

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 14 September 2004

Present: Dr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Professor P Beaumont, Lady Catto, Dr N Dower, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Cllr P Johnston, Mr J Leiper, Mr M Lockhead, Professor S Logan, Dr M Mackie, Mr D Marr, Dr N Milne, Mr P Richards, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Professor W Smith, Mr S Styles, with Professor N Haites, Professor B MacGregor, Professor A Rodger, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr A Donaldson, Mrs C Inglis, Dr P Murray, and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from: Rector, Mr A Amoore, Mr T Brotherstone, Dr A Dawson, Professor C Gane, Mr R Ruddiman, Cllr J Stewart.

MINUTES

1. The Minutes of meeting held on 29th June 2004 were approved.

STATEMENT BY SENIOR LAY MEMBER

2. Dr Mair noted that Dr Dawson, Dr Dower and Professor Salmon had all reached the end of their terms' of office as members of Court. The Court recorded its thanks and appreciation for their respective contributions as members.
3. Dr Mair informed the Court that Mr G Stevenson had resigned as a member of Court. The primary reasons for his resignation were that he held concerns over a lack of transparency in certain areas of the University and with regard to the ability of senior management to respond to criticism.
4. Dr Mair expressed regret that Mr Stevenson had felt it necessary to resign. He had attempted to dissuade him from resigning and to arrange a meeting with senior management to discuss his specific concerns but this, had regrettably, not proven possible.
5. The Court recorded its appreciation of all the help, advice, expertise and support that Mr Stevenson had given to the University. It was agreed that this should be conveyed to Mr Stevenson in a letter of thanks.
6. Dr Mair also informed the Court that a Convenors' Group would be established. This would be Chaired by Dr Mair and would include the convenors of the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee, Audit Committee, Student Affairs Committee and the Staffing and Development Committee along with the Principal, Senior Vice-Principal and the University Secretary. The group would allow the convenors of these key committees to discuss with senior management a variety of issues related to the University's activities.
7. Dr Mair noted that, following the publication in November of revised governance guidance by the Committee of University Chairmen, the University intended to undertake an effectiveness review of Court. This would begin in January 2005.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

8. The Principal noted that, although subject to Audit, the year-end financial results showed the University record a historical cost deficit of £2 million for 2003/04. When exceptional items were excluded, such as the restructuring costs and gains on property sales, the University had achieved its underlying target surplus of £3m.

- 9 The Principal also informed Court that the University continued to discuss closer collaboration with the Rowett Research Institute, the Macaulay Land Research Institute and the Fisheries Research Service respectively.
- 10 The Principal then noted that the recruitment of outstanding senior academic staff had already been extremely successful and that this would continue over the course of the next year.

#### RESTRUCTURING REPORT

- 11 Professor Logan introduced a paper which set out information on the staff restructuring scheme and a detailed account of how restructuring funds had been utilised during 2003/04. As a result 214 positions had been removed through voluntary severance/early retirement with recurrent savings of £4.454 million and a further £1.345 million within the University Administration. In addition, 22 high quality Chair level appointments had been made to date under the Sixth Century Campaign.
- 12 The report made the following recommendations:
- (i) That as the staff restructuring scheme had largely met its objectives a there was no need to pursue further staff reductions through an institutional-wide scheme of compulsory redundancy during the two remaining years of the current financial planning period.
  - (ii) That notwithstanding the recommendation contained in (i) above, funding continue to be made available from the restructuring funds to resource further individual voluntary packages as appropriate;
  - (iii) That for the remainder of the planning period restructuring funds be made available to provide interim budget relief to the College of Life Sciences & Medicine;
  - (iv) That Heads of College should continue with aggressive investment strategies in targeted areas of excellence;
  - (v) That training in techniques for the effective management of performance be provided to Heads of School to facilitate more effective overall management of individual staff contribution;
  - (vi) That staff retention be assisted through the development of an institutional reward and benefits strategy;
  - (vii) That the significant achievements of the academic Colleges during 03/04 and their future plans be communicated clearly and in a structured and effective manner to all staff.
- 13 In discussion, Professor Logan noted that it had been a difficult period for staff and that it would be important to engage all staff with the benefits that the restructuring would bring. He also intimated the University's appreciation of the constructive manner in which the Campus Trades Unions had worked with the University through this period.
- 14 The Court approved the recommendations.

#### NATIONAL FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

- 15 The Director of Human Resources introduced a paper on The Framework Agreement for the modernisation of pay structures in higher education. The Agreement was one of the biggest reforms of pay and conditions in higher education in the last fifty years. Mrs Inglis highlighted the background to the Agreement and its key features, the primary essence of which was to provide local flexibility in determining pay, grading and conditions of service.

- 16 The Court noted that the Agreement was required to be implemented by August 2006. To that end a steering group had been established with representation from all recognised Trades Unions. This would enhance the existing consultative and negotiating structures, which would continue to be the main focus for taking forward negotiations on implementation.
- 17 In discussion, the Court further noted that the cost of implementation in Scotland had been estimated at £8m and at Aberdeen it was possible that it would cost the University an additional £2m. At this stage it was unclear whether the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council would provide dedicated financial support to institutions.

#### REPORT ON MAJOR ESTATES PROJECTS

##### *Marischal College*

- 18 Minute edited on grounds of commercial confidence.

##### *School of Education Relocation*

- 19 The Court noted that the refurbishment of the MacRobert Building was on schedule for completion in May 2005 and within budget. The sale of the Hilton site was now only conditional on planning permission and related appeals.

