

Edinburgh Napier University

University Court

**Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 24 June 2024
at 3.00 pm in the Rivers Suite, Craiglockhart and by Teams Video Conference**

Present: J Boyle (Chair); Professor A Nolan (Principal & Vice-Chancellor); Professor P Andras; G Akshil; P Alonzi; Professor N Antonopoulos; R Cairns; D Chapman (online); Professor M Chipulu; J Chittleburgh; Professor S Cross (online); L Duncan; A Houghton; Q Miao; S Hall; S Kumar; Dr K Hewitson (online); M Melville; T Oyinlola (online); Dr H Patrick; Lady Paton (Chancellor's Assessor); P Sim; R Tomlinson; P Upton; Professor L Yellowlees.

In attendance: M Greenhalgh (Director of Strategy and Planning & Secretary to Court); C Begbie (Director of People & Services); D Cloy (Head of Governance & Risk); N Graham (Vice Principal, International); Professor N Karodia (DVC & Vice Principal, Learning & Teaching); A McGoff (Director of Finance & Operations); S Virdee (Head of EDI) (item 11); M Wilkinson (Head of Student Wellbeing & Inclusion) (item 11).

Observing: T Connolly (Information Governance Adviser); E Kingsford Eghan (ENSA President elect); H Wareing (Careers and Skills Development Manager).

1. OPENING REMARKS, APOLOGIES, DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND CHAIR'S UPDATES

- 1.1. Members received and welcomed a slide presentation documenting the recent awards and recognition received by the University, its staff and students.
- 1.2. The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and welcomed incoming ENSA President, Evans Kingsford Eghan and Tiana Connolly (Information Governance Adviser) who were observing the meeting. Helen Wareing (Careers and Skills Development Manager) who been elected to Court as the professional services staff member and would join Court next session was also welcomed to the meeting.
- 1.3. An update was provided on the Principal Appointment Process. It was noted that the final part of the process would conclude later this week and it was expected that that the outcome would be communicated later in July. A summary of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) matters relating to the process was provided and it was noted that a full report would be presented to the next Court meeting.

- 1.4. The Vice-Chair reported that they would normally undertake the Chair of Court annual review to inform Chair performance enhancements in the coming year, which would be reported at this meeting. However, as the Chair was demitting this was not necessary or appropriate so had not been undertaken. This was consistent with the position taken in the final year of the previous Chair and would be noted in the statement of Governance Code compliance in the annual accounts as an exception which is allowed under the Code's "comply or explain" provisions.
- 1.5. The apologies were **noted**.
- 1.6. L Yellowlees declared her SFC Board membership under declarations of interests.

Part A For discussion and decision

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 MARCH 2024 UC(23/24)47

- 2.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2024 were **approved**.

3. MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1. There were no matters arising.

4. PRINCIPAL'S REPORT UC(23/24)48

- 4.1. Court received the Principal's written report. The challenging Higher Education funding landscape was highlighted and it was noted that the Principal had flagged to the Minister for Further Education and Higher Education her concern around the process and transparency of approach adopted by the SFC to funding allocations this year. A key example had been the SFC narrative on the lack of recognition of the financial impact on universities operating the STSS pension scheme from increased contribution rates, contrasted with universities operating the USS pension scheme who had benefitted significantly in terms of employer contributions from an improved scheme valuation.
- 4.2. Thereafter, Court **noted** the report.

5. REPORT FROM NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE ON COURT AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP* UC(23/24)49

- 5.1. Court received the paper which reported on the proceedings of the Nominations Committee meeting held on 13 May 2024 and presented recommendations for approval regarding the membership of Court committees for 2024/25, and in the position of Vice-Chair of Court.
- 5.2. Court:
 - a) **Noted** the report of the meeting of Nominations Committee held on 13 May 2024.
 - b) **Approved** the recommendations regarding the convenorship and membership of committees as detailed in the paper and contained in Appendix A.

