

**Minutes (Open) Unapproved University Court – 18 February 2026**

\*attended online

**Members**

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David Brew (Chair)	Colin Graham (Vice-Chair)
Professor Liz Bacon	Kerith George-Briant
Dia Banerji	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	Luke Webster

**Apologies**

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Andrew Bailey	Pam Herries
Fiona Drysdale KC	Dr Hadi Mehrpouya
Lynne Hamilton	Steven Traynor

**In Attendance**

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Graeme Bletcher (Item 76.4)	Andrew Menzies
Professor Alice Brown	Dr Dianne Peden (Clerk)
Eilidh Fraser	Caroline Summers (Secretary to Court)
Frazer Greig (Item 76.2)	Cullen Warnock (Item 76.1 and 76.2)
Vanessa Kind	

**Open Business****Main Business**

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

- (i). Court noted that declarations of interest had been sought at the start of the formal meeting, which commenced the previous day, and no further declarations were made.

**77. Supporting Strategies**

- (i). Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor L. Bacon, noted that Court had approved five of the nine supporting strategies - Financial; International and Partnerships; People; Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation; and Student Success - at its November

meeting, and that the remaining four strategies were now presented for consideration and approval. It was highlighted that a framework incorporating the University-level Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the supporting strategies KPIs, and other internal indicators was under development. In addition, as the supporting strategies had been developed in parallel, it was highlighted that a final review would take place when all nine supporting strategies had been approved to ensure consistency of terminology and appropriate cross-referencing. It was expected that any changes would be minor and editorial in nature.

### **77.1. Sustainable Development Strategy**

**CT/0226/075**

- (i). Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services, A. Menzies presented the revised Strategy and highlighted that it had been realigned to the new University Strategy, supported by extensive stakeholder engagement. Court noted that feedback gathered through this process, including an open online session, had been incorporated into the final draft presented for approval.
- (ii). Court was advised that the Strategy was organised around four pillars: teaching and research, knowledge exchange, responsible campus operations, and community engagement. Court discussed the accompanying KPIs, noting their clarity, robustness, and the inclusion of defined targets, with progress to be reported to Court in due course. Members expressed satisfaction with the revisions and confirmed consensus.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Sustainable Development Strategy.

### **77.2. Estates Strategy**

**CT/0226/076**

- (i). Chief Estates Officer, C. Warnock presented the revised Strategy, highlighting that it had been aligned to the new University Strategy and the revised Sustainable Development Strategy following extensive stakeholder engagement and committee feedback. Court was advised that the Strategy emphasised common design themes to reinforce Abertay's identity, enhanced technology integration—including upgrades to building management systems, occupancy-based energy controls, and movement toward a “smart campus”—and continued work on sustainability initiatives such as energy monitoring, solar panels, and biodiversity improvements.
- (ii). Court raised queries regarding the clarity and measurement of KPIs, including the use of AI-enabled systems, utilisation metrics, baselines, and the distinction between current and target measures. It was acknowledged that there was the need to refine KPI definitions and to ensure appropriate baselining.
- (iii). Court discussed ongoing challenges associated with the age and suitability of the estate, the need to improve space utilisation and flexible teaching provision, and opportunities

for community engagement through new facilities such as the proposed Health and Wellbeing building. Court discussed the need for a more accurate baseline that reflects areas that are usable for modern teaching and learning and requested clearer utilisation statistics, including greater granularity on room usage, core teaching space demand, and the impact of cross-Faculty IT lab planning.

- (iv). It was agreed that revised utilisation data would be brought back to Court, alongside improved KPIs that define baselines, targets, and the measures through which Court and Finance and Corporate Performance Committee (FCPC) can monitor progress.

**Action:** Chief Estates Officer to provide Court with revised utilisation data, alongside improved KPIs that define baselines, targets, and the measures through which Court and Finance and Corporate Performance Committee can monitor progress on the Estates Strategy.

**Outcome:** Court confirmed support for the overall direction of the Strategy and approved it in principle, on the understanding that further detail on KPIs and implementation arrangements would be developed and brought back to Court at its next meeting.

### 77.3. Digital Strategy

CT/0226/077

- (i). Chief Digital Officer, F. Greig, presented the revised Strategy, highlighting that it consolidated previous work and aligned investment priorities with the University's Financial Strategy. Court was advised that the Strategy looked to emphasise disciplined investment, value for money, and support for staff and student journeys through greater automation and reduction of manual processes.
- (ii). Court discussed the growing potential of AI to streamline operations, address technical debt, and enhance efficiency, noting links to the University's transformation bid and the need for parallel investment in digital skills and updated teaching laboratories. Court considered issues of data sovereignty, cybersecurity, and the energy consumption of AI models. F. Greig outlined ongoing work in relation to data residency, ensuring data is held in appropriate jurisdictions (e.g. UK/EU), alongside work to strengthen cybersecurity risk assessment and to encourage the use of more power-efficient AI solutions, where available, in collaboration with suppliers e.g. using a mix of local and cloud-based approaches aligned with the Estates and Sustainable Development Strategies.
- (iii). Court sought clarity on KPIs relating to AI, automation, digital skills, and project benefits. F. Greig described the use of benefit realisation plans for all digital projects but acknowledged the challenge of developing meaningful aggregate level indicators that Court can use to monitor progress over time. Court also discussed whether a separate AI strategy was required or whether AI should be more explicitly embedded within the Digital Strategy, noting the need for appropriate AI governance.

**Action:** Chief Digital Officer to provide Court with improved KPIs that define baselines, targets, and the measures through which Court and Finance and Corporate Performance Committee can monitor progress on the Digital Strategy.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Digital Strategy in principle, subject to further development of KPIs, baselining, and implementation plans. It was agreed that a revised version incorporating these elements would be brought back to Court at its next meeting.

