UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 30 September 2015

Present: Ms M Chapman (in the Chair for Minutes 17 to 64), Principal, Sir Moir Lockhead (Lead for Minutes 1 to 16) Mr A Arthur, Professor C Black (for Minutes 1 to 16), Professor N Booth, Professor C Brittain, Miss G Clarke, Mr C Duncan (for Minutes 1 to 35), Mr J Hall (for Minutes 1 to 35), Professor P Hannaford, Professor S Heys, Professor N Hutchison, Professor J Kilburn, Mr D MacFarlane, Professor P McGeorge, Cllr R McKail, Mrs K McPhail, Ms A Minto (for Minutes 1 to 29), Mr K Murray, Dr N Oren, Mr B Pack, Mr B Paterson, Mrs J Shirreffs, Professor J Skakle, and Mr D Steyn.

In attendance: Mrs C Inglis, Mr D Beattie, Mrs E Bowie (for Minutes 23-29 only), Miss M Burgoyne, Mr A Donaldson, Mrs D Dyker, Professor S Kunin (for Minutes 1 to 16 only), Professor B MacGregor (for Minutes 1 to 20 only), Professor M Ross (for Minutes 1 to 16 only), Mr N Qamar (for Minutes 30-33 only) and Mr B Purdon (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D Haywood, Cllr J Laing and Rev Professor I Torrance.

NEW MEMBERS

1 The Court welcomed Ms Minto and Ms Clarke to their first meetings as members of Court, and Ms Burgoyne to her first meeting as a second student representative in attendance.

Briefing on Trustee Law and the Role and Responsibilities of Trustees

2 The Court received a presentation and briefing from the University's legal advisers on the role and responsibilities of members of Court as charity trustees under Scottish Charities law. The briefing also covered the implications of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance for the role of University governors and the potential future implications of the HE Governance (Scotland) Bill. The Court then considered a number of potential governance scenarios and how the University's procedures would address these.

Strategy Day: Transforming the world with greater knowledge and learning

Delivering our Strategic Objectives

THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

3 The Court received a presentation from the Principal on the strategic environment in which the University was operating and which would influence its ability to deliver the objectives of the Strategic Plan for 2015-2020.

4 The Principal highlighted the key issues arising for the University from the UK and Scottish political context, including the implications of a UK exit from the European Union, the potential for further reductions in funding arising from both the UK Government and Scottish Government spending reviews, and the continuing likelihood that UK immigration policy would be unhelpful to overseas student recruitment.

5 The Principal also highlighted the key future developments which might define the higher education policy context for the University over the coming years. This included the current review of UK Research Councils and a potential reduction in the number of these, together with further concentration of research funding around elite institutions or research institutes. With regard to teaching, increasing competition for RUK students and the lifting of the 'cap' on English Universities would make that a more difficult environment and limit opportunities for growth. The UK Government's proposals to introduce a 'Teaching REF' might also have
implications for Scottish universities. The Principal highlighted that key issues for the University to improve upon continue to be retention and the numbers of students achieving a 1st or 2:1 degree classification.

6 The Principal highlighted the need for the University to have regard to the wider international context and that it was imperative for the Institution to continue to raise its profile and pursue the priorities in the internationalisation strategy.

7 The Principal noted that three key risks for the University in delivering the Strategic Plan were: a failure to improve retention and improve student performance; a failure to increase the number of research citations; and a failure to ensure a fair workload for staff.

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

8 The Court received a paper and presentation from Professor Kilburn (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) on the development of a new approach to integrated strategic, academic and financial planning at both University and School level, the emerging KPIs and high-level strategic targets, and an update on financial sustainability and investment and disinvestment. The Court also received a presentation from Professor Heys on the vision for the new School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition and the development of its School Plan.

9 The Court noted the work that was ongoing to develop School level Strategic Plans and Operational Plans. The Court was also reminded of the key features of the academic restructuring and devolution of budgets to School level that were being implemented to enable, incentivise and reward innovation and enhanced academic performance within Schools. Each School was developing a 5 year plan with underpinning annual operational plans, together with KPIs and targets for that area, which would in turn feed in to the University’s overall strategic targets.