- c) **Approved** the appointment of Lesley Yellowlees as Vice-Chair from 1 August 2024 for a period of one year.

6. INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT & HOME RECRUITMENT UPDATE

- 6.1. Court received the presentation which updated on the current international market environment and home recruitment position. The current political environment, implications for the sector and outlook for 2024/25 were outlined and the range of income growth activities underway, including through the Edinburgh Napier University International College (ENUIC), were highlighted. An update on the position with home SFC recruitment for September 2024 was also provided and the range of actions in train to maximise recruitment were outlined.
- 6.2. Discussion followed during which it was noted that ENUIC progression would be closely monitored, and that data would be available following the September 2024 intake. It was noted that the University's diversification efforts were having a positive impact, but it remained a challenge to mitigate the continued volatility in key international markets. The practice among some competitors of offering generous scholarships to incentivise students to accept their offers was noted as a feature of the current volatile market. Regarding the sector-wide challenge of recruiting nursing students it was noted that the University was exploring the possibility of alternative pathways such as part-time models, and collaborative delivery with college partners as a means of addressing.
- 6.3. Thereafter, Court **noted** the update.

7. REVIEW OF THE CURRENT FINANCIAL POSITION* UC(23/24)50

- 7.1. Court received the report which provided the University's financial position as at the end of April 2024. It was noted that F&PC had reviewed the financial position in detail and had endorsed a financial framework for Project VISION which would enable progress while mitigating against financial risk.
- 7.2. In discussion, it was noted that comparisons on staff cost/income ratios between institutions was problematic due to varying practices on outsourcing of services. In response to a query as to what steps ENSA could take to improve its financial position, the Director of Finance and Operations offered to engage with ENSA to advise on opportunities for income growth and cost management.

8. EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, ANNUAL PLAN, UC(23/24)51 THREE-YEAR FINANCIAL FORECAST AND BUDGET FOR 2024/25*

- 8.1. Court received the paper which presented the outcome of the University's planning and budgeting process for the upcoming academic year 2024/25, with reference to the future planning horizon. The challenging environment and efforts underway within Schools and Professional Services to control costs were highlighted. It was noted that the proposed budget did not conform with some of the financial risk tolerance thresholds set out in the Risk Appetite

Statement, which Court would accept in approving the budget. It was noted that the projections provided would enable key Project VISION developments to be funded without borrowing, within the parameters of the financial framework now established which would mitigate risk by breaking the developments down into discreet projects allowing a pause on further development if necessary to preserve the University's financial position.

- 8.2. Discussion followed during which it was noted that there was confidence in the achievability of the income growth presented in the projections subject to favourable policy decisions by government, particularly in relation to international student visas. It was noted that ongoing discussions between ULT and Schools/Services were focussed on identifying opportunities for further income growth and efficiencies, including activities that could be stopped. As an example, it was noted that a number of modules had been 'retired' to make programmes more coherent and that assessments had been modified to make them more efficient and effective. It was noted that further detail on the outcome of these discussions would be provided at the next Court meeting.
- 8.3. Thereafter, Court **approved** the budget for 2024/25 and **noted** the University Annual Plan and draft Key Performance targets for 2024/25.

9. PROJECT VISION UPDATE

UC(23/24)52

- 9.1. Court received the report and presentation which presented the masterplan for Project VISION, a summary of next steps and outline stakeholder engagement to progress further options analysis and outline business cases, an update on the financial approval framework for VISION, a summary update of next steps from the space utilisation exercise, including an update on measures introduced on timetabling policy and an update on other matters including the revised VISION Governance Structure, sports facilities, student accommodation and launch of the Digital Strategy.
- 9.2. Discussion followed during which the importance of continued maintenance of the estate alongside VISION development was emphasised, recognising the need to ensure ongoing visible improvements across the estate to ensure a positive environment for current campus users.
- 9.3. Thereafter, Court **noted** the update.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT

UC(23/24)53

a) Top Risks Monitoring Schedule (3 of 3)*

- 10.1. Court **noted** the report which provided the final assessment of confidence in the management of the University's top risks for academic year 2023/24.

