

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 2 November 2004

Present: Dr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Professor P Beaumont, Professor I Booth, Mr T Brotherstone, Lady Catto, Mrs S Grant, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Mr J Leiper, Professor S Logan, Dr M Mackie, Mr P Richards, Mrs M Ross, Dr G Roberts, Mr R Ruddiman, Professor C Smith, Mr S Styles, with Professor C Gane, Professor N Haites, Professor A Rodger, Professor B MacGregor, 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 intimated from, the Rector, Mr A Amooore, Miss A Harper, Mr M Lockhead, Mr D Marr , Dr N Milne, and Councillor J Stewart.

Dr Mair welcomed Mr Brotherstone and Mrs Ross to their first meetings as Senate Assessors.

*Declaration of Interests:* The Principal declared an interest as a Governor of the Rowett Research Institute in relation to Minute 58-61. Mr Brotherstone declared an interest as Vice-President of Association of University Teachers Scotland in relation to Minute 45.

MINUTES

44 The Minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2004 were approved.

NOTE ON MINUTE 15 OF 14 SEPTEMBER 2004 CONCERNING  
THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

45 Mr Brotherstone noted that minute 15 on the Framework Agreement from the previous meeting described the "essence" of the agreement as being to "provide local flexibility in determining pay, grading and conditions of service". Mr Brotherstone asked that the Court also note that from the perspective of the Association of University Teachers the "essence" of the agreement was to address the historic differential in salaries between academic staff and equivalent professions. The Court agreed to note this.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

46 The Principal noted that the University had held two events in Aberdeen to launch the second phase of the Sixth Century Fundraising Campaign. This next phase had a target of £60m and further launch events were planned in the UK and abroad.

47 The Principal informed Court that the University had recently been visited by representatives from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) to consider the University's institutional plan. The visit had gone well with SHEFC representatives welcoming a number of responses the University had made to points raised during the Council's visit last year.

48 The Principal also reported that the University believed that a recent visit by SHEFC to evaluate the merger with Northern College and the development of the School of Education had been very positive although this was as yet subject to formal confirmation by SHEFC.

49 At the Principal's invitation, Professor Gane updated the Court on the progress of the Further and Higher Education Bill in the Scottish Parliament. The University had shared a series of concerns with others in the Higher Education sector regarding the implications of the Bill as originally drafted. Professor Gane reported that almost all of the key concerns had been accepted by the Scottish Executive and the Bill amended accordingly.

50 The Principal then informed Court that the outcome of the Scottish Executive's spending review looked to be broadly favourable for the higher education sector but added that it remained to be seen how funds would be distributed to individual institutions by SHEFC.

51 At the Principal's invitation, Dr Roberts updated the Court on a confidential basis regarding the progress of agreeing with the City Council revised proposals for the development of joint sporting facilities. Any new proposals would be brought back for approval to the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee and Court.

#### RESEARCH STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

52 Professor Houlihan introduced a paper, which summarised progress in discussions regarding a number of strategic research alliances.

##### *Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability*

53 Professor Houlihan reminded the Court that the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability relied primarily on investment from the National Environmental Council (NERC), and to a lesser extent the Macaulay Institute and the University. A Business Plan had been submitted to the NERC Council, supported by a Science Plan. The Business Plan included a series of options for the location of the Centre, with the preferred options involving a relocation of staff from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Banchory, to join staff from the Macaulay and the University in a new-build centre at Craigiebuckler which would be badged as a University Research Campus.

54 A Strategic Research Development Grant application had been made jointly by the University and the Macaulay Institute to SHEFC to support ACES through a capital contribution of £1m, and a further £0.5m to fund two joint Chairs. There was also a possibility that the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) might provide financial support for the Centre. In addition, it was proposed on the recommendation of JPFEC, that the University provide capital funding of £0.5m in support of the physical realisation of the ACES Centre.

55 The Court noted that a proposed governance structure for the new Centre would be brought to Court for approval, although at present it was envisaged that the Director of the Centre would be a University employee.

56 Professor Houlihan explained that, in relation to the next Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the three Chair positions within the Centre would be expected to be submitted for assessment, although this would not necessarily be the case for other staff. He added, however, that the importance of the Centre in the longer-term went beyond the next RAE and that it would strengthen the University's research profile in a variety of ways.

57 The Court approved capital funding of £0.5m in support of the physical realisation of an Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES).

##### *Rowett Research Institute*

58 Professor Houlihan introduced the paper which explained the background to discussions, most notably that the University and the Rowett Research Institute had a history of successful collaboration in areas of common interest, and that the Institute, which is core funded by SEERAD, was being advised by the Scottish Scientific Advisory Committee to optimise its research capacity by developing its relationship with higher education institutions.

- 59 In this context, the University and the Institute wished jointly to consider the creation of a strategic alliance that would facilitate the integration of research undertaken by both institutions in the field of human nutrition and health, ideally in a new international centre of research excellence. It was acknowledged that while the two institutions had much in common regarding their research objectives, they both had different governance, staffing and financial arrangements.
- 60 It was further explained that part of the process would be to consider the potential for savings to both institutions through closer integration. The implications for the University in research terms would also be part of that due diligence process.
- 61 The Court approved the further exploration of possible models of collaboration to facilitate the formal integration of research undertaken by the University and the Rowett Research Institute.

