

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 16 September 2003

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Mr A Amoore, Professor P Beaumont, Lady Catto, Dr N Dower, Ms J Duncan, Ms C Edge, Professor G Graham, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Cllr P Johnston, Dr P Kinnear, Mr M Lockhead, Professor S Logan, Professor B MacGregor, Dr M Mackie, Mr A Mair, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Cllr J Stewart, Mr S Styles, with Professor D Houlihan, Professor A Rodger, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr A Donaldson, Mrs C Inglis, Dr P Murray, Mrs L Manders and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Dr A Dawson, Mr J Leiper, Mr D Marr, Dr N Milne, Professor W Smith, Mr G Stevenson and Professor I Torrance.

Mr Mair informed the Court of the resignation of Mr Duncan and noted that this was Dr Kinnear's final meeting as a Senate Assessor to Court. The Court noted its appreciation of Mr Duncan and Dr Kinnear's considerable contribution to the work of the Court.

MINUTES

- 1 The Minutes of meeting held on 1st July 2003 were approved, subject to their amendment to record Dr Dower's apologies for that meeting.

STATEMENT BY THE PRINCIPAL

- 2 The Principal updated the Court on the first indication of the year-end financial results. These indicated an historical cost surplus, including exceptional items, of £5.681 million. This was ahead of the budgeted figure of £5.542m. These figures, although subject to audit, showed a positive variance compared to the historical cost surpluses forecast in the SHEFC mid-year return and the Strategic Plan. Cash Reserves, remained healthy at £27.689m, while Research Grants and Contracts income had increased this year by 9.6% to £36.8m this year.
- 3 The Principal then asked Professor Houlihan to update the Court on the status of student admissions. Professor Houlihan noted that Court had before it an admissions report and that in summary, the undergraduate numbers were on target and the University has been able to withdraw from the clearing process earlier than many others. Applications for taught postgraduate courses were strong, with the numbers of overseas applications being the best for several years. In relation to postgraduate research admissions, there remained scope for improvement.
- 4 The Principal informed the Court that the University had been represented at the recent Offshore Europe Exhibition. The event had helped considerably to increase the University's profile within the Oil and Gas Industry.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION CONSULTATIONS

- 5 The Court received a paper which invited members to comment on four consultation documents which had been published over the summer vacation and which were required to be submitted by 30th September 2003.

Inquiry into the impact of England's University Fees on Scottish Higher Education

- 6 Professor Sewel introduced a paper which summarised the main points of the Enterprise and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament inquiry into the impact and potential problems for Scotland of proposals to introduce top-up fees in England. The paper noted that the Committee did not intend to consider the introduction of top-up fees as an option in Scotland. The Committee did, however, intend to produce alternative options for possible future structures and mechanisms for funding higher education.
- 7 Following general discussion, the Court noted its concern that Scottish universities would be at a competitive disadvantage as a result of English Universities' increased funding. It was agreed that this would be reflected in the University's response to the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

Consultation on the Review of Research Assessment

- 8 Professor Houlihan introduced the paper which summarised the main points of the review of the future shape of the Research Assessment Exercise. The review addressed the fundamental aspects of the research assessment process from which the UK Funding Councils aimed to agree on a common approach to research assessment.
- 9 The Court noted that the University was consulting widely with academic staff before responding to the consultation.

The Sustainability of University Research: A Consultation on Reforming Parts of the Dual Support System

- 10 Professor Houlihan introduced the paper to the Court, which summarised the key issues relating relating to the proposal that from September 2004 universities must submit grant proposals using a pricing and costing methodology that enabled them to estimate robustly and reliably the full economic cost of individual research projects. This was linked to the Government's wish to make explicit universities' central responsibility for the long-term sustainability of their research by making it the responsibility of institutions to recover the full economic costs of the totality of the research they carry out.
- 11 The Court noted that the views of academic staff were being sought before the University formally responded to the consultation.

Improving Standards in Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes

- 12 Dr Roberts introduced the paper and noted to the Court that it was the second consultation undertaken by the four UK Funding Councils as part of a joint programme to enhance the quality of research degree programmes by developing threshold standards.
- 13 The Court noted that the University was seeking the views of academic staff before formally responding to the consultation.

