

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 7 February 2006

Present: Dr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Mr A Amoore, Professor I Booth, Mr T Brotherstone, Lady Catto, Dr D Cruickshank, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Professor S Logan, Dr M Mackie, Mr M Moir, Mr E Obi, Mr P Richards, Mrs M Ross, Mr R Ruddiman, Professor C Secombes and Mr S Styles, with Professor C Gane, Professor N Haites, 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 the Rector, Professor P Beaumont, Councillor P Johnston, Mr J Leiper, Mr M Lockhead, Ms C Macaslan, Mr D Marr, Councillor J Stewart, Professor B MacGregor and Professor A Rodger.

MINUTES

161 The minutes of meeting held on 13th December 2005 were approved.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

162 Mr Styles declared an interest as Secretary of the Aberdeen Association of University Teachers. Mr Brotherstone declared an interest as Vice-President of the Association of University Teachers Scotland.

INTIMATIONS

163 Dr Mair informed Court that the Rector was not attending because the agenda included an item on the constitutional position of the Rector on Court and he wished Court members to be able to discuss the matter freely.

164 Dr Mair informed Court that Mr Doug Marr, General Council Assessor on Court, had resigned from Court due to increasing pressures on his time from other commitments. The Court recorded its thanks and appreciation for Dr Marr's service to the University.

CONGRATULATIONS

165 The Court congratulated Mrs Grant and Professor Haites who had both been honoured in the New Year's Honours list.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

166 At the invitation of the Principal, Professor Logan reported that the Association of University Teachers (AUT) was balloting its members with a view to industrial action in regard to a three-year pay claim. The University had met with local and national representatives of the AUT and had established that the matter of dispute was essentially a national one with the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). The University intended, therefore, to await the outcome of the national ballot and further national negotiations. In the meantime, the University was preparing contingency measures to manage the impact of any industrial dispute.

167 The Principal noted that Court would discuss the Matthew Hay Project proposal to build a new medical teaching centre on the Foresterhill campus. He highlighted a number of other recent capital projects at Foresterhill and noted that the Matthew Hay Project, if approved, would make that campus a fully integrated centre of medical teaching and research. He also noted that there had in recent years been a significant investment in the Old Aberdeen campus but that there remained a number of major projects to take forward at that location.

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2008

168 Professor Houlihan introduced a paper on progress with planning towards the Research Assessment Exercise RAE 2008 and gave a presentation summarising the main characteristics and challenges which the exercise would pose for the University.

169 The Court noted the progress made to date.

JOINT PLANNING FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Matthew Hay Project

170 Professor Haites introduced a paper setting out a business plan and risk assessment for the Matthew Hay Project. The project was a joint initiative between the University and NHS Grampian that would address the need for high quality teaching facilities for students at Foresterhill.

171 The building would: (i) provide new Anatomy and Clinical Skills facilities, (ii) consolidate teaching of all medical students at Foresterhill, (iii) accommodate NHS Grampian's IT and professional development training, and (iv) provide a conference venue and a locus for telemedicine delivery.

172 The total capital cost was estimated at being £15.9m with an assumed completion date of late 2008. The Court was assured that should the project not be completed in time the University expected still to be able to use the existing anatomy facilities at Marischal College, notwithstanding the occupation of that building by the City Council.

173 The Committee had recommended approval of a total budget of £9.2m for the University's capital contribution to the project. This sum would include University fundraising of at least £2m. The NHS Grampian contribution of £6.7 million would include a figure of £2 million to be raised through fundraising but underwritten by NHS Grampian.

174 The Court approved the project.

Marischal College

175 Professor Logan informed Court that the University had now signed the contract for a 175-year lease of Marischal College to the City Council in line with the terms previously approved by Court. A public announcement would be made in due course after staff at Marischal College had been informed.

176 The Court noted that this represented a highly satisfactory conclusion of a long-standing issue and recorded its appreciation of the considerable work undertaken by the Estates Section.

EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW OF COURT

177 Mr Amore introduced a report from the Effectiveness Review of Court Working Group. Following the meeting of Court on 13th December 2005 and the first Report, the Group had considered further the issues of:

- 1) A possible reduction in the size of Court.
- 2) The status of the Rector also being *ex officio* the Chair of Court.

178 The Working Group now recommended to Court:

- 1) That the issue of the size of Court not be taken further at present.

- 2) That the Chair of Court *ex officio* be removed from the position of Rector. The Rector would, however, remain a member of Court, where he or she would continue to represent the interests of students. The Group advised Court that this change would, if approved, likely require primary legislation, would be best pursued in concert with the other three ancient Scottish universities, and would take some considerable time to implement.

179 With respect to the issue of the size and composition, the point was made that the current composition would over time become increasingly incompatible with accepted best practice in both the private and public sectors. It was noted, however, that to secure agreement to alter the composition of Court could take up a considerable amount of time and might prove to be a diversion from institutional priorities.

180 With respect to the position of the Rector as Chair, it was proposed that at this time the Court should only note the recommendation. Given that any change would probably require primary legislation and that this would be difficult to progress without the agreement of the other three ancient Scottish universities, it was proposed that the Group should take into account the views of those institutions and report back to Court at a later date.

181 It was further noted that the suggested change to the position of the Rector could be controversial both within the student community and other constituencies. The President of the Students' Association, reiterated his opposition to the change and added that the Students' Associations of the other three ancient Scottish universities would be likely to oppose any similar change at their respective institutions. Other members noted that the position of the Rector as Chair was increasingly anachronistic in the context of the rising level of governance responsibilities expected of the Court.

