

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 24 May 2005

Present: Mr A Amooore, Professor P Beaumont, Mr T Brotherstone, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Mr M Lockhead, Professor S Logan, Dr M Mackie, Dr A Mair, Mr P Richards, Dr G Roberts, Mrs M Ross, Mr R Ruddiman, Professor W Smith, Mr S Styles, with Professor C Gane, Professor N Haites, Professor A Rodger, Mr S Cannon, Mr A Donaldson, Ms I Bews, Mrs C Inglis, Dr P Murray, Mrs L Manders and Ms K Atkinson (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from The Principal, Professor I Booth, Lady Catto, Mr J Leiper, Professor B MacGregor, Mr D Marr, Dr N Milne and Councillor J Stewart.

MINUTES

313 The Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March 2005 were approved subject to the amendment of Mr S Grant to read Mrs S Grant.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

314 With regard to Minutes 328-331, Ms Bews, Mr Cannon, Dr Mair and Dr Roberts declared an interest as Trustees of the University's Superannuation & Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS).

315 With regard to Minute 335 Mr Ruddiman declared an interest as partner at Ledingham Chalmers, Solicitors.

STATEMENT BY OFFICERS

316 The Senior Vice-Principal reported that the recruitment of high quality academic staff was continuing at all levels across a range of subject areas. Heads of College were invited to present a review of recent staff recruitment and strategic developments to the Court in June.

317 The Secretary then gave an update on the development of a mentoring arrangement between the University, the University of Edinburgh and Strathclyde University which would offer the UHI Millennium Institute an accelerated route to university title. The Court noted that participation in this arrangement was consistent with pursuit of the University's strategy of being at the hub of a network of education providers in the North-East of Scotland.

ELECTION OF RECTOR

318 The Court noted that Mr Robin Harper was appointed Rector for a three-year period from 1 July 2005.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

319 The Court received a copy of the Key Themes letter from the Quality Assurance Agency which provided an early indication of the findings of the recent Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the University.

320 The Court was pleased to note that the Visiting Team had expressed "**broad confidence**" in the effectiveness of the institution's systems for maintaining quality and standards, which was the highest of the three ratings available.

321 The Court noted that further clarification had been sought regarding comments contained in the letter and that a draft final report would be sent to the University for comment in late June 2005.

322 The Court recorded its appreciation of the contribution of all staff who had been involved in the Review, and in particular Dr Roberts, Dr Mackintosh and Dr Spedding.

#### STRATEGIC PLAN 2004-2009

323 Professor Logan introduced the updated draft Institutional Strategic Plan 2004-2009, which took account of comments made at recent meetings of the Business Committee of the General Council, the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee and the Senate. It was noted that the suggestion to identify the senior lead managers within the institution against each of the principle objectives would be accommodated through the version of the Plan which would be mounted on the University's website.

324 The Court agreed that the Plan should make greater reference to the potential impact of the introduction of tuition fees in England. The Court also agreed that the safety and security of staff and students should feature more prominently, as should the inter-relationship between the modernisation of pay structures and current challenges relating to pension provision. The Court noted that the target for postgraduate research students might be over-ambitious.

325 The Court noted that it would be invited to consider the Institutional Computing and Information Technology Strategy in the context of the external review of the Directorate of Information Systems and Services (DISS).

326 Members of the Court were invited to forward any further comments to Dr Murray. The final draft Plan would be considered through the second committee cycle this term, with a view to Court signing it off for submission to SHEFC at its next meeting.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND CASHFLOW PLANNING

327 Professor Logan introduced a paper on the institutional ten-year framework for infrastructure investment and related borrowing strategy. It was noted that the framework, which would be kept under regular review by JPFEC, would be revised in light of changing priorities and new opportunities. All projects valued at over £1 million and/or those which pose a significant business risk, would continue to be considered via the current approval process, subject to a satisfactory business case and risk assessment. Should any of the assumptions upon which the framework was based prove incorrect, then projects would be delayed, deferred or reprioritised.

328 The Court approved the ten-year investment framework and borrowing strategy and the projects that were to be funded from Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF): Round 3 and Learning and Teaching Infrastructure Fund (LTIF).

#### UNIVERSITY SUPERANNUATION AND LIFE ASSURANCE SCHEME

329 The Court received a paper on the University Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme: Actuarial Valuation 31.7.04.

330 The Court noted that, following the amendment of assumptions for investment returns, the Valuation gave rise to a deficit of £6.8 million, with market value of assets at 31 July 2004 of £52 million.

331 The Court also noted that, in finalising the Valuation, the Scheme Actuary had based the assumptions on the amendment of Scheme rules for pension increases from (a) RPI, subject to a minimum of 3% per annum, to (b) RPI, subject to a maximum of 2.5% per annum. This proposed change was subject to negotiation with members.

332 The Court approved the following recommendations: -

- (i) that the overall contribution rate increase to 23.1% from 1 August 2005;
- (ii) that the University contribution rate increase from 13.5% to 17.1% from 1 August 2005;
- (iii) that Scheme rules be amended for pension increases and applied from 1 August 2005;
- (iv) that Human Resources in taking forward the Scheme rule amendment with the members consider an increase to the employee contribution rate along with the introduction of a salary sacrifice scheme;
- (v) that a full option appraisal be taken forward in considering the future of UASLAS. The options would range from maintaining the current Scheme to the possibility of merging with USS.

#### COURT EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

- 333 Mr Amooore gave a brief oral update on the progress of the Court Effectiveness Review. The format and scope of the Review had been agreed. A questionnaire would be issued shortly.