INVESTING IN RESTRUCTURING

- 14 Mr Cannon introduced the paper (copy filed with principal copy of the minutes) which, following the decision of the University Court on 1 July 2003 to provide funding of £9 million over three years in a Restructuring Scheme, proposed a framework for the operation of that scheme. It was noted that at 6.2 in the paper, the first paragraph had been included in error and would be removed from the paper.
- 15 The paper invited the Court to approve the general principles of the scheme and to appoint a Committee on Restructuring to take forward institutional restructuring and to consider, and approve where appropriate, requests for restructuring funds. The Committee would comprise:

Principal (Convener)
Secretary to the University
Senior Vice-Principal
Vice-Principal (Research & Commercialisation)
Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning)

- 16 The appropriate Head of College would be invited to attend the Committee to present individual proposals.
- 17 Following discussion, it was agreed the Committee should report to Court on its progress on a quarterly basis.
- 18 In discussion, the Court was assured that the process of restructuring would take account of the need to ensure the retention of existing staff, although this would have to come from College resources. The process would also have to recognise our obligation as a university to maintain a breadth of disciplines for the benefit of students and the wider community the University serves.
- 19 The Court approved the proposals, subject to the above amendments.

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES: REMIT AND COMPOSITION

- 20 The Court received a paper setting out proposals for amendment to the remits and compositions of a range of University Committees in light of the establishment of Colleges.
- 21 The Court, for its part, approved the recommended changes and agreed to forward the paper to Senate for its approval.

REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL TECHNICAL STAFF REQUIREMENTS

- 22 The Court noted that a review of the University's technical staffing had been requested, as a matter of urgency, by the Heads of College in order to determine accurately the technical resources required to support the strategic objectives of the new Colleges. The review was intended to identify the areas of over-provision or duplication, opportunities for cross-functional working, skill-gaps and cost saving opportunities. External consultants had been appointed to undertake the review and a period of consultation with Trade Unions and staff had commenced.

UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE ADMISSIONS

- 23 The Court received a summary of the status of undergraduate and postgraduate admissions. The Court noted the report, which was in addition to the update given by Professor Houlihan (See minute 3).

DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

- 24 The Court noted that the Principal and the Senior Lay Member under delegated powers had approved the following during the summer holiday period:

Education Relocation Project

- 25 (i) the selection of a preferred purchaser for the Hilton site and the conclusion of sale missives;
- (ii) the MacRobert decant strategy and associated costs.

Future School Structure of Arts & Divinity

- 26 Approval of the future configuration of Schools of the former Faculty of Arts & Divinity, within the new College of Arts & Social Sciences. The new structure linked the School of Modern Languages with the School of English and Film Studies, and the School of History and History of Art with the School of Divinity, Religious Studies and Philosophy. This followed consultation with staff by the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Divinity and the Head of College.
- 27 Approval was also given to begin the process of appointing Heads of these Schools.

MATTERS FOR HOMOLOGATION

- 28 The Court homologated the following items, approved by the Principal under powers delegated to him on specific matters authorised by the Court:

29 Professor Peter Sharp, Head of Department of Bio-Medical Physics and Bio-Engineering
The continuing appointment of Professor Sharp as Head of Department until the structure of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine had been finalised.

30 Professor Colin McCaig, Head of Department of Biomedical Sciences
The continuing appointment of Professor McCaig as Head of Department until the structure of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine had been finalised.

31 Professor Lewis Ritchie, Head of Department of General Practice and Primary Care
The continuing appointment of Professor Ritchie as Head of Department until the structure of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine had been finalised.

32 Professor Allan Templeton, Head of Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology
The continuing appointment of Professor Templeton as Head of Department until the structure of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine had been finalised.

33 Professor John Simpson, Head of Department of Pathology
The continuing appointment of Professor Simpson as Head of Department until the structure of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine had been finalised.

34 Professor Phil Swanson, Established Chair in Hispanic Studies
The translation of Professor Swanson to the Established Chair of Hispanic Studies, with effect from 1 July 2003.

35 Professor Alison Saunders, Carnegie Chair in French
The translation of Professor Saunders to the Carnegie Chair in French, with effect from 1 July 2003.

COURT INFORMATION SEMINAR

- 36 The Court noted that an information seminar for new and continuing Court Members had been held on 12 September. The seminar provided information on the role of Members of Court and included presentations on a variety of issues related to governance and the University's operations.

PAPERS FOR INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

- 37 The Court noted that copies of the following papers were available on request from the Court & Planning Office (ext 272093)
- (i) MONITORING OF STUDENT NUMBERS 2002-03 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING: SHEFC Circular Letter HE/23/03, dated 18 July 2003.
 - (ii) NEW ACCESS PARTNERSHIPS – ALLOCATION OF ADDITIONAL FUNDED PLACES FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2003-04: SHEFC Circular Letter HE/27/03, dated 16 July 2003.

- (iii) OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE (CEIG) AND REVIEW OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: SHEFC Circular letter HE/28/03, dated 21 July 2003.
- (iv) SCIENCE RESEARCH INVESTMENT FUND – SECOND ROUND: Letter from SHEFC, dated 25 July 2003, announcing the outcome of proposals submitted for funding under the second round of the Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF2).