

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 1 November 2005

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Mr A Amoore, Professor P Beaumont, Professor I Booth, Mr T Brotherstone, Lady Catto, Dr D Cruickshank, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Mr J Leiper, Mr M Lockhead, Professor S Logan, Mrs C Macaslan, Dr A Mair, Mr M Moir, Mr E Obi, Mr P Richards, Mrs M Ross, Mr R Ruddiman, Mr S Styles, with Professor C Gane, Professor N Haites, Professor B MacGregor, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr A Donaldson, Mrs C Inglis, Dr P Murray, Mrs L Manders, Dr T Webb and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr M Mackie, Mr D Marr, Professor A Rodger, Professor C Secombes, and Councillor J Stewart

MINUTES

31 The Minutes of meeting held on 13th September 2005 were approved subject to their amendment to record Dr Cruickshank's presence.

32 The Court agreed that it should in due course receive a report on the strategic issues to emerge from the discussions the Court had held at its away-day on the 13th of September.

RECTOR'S ASSESSOR

33 The Court welcomed Mr Edward Obi to his first meeting as Rector's Assessor.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

34 The Principal reported that the refurbished Old Town House had recently been formally opened by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Ms Tessa Jowell. The University was also about formally to open the sporting facilities it had acquired adjacent to Hillhead Halls of Residence, to be known as the Hillhead Centre. While the University generally needed to improve further its sporting facilities this new Centre represented a significant step in improving the quality.

35 The Principal drew Court's attention to the report on the 2005 Word Writer's Festival which reflected on some of the achievements of the Festival to date.

36 The Principal also reported that he had recently attended receptions for the alumni community in Orkney and Shetland where there had been an encouraging level of interest in the University.

37 The Principal noted that, as had been intimated at the Court's away-day, there was an increasing degree of uncertainty surrounding the impact that diverging tuition fee regimes in Scotland and England would have on higher education. A paper would be brought to Court to consider the implications for the University in due course.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

Minute edited on grounds of confidentiality

REVIEW OF THE DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

45 Professor Gane provided Court with a report on the Review of the Directorate of Information Systems and Services (DISS).

46 The review had been commissioned because no external review had been undertaken since the DISS had been established ten years previously. It had been taken forward with the assistance of two external reviewers, one an expert in Information Technology, the other a senior academic librarian from another Scottish university.

- 47 The initial conclusions of the review had highlighted a number of areas of concern regarding the current operation and delivery of services. In particular it had concluded that the DISS was remote from the University's new academic College structures and that there were serious concerns among the academic community regarding the adequacy of the level of service.
- 48 As a result, the review had recommended the disaggregation of the services to create two divisions, one for Libraries and Special Collections and the other for Information Technology, with the University appointing high quality Directors for each division.
- 49 The Court noted the progress of the review and that it was now planned to take forward the disaggregation of the DISS by January, 2006.

UPDATE ON THE LIBRARY PROJECT

- 50 Professor Gane provided the Court with an update on the progress of the Library Project.
- 51 The Court noted that following an international design competition the University had now identified a preferred team of architects, surveyors and engineers and was concluding the appointment in accordance with European Union procurement procedures.
- 52 The Court was informed that while a design team had been appointed this did not mean that any decision on the building design had as yet been made. The Court noted that in due course the design team would assist the University to engage the University community and other stakeholders in taking forward the Project.

UPDATE ON THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

- 53 Professor Logan introduced a paper that updated Court on the progress the University had made towards the implementation of the national Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of Pay Structures. The report would also be submitted to the Scottish Funding Council to inform them of progress made.
- 54 The Court noted the progress made to date, most notably the reduction in the working week for manual workers from 1st August 2005 and the implementation of a job evaluation system pursuant to the development of a new pay and grade structure by August 2006.
- 55 Professor Logan drew the Court's attention to the considerable contribution that campus trade unions had made to assist the University in all of these issues.

JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Student Population Planning and Funding Implications

- 56 Professor Logan introduced a paper that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had considered on the year-end home/EU student population figures for 2004-05 and their implications for the institution.
- 57 The Court noted that the required levels of student population had not been achieved in a number of priority subject areas and that the Funding Council could subject the institution to clawback of teaching grant in the order of £460K.
- 58 The Court also noted that, while it was too early to establish actual figures for the student population in 2005/06, there were concerns that clawback might also be applicable this session.
- 59 The Court noted that an action plan would be drawn up detailing the steps being taken to understand and address these trends and that a number of issues were identified as requiring further investigation, including marketing, product range and retention rates.