10 The Court discussed what the five year vision for the University might look like in terms of its student population, research strengths, estate and financial structure, including expected academic areas of growth. In discussion, it was noted that the University had incorporated the need for staff:student ratios in keeping with appropriate sector benchmarks into its expectations for growth in student numbers which it was anticipated would be from overseas/fee paying students. The importance of student support services for an increased population of overseas students was also noted.

11 The Court discussed the implications of the new approach to planning and devolution of budgets for the role of Heads of Schools and that this would represent a new level of responsibility for them which the University would need to support. The Court discussed the role of Colleges, noting that these would continue to have a key role in holding Schools to account for their performance and noted that there would continue to be College level plans.

12 The Court discussed the need to ensure that the research performance of staff was supported and enhanced and noted that initiatives around fair workload modelling, improved academic line management and mentoring was intended to achieve that.

13 The Court discussed the issue of cross subsidisation of Schools. It was noted that this was under consideration in the context of the emerging School Plans but that, while cross subsidy might still be required in some areas, the aim would be for Schools to achieve break even or better positions over time.

14 The Court discussed in detail a set of potential KPIs & high-level strategic targets together with possible supporting metrics for how these would be calculated and measured. Following discussion, the Court agreed that there should be fewer KPIs, which were prioritised and which reflected the key aspects of where the University aimed to be in five years times. The Court further agreed to receive an updated set of KPIS and high-level strategic targets at its next meeting.
The Court received a presentation from representatives of the Aberdeen University Students’ Association (AUSA) which highlighted the extent to which the student population at the University had changed over the past ten years and would continue to become increasingly diverse. The presentation highlighted that, in this context of an increasingly diverse student community, it was important that Court and the University understood the key issues of equality, diversity, and liberation and what these meant in practice for students.

In discussion, the Court noted the work that both AUSA and the University was engaged in to address issues such as alcohol culture and the negative effects that could have on students and their involvement in student clubs and societies. The Court also discussed the impact that a failure to address the distinctive needs of particular students might have on issues such as retention, noting that one such set of students might be young male first year students from low progression schools in the North-East of Scotland. The Court also noted that the presentation highlighted why diversity in its own membership was also an important issue.

PRESENTATION ON ONESOURCE

The Court received a presentation and paper (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) from Professor MacGregor on the OneSource programme which gave an overview of the background to the OneSource programme, a progress update on each the component projects which were currently live and highlighted the strategic importance of OneSource and the benefits the system was expected to deliver.

The Court also received a presentation and demonstration of the operation of MyCurriculum and MyTimetable and the new course catalogue systems, noting that these had been successfully implemented for registration for the current academic year to approximately 12,000 students to date. The Court noted that in broad terms student feedback on the system had been positive. It was noted that the system was designed to ensure that course choices that would not meet degree requirements could not be selected.

The Court discussed the background to the budget for the programme being increased from £5.4M as agreed in 2010 to £9.4M in June 2015 and the reasons why the original budget had been insufficient. It was noted that the programme was expected to contribute to £1.5M of annual savings and that further information on the extent to which this was made up of ‘cash’ and ‘non-cash’ savings could be provided to Court if required. The Court noted that the experience of other institutions had also been that the initial budget forecast had been insufficient and that projects of this nature would change in scope and cost over time as both technology and user requirements evolved. It was also noted that investment in digital and IT related infrastructure should be viewed in the same way as the need for continuous investment in the built estate. The Court noted that it would be imperative, however, to maintain close control and monitoring of the lead consultants, particularly when the programme moved to the next phase and the potential adaptation of a US based student software system.

The Court noted that an audit of the project had resulted in one High Priority recommendation which related to the change in the project sponsor from Professor MacGregor to Professor Hannaford. The Court noted that Professor Hannaford was leading the development of the University’s wider digital strategy, which OneSource was inherently part of, and was assured that the transition would be carefully managed.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2015 were approved.

The Court also noted the updated Action Log (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).
DEVELOPMENT TRUST STATUS REVIEW

23 The Court received a paper (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) which provided a report on a review which had been carried out to assess the current status and structure of the University of Aberdeen Development Trust, particularly with reference to its status as a separate charity.

24 The Court noted that the report had been produced following an earlier analysis of the Development Trust carried out by fundraising consultancy Marts & Lundy which had produced a range of recommendations including that consideration be given to dissolving the Development Trust as a separate organisation and re-establishing it as a department of the University. This proposal had subsequently been investigated in detail by the Director of Development and Alumni Relations and a report presented to the Development Trust which recommended that the current structure of the Trust as a separate charity to the University be retained. The Court noted that this recommendation had been approved by the Development Trust at a meeting on 26 August 2015.

25 The Court noted that the main reasons for this decision were:

- The absorption of the Development Trust into the University could potentially reduce Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Research Excellence Grant (REG) funding. This would be as a result of altering the way in which charitable income currently received via the Development Trust was accounted for in the formulae used by government departments.
- While Marts & Lundy highlighted potential issues which can arise due to the current arrangement between the Development Trust and the University, it was felt that this could be addressed by the establishment of an internal Development Committee which would comprise senior University management and academics in addition to lay members including a number of Development Trust Trustees. It was further accepted by the Development Trust that the University and the Trust needed to work closely and more effectively together.
- There were several issues relating to financial management and regulation as well as organisational structure which would have to be overcome to enable the integration of the Development Trust into the University and the cost of these – both financially and in terms of staff time – was considered to be excessive when balanced against the benefits which might be produced.

26 In discussion, a further issue that had been of concern to the Trustees of the Development Trust regarded the potential implications of the Higher Education Governance Bill should it result in a loss of the charitable status of the University and/or its status as a non-governmental organisation. These were considered to be risks which strengthened the basis for retaining the current structure where the Development Trust had separate charitable status to the University.

27 In further discussion, the Court also noted that while closer working between the two charities was necessary, both should continue to have regard for the need to demonstrate that neither was in control of the other’s activities as this could give rise to a challenge from the University’s Auditors regarding the current separate basis for accounting and financial reporting.

28 The Court noted that currently all staff working in the Development Trust were employed on University contracts but that there was no formal secondment arrangement in place. At present the University did not have to charge VAT on secondments and there was no VAT liability on salary costs for directly employed staff. The Court noted that retaining the current separate status of the Development Trust would require existing contracts to be reviewed and a formal secondment arrangement established to align with the current VAT position.

29 The Court noted the decision of the Development Trust to accept the recommendation that it retain its separate charitable status.
HEALTH AND SAFETY

REPORTS ON ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS

30 The Court received and considered a paper (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) which provided details of two injuries which were reportable to the Health and Safety Executive. The Court also received a report on the Operating Board’s consideration of the report. The Court noted that the incidents were as follows:

- A member of staff slipped and hit a kerb resulting in a broken bone in her foot.
- A member of staff fell over a wall when cutting grass and suffered fractured heel bones, originally reported as fractured ankles. The Court noted that investigations into the incident were continuing pending the availability of the member of staff for interview but that the report detailed a number of ‘lessons learnt’ from the incident in relation to grass cutting work on slopes which were being taken forward.

31 The Court also received details of two further incidents which were not reportable to the Health and Safety Executive where a member of staff suffered an epileptic fit and lost consciousness for several minutes and a member of staff stepped onto a displaced and loose drain cover, fell and twisted her ankle.

ANNUAL REPORT FROM HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

32 The Court received the Health and Safety Committee’s Annual Report for the year 2014/15 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) together with a report on the Operating Board’s consideration of the report. The report provided information on a number of health and safety initiatives that had been taken forward during the year and regarding significant incidents that had occurred including:

- In response to the Safety Climate survey carried out by the Health and Safety Laboratory, the University had set up various focus groups to take forward the findings.
- The Health and Safety Register.
- Four schools/institutes underwent a health and safety audit during the reporting year. There were two Priority 1 recommendations in the audit reports.
- The number of reportable injury accidents during the reporting period was 4, and was a reduction from 5 in the previous year.
- There were 10 fire incidents logged in the year with the Fire Services attending on 8 occasions. There were no injuries. A fire incident in the Meston Building resulted in severe damage to property and equipment and another fire in Humanity Manse caused damage to internal fittings.
- There were no incidents resulting in the involvement of the Health and Safety Executive.
- The University had continued to work closely with the Students’ Association to further enhance the safety culture among the wider student community, including the student safety initiative ‘Cluedup’.

33 In discussion, it was noted that the Health and Safety risk register was being reviewed and this would include the basis for the net risk score being appropriate to the mitigation measures. The Court also noted that Health and Safety audits of two Schools included two priority 1 recommendations and that one of these had now been resolved and the other was being resolved.

STANDING REPORTS

REPORT FROM THE RECTOR

34 The Rector reported that she had no matters to report but expected to provide a report at the next meeting.
REPORT FROM THE SENIOR GOVERNOR

35 The Senior Governor highlighted that as had been discussed earlier in the agenda the University's response to the consultation on the HE Governance Bill was included in the Governance and Nominations Committee Report.

REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL

36 The Principal introduced his written report (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) on recent developments within the University including updates on: Open Meetings with Staff, Admissions and Registration, International Activities and Developments, Student sporting achievements, and in Music.

37 The Principal highlighted that the University had moved up six places to 172nd in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and had maintained its ranking of 137th in the QS World University Rankings. The Principal also noted that the University’s Dental School had been ranked 4th in the UK and that this reflected the commitment and professionalism of the staff involved.

38 The Principal noted that the University had been short-listed for two awards in the Times Higher Education Awards: Research Project of the Year for the University’s ‘Cool Farm Tool’ and in the Public Engagement category for the ‘Exploration’ event. The Principal also reported on the success of a number of staff and student projects in the Converge Challenge awards which recognised academic projects with commercial and entrepreneurial potential.

OPERATING BOARD REPORT

39 The Court received a report from the Operating Board meeting held on 7 September 2015 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The principal items of the report that were noted by Court were:

- An update on the draft outturn for the Financial Year ended 31 July 2015;
- An update on Student Admissions for entry in September 2015;
- The progress of the development of School 5 Year Plans;
- The progress of the University’s Athena Swan Action Plan;
- A report from the Capital Programme Monitoring Committee and a report on the progress of the OneSource project.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

40 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Governance and Nominations Committee at its meeting on 7 September 2015 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The Court approved the following:

Procedure for Removal of Members from Office

41 The Court had previously agreed that as a result of a review of compliance with the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance in 2014, an issue that should be considered further by the Committee regarded a guideline to the Code which stated that the governing body should have the power to remove any member of the governing body. While the Court had the power under Ordinance to remove co-opted independent members from office (in certain circumstances), this did not extend to all members. The Committee had, therefore, considered legal advice on the matter which suggested that the most pragmatic way to achieve this power was to revise the Court's letter of appointment to enable it to remove members on a contractual basis should he or she breach their conditions of appointment.

42 The Court received an amended the letter of appointment, together with a revised policy outlining the circumstances in which the removal of a member of Court might be required and the
procedure to be followed in such an eventuality. The conditions of appointment had in line with the legal advice been updated to include adherence with the Court’s Code of Conduct for Members. The policy and procedure for removal included a new Resolution to replace Resolution 235 [Removal of Co-opted Members] which had until now set out the process for removal of a co-opted member.

43 The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee, approved:

- A revised letter of appointment for members of Court which would make adherence with the Court’s Code of Conduct for Members a condition of appointment;
- A procedure for the removal of a member of Court, outlining the potential circumstances in which it might be invoked and a new Resolution with the process to be followed in such a circumstance. The Court further approved that, in accordance with the process for the creation of Resolutions set out in the Universities (Sc) Act 1966, the draft Resolution would be referred for consultation with the Senate, the General Council, and for public display within the University for the statutory period.
- A revised Code of Conduct for Members to reflect the conditions of appointment.