b) University Top Risks for 2024/25*

- 10.2. Court **approved** the Top Risks Register for 2024/25 as recommended by the Audit & Risk Committee.

c) Risk Appetite Statement

10.3. Court **confirmed** the Risk Appetite Statement and Tolerances.

11. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT UC(23/24)54

11.1. Court received the paper and presentation which provided an update on activities underway associated with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and sought to engage the Court in the development of a refreshed approach to EDI at Edinburgh Napier University. It was noted that the next Mainstreaming Report would be published in April 2025, so this report served as an interim update on progress.

11.2. Discussion followed during which it was noted that there was a positive culture in place within the University around EDI which would provide a good foundation to further develop a shared understanding and consistency across the University. It was noted that engagement within Schools to date had been through Inclusion Leads and that further engagement and embedment within Schools would follow. It was noted that a key priority was to develop performance measures to allow performance and improvement to be monitored, which would be benchmarked against other institutions to ensure they were realistic and achievable. The challenge of ensuring that the University's internal drivers were not in tension with the range of external drivers was recognised, and it was anticipated that disclosure of diversity data by staff and students would improve as the culture developed, and individuals felt comfortable and safe to disclose. It was noted that everyone had a role to play in delivering the strategic vision for EDI at the University, and that the view of students was important, as was disclosure of diversity data by students to ensure that meaningful actions could be put in place to support particular groups.

11.3. Thereafter Court **noted** the update on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and **endorsed** the new strategic approach outlined.

12. EDINBURGH NAPIER STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION UPDATE UC(23/24)55

12.1. Court received and **noted** a presentation on Edinburgh Napier Students' Association's key activities and progress over the past year, which highlighted the achievements of the Sabbatical Officers against their manifestos and provided reflections on areas for future development and improvement. Members welcomed the report and thanked the Sabbatical Officers for their contribution.

13. HONORARY AWARDS* UC(23/24)56

13.1. Court **approved** the Honorary Award nominations recommended by the Honorary Awards Committee and Academic Board.

Part B For information

14. ACADEMIC BOARD MEETING 7 JUNE 2024 UC(23/24)57

14.1. Court **noted** the minutes from the meeting of the Academic Board of 7 June 2024

15. HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT UC(23/24)58

15.1. Court received and **noted** the paper which provided the Annual Report on Health & Safety management. Thanks were extended to all involved for the work reflected in the report.

16. ANNUAL NOTIFICATION OF VISITING AND EMERITUS PROFESSOR APPOINTMENTS UC(23/24)59

16.1. Court received and **noted** the paper which detailed the current Visiting and Emeritus Professor appointees within Edinburgh Napier University.

Part C Not intended for discussion

17. REPORTS FROM COURT COMMITTEES

17a Finance & Property Committee meeting on 1 May 2024* UC(23/24)60

17.1. The report was **noted**.

17b Finance & Property Committee meeting on 16 May 2024* UC(23/24)61

17.2. The report was **noted**.

17.c Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 5 June 2024* UC(23/24)62

17.3 The report was **noted**. It was noted that the Committee had considered the University's preparedness to deal with scenarios concerning reputational risk.

18. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

18.1. The dates of future Court meetings were **noted** as follows:

Court

28 October 2024

09 December 2024

24 March 2025

23 June 2025

Graduations

Wednesday – Friday 3 - 5 July 2024

Tuesday & Wednesday 29 & 30 October 2024

Wednesday – Friday 9 - 11 July 2025

VALEDICTIONS

It was the last meeting of Geou Akshil, Andy Houghton and Sharon Hall. Thanks were extended to them for their contributions to Court and the University.

It was the last meeting of the Chair of Court June Boyle. The Vice-Chair and Principal extended thanks for her significant contribution to the Court and the University over her 12 years of Court membership, the past four of which as Chair.

*Denotes a paper to which an exemption under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 applies.