Research Assessment Exercise 2008

- 60 Professor Houlihan introduced a report that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had considered on progress with planning towards the Research Assessment Exercise 2008.

61 The Court noted that recent activities had focussed on the following:

- College-instigated external and internal reviews of publications to provide a calibration against the preliminary quality levels assigned in the early part of 2005;
- The development and implementation of the University Publications Database;
- Responding to the RAE Panels' Criteria and Working Methods statements;
- Initiation of the development of an internal code of practice on equal opportunities and the RAE and associated training;
- Providing summary information from the published Guidance on Submissions and other RAE documentation.

Monthly Management Accounts 2004/05

62 Ms Bews reported to Court that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had received copies of the Monthly Management Accounts for the year ending 31 July 2005. The Court noted that the accounts reported an historical cost surplus of £3.118 million against a budgeted surplus of £1.406 million, a favourable variance of £1.712 million.

63 It was noted that the Colleges and the Administration had all either achieved or exceeded their savings targets. The Court also noted that a one-off contribution of £0.5 million had been made towards the University's own pension scheme as part of the ongoing actions to redress the current deficit.

64 It was also reported that research grants and contracts, academic fees and residences and catering had performed ahead of target for the year. Provision had been made in the accounts for possible clawback of grant by the Funding Council and, on the recommendation of the Audit Committee, an increased level of bad debt.

65 The Court also noted that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had received a paper on the year-end provisional out-turn 2004/05 and had agreed that unused interim support of £800K be rolled forward from 2004/05 to 2005/06 for strategic investment across the University.

Matthew Hay Project

66 Professor Logan introduced to Court a paper that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had approved on the Matthew Hay Project which would enable the University, in conjunction with NHS Grampian, to provide learning and teaching facilities on the Foresterhill Site.

67 The Court noted that the existing Anatomy facilities needed significant investment and that the proposed new building would allow the redevelopment of Marischal College to proceed.

68 The Court approved the allocation of a budget of £250K as the University's contribution towards the initial costs of planning and design.

EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW OF COURT

69 Mr Amore reported that the Effectiveness Review of Court Working Group was preparing a report which it expected to bring to the next meeting.

JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Overseas Tuition Fees 2006-07

70 The Court received a recommendation from the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee that the 'headline' rates of full-cost fee be charged to international [non-EU] students in the academic year 2006-2007 as follows: -

Arts-based programmes	£8,532
Science-based programmes	£11,232
Clinical Medicine	£21,000

71 The Court noted that this represented an increase of 2.5% on 2005-06 rates.

- 72 The Committee also recommended to Court approval of a further proposal that overseas Postgraduate Diploma students should in future be charged five-sixths of the annual overseas tuition fee, with Postgraduate Certificate students being charged half that figure.
- 73 In accordance with current policy, Heads of College had the right to offer discounts on these fees, and/or packages including student accommodation, provided that such discounts were based on academic or marketing criteria and would not constitute either direct or indirect discrimination.
- 74 The Court approved the Overseas Tuition Fees 2006-07.

Occupational Health: Non-Standard Fee Rate 2005-06

- 75 The Court received a recommendation from the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee that a non-standard fee rate be applied to the Certificate/MSc in Occupational Health, to take effect from 2005-06:

Certificate in Occupational Health	£3,000
MSc in Occupational Health	£9,000

- 76 The Court approved the Occupational Health Non-Standard Fee Rate for 2005-06.

STAFFING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Health & Safety for Pregnant Employees

- 77 The Court approved a proposal from the Staffing and Development Committee to make the following amendments to the Policy:
- The title of the Maternity Leave Procedure be changed to Maternity Procedure to highlight the range of information which is encompassed within it
 - The paragraph on health and safety be moved to the beginning of the Procedure to give it a more prominent place within the document
 - The wording of the paragraph on health and safety within the Policy be amended.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

- 78 The Court approved the following recommendation from the Nominating Committee:

Audit Committee

- 79 That Mr Grenville S Johnston be re-appointed as a member of the Audit Committee for a further three-year period to 31 July 2008.

ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW:
DRAFT REPORT AND UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

- 80 The Court was informed that a copy of the Final Report on Enhancement-Led Institutional Review: Draft Report and University Response was available on the web at www.qaa.ac.uk or on request from the Court & Planning Office.

JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Student Admissions

- 81 The Court noted that that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had received a report on student admissions. Current indications showed that overseas undergraduate admissions were below target. International officers were actively pursuing applicants who had accepted a place but had failed to register. It was also reported that there were shortfalls in home/EU admissions to certain priority funding groups.
- 82 The Court noted that home/EU and overseas postgraduate taught admissions were below target. Work was underway to identify those programmes that would be offered in January 2006 and to formulate a funding and marketing plan to attract applicants. Postgraduate research admissions figures were not available at this stage.

*Strategic Alliances*Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES)

- 83 The Court noted that the Funding Council had recently reviewed the science case for the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES). Formal confirmation of the outcome of the review was pending. The Court also noted that the November meeting of the Natural Environmental Research Centre Council would be critical in determining its position in relation to the Centre. The recruitment of PhD students and staff was underway.

Rowett Research Institute

- 84 It was noted that negotiations with the Rowett Research Institute regarding closer collaboration were continuing. A Business Plan was being developed on the proposed Models 3 (subsidiary company to the University) and 4 (merger). The Plan would then inform the scope of due diligence required, and the cost involved. The feasibility of the Institute relocating to the Foresterhill Site was also under consideration.

Life Sciences Enterprise Unit

- 85 The Court noted that a potential site had been identified for the construction of the Life Sciences Enterprise Unit. On formal grant of a ground lease from NHS Grampian to Scottish Enterprise Grampian, design procurement and planning would be progressed and the target deadline for completion of the project was March 2007.

Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report

- 86 The Court noted that, in general, spend against the annual capital programme and institutional projects in 2004/05 had been as planned and that a number of capital budgets were to be rolled forward from 2004/05 to 2005/06.
- 87 The Court noted that the Committee had noted progress reports on various projects including Marischal College, Education Relocation, the disposal of the Hilton Site, Library Project, Central Heating Station, Zoology Building, Institute of Applied Health Sciences (IAHS) 2, Student Accommodation, the Student Centred Facility and the Old Aberdeen Town House.

Investment Committee Report

- 88 The Court noted that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had received a report from the recent Investment Committee meeting and noted that investments were generally performing well.

Finance Act 2004: Pension and USS Changes

- 89 The Court noted that the Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee had received, for information, a paper on proposed changes to the Pension & USS Scheme rules, in line with the reforms instigated by the Finance Act 2004. The Committee had also noted that a paper would be brought forward detailing the costs and other implications associated with removing the pensions cap on past service.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Internal Audit Reports

- 90 The Court noted that the Audit Committee had approved the following internal audit reports from Deloitte. Follow-up reports in each area would be carried out during 2005/06.
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| (i) International Students | (Report No. 7 of 2004/05) |
| (ii) HR/Payroll System & Process Review | (Report No. 12 of 2004/05) |
| (iii) Spin-Outs and Subsidiaries | (Report No. 14 of 2004/05) |
| (iv) Language Centre | (Report No. 15 of 2004/05) |
| (v) Budgetary Control | (Report No. 16 of 2004/05) |
| (vi) 2nd Follow-up of 2003/04 Internal Audit Recommendations | (Report No. 17 of 2004/05) |

- 91 The Court noted that the Committee had also approved the second of two follow-up reports on internal audit recommendations made in 2003/04, and agreed that good progress had been made.

STUDENT APPEAL DECISION

- 92 The Court noted that a Court Appeal Committee had met on 9 September 2005 to hear an appeal against the decision of the Students' Progress Committee to uphold a recommendation to terminate a named student's candidature for the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary).
- 93 The Court noted that the Court Appeal Committee agreed not to uphold the student's appeal.

PAPERS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

- 94 The Court was informed that the following papers were available on request from the Court Office:
- (i) CONSULTATION ON CROSS BORDER STUDENT FLOWS: HIGHER EDUCATION TUITION FEE LEVELS - SUMMARY OF RESPONSES AND NEXT STEPS: Report providing responses to the consultation paper issued by the Scottish Executive on proposals to increase the level of higher education tuition fees above the level of inflation in 2006-07.
 - (ii) FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND 2003-04: SHEFC Circular Letter HE/27/05. The recent publication by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) of the Resources of Higher Education Institutions 2003-04.
 - (iii) RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE
Two documents were published recently relating to RAE 2008. The Guidance on Submissions specifies the content and data requirements for submissions (www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2005/03/) and the Panels' Draft Criteria and Working Methods are available for consultation (www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2005/04/).

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 95 It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 13 December 2005.