#### **77.4. Civic Engagement Strategy**

**CT/0226/078**

- (iv). Head of Communications and Public Affairs, G. Bletcher, presented the revised Strategy, highlighting that it builds on the 2023 version and had been developed through staff consultation, adopting a wider definition of civic engagement spanning seven domains, including societal, environmental, cultural, and economic impact. It was highlighted that the updated Strategy places greater emphasis on research, knowledge exchange and innovation activities, and introduces improved mechanisms for recording and reporting engagement, including an engagement logging form, events policy, external speaker protocol, and an annual civic engagement report.
- (v). Court noted that the communications, events, and engagement functions had recently been brought together into a single team and that early benefits were already evident, including increased participation in the Dundee Science Festival and enhanced visibility of civic activities.
- (vi). Court discussed challenges associated with measuring civic engagement, agreeing that percentage-based KPIs aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals would allow for variability in annual activity. Court was reminded that there would be a further exercise to ensure consistency of measurement across institutional strategies. Court also considered the role of alumni engagement, noting examples of recent activity, opportunities for digital engagement, and the constraints posed by current resourcing. Court recognised that further development in this area would be dependent on capacity and operational planning.

**Outcome:** Court approved the revised Civic Engagement Strategy, recognising its strengthened structure, clearer governance, and integrated approach to recording and supporting civic activity.

#### **78. Policy Documents**

##### **78.1. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**

**CT/0226/080**

**Outcome:** Court approved the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

**78.2. Neonatal Care Leave Policy**

**CT/0226/081**

**Outcome:** Court approved the Neonatal Care Leave Policy.

**78.3. Special Leave Policy**

**CT/0226/082**

**Outcome:** Court approved the Special Leave Policy.

**78.4. Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorism Funding Policy** **CT/0226/083**

**Outcome:** Court approved the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorism Funding Policy.

**78.5. Fraud Response Plan**

**CT/0226/084**

**Outcome:** Court approved the Fraud Response Plan, which will be added as an appendix to the Fraud Prevention Policy.

**78.6. Investment Management Policy**

**CT/0226/085**

- (vii). The Chair reminded Court that an updated version had been circulated to Court on 16 February 2026 to address comments from FCPC (CT/0226/068). Court was advised that changes included removal of the alcohol exclusion (noting that the University's Investment Fund Manager, UBS, does not hold such investments), formalisation of the University's existing position on fossil fuel avoidance, simplification of wording relating to alignment with core values, and consideration of adding an exclusion relating to animal exploitation. Court discussed the practicalities of implementing exclusions through UBS and noted that some categories may not be identifiable through available screening tools.
- (viii). Court considered the compatibility of the policy with University research activities and agreed that genetic modification (GMOs) should be removed from the exclusions list in the policy. It was also noted that the wording relating to weapons may require refinement, and that further clarity would be brought back through FCPC. Court sought assurance regarding the scope of the "adult entertainment" exclusion and noted that this referred to legal industry activity.

**Action:** Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services, working with the Finance and Corporate Performance Committee, to finalise the exclusions table in the Investment Management Policy in line with Court's agreed changes; continue engagement with UBS to ensure exclusions are practical and cost-effective; and report back to Court on 17 June 2026.

**Outcome:** Court approved the Investment Management Policy in principle, delegating finalisation of the exclusions table to the Finance, Corporate and People Committee,

which will continue engagement with UBS to ensure exclusions are practical and cost-effective and report back to Court at its meeting on 17 June 2026.

**78.7. Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement** **CT/0226/086**

**Outcome:** Court approved the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement.

**78.8. General Descriptor for Court Members** **CT/0226/087**

**Outcome:** Court approved the General Descriptor for Court Members.

**78.9. Rules for Nominations and Elections to University Court** **CT/0226/088**

**Outcome:** Court approved the Rules for Nominations and Elections to University Court.

**79. Process for Election of Staff Members to Senate 2026** **CT/0226/089**

- (ix). Dr D. Peden highlighted that the terms of eleven of the twelve elected members of Senate would end on 31 August 2026, which had raised concerns about continuity, succession planning, and institutional memory. Court was advised that the Governance and Nominations Committee (CT/0226/069 and CT/0226/070) had recommended a strengthened and modernised election process, centred on the introduction of staggered terms. Court was advised that under the revised approach, elected members would be divided into two groups: Group A would serve an initial two-year term, and Group B would serve the standard three-year term, with all subsequent terms set at three years on a rolling basis. This approach would prevent largescale simultaneous turnover in future cycles.
- (i). GNC had also further recommended the adoption of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) for all categories of election, enhancing fairness and proportionality in multi-seat contests. It was also proposed that any mid-term vacancies would be filled only for the remainder of the original term, ensuring the staggered pattern is maintained.
- (ii). Court queried the impact on the Senate-nominated member of Court, the rules of which state a three-year term (CT/0226/098). It was confirmed that the revised arrangements would look to ensure that there was no disadvantage to the Senate-nominated member on Court.
- (iii). Court was advised that Senate (CT/0226/072) had endorsed the proposed changes.  
**Outcome:** Court approved the revised Senate election process and timeline, enabling implementation ahead of the 2026 election cycle.

## **Concluding Matters**

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### **80. Any Other Competent Business**

**Oral Report**

- (i). No other matters were raised.

### **81. Reflections on the Meeting and Future Business**

**Oral Report**

- (i). Court noted its thanks for the timely circulation of papers in advance of the meeting.
- (ii). Court was reminded that the annual public stakeholder event will take place prior to the April meeting, with further details to be circulated in due course.

**Date of Next Meeting: 29 April 2026**

**Chair: David Brew**