##### *Gallowgate Building and Student Centre*

The Court noted that the sale of the Gallowgate Building was complete and that the first phase of the Student Centre on campus was on schedule to be ready for the start of the new academic session. Detailed plans and a business case for the next phase would be brought to the Joint Planning Finance Estates Committee and Court in the Autumn.

##### *Sports Facilities*

- 21 Dr Roberts updated the Court on the progress of the project to develop joint facilities with the City Council on the Linksfield site. The initial bid to SportScotland had been awarded significantly less funding than required. The Council was now considering how to remodel the facility while still satisfying SportScotland criteria and exploring additional sources of funding.
- 22 Dr Roberts noted that the University had stated that the bid continued to have its support, but that this was conditional on the facility meeting the needs of the University, being within finances available to the University and be subject to appropriate management structures. The University continued to have alternative options should this joint project not prove to be successful.

##### *Library Project*

- 23 The Court noted that significant financial support for the project had been secured and that a communications plan and promotional material to take forward the fundraising campaign was being prepared.

#### REPORT ON STUDENT ADMISSIONS

- 24 Professor Houlihan introduced a paper which provided an update on undergraduate and postgraduate admissions.
- 25 Undergraduate admissions across most of the main degrees were on target. For the BSc there was the possibility of a small shortfall in numbers. Professor Houlihan had established a working group to review how to increase the popularity of the BSc, although the decline in applications in this area had been a national trend. Overseas figures were above target and overall, undergraduate admissions looked to be very satisfactory.

- 26 Professor Houlihan noted, however, that in certain postgraduate areas the figures were not so encouraging. While overseas taught programme admissions looked promising, there was a possibility that in the areas of home taught and research programmes, and in overseas research programmes, that the University would not achieve its targets. While there was still time for this to improve, the University would review this as a matter of concern.

#### NOMINATING COMMITTEE

##### *Vice-Principals*

- 27 The Court approved a recommendation of the Nominating Committee: (i) that Professor Logan and Dr J G Roberts continue to occupy places on Court as Vice-Principals *ex officio*, and following the retirement of Professor Sewel that Professor Houlihan formally become a member of Court; and (ii) that Professors Gane, Haites, MacGregor and Rodger be in attendance at Court.

##### *Membership of Court Committees and Joint Court-Senate Committees 2004-2005*

- 28 The Court approved the appointments to Court and Joint Court-Senate Committees as recommended by the Nominating Committee. It was agreed that in future, where possible, vacancies would be brought to the attention of all Court members before the Nominating Committee brought forward recommendations to Court.

##### *Representatives on Educational and Other Bodies*

- 29 The Court received recommendations from the Nominating Committee with regard to appointments of representatives on educational and other bodies. It agreed to extend the respective periods of office for 2004-05 or for a further term where specified except for the following changes in representation:

##### British Universities Film and Video Council

- 30 Mr I Harold

##### Divinity Chairs: Board of Nomination

- 31 Professor J Webster  
32 Miss A Harper

##### Highland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (HRFCA)

- 33 Mr S Duggan

##### North East Regional Postgraduate Education Committee

- 34 Professor M Greaves

#### NOMINATING COMMITTEE MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

##### *Chancellor's Assessor*

- 35 The Court noted that Dr Mair had been re-appointed as Chancellor's Assessor for a further four year term from 1 August 2004.

##### *General Council Assessors on Court*

- 36 The Court noted that Mr J Leiper had been re-elected for a further four-year term of office as a General Council Assessor on Court from 1 October 2004 and that on the expiry of Dr A Dawson's term of office on 30 September 2004, Mr R J A Ruddiman had been elected for a four year term of office from 1 October 2004.

#### *Lay Membership of Court*

- 37 The Court noted that there were currently two vacancies for lay members of Court and that the Nominating Committee would bring forward recommendations in due course.

#### *Senate Assessors on Court*

- 38 The Court noted that there was currently one vacancy for a Senate Assessor on Court and that an election was due to be held in October.

#### *Delegated Powers*

- 39 The Court noted that during the vacation period, the Principal and the Senior Lay Member had taken action to appoint Mr A Amoore and Miss A Harper as Court representatives on the Redundancy Committee. This was as a result of vacancies created by the retirement of Professor J Sewel and Dr A Dawson and to ensure that the Committee was populated, should it have been required to meet in this period.

#### DEVELOPMENT TRUST REPORT

- 40 The Court noted a report from the Development Trust which summarised gifts, benefactions and awards for the period 1st February 2004 to 31st July 2004.

*Note by Clerk: The report included a category for charitable awards. This figure did not refer to awards received solely in that period as might otherwise be inferred without clarification.*

#### PAPERS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

- 41 The Court was informed that the following papers were available on request from the Court office.
- (i) FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION: Proposal to develop bid for funding from SHEFC Strategic Change Grant.
  - (ii) RAE 2008: Units of Assessment and Recruitment of Panel Members
  - (iii) STAKEHOLDER SURVEY: SHEFC Circular Letter HE/30/04, 29 July 2004. (
  - (iv) HONOURS IN CONFIDENCE: BIRTHDAY HONOURS 2005
  - (v) SHEFC CL HE/31/04 : ENHANCING RESEARCH COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH THE POOLING OF RESEARCH RESOURCES

#### DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 42 It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 2 November 2004 at 2.00pm.