182 The Court agreed:

- 1) That the issue of the size and composition of Court be taken no further at present.
- 2) To note the Working Group's recommendation regarding the position of the Rector.
- 3) That the Working Group should establish with the other three ancient Scottish universities their likely positions on this matter and report back in due course.

183 The Court noted that the Group would take forward the other recommendations approved at the December meeting, particularly with regard to a review of Court's sub-committees.

STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION CONSTITUTION

184 Mr Richards introduced a revised draft of the Students' Association Constitution (*copy filed with the Principal copy of the minutes*). The draft had been considered on a number of occasions by the Student Affairs Committee, by the University's lawyers, by the Association's and NUS lawyers, and had been approved by the Students' Association.

185 The Court, for its part, approved the Constitution subject to the correction of minor typographical errors.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

186 Professor Logan informed Court that work was underway to prepare an updated Strategic Plan for submission to the Scottish Funding Council. Members of the Court were invited to send comments on the content of the existing plan to Mrs E Schofield, Deputy Director, Policy, Planning & Governance.

- 187 The Court also noted that the Operational Plan for 2005/06 was available on the Court Intranet. The next update to the Operational Plan would be posted later in the month.

FUTURE BUSINESS

- 188 Mr Cannon reminded Court that it had approved a recommendation from the Effectiveness Review of Court Working Group that there be a standing item on the Court Agenda inviting members to suggest items for discussion at future meetings to the Clerk to Court.

SENATE REPORT

*Draft Resolution No < > of 2006
[Changes in Regulations for First Degrees]*

- 189 The Court received the draft Resolution No of 2006 (Changes in Regulations for First Degrees] from the Senate and decided to forward it to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

Policy on Student Complaints

- 190 The Court received changes to the University's Policy on Student Complaints, which had been approved by the Senate, for its part, on the recommendation of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning.

- 191 The changes had been proposed because the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 included provision to extend the remit of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to include further and higher education establishments. This replaced the Universities Scotland Scheme for Independent Review of Student Complaints in Scotland. The SPSO, unlike the Universities Scotland Scheme, extended the provision for investigation of complaints to those from staff and members of the public, not just students and, as such, included both applicants and former students.

- 192 At present the University's Admissions policy provided details of the procedures to be followed by applicants wishing to complain but no formal procedures currently existed for complaints by former students. In order to address this and to align the complaints procedures for applicants, students and former students, it was proposed to extend the current Policy on Student Complaints to cover all three categories.

- 193 The Court, for its part, approved the changes to the Policy on Student Complaints, as set out in the appendix to this minute. (*See also Minutes 206 and 209-210*)

Progression and Articulation Agreement with Aberdeen College

- 194 The Court received a recommendation from the Senate to approve a revised Progression and Articulation Agreement with Aberdeen College. The agreement superseded the existing agreement and had changed in respect of the individual articulation routes and in regard to the Section on Intellectual Property. The articulation routes had been agreed, in principle, by the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate) and the College Teaching and Learning Committees, Heads of the relevant Schools, and relevant Admissions Selectors.

- 195 The Court was assured that the agreement did not mean the University would not itself seek to promote progression and articulation routes, but rather that it would retain a close interest in the manner in which Aberdeen College, for its part, publicised courses linked to the University.

- 196 The Court, for its part, approved the revised Progression and Articulation Agreement with Aberdeen College.

Effectiveness Review of Senate

- 197 Professor Logan noted that Court was being asked by Senate to approve a number of items that arose out of the results of an effectiveness review of Senate. He indicated the key results of that review. A full report would be brought to Court at its next meeting.

Draft Resolution No. 111 of 2006

[Sixth Amendment to Schedule A to University Court Ordinance No. 111 (Election of Readers and Lecturers to the Senatus Academicus)]

- 198 The Court received the draft Resolution No. 111 of 2006 (Sixth Amendment to Schedule A to University Court Ordinance 111 (Election of Readers and Lecturers to the Senatus Academicus)] from the Senate.
- 199 This Resolution arose from the approval by the Senate of a recommendation from the Senate Effectiveness Review Group that the *ex officio* membership of the Senate should be reduced, with an increase in the number of elected members and a redistribution of the latter by School to reflect better the new College structure. The Senate had agreed that its *ex officio* membership should reflect function rather than academic grade, with the smaller *ex officio* membership being balanced by an increased elected element.
- 200 The Court decided to forward the Resolution to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

Established Chair Holders and Membership of Senate

- 201 The Court received a recommendation from the Senate arising from its Effectiveness Review, that those appointed to Established Chairs (either new or vacant) in the future should no longer have automatic right of membership of the Senate *ex officio* (but would be eligible to stand for election).
- 202 The Court noted that the Group would consult with Human Resources in regard to the position concerning current holders of Established Chairs.
- 203 The Court, for its part, approved the recommendation.

Senate Assessors on Joint Planning Finance and Estates Committee

- 204 The Court received a recommendation from the Senate, arising from its Effectiveness Review, that in order to secure representation from each of the three Colleges, the number of Senate Assessors on the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee (JPFEC) be increased from two to three. If approved, the Senate, in arranging elections, would ensure that one Senate Assessor was appointed to the JPFEC from each College.
- 205 The Court agreed to refer this change to the JPFEC for its consideration.

STAFFING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Public Services Ombudsman

- 206 The Court approved a recommendation from the Committee that the Grievance Procedures for staff be reviewