfaction. Court expressed its gratitude to Mr J. Nicholson for his analysis of the survey results and to the staff for their hard work to ensure a positive student experience.

Outcome: Court noted the National Student Survey Report.

Matters for Approval

28. Complaints Annual Report **CT/1124/017**

28.1. Protected Characteristics Report **CT/1124/018**

- (i). Mr J. Nicholson introduced the Complaints Annual Report, submitted as enclosure 17, highlighting that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman requires the University to publish an annual report on Complaints handling and that complaints provide an opportunity to improve our service delivery. Court noted that the section entitled “You Said, We Did” is publicised across the University.
- (ii). Court was advised that all complaints are recorded, with the majority dealt with as stage 1 frontline resolution. It was highlighted that the Complaints Handling Procedure emphasises the quick resolution of complaints, at the point nearest to wherever they arise within the University. Court was advised that further training is being implemented with partner institutions to ensure they understand the requirements for dealing with Complaints in Scotland.
- (iii). Court discussed the Protected Characteristics Report, submitted as enclosure 18. Court’s attention was drawn to Table 2, which showed that in 2023/24, the percentage share of each category of complaint was broadly the same when comparing BAME and White students. However, data showed that White students were slightly more likely to complain about service provision.

Outcome: Court approved the Complaints Annual Report and the Complaints Annual Report Protected Characteristics Report.

[Mr J. Nicholson left the meeting]

[Ms S. Binnie and Dr H. Coutts joined the meeting]

29. Integrated Annual Report and Accounts

CT/1124/019

- (i). The Head of Finance, Ms S. Binnie introduced the Integrated Annual Report and Accounts, submitted as enclosure 49, highlighting that it included a financial summary and a note on changes from 2022/23 as well as the Audit Results Report for the 2023/24 Audit as Annex A. Court was advised that the main changes were: an increase in Tuition Fees and Education contracts linked to TNE and Abertay Online students, offsetting a reduction in the number of on-campus students; an increase in Staff Costs impacted by a number of factors, including the pay award, increments and a small number of new posts relating to priority areas including internal recruitment and TNE; a change in Unrealised (Loss)/Gain on Non-current asset investments relating to the portfolio managed by our fund managers and impacted by external factors outwith the University's control.
- (ii). Court's attention was drawn to pension scheme changes with an asset ceiling having been put in (in line with the sector) which has been recognised in these accounts. It was highlighted that Universities Superannuation Scheme' pension scheme was classified as a liability in 2022/23 but as an asset in 2023/24. Court was advised with regards to the Balance Sheet that the total Net asset position year on year was consistent although individual balances had moved. Court discussed the cash reserve position and the challenges facing the University, including increasing staff costs.
- (iii). The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Mr J. Barnett, highlighted that the Committee had met with members of the Finance and Corporate Performance Committee and the Chair of Court in attendance to discuss these items, with the draft minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2024 submitted as enclosure 21. The Committee had agreed to recommend the integrated annual report and accounts to Court for approval, subject to some amendments to the sections relating to Key Performance Indicators, Net Cash table and some additional minor edits which had been made prior to submission to Court.
- (iv). Court thanked Ms S. Binnie and the Finance team, in the absence of a Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services, for their work in finalising the report.

Outcome: Court approved the Integrated Annual Report and Accounts.

[Ms S. Binnie left the meeting]

29.1. Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report

CT/1124/020

- (i). Mr J. Barnett introduced the Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report, submitted as enclosure 20, highlighting that it had been drafted following receipt and consideration of reports from the internal and external auditors, provided as Annexes 1 and 2 respectively. Court was advised that the Committee, at its meeting on 5 November, had confirmed it as an accurate summary of its activities for 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024. The Committee had confirmed that it was satisfied with the adequacy and effectiveness of the University's financial and management systems and considered that the Court's responsibilities in relation to audit had been satisfactorily discharged.

Outcome: Court noted with satisfaction the Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report, which will be submitted to SFC with the Integrated Annual Report and Accounts.

[Dr H. Coutts left the meeting]

Committee Matters

30. Audit and Risk Committee

30.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2024

CT/1124/021

- (i). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended the draft Integrated Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 to Court for approval and had approved the Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report, both of which had been considered under agenda item 8.
- (ii). In addition, Court's attention was drawn to item 13 of the minutes, the Strategic Internal Audit Plan, which had been approved by the Committee.
- (iii). Court noted that the Committee had reviewed three Annual Reports: Cyber Resilience; Value for Money; and Insurance Covers & Broker Arrangements; provided for information in the Supplementary Documents folder.
- (iv). Court was advised that the Committee had approved the Audit and Risk Committee Annual report to Court, which had been covered under agenda item 8.1. Court noted that the Committee had discussed the External Audit Results Report and the Internal Audit Annual Report, which were provided as Annexes to the report.

Outcome: Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 5 November 2024.

31. Finance and Corporate Performance Committee

31.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2024

CT/1124/022

- (i). Court noted that the Committee had reviewed the Information Governance Annual Report and the Insurance Covers & Broker Arrangements Annual Report, provided for information in the Supplementary Documents folder.
- (ii). In addition, Court's attention was drawn to item 10 of the minutes, the Capital and Infrastructure Update, where the Committee had approved the allocation of:
- (iii). an additional £60k from the ring-fenced sale of residences proceeds to the heat network development project to allow the application to be finalised; and
- (iv). an additional £468k from the ring-fenced sale of residences proceeds to the library ground floor refurbishment project, which includes the relocation of the Students' Association.

Outcome: Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Corporate Committee held on 1 October 2024.

32. Governance and Nominations Committee

32.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2024

CT/1124/023

- (i). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended the Annual Review of the Effectiveness of Court for approval, which would be discussed under agenda item 11.2.
- (ii). In addition, Court's attention was drawn to item 6 of the minutes, where the Committee had approved the Policy Document Governance Policy, provided for information in the Supplementary Documents folder.
- (iii). Vice-Principal and University Secretary, Ms C. Summers, provided Court with an update in relation to the membership of Court and its Committees. Court noted that Ms. Fiona Drysdale's appointment from 1 January 2025 had now been confirmed and that the Committee was proposing her appointment to the Audit and Risk Committee.

Outcome: Court approved the appointment of Ms F. Drysdale to the Audit and Risk Committee from 1 January 2025.

Outcome: Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Nominations Committee held on 24 October 2024.

32.2. Annual Review of Effectiveness of Court

CT/1124/024

- (i). The Chair introduced the annual evaluative report on the Effectiveness of Court for academic year 2023-24, submitted as enclosure 24, highlighting that it was a requirement of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance. Once approved it would be published on the University's website. Court welcomed the revised format and thanked the Head of Governance and Deputy Secretary, Dr D. Peden for her work on drafting the report.

Outcome: Court approved the Annual Review of Effectiveness of Court.

33. People, Health and Equality Committee

33.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2024

CT/1124/025

- (i). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended several items for approval: the Complaints Annual Report and the Protected Characteristics Report (agenda item 7) the Health and Safety Annual Report (agenda item 12.2), the Redundancy Avoidance Policy (agenda item 12.3) and the Grievance and Discipline – Process for Specified Roles (agenda item 12.3).
- (ii). Court noted that the Committee had reviewed the Occupational Health Annual Report and the Prevent Duty Annual Report. provided for information in the Supplementary Documents folder.

Outcome: Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the People, Health and Equality Committee held on 8 October 2024.

33.2. Health & Safety Annual Report

CT/1124/026

- (i). The Chair of the People, Health and Equality Committee, Ms H. Dunk introduced the Health and Safety Annual Report, submitted as enclosure 26, that had been drafted by the Health and Safety Manager, Mr Ian Wilson. She highlighted that it provided an annual summary of the Health and Safety activity for 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024, including compliance, accidents, incidents and near misses, inspection and audit reports. Court was advised that the report had been considered by the Health and Safety Sub-Committee prior to its submission to the Committee and that it would be published on the University's intranet.

Outcome: Court approved the Health and Safety Annual Report.

33.3. Redundancy Avoidance Policy

CT/1124/027

- (i). Ms H. Dunk introduced the Redundancy Avoidance Policy, submitted as enclosure 27, highlighting that the policy had been updated to reflect recent legal changes in

relation to redundancy situations for pregnant employees and employees on maternity, adoption, or shared parental leave. Court was advised that the opportunity had been taken to conduct a full review of the policy, resulting in a number of other changes, including removal of reference to maintaining a redeployment register. Minor editorial changes had also been made, including the adoption of gender neutral language.

Outcome: Court approved the revised Redundancy Avoidance Policy.

33.4. Grievance and Discipline – Process for Specified Senior Roles CT/1124/028

- (i). Ms H. Dunk introduced the Grievance and Discipline – Process for Specified Senior Roles, submitted as enclosure 28, highlighting that it sets out the grievance and discipline procedures to be followed where a complaint is raised in relation to Court appointed roles or the Director of People & Organisational Development. Court was advised that this process would be appended to the Grievance and Discipline Procedure documents.
- (ii). Court was advised that, in addition to revised process, the enclosure contained an Executive Summary, which included a Note from Thorntons outlining the key proposed changes. It also contained for comparison a copy of the current process as Annex A and for information a copy of the Grievance Procedure as Annex B and a copy of the Discipline Procedure as Annex C.

Outcome: Court approved the revised Grievance and Discipline – Process for Specified Senior Roles.