#### *Fisheries Research Services*

- 62 The paper explained that there was existing teaching and research collaboration between the University and the Fisheries Research Services (FRS). The Scottish Executive was now encouraging the FRS to collaborate further with universities. While other Scottish universities would be of interest to FRS activities, it was thought that in certain areas there was an opportunity to strengthen research collaboration between the FRS and this University.
- 63 The Court agreed to the establishment of a Steering Group to manage the process of developing collaboration between the University and the FRS.

#### STUDENT CENTRE

- 64 Mr Cannon introduced the paper, which set out proposals for a new Student Centre and the refurbishment of the Central Refectory. They followed on from the earlier decision of the Court to close the Gallowgate Union, given its continuing losses, and that changing student trends suggested a new range of campus based services were required. At the same time there was a need to address unsustainable losses in the University's catering services.
- 65 The project could be undertaken either as a phased development to 2009, at an estimated cost of £9.5m, or by temporarily closing the Central Refectory in order to complete the project in eighteen months, at an estimated cost of £8.786m. While involving larger short-term disruption to services, it was believed that it was vital to the reputation of the University in student recruitment terms that the project be completed as quickly as possible. In doing so, it was acknowledged that adequate arrangements for students and staff would need to be identified.
- 66 In discussion, it was explained that the building would be a flexible space that could be revised or extended potentially, should there be an increase in the student population in the future. It was also explained that it had yet to be determined whether all catering provision in the building would be outsourced. It was acknowledged that the University would need to strike a balance in terms of the food provision in the building, both between 'snacks' and 'main meals', and also the provision of 'healthy eating' options.
- 67 The Court also noted that there was concern regarding how the new arrangements would meet staff needs, particularly for social space. It was readily accepted that the University would need to address this issue.
- 68 The Court approved the proposal to refurbish the Student Centre and the recommendation that further detailed consideration be given to the scheduling of the work by the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee. The Court also approved the Student Centre Business Plan.

## RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE PLANNING

- 69 Professor Houlihan introduced a paper which provided information on the University's preparations for the forthcoming national Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008. In addition to ongoing research planning as part of the annual planning process, a RAE steering group had been established to oversee the University's RAE submission, supported by a designated member of staff as RAE co-ordinator.
- 70 The Court noted that the first stage in the planning process was to hold a College-based review of staff and publications. The outcome of this would be reported to the RAE steering group in January.

## JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE MATTERS FOR APPROVAL

### *Institutional Performance Indicators*

- 71 The Court received and approved a paper which set out a range of proposed institutional performance indicators.

### *Crombie-Johnston Halls*

- 72 The Student Residential Accommodation Framework Strategy, approved by Court in December 2003, had included the redevelopment of Crombie-Johnston Halls. To take this forward, it was recommended that a budget of up to £200k for the appointment of a design team be approved to allow an initial feasibility study of the site to take place and the preparation of an outline proposal for the redevelopment.
- 73 The Court approved the recommendation.

### *Intermediary Technology Institute Guidelines on Collaboration with Scottish Universities*

- 74 The Court approved the Intermediary Technology Institute Guidelines on Collaboration with Scottish Universities.

### *Debtors Write-Off*

- 75 The Court approved a recommendation to write off bad debts of £375k.

## RESEARCH ETHICS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

- 76 The Court received a paper that recommended the establishment of an Institutional Research Ethics and Governance Committee as a Joint Committee of Senate and Court.
- 77 The paper explained that the University had a responsibility to ensure that the research it supports is carried out in conformity with the law and in accordance with best practice. An increasing requirement from major funders of research was to demonstrate robust research governance and ethical approval arrangements within auditable formal decision-making procedures. While the University had a central Ethical Review Committee for research involving animals, it had no general Research Ethics Committee.
- 78 The Court approved the establishment of the Committee as described in the appendix to this Minute.

## COURT APPOINTMENTS

### *Vice-Principal, Library and Information Services*

- 79 The Court approved a recommendation from the Principal to apply an uplift of the post of Vice-Principal (Library and Information Services) from 0.5 of full time equivalent to 1.0, as from 1 January 2005, effective for the duration of the term of office.

## STUDENT ADMISSIONS REPORT

- 80 The Court noted a report which summarised the principal points from this year's admissions round, as under:
- Undergraduate admissions targets for UK and EU full-time students had been met overall, although there had been a decline in both applications and admissions in the priority areas of Science and Engineering. This had been compensated for by increasing the target for MA entry.
  - Apart from Engineering and non-graduating programmes, the number of full-cost international undergraduate students had exceeded targets in all areas.
  - The number of UK/EU applications received, and students admitted to Taught Postgraduate programmes had been a disappointment. A Working Group was considering ways to increase numbers by recruiting more students for entry in February 2005.
  - Numbers of full-cost taught postgraduates had risen significantly, with all three Colleges exceeding their targets.
  - Research student registration had commenced only on 1st October, but preliminary indications were that, after registrations later in the year were taken into account, targets would be met.

## FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION

- 81 The Court noted a paper which provided an update on implementation progress and the remit and membership of the Framework Agreement Steering Group.

## JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE REPORT FOR INFORMATION

### *Operational Plan 2004/05*

- 82 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received and approved the Operational Plan 2004/05 and that the Committee would receive regular progress reports throughout the year. The plan was available for consultation in the Court & Planning Office.

### *Timetable for Planning for year 2005/06*

- 83 The Court noted that the Committee had received and approved the Timetable for Planning for the year 2005/06.

### *Marischal College*

- 84 The Court noted that the Committee had received and considered a report on negotiations between the University of Aberdeen and Aberdeen City Council in respect of the potential redevelopment and future use of Marischal College and had agreed that negotiations with Aberdeen City Council should continue and that appropriate due diligence should be undertaken.

### *Research and RAE2008 Planning*

- 85 The Court noted that the Committee had received and approved a paper outlining progress in planning for the Research Assessment Exercise 2008.

### *Full Economic Costing*

- 86 The Court noted that the Committee had received a paper on the implementation of full economic costing of research.

*Strategic Research Development Grant (SRDG) 2004*

- 87 The Court noted that the Committee had received a paper on the submission of bids for funding from the Strategic Research Development Grant 2004. The Court noted that three outline bids had been submitted and that the University was also a partner in a number of other bids.

*Commercialisation Activity 2003/04*

- 88 The Court noted that the Commercialisation and Income Generation Sub-Committee had considered thirteen applications for SHEFC Knowledge Transfer Grant during 2003/04, of which six had been funded. The University had been awarded funding totalling £905K for five projects in Round Five of the Scottish Enterprise Proof of Concept Fund.

*Catering Update*

- 89 The Court noted that the Committee had considered arrangements for the closure of the Central Production Unit (CPU) and the interim provision of catering, and that the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) tendering process for the longer-term provision of catering from January 2005 was underway.

*Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee*

Capital Programme 2003/04

- 90 The Court noted that capital expenditure on major projects during the year 2003/04 was approximately £11M, an underspend of £3.4M. Capital expenditure on the annual rolling programme was approximately £2.5M, an underspend of £1.3M. These were largely due to the timing of invoices, phasing and predicted delays on some projects.

Project Board Reports

- 91 The Court noted that the Sub-Committee had received reports on the Cruickshank Building, Zoology Building, Institute of Applied Health Sciences (IAHS) and IAHS2, Marischal College, Heating Station, Education Relocation, Sports Facilities, Old Aberdeen Town House and Catering and Student Accommodation.

*Student Admissions*

- 92 The Court noted that the Committee had received a report on student admissions for 2004/05.

AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

- 93 The Court noted that the Committee had received and approved Internal Audit Reports on Copyright; Payroll – Short-term Contracts; Business School; Domestic Properties; and the Follow-up Report on the 2002-03 Internal Audit Recommendations.
- 94 The Court noted that the Committee had received, for information, the Institutional Register of Strategic Risks.
- 95 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the Internal Audit Needs Assessment and Operational Plan for 2004-05 to 2006-07.
- 96 The Court noted that the Committee had agreed a process of tendering for External Audit Services, with effect from 1 January 2005.

## STAFFING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

- 97 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the remit and composition of a new Sub-Committee, to be designated the Support Staff Liaison Committee. The newly established Sub-Committee would harmonise the activities of the former Technical Staff Liaison Committee and Secretarial Support Staff Committee.
- 98 The Court noted that the Committee had approved in principle the Mediation and Appeals Process that would form part of the implementation process of the new Clinical Consultant Contract Terms and Conditions.

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE: INTIMATION OF VACANCIES

### *Lay Member Vacancy on the Research Ethics and Governance Committee*

- 99 The Court was informed that a vacancy existed for a lay member on the proposed Research Ethics and Governance Committee and expressions of interest were invited.

### *Review of Decisions to Deny Freedom of Information Requests*

- 100 The Court was informed that a vacancy existed for a lay member of Court to adjudicate on any requests for the review of a University decision to refuse disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act and expressions of interest were invited.

## PAPERS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

- 101 The Court was informed that the following papers were available on request from the Court Office.
- (i) STRENGTHS OF THE SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH BASE: SHEFC Circular Letter HE/14/04, dated 26 April 2004: Executive Summary of report by staff of the Council on the strengths of the Scottish higher education research base.  
*Note: A copy of the full consultation is available on request from the Court & Planning Office, or on the Scottish Funding Councils website at <http://www.sfc.ac.uk>.*
- (ii) STAKEHOLDER SURVEY: SHEFC Circular Letter HE/30/04, 29 July 2004, announcing that Partners in Evaluation Scotland (PiES) had been commissioned to undertake a survey intended to find out the views of SFEFC/SHEFC partners and stakeholders so that they may have a better understanding of their needs and improve methods of communication and operation.

## DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 102 It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2004 at 2.00pm.