Membership of Court Committees for 2015/16

44 The Court on the recommendation of the Committee approved the continuing membership of Court Committees for 2015/16.

Benefactor to the University Award – In Confidence

45 The Court noted that the Committee had received and considered a nomination for the inaugural Benefactor to the University Award which proposed an award to Dr Ronald Scott Brown. The Committee had noted that the nomination had been previously considered and endorsed by the Development Trust’s Stewardship Committee.

46 The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee approved the award to Dr Scott Brown.

Attendance Record at Court and Key Committees of Court 2014/15

47 The Court received and noted the draft note of attendance at Court and key Committees for disclosure in the 2014/15 financial statements.

Governor Appraisal Exercise

48 The Court received and noted a summary report on responses from the Governor Appraisal Questionnaire.

49 In addition, the Court noted the Committee’s consideration of the following business:

- the University’s response to the consultation on the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill;
- the draft University Corporate Governance Statement for the 2014/15 financial statements;
- A report by the Equality Challenge Unit on Equality & Diversity in Scottish University Governing Bodies.

Partnership, Negotiation and Consultative Committee

50 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Partnership, Negotiation and Consultative Committee at its meeting on 9 September 2015 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). In addition the Court approved the following:

- An amended Smoking Policy which took into account new legislation introduced in 2015.
- An amended Policy and Procedure for the Conduct of Appeals related to the University’s Grievance, Discipline, Redundancy, Promotion and Flexible Working policies and procedures.
ROUTINE BUSINESS

SENATE REPORT

51 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Senate at its extraordinary meeting on 15 September 2015 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The Court approved the following:

Draft Resolution No 281 of 2015 [Reform of Academic Structure]

52 The Court received a report on the Senate's further consideration of how changes to the academic structure of the University and devolution of budgets to Schools would be implemented.

53 The Court, noting that the draft Resolution No 281 of 2015 [Reform of the Academic Structure] had been approved by the Senate and had been considered by the Business Committee of the General Council, and that no amendments having been received, formally approved the Resolution.

Code of Practice on Student Discipline

54 The Court received the draft Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) and associated draft Resolution, together with a report on comments received from the Business Committee of the General Council.

55 The Court, noting that the draft Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) and associated draft Resolution had been approved by Senate, considered by the Business Committee of the General Council and had been made generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966 formally approve the new Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic).

ANNUAL REPORT ON INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW OF QUALITY, 2014-2015

56 The Court received and approved the Annual Report on Institution-Led Review of Quality 2014–2015 for submission to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and approved an Annual Statement of Assurance to SFC confirming that the Court had approved the Annual Report (copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENT TRUST ACTIVITY

57 The Court received a report (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) on the activities and fundraising performance achieved by the Development Trust over recent months.

UPDATE OF VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE SCHEME

58 The Court received an update (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) on the progress of the Voluntary Service Scheme including the number of approved applications and the resulting costs and recurrent savings of these.

ANNUAL STATEMENT ON RESEARCH GOVERNANCE INTEGRITY

59 The Court received and noted the University's Annual Statement on Research Governance Integrity (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) which it was required to provide to Court outlining the procedures it has in place to ensure compliance with the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity.
PROMOTION AND CONTRIBUTION AWARD EXERCISE 2015 OUTCOMES AND EQUALITY MONITORING

60 The Court received and noted a report on the 2015 Promotion and Contribution Award Exercise (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

61 The Court noted the recommendations from the Staff Promotions Committee in relation to the 2015 Promotion Exercise.

62 The Court also noted the statistics associated with the 2015 Exercise from an equality and diversity perspective with regard to gender, ethnicity and disability.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT TO 31 JULY 2015

63 The Court noted the draft Management Accounts and Reports for the period to 31 July 2015 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

64 The Court noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 8 December 2015 at 9.00am.

M. J. [Signature] 8/12/2015
Rector Date Approved