#### STATEMENT OF PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

- 334 The Court received and approved a revised version of the Statement of Primary Responsibilities previously seen by Court.

#### NOMINATING COMMITTEE

- 335 The Court approved the appointment of Dr Don Cruickshank as a co-opted member of Court for an initial period of three years, commencing with immediate effect.

#### MEMBERSHIP AND REMIT OF LEGAL SERVICES TENDER PANEL

- 336 The Court approved the remit and membership of the Legal Services Tender Panel as set out in the appendix to this minute and noted that a recommendation for appointment of solicitors would be brought to the next meeting.

#### DENTAL UNIT

- 337 The Court noted that members had recently been informed by letter of the closure of the Dental Unit and of plans for future provision, as set out in the appendix to this minute.

#### JOINT PLANNING FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

##### *Cross-border Student Flows: Higher Education Tuition Fee Levels*

- 338 The Court noted that the Committee had received a consultation paper from the Scottish Executive on the possible introduction of a higher general rate of tuition fees in Scotland. This issue has arisen due to the introduction, from 2006, of higher tuition fees in England, and sought to address concerns that opportunities for Scottish-domiciled students could be reduced if no change were made to the fee arrangements in Scotland.

- 339 A summary paper highlighted the following main issues: -

- (i) the level at which general tuition fees should be set;
- (ii) whether there should be a separate flat-rate fee for medicine and, if so, at which level it should be set;
- (iii) whether Scottish and non-UK/EU domiciled students not eligible for SAAS support should be protected from the changes; and
- (iv) how to deal with gap year students in 2006 for tuition fee purposes.

- 340 The Court noted that the University's response was under preparation for submission to the Executive by 30 May 2005.

*Strategic Plan 2004-2009: Draft Update*

- 341 The Court noted that the Committee had received and commented upon a draft update of the Strategic Plan 2004-2009. (see *Minute 323-326 above*)

*Funding for Teaching and Research 2005/06*

- 342 The Court noted that the Committee had received an analysis of the impact on the University of the SHEFC allocation of Main Grants in Support of Teaching and Research for 2005/06, as announced in circular letter HE/08/05.
- 343 The University's allocation of grant had increased by 3.9% since 2004/05, 0.5% above the average increase across the sector. However, it was noted that without the 74% increase in Knowledge Transfer Grant funding to £1.534million, the University's total funding increase would have been below the sector average.

*Revenue Budgets 2005/06 - 2007/08*

- 344 The Court noted that the Committee had received and noted an update on the preparation of revenue budgets for the period 2005/06 to 2007/08 and that detailed budgets would be brought forward for approval in June 2005.

*Financial Reports 2004/05*

- 345 The Court noted that the Committee had considered the management accounts for the eight months to 31 March 2005, which estimated an historical cost surplus of £3.057million against a budgeted surplus of £1.194million, a favourable variance of £1.863million.

*Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee*

- 346 The Court noted that the Committee had noted that, although the timing of some institutional projects had changed, there were no major issues relating to capital expenditure for the period ending 31 March 2005.
- 347 The Court also noted that SHEFC had recently allocated the University additional funds of £418,500 to support the modernisation of its teaching infrastructure. The funding would be used for works in the William Guild Building.
- 348 The Court noted that the Committee had received progress reports on the following projects: Marischal College, Zoology Building, Institute of Applied Health Sciences (IAHS) 2, Education Relocation, Sports Facilities, Student Accommodation and the Old Aberdeen Town House.

*Collaboration*

Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES)

- 349 The Court noted that a revised Strategic Research Development Grant bid had been submitted to the Funding Council for ACES.

Rowett Research Institute

- 350 The Court noted that discussions were continuing at a number of levels between the University and the Rowett Institute with a view to developing a range of possible models of collaboration.

Fisheries Research Services

- 351 The Court noted that discussions were continuing with the Fisheries Research Services. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions was under preparation.

*University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS)*

- 352 The Court noted that the Committee had received and, for its part, approved a paper recommending changes to the operation of the University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme. (see *Minute 329-332 above*)

SENATE REPORT

*Draft Ordinance No of 2005: [Use of Surplus Endowment Revenue]*

- 353 The Court noted, that the Senate, for its part, had approved the Draft Ordinance No of 2005 [Use of Surplus Endowment Revenue].

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

- 354 The Court noted vacancies for Court members or representatives of Court on a number of University committees for the next academic year and that members were invited to nominate to the Secretary individuals they felt might be suitable for these positions.

STUDENT APPEAL

**Confidential Minute**

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PAPERS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

- 357 The Court was informed that the following papers were available on request from the Court Office:
- (i) UCEA HEALTH AND SAFETY SEMINARS: UCEA Update 05/02 advertising two seminars on the health and safety responsibilities of Heads of Institution, Chairs of Governing Bodies and Senior Managers, to take place in Edinburgh on 5 May 2005 and in London on 13 May 2005.
  - (ii) SHEFC CORPORATE PLAN 2003-06: UPDATE: SHEFC Circular Letter FE/06/05 updating the Councils' joint corporate plan.
  - (iii) EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT
  - (iv) SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE'S RESPONSE TO THE LAMBERT REVIEW: A summary of action points from the Scottish Executive's response to the Lambert Review on Business – University Collaboration  
*Note:* The full report was available on request from Research & Innovation (ext 3978/2266).
  - (v) UASLAS TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT
  - (vi) SHEFC CORPORATE PLAN UPDATE: SHEFC Circular Letter HE/05/05

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 358 It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 28 June 2005 at 2.00pm