- (i). Ms H. Dunk thanked Ms R. Donoghue, whose term of office would come to an end on 31 December 2024, for her contribution to the work of the Committee.

34. Remuneration Committee

34.1. Report from the meeting held on 1 November 2024 CT/1124/029

- (ii). Court was advised that the Committee had discussed the review of the Pay Policy, the annual report on salaries in the discretionary range, as well as reviewing senior staff salaries, including the Principal's remuneration.
- (i). Court was advised that further information on the Committee's decisions regarding the remuneration of individuals would be provided under agenda item 25 in the reserved part of the meeting.

Outcome: Court noted the Report from the meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 1 November 2024.

Senate Matters

35. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2024 CT/1124/030

- (i). Court was advised that the Senate had discussed two items covered on today's agenda: the National Student Survey (agenda item 6) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Return: Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (agenda item 16.2).

Outcome: Court noted the draft minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 30 October 2024.

36. Academic Matters Report CT/1124/031

- (i). The Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor A. Irons, introduced the Academic Matters Report, submitted as enclosure 31, highlighting that it provided an overview of the wide range of activities across the University. Professor Irons highlighted that the University had been named the UK Cyber University of the Year at the National Cyber Awards and had achieved an impressive ranking of 15th for student satisfaction with teaching (based on the National Student Survey results), as highlighted in this year's Guardian University Guide 2025. Court's attention was drawn to the number of items relating to students.
- (ii). Court offered its congratulations to all those involved and acknowledged the external recognition of work being undertaken at Abertay.

Outcome: Court noted the Academic Matters Report.

Matters for Information

37. Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Returns

- (i). Court had agreed at its meeting on 18 September 2024 that returns that required to be submitted to the SFC as part of the new Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model would be signed off by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, unless Court sign-off was explicitly required, and that copies would be provided to Court for information. Court was advised that the Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report would be submitted to the February meeting of Court as the deadline for submission had been extended to 31 January 2025.

37.1. Research Assurance and Accountability Return CT/1124/032

Outcome: Court noted the SFC: Research Assurance and Accountability Return submitted as enclosure 32, which had been submitted to the SFC on 30 October 2024.

37.2. Self-Evaluation and Action Plan

CT/1124/033

Outcome: Court noted the SFC: Self-Evaluation and Action Plan, submitted as enclosure 33, which would be submitted to the SFC on 2 December 2024.

38. Executive Group Report to Court

CT/1124/034

- (i). The Chair thanked the Executive Group for its report to Court, submitted as enclosure 34. Court discussed the impact of recovery of SFC funding for under recruitment (“clawback”). It was highlighted that SFC was currently reviewing the funding model and that it was not clear whether the clawback process would change in future years. It was highlighted that in-year recovery in funding for nursing places has already been implemented.
- (ii). Court discussed the significant impact of the increase in employer’s National Insurance contributions.
- (iii). Court was advised that the Heat Network Application had been submitted to the Scottish Government.
- (iv). Court welcomed the range of external engagements being undertaken by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Liz Bacon, and colleagues. It discussed how the impact of this work could be measured, the alignment with the University strategy and the judgement calls that needed to be made with regards to attendance.

Outcome: Court noted the Executive Group Report to Court.

39. Students’ Association Report to Court

CT/1124/035

- (i). The Students’ Association Vice-President, Mr L. Webster, introduced the Students’ Association Report to Court, submitted as enclosure 35, highlighting that the report provided an insight into the work that had been undertaken since the last meeting of Court. Court’s attention was drawn to the success of events forming part of “Freshtival”, the work of student societies, the new Podcast “Sabber Chat”, and the success of events as part of Black History month led by the Students’ Association President, Ms D. Allaiouti. Court praised the Quest for Kindness campaign, which had raised £365 for the British Red Cross. Court was advised of training being undertaken by the sabbatical officers as well as a report on the Students’ Association’s move to the library.
- (ii). Court discussed the concerns raised in the report with regards to student consultation as part of the recent Academic Restructure. It was acknowledged that the change in structure may have had an impact on the arrangements for student

representation. Court noted that the Executive Group meet with the Students' Association Executive every six weeks, with agenda items set by both parties. It was highlighted that the Executive Group are also happy to consider other opportunities for engagement with the Students' Association.

- (iii). Court was advised of upcoming activities, including 16 Days of Activism and SHAG Week, continuing the work of the previous President, Ms Livi Robertson, on educating students on sexual health.

Outcome: Court noted the Students' Association Report to Court.

Concluding Matters

40. Any Other Competent Business

Oral Report

- (i). No other competent business was raised.
- (ii). The Chair requested that Ms E. Fraser remain for agenda items 20-23 under reserved business.

Chair: Mr David Brew

Date of Next Meeting: 19 February 2025