

Minutes (Open) Unapproved University Court – 17 February 2026

*attended online

Members

David Brew (Chair)	Colin Graham (Vice-Chair)
Professor Liz Bacon	Pam Herries* (until item 69)
Dia Banerji (from item 66)	Fraser Keir
Liz Blackburn*	Veronica Lynch
Dr Scott Cameron	Jim Macgregor
Col. Eur Ing Iain Davidson VR	Antony Marks
Carla De Brito	Thomas Sloan
Professor Ruth Falconer	Steven Traynor
Kerith George-Briant	Luke Webster

Apologies

Andrew Bailey	Lynne Hamilton
Fiona Drysdale KC	Dr Hadi Mehrpouya

In Attendance

Professor Alice Brown	Dr Dianne Peden (Clerk)
Vanessa Kind	Caroline Summers (Secretary to Court)
Andrew Menzies	

Open Business**Preliminary Matters**

51. Welcome and Apologies**Oral Report**

- (i). The Chair welcomed Court to its third meeting of the academic year, highlighting that it was part of the annual Court Conference. Court was advised that the University Chancellor, Professor Alice Brown was in attendance and agreed that Professor A. Brown could remain for the entire meeting including consideration of reserved business.
- (ii). The Chair highlighted that Equality Impact Assessments for relevant items were available via Admincontrol along with Other Matters for Information for which no action was required.
- (iii). Apologies were received as noted above.

52. Declaration of Potential Conflicts of Interest

Oral Report

Outcome: None were declared.

53. Minutes of Court 26 November 2025

CT/0226/059

Outcome: Court received and considered the minutes and approved them as an accurate record of its meeting held on 26 November 2025.

54. Minute of a decision of Court by correspondence 10 December 2025 CT/0226/060

Outcome: Court received and considered the minutes and approved them as an accurate record of a decision taken by correspondence on 10 December 2025.

55. Minutes of decisions of Court by correspondence 17 December 2025 CT/0226/061

Outcome: Court received and considered the minutes and approved them as an accurate record of decisions taken by correspondence on 17 December 2025.

56. Minutes of a decisions of Court by correspondence 6 February 2026 CT/0226/062

Outcome: Court received and considered the minutes and approved them as an accurate record of a decision taken by correspondence on 6 February 2026.

57. Action List and Matters Arising

CT/0226/063

- (i). Court was advised that the action list had been updated on 9 February 2026 and included ongoing and recently completed actions. Six actions had been completed since the previous meeting with four actions ongoing, none of which were due at this meeting.

Court Matters

58. Court Matters

CT/0226/064

- (i). Vice-Principal and University Secretary, C. Summers highlighted an ongoing vacancy for a lay member on the People Health Equality Committee, inviting interested members to express interest. Court was advised that that a vacancy also remains for a new lay member of Court and that the recommendation from the Governance and Nominations Committee (GNC) was to delay recruitment to ensure alignment with the Chair of Court appointment process. Court was advised that the recruitment timeline would be agreed at meeting of the Committee on 5 March 2026.

- (ii). Court was advised that that changes to the Terms of Reference for the Remuneration Committee would be proposed under agenda item 24.
- (iii). Court was advised that GNC at its meeting on 4 December 2025 had recommended the addition of the Vice-Chair of Court to the composition of the Governance and Nominations Committee.

Outcome: Court approved the addition of the role of Vice-Chair of Court to the composition of the Governance and Nominations Committee.

- (iv). Court was advised that the Annual Public Stakeholder Event would take place prior to the meeting of Court on 29 April 2026, with further details to be circulated in due course.
- (v). Court noted the sector governance developments outlined in the paper.

59. Appointment Committee

59.1. Update from the Appointment Committee

CT/0226/065

- (i). Court was advised that following approval of the Terms of Reference of the Appointment Committee by correspondence on 17 December (CT/0226/061) Court had delegated authority to the Vice-Chair of Court and the Secretary to Court to finalise the Committee's membership. Court noted the finalised membership set out in the enclosure.
- (ii). C. Summers updated Court on the appointment process for the new Chair of Court, noting that an external search agency, FWB Ltd, had been appointed to support the process. Court was informed of the indicative timeline, with the intention for the new Chair to take up appointment on 1 August 2026. Court also noted that the Vice Chair would assume responsibilities from 16 May 2026, when the current Chair's term concludes.

