

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 9 December 2008

Present: Dr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Rector, Mr A Amoore, Mr A Arthur, Lady Catto, Dr P Edwards, Professor C Fynsk, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Mr G Hunter, Councillor P Johnston, Mr B Lockhart, Professor S Logan, Mr D MacKay, Mr B Pack, Professor C Secombes, Professor N Webster, with Professor C Gane, Professor N Haites, Professor P Morgan, Mr S Cannon, Mrs C Banks, Ms I Bews, Mr A Donaldson, Mrs C Inglis, Dr G Mackintosh, Mrs L Manders, Dr P Murray, Mrs E Schofield and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Ms J Craw, Sir Don Cruickshank, Mr P Haley, Sir Moir Lockhead, Professor B MacGregor, Ms C Macaslan, Dr M Mackie, Professor G Robinson, Professor A Rodger, Mr R Ruddiman and Councillor Stewart.

MINUTES

66 The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2008 were approved.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

67 Mr Arthur declared an interest in the agenda item on National Collective Bargaining as a member of the local committee of the University and College Union.

REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL

68 The Principal informed Court that later in the month the University would receive an institutional visit from representatives of the Scottish Funding Council when a range of issues would be discussed. The Principal also reminded Court that the results of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) would be received on 17th December. The results would be highly important for the University, both in terms of future research funding and as an indicator of research strength. The Principal also noted that the University had held its winter graduation ceremonies in the Elphinstone Hall for the first time due to the Mitchell Hall being unavailable. This venue had proved very successful. In discussion, it was also noted that the ceremonies had highlighted the increasing number of international students graduating. The Court agreed that it was vital that the University continue to expand its student base and to ensure it made every effort to look after students from overseas.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

OPERATING BOARD

Updated 10-Year Plan

69 Ms Bews introduced a revised version of the 10 Year Cash Flow Plan, which had been updated to incorporate expected spend profiles on the proposed new Rowett building and income streams to fund the project, together with updates in relation to asset sales and the current financial environment. The Operating Board recommended that the Court approve the plan and drew the Court's attention to the following recommendations contained within it:

- That authority be delegated to agree borrowings from the University's existing facility in line with the professional advice obtained and recommendations of the Finance Director, and to seek Scottish Funding Council approval to extend this beyond 2015/16, if desirable, to a group comprising of at least three of the following: the Principal, Senior Vice Principal, Senior Lay Member and Convener of the Operating Board.

- That future project budgets be based on prevailing construction market conditions to ensure that advantage is taken of possible cost savings to facilitate further investment.
- That Colleges and central administration be invited to develop more detailed strategic project briefs and business cases for the highest priority projects prior to requesting commitment in principle to these projects by the University.
- That the sale of Dunbar and Rowett land and buildings be delayed to maximise the proceeds generated.

70 The Court approved the revised version of the 10 Year Cash Flow Plan.

Future Collective Bargaining Arrangements

71 Mr Cannon introduced a paper from the Operating Board on Future Collective Bargaining Arrangements.

72 The Court noted that the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) was seeking from all of its member institutions confirmation of their position with regard to collective bargaining and managing industrial action. The UCEA Scottish Committee was also recommending that institutions communicate to staff the consequence of their participation in future industrial action.

73 The Operating Board recommended to Court that:

- The University should remain within national collective bargaining arrangements, but that this be kept under review up until March 2009. Although there were growing differences between the funding of English and Scottish institutions which could potentially disadvantage Scottish institutions if the University withdrew from national bargaining, this would likely impact adversely on employee relations.
- It would not be appropriate to communicate to staff at this stage on the consequences of industrial action.

74 The Court approved the recommendations.

Quality Assurance

75 Mr Cannon introduced a paper from the Operating Board recommending that the Court approve the University's Baseline Report on Quality for submission to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

76 The Court approved the paper for onwards submission to the SFC.

Minutes

77 The Court received and noted a copy of the unconfirmed minutes of the Operating Board meeting of 1st December 2008.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Audit Committee Annual Report for 2007-08

78 Mr Amoore introduced the Audit Committee's annual report for 2007/08.

79 The Court approved the report for submission to the Scottish Funding Council and noted that the Audit Committee had been satisfied with the work of the external auditors.

Internal Auditors' Annual Report 2007-08

80 Mr Amoore introduced the Internal Auditor's Report for 2007/08.

81 In discussion, the Court noted that the Audit Committee monitored how points arising from Internal Audit reviews were followed up and implemented.

82 The Court approved the Internal Auditor's Report for 2007/08 for submission to the Scottish Funding Council.

Draft Annual Accounts Year Ended 31 July 2008 (See Minutes 99-102)

83 The Court noted that the Committee had considered the University's Draft Annual Accounts for the financial year 2007/08, together with a commentary from the Director of Finance. The Court noted that subject to a few minor amendments, the Committee, for its part, had approved the accounts.

External Auditors' Report (See Minute 99)

84 The Court noted that the Committee had received the External Auditors' Report and considered the issues that had been highlighted in the audit. The Court noted that the external auditors had issued an unqualified audit opinion in respect of the consolidated accounts.

Minutes

85 The Court received and noted a copy of the unconfirmed minutes of the Audit Committee meeting of 20th November 2008.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Committee for the Appointment of the Principal

86 Mr Cannon introduced a paper from the Governance Committee, recommending the composition and membership of an appointment committee for the selection of the next Principal.

87 Mr Cannon noted that the paper contained a drafting mistake. The wording in the paper suggested that the Convenor of the Governance Committee had met with all Heads of School, Heads of College and Vice-Principals. Mr Cannon informed Court that the Convenor had consulted widely and had met all Heads of School, but not all Heads of College or Vice-Principals.

88 The Governance Committee recommended that Court establish a panel of 8, consisting of 5 academics drawn from across the institution and 3 independent members.

89 The proposed membership of the Committee would be as follows:

Sir Don Cruickshank (Convenor)
Sir Moir Lockhead
Dr Alistair Mair
Professor Celso Grebogi, Sixth Century Chair in Nonlinear and Complex Systems
Professor Neva Haites, Head of College of Life Sciences and Medicine
Professor Dominic Houlihan, Vice-Principal for Research and Commercialisation
Professor Tim Ingold, Chair in Social Anthropology
Mrs Margaret Ross, Head of School of Law

90 In discussion, it was noted that the proposed composition of the Appointment Committee did not include specific representation of non-academic staff. The Court agreed that the matter should be considered by the Appointment Committee at its first meeting and, thereafter, referred back to the Court.

91 The Committee also recommended that Professor Sir George Bain, former President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, be appointed to serve as an external advisor to the Committee

- 92 The Court approved the composition of the Selection Committee for the appointment of the next Principal, subject to the resolution of the matter of non-academic staff representation.

Vacancy on the Operating Board

- 93 The Court noted that the Committee had considered, by circulation, nominations from members of Court for the vacancy for an independent member on the Operating Board.
- 94 The Committee had agreed to recommend to Court that Mr Brian Pack be appointed to the vacancy with immediate effect.
- 95 The Court approved the appointment.

Changes to the Composition of the Health and Safety Committee

- 96 The Committee recommended that Court approve two changes to the composition of the University Health and Safety Committee following the merger with the Rowett Research Institute and the formation of the Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health.
- 97 The Court approved the following changes:

- (i) The addition of one representative from the Prospect trade union.
- (ii) An increase in the number of appointees from the College of Life Sciences and Medicine from two to three, with one of the appointees coming from the Rowett Institution of Nutrition and Health. The Court noted, however, that this would be an interim measure which would be reviewed when the School relocated to Foresterhill. The interim change would recognise the significant size and risk associated with the Rowett's activities and its geographical separation from other University activities.

Minutes

- 98 The Court received and noted a copy of the unconfirmed minutes of the Governance Committee meeting of 4th November 2008.

UNIVERSITY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

- 99 Ms Bews introduced the University's Group Consolidated Annual Accounts for the financial year 2007-08, which had been considered by the Audit Committee and by the Operating Board, with a recommendation for their approval. (*See also Minute 83*). The Court also received a commentary from the Finance Director which highlighted key audit and accounting issues; the External Auditors' Report and Management Letter which provided a clean audit opinion; and the Annual Summary Report on Endowments.
- 100 Ms Bews drew to the Court's attention a number of key points in the Accounts. The Accounts reported an historical cost surplus of £14.3m, which included two exceptional items. Excluding these, the surplus was £6.1m. The budget target for 2007-08 had been £4m. Income for the year had increased by £13.6m (7.9%), with overseas fees increasing by £1.6m (11.7%) and Research Grants and Contracts income increasing by £3.1m (6.6%).
- 101 The Court approved the University's Annual Accounts for 2007-08.
- 102 The Court also noted the Annual Summary Report on Endowments which had fallen in value by 13.4% to £30.9m in the year due to the high volatility in the stock market.

SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

- 103 Professor Logan introduced a paper on developments in higher education policy in Scotland. The paper included a copy of the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) response to the interim report of the Joint Future Thinking Taskforce on Universities (JFTTU) and the Ministerial Letter of Guidance to the SFC.
- 104 In discussion, the Court noted that the University would not know the full impact of the new funding streams proposed through the General and Horizon funds until the Spring of 2009. The Court noted that the decision to place widening access funds within the Horizon Fund was surprising. The Court also noted that the documents suggested the SFC would take on a more explicit planning role in future. Some members of Court expressed concern that the emphasis on skills and employability could, depending on how these were defined, be at odds with the mission of the University.

QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

- 105 The Court received and noted the management accounts for the period ended 31 October 2008.

SENATE REPORT

Curriculum Reform

- 106 The Court noted that the Senate, at its meeting on 19 November 2008 had received a response from the Curriculum Reform Commission to a number of issues raised by the Senate at the previous meeting of 29 October 2008 when the Commission's Final Report was considered. The Court noted that having received this response, the Senate, for its part, had approved, in principle, the recommendations set out in the Final Report from the Curriculum Reform Commission, subject to one amendment (*See Minute 108*).

Baseline Report on Quality Arrangements

- 107 The Court noted that the Senate, for its part, had approved the Baseline Report on Quality Arrangements. (*See Minutes 75-76*).

CURRICULUM REFORM UPDATE

- 108 The Court received and noted a paper on the progress of Curriculum Reform.

FUTURE BUSINESS

- 109 Members were invited to forward to the Clerk any matters they felt should be included in Court papers as future business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 110 The Court noted that the date of its next meeting was 10th February 2009 2pm Court Room.