

## University Court

01 November 2023, 13:00 - 17:00

By Microsoft Teams

**Members:** Alastair MacColl (Chair), Andrea Robertson (Vice Chair), Vicki Nairn (Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor), Fiona Mclean (Rector), Angus Campbell (FE Regional Lead), Allan Clow (Independent), Calum Ross (HIE Representative), Paul Travill (Independent), Heather Offord (Independent), Alex Paterson (Independent), Rosemary McCormack (Staff Governor), Derek Lewis (Chair UHI NWH), David Sandison (Chair UHI Shetland), Sara O'Hagan (Trade Union Representative), William Campbell (Student Governor), Gary Souter (Student Governor)

**In attendance:** Sheena Stewart (UHI EO), Lorna Walker (UHI EO), Scott Rhynas (UHI EO), Niall McArthur (UHI EO), Neil Simco (UHI EO), Roger Sendall (UHI EO), Max Brown (UHI EO) (in part), Margaret Antonson (UHI EO) (in part), Nicholas Oakley (UHI EO) (Clerk)

**Guests:** Audrey Decou (UHI EO Observer), Lindsey Moodie (UHI EO Observer)

**Apologies:** Poonam Malik, Helen MacInnes, Mei-Li Roberts, Malcolm Burr

Key: Action, **Decision**

### 1. \*Preliminary Items

#### 1.1 \*Welcome and apologies

The Chair opened the meeting and noted the apologies.

#### 1.2 \*Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 1.1. \*Notification of other business

There was no notification of other business.

#### 1.2. \*Starring

Members **requested** that item 6.2 Regional Outcome Agreement be starred for discussion. All unstarred items were approved/ noted per the recommendation set out in each paper.

### 2. \*Minutes of meetings

#### 2.1. \*Approval of the minutes of:

Members **approved** the minutes of the Court meetings held on 22 August 2023 and 18 September 2023 as an accurate record.

#### 2.2. \*Matters arising

Members **noted** that all of the actions arising were complete or on the agenda.

#### 2.3. \* Delegated decisions

The following delegated decisions were reported and **noted**:

1. Annual report institutional review had been submitted to SFC, via Chair's action.

2. The annual report on carbon emissions would be submitted by 30 November 2023. This was being finalized, with the Chair to take delegated action to submit to meet the deadline arising between meetings.
3. Academic Partner Chair appointment: Members were advised that the interim Chair at UHI Moray, Jamie Wilson, had agreed to remain in post until a permanent Chair was recruited.

### 3. \* Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor Update

The interim Principal and Vice Chancellor, Vicki Nairn, reported on activities since the last meeting.

£4m of recurring savings continued to be sought as part of the Executive Office (EO) savings target and restructure plan. The senior executive team (SET) had identified £2.2m of staff and £0.7m of non-staff savings toward the £4m target. Vicki Nairn reported that the restructure activity undertaken as part of this budget target had proved complex and difficult, with a number of posts being removed. However, EO remained on schedule for this work and expected to complete the process by the end of October, and she remained confident that EO would meet its annual savings target.

Vicki Nairn reported that although the organization had made best efforts to mitigate the impact of the restructure on staff, the redundancy scheme had had a significant negative effect on staff morale, as well as attracting external stakeholder interest. Themes raised included the effect on the local economy, reinforcing their support of UHI, and concerns about how reshaping business will impact the organization and student experience.

There had also been significant attention from the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) UHI branch, with industrial action occurring including both strike action and action short of strike by EO staff. Contingency plans had been put in place, but this also attracted further negative publicity. However, positive recent discussions with UCU were reported, and strike action had been suspended subject to ongoing negotiations.

Vicki Nairn reported that as well as the impact on staff and morale, the restructure has taken a significant effort by senior officers and management team.

[Andrea Roberston joined the meeting]

Neil Simco, Deputy Principal, reported on the EIS FELA national industrial action. Although the dispute had not been resolved, EIS-FELA did not get a renewed mandate following a recent ballot, so staff are now entering marks and awards will be issued as soon as possible thereafter once verification checks were completed. Approximately 260 students had been affected.

Turning to the partnership's financial sustainability, Vicki Nairn reported that meetings were scheduled with all academic partners (APs) to review sustainability plans with UHI officers and a working group drawn from the Finance and General Purposes Committee, before the next Court meeting. A full report would be presented to Court at the next meeting.

On the target operating model, Vicki Nairn reported that she was chairing an executive group to develop broad agreement on future of UHI and progress towards operating as a single institution, and work was progressing well and to schedule. A communications and engagement plan would be prepared as part of this work.

Vicki Nairn closed her report by reporting on her attendance at graduations across the partnership.

Court **noted** the IPVC update.

#### 4. \* Students' Association Report

William Campbell, HISA President, reported on the student's association activities. Recent events included freshers' activities, with both local and regional events held. Events marking Black History Month, including panel discussions, had also just concluded. Other highlights included:

1. Completed office move to UHI House, now co-located with students and EO staff.
2. Elections: various positions filled. A few vacancies remained, so co-option and internships were being considered.
3. Student voice representative process had changed, with training now mandatory.
4. Hosted a student leadership conference.
5. The HISA strategic plan had been extended to allow the new CEO time to engage and reflect on changes.
6. Organisational changes included appointment of Rachel Burn as CEO from 20 November; promotion of Wendy Day to Director of Finance and Operations, and appointment of Simon Varwell as Director of Student Engagement. On behalf of HISA, William Campbell thanked Anthony Blackshaw, the departing interim CEO, for his work during the interim period.

In response to queries around wellbeing and student mental health, William Campbell reported that HISA staff were receiving mental health training as well as gender-based violence training, and work was ongoing in conjunction with academic partners around this area. For instance, UHI Perth held a "good vibes" festival to help new students to integrate, which merged activities and student support with mental health and wellbeing support. The HISA advice service was also highlighted as an asset in this area.

Court **noted** the student association report.

#### 5. \*Strategic Items for discussion

##### 5.1. \* Financial Sustainability (CONFIDENTIAL)

Vicki Nairn reported on financial sustainability.

RESERVED ITEM REDACTED

Court **noted** the financial sustainability update.

##### 5.2. \* Target Operating Model update (CONFIDENTIAL)

RESERVED ITEM REDACTED

Court **noted** the target operating model update.

#### 6. Items for noting or approval

##### 6.1. \*Student recruitment: latest figures for 2023/24

[Margaret Antonson joined the meeting]

Margaret Antonson, Director of Performance and Planning, reported on the further education figures for 2023/24. Members were advised that there was ongoing Colleges Scotland discussion on the need for skills and a focus on further education. UHI had established an FE strategy group, and planned to meet with SFC officials in November to progress increasing credit allocation for 2024/25, as well as ensuring SFC were aware of school-based FE, especially in island and rural areas.

Members **noted** the student recruitment update.

**6.2. \*Regional Outcome Agreement 2023/24**

Margaret Antonson, Director of Performance and Planning, reported on the regional outcome agreement 2023/24. She advised that this was the final year of the current SFC approach, and SFC were consulting on a new assurance and accountability framework for 2024/25 onwards.

Members **endorsed** the Regional Outcome Agreement 2023/24.

**6.3. \*MAATIC update**

Vicki Nairn, Interim Principal and Vice Chancellor, gave an update on the MAATIC project. She noted that the current institutional lead, Gary Campbell, was leaving post in December, and alongside other project staff turnover a change had been made to the resources allocated by EO to the project.

Members noted the wider need to ensure Economic Development is prioritized at UHI, following the Court commitment in June 2023 to add additional resource as a means to strengthen expertise and resource allocation. UHI officers noted that economic development, as well as MAATIC, remained a priority, and the SMT would be reconfigured to ensure that these were prioritized operationally.

**6.4. \*Merger funding review update**

Sheena Stewart, University Secretary, provided an update on the merger funding review. Following discussion, members agreed that the brief be broadened to establish to what extent the process leading up to the merger was a contributory factor, given the long gestation period for the merger. Members also asked that the brief be explicit that the appointed auditors identify lessons learned.

Action: Update the merger funding review brief.

**6.5. Annual report to SFC on institution-led review in 2022/23**

**Noted** without discussion.

**6.6. Homologation of appointments to Academic Partner boards**

**Approved** without discussion.

**6.7. Committee Annual Terms of Reference Approval**

**Approved** without discussion.

**7. Minutes from Committees of Court**

**7.1. UHI Foundation 19 September 2023**

Minutes of the UHI Foundation held on 19 September 2023 were **noted**.

**7.2. Finance & General Purposes Committee 21 September 2023**

Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on the 21 September 2023 were **noted**.

**7.3. Audit Committee 25 September 2023**

Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 25 September 2023 were **noted**.

**7.4. Nominations Committee 25 September 2023**

Minutes of the Nominations Committee held on 25 September 2023 were **noted**.

**7.5. Partnership Forum 3 October 2023**

Minutes of the Partnership Forum held on 3 October 2023 were **noted**.

**8. \*Any Other Business**

No other competent business.

**9. \* Reserved Business**

**9.1. Reserved minutes of Court 22 August 2023**

**9.2 \* EO restructure and industrial action**

**9.3 \* Reserved minutes of Nominations Committee 25 September 2023**