59.2. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2026

CT/0226/066

- (i). Court noted that the Committee had been content to confirm engagement with an executive search agency, acknowledging the cost implications. The Committee had emphasised the importance of the appointed agency's understanding of the Scottish market and the need for a broad candidate pool.
- (ii). Court was advised that the Committee had agreed the draft candidate brief and selection criteria, subject to some minor amendments and any further suggestions from the search agency.
- (iii). Court was advised that the Committee had been content to confirm the appointment of a third part to provide an online voting system.

Outcome: Court noted the minutes of the meeting of the Appointment Committee held on 19 January 2026.

Committee Matters

60. Audit and Risk Committee

60.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2026 CT/0226/067

- (i). Court noted that the Committee had reviewed the Value for Money Annual Report (CT/0226/103) and the Briefing on Risks Associated with Potential Reclassification of Universities as Public Sector (as noted in CT/0226/063).
- (ii). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended two items to Court for approval: the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorism Financing Policy (CT/0226/083) and the Fraud Response Plan (CT/0226/084).

Outcome: Court noted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 27 January 2026.

61. Finance and Corporate Performance Committee

61.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2025 CT/0226/068

- (i). Court noted that the Committee had approved the Procurement Strategy (CT/0226/101) and had reviewed the Procurement Annual Report (CT/0226/102) and Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Annual Report (CT/0226/104).
- (ii). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended three items to Court for approval: the Intellectual Property Policy (approved by Court by correspondence CT/0226/061), the Investment Management Policy (CT/0226/085) and the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement (CT/0226/086). The Chair highlighted that an updated version of the Investment Policy (CT/0226/085) had been circulated to Court on 16 February 2026.
- (iii). Court was advised that the Committee had discussed early drafts of the supporting strategies: the Sustainable Development Strategy (CT/0226/075); the Estates Strategy (CT/0226/076); the Digital Strategy (CT/0226/077) and the Civic Engagement Strategy (CT/0226/078) and that the drafts submitted to Court for approval had been circulated to the Committee on 30 January 2026 and the Committee had agreed by correspondence to recommend these recommended to Court for approval.

Outcome: Court noted the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Corporate Performance Committee held on 9 December 2025.

62. Governance and Nominations Committee

62.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2025

CT/0226/069

- (i). Court noted that the Committee had approved the Person Specification for Independent Lay Court Members.
- (ii). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended six items to Court for approval; the General Descriptor for Members of the University Court (CT/0226/087); Rules for Nominations of Vice-Principals to University Court (CT/0226/096); Rules for Nominations of Abertay Students' Association Members to University Court (CT/0226/097); Rules for Senate Nominations to University Court (CT/0226/098); Rules for the Nomination of Trade Union Members to University Court (CT/0226/099) and Rules for Election of Staff Members to University Court (CT/0226/100).

Outcome: Court noted the minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Nominations Committee held on 4 December 2025.

62.2. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2026

CT/0226/070

- (i). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended two items to Court for approval: the Chair's Committee Terms of Reference Review (CT/0226/079) and the Process for Election of Staff Members to Senate (CT/0226/089) with the final recommendation to Court having been made by the Committee by correspondence following discussions at Senate on 28 January 2026 as noted below (item 64.1).

Outcome: Court noted the minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Nominations Committee held on 23 January 2026.

63. People, Health and Equality Committee

63.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2025

CT/0226/071

- (i). Court noted that the Committee had noted the Learning and Development Annual Report (CT/0226/105).
- (ii). Court was advised that the Committee had recommended three items to Court for approval; the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (CT/0226/080); Neonatal Care Leave Policy (CT/0226/081) and the Special Leave Policy (CT/0226/082).

Outcome: Court noted the minutes of the meeting of the People, Health and Equality Committee held on 16 December 2025.

64. Senate

64.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2026

CT/0226/072

- (i). Court noted that Senate had discussed earlier drafts of the four supporting strategies: the Sustainable Development Strategy (CT/0226/075); the Estates Strategy (CT/0226/076); the Digital Strategy (CT/0226/077) and the Civic Engagement Strategy (CT/0226/078). Court was advised that Senate had also discussed the Process for the Election of Staff Members to Senate (CT/0226/090) prior to its finalisation by GNC as noted under item 62.2.
- (ii). Court was advised that Senate had approved the Institution-Led Review: Services (Sustainability) and a minor revision to the Academic Governance Framework.

Outcome: Court noted the minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 28 January 2026.

Regular Reports

65. Report from the Chair of Court

Oral Report

- (i). The Chair reported that recent sector developments had been largely covered in the briefing paper circulated as briefing for the Court Conference. Court was advised that membership Future Framework Steering Group has now been confirmed, and the Committee of Scottish Chairs was scheduled to meet next month in Stirling.
- (ii). The Chair noted the group legal action being pursued by students in England regarding alleged shortcomings in university provision during the Covid-19 pandemic. He expressed the view that such action was unlikely to impact Scottish institutions.
- (iii). An update was provided on the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) governance review, which is expected to conclude with adoption of a revised Code at the CUC Plenary in the latter half of May. As the Chair's term of office concludes in mid-May, he noted that he would not be participating in the Plenary. He indicated that the issues under review are not expected to raise concerns for Abertay or other Scottish HEIs given the existence of the Scottish Code
- (iv). The Chair highlighted that Professor Cara Aitchison, Chair of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), would be attending the Court Conference dinner. Members were encouraged to engage with her presentation and to raise questions on governance, future financing, or longer-term strategic matters.

66. Executive Group Report

CT/0226/073

- (i). Court was advised that the report provided Court with an update on key institutional matters not covered elsewhere on the agenda, including student recruitment, financial performance, external engagement, academic developments, and strategic initiatives.

Court noted that it also contained two appendices: Key External Engagements by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor and an Academic Matters report.

- (ii). Court was advised of an improvement in SFC-funded student numbers for 2025-26. However, a [REDACTED] decline in Scottish applicants for 2026-27, at the January application deadline, was noted, with significant variability across the sector. Court welcomed the improvement for 2025-26 and acknowledged staff effort in achieving this. Court discussed recruitment trends, sectoral comparisons, and the impact of recent investments in the recruitment and admissions functions.
- (iii). Court discussed wider sector challenges, including demographic decline, increased competition for Scottish applicants, and the risk of a longer-term 'cliff edge' in student numbers. Court was advised of recent and ongoing investments in Admissions and Marketing, which is expected to strengthen conversion for 2026-27 and have greater impact for 2027-28. Increased school engagement activities were highlighted, though it was noted that other institutions were adopting similar approaches. Court noted that applications for 2026-27 entry would continue to be closely monitored.
- (iv). Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor L. Bacon updated Court on the University's confidential bid, [REDACTED] to the SFC Transformation Fund, submitted on 13 February 2026. Court recorded its thanks to Dean of the Faculty of Design, Informatics and Business, Professor James Brown for leading the application. Court was advised that the Fund totals £20m, with outcomes expected in April.
- (v). Court noted its concern that the University had not yet received the end of year assurance summary as part of the SFC Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model. C. Summers noted that the matter had been raised directly with the SFC. Court was advised that the SFC has appointed an external firm to undertake an evaluation of the SFC outcomes framework process.
- (vi). Court noted the intention to submit a bid to the Tay Cities Deal and discussed the resource implications of progressing this should funding be awarded. It was confirmed that there were no further updates on the Heat Network project beyond those already provided in the paper.
- (vii). Court welcomed the breadth of institutional activities highlighted in the appended reports.

67. Students' Association Report

CT/0226/074

- (i). Students' Association President, C. De Brito, and Students' Association Vice-President, L. Webster, presented the report, outlining recent activities and engagement initiatives.
- (ii). Court was advised of a series of successful student events, including the winter meal (attended by approximately 35 students), refreshers week for international students,

Burns Night, and Chinese New Year celebrations. Court noted that feedback from participants had been very positive, and several of these events are expected to become annual fixtures. Court commended the commitment shown in supporting students during the winter break.

- (iii). Court noted that the Students' Association is developing a new buddy system to support isolated or less confident students in engaging with societies and sports clubs. The initiative aims to improve inclusion and create a stronger link between student wellbeing services and student-led groups.
- (iv). Court was advised that work continues on redesigning the society award scheme, introducing Bronze, Silver and Gold recognition for society committee members. The scheme will highlight skills development, community engagement, fundraising activities, and contributions to University events.
- (v). Court note that ahead of the Scottish elections, the Students' Association was promoting voter registration and encouraging student political participation. It was highlighted that plans were underway for a student trip to the Scottish Parliament, with the intention of holding the visit before the pre-election period begins.
- (vi). Court was advised that the Students' Association had delivered a sexual health awareness campaign (SHAG Week), continuing work initiated by a previous President, Livi Robertson and hosted a Galentine's movie night as part of wider efforts to sustain engagement in Trimester 2.
- (vii). Court noted the breadth of activity being undertaken and thanked the Students' Association for its ongoing work to support and represent the student community.

Main Business

68. Chair's Committee Terms of Reference Review

CT/0226/079

- (i). Head of Governance and Deputy Secretary, Dr D. Peden highlighted that GNC had reviewed the current arrangements for managing urgent University business between scheduled Court meetings, with a particular focus on the role and remit of the Chair's Committee. The review had been initiated following concerns raised previously by Court.
- (ii). Court was advised that the review had considered practice across the Scottish sector, lessons learned from the recent cases, and requirements of the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance (2023), which emphasises the need for clear definition and transparency in any delegated authority exercised between meetings.
- (iii). Key outcomes of the review were highlighted as follows:
 - Renaming of the Chair's Committee to the Exceptions Committee to better reflect its purpose in handling urgent or exceptional matters.

- Revised Terms of Reference, providing clearer specification of:
 - the circumstances in which the Committee may act on behalf of Court;
 - enhanced reporting requirements, including email notification of decisions and submission of minutes within 10 working days;
 - strengthened expectations regarding alignment with strategic objectives, statutory duties, and good governance principles.
 - Updated membership provisions to ensure clarity of composition and to safeguard the independence of the Audit and Risk Committee.
 - Minor amendments to the Scheme of Delegation and Decision-Making Powers to reflect the revised remit and improve procedural safeguards.
- (iv). Court was advised that the proposed changes were intended to enhance transparency, accountability, and governance clarity in the handling of urgent matters between Court meetings. It was proposed that the establishment of the Exceptions Committee and the related amendments to the Scheme of Delegation and Decision-Making Powers would take effect immediately. Court was advised that GNC had endorsed the proposals on 23 January 2026 (CT/0226/070) and recommended these for Court approval.

Outcome: Court approved the changes to the Terms of Reference for the Chair's Committee including it being renamed as the Exceptions Committee.

Outcome: Court approved the proposed changes to the Scheme of Delegation and Decision-Making Powers to reflect the establishment of an Exceptions Committee.

Matters for Information

69. Scottish Funding Council Return: Self-Evaluation Action Plan (SEAP)

CT/0226/090

- (i). Court was advised that the Self-Evaluation and Action Plan had been prepared to meet SFC's requirement- for institutions to provide annual statements on the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement of provision, in line with the first cycle of Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework and endorsed by the institution's Accountable Officer. Court noted that, in line with the process previously agreed by Court, the return had been signed off by the Principal and submitted to the SFC on 2 December 2025 to meet the statutory deadline.
- (ii). Court considered student retention and employability data, noting that approximately 15% of first-year students leave the University, with some transferring to other institutions or employment. Court reiterated the importance of widening participation as central to the University's purpose, noting the potential impact that might have on retention.

- (iii). Court also discussed the influence of AI on graduate employability, including the increasing use of AI-generated job applications and the difficulty employers face in evaluating them. This was considered alongside broader labour-market changes such as outsourcing and automation. Court was advised of plans to incorporate AI literacy, sustainability, and emerging disciplinary trends into the curriculum, supported by enhanced employer engagement to ensure students are well prepared for the evolving job market and to reinforce the value of Abertay degrees.
- (iv). Court was advised that the annual Retention, Progression and Module Performance Update would be submitted to its next meeting.

Date of Next Meeting: 29 April 2026

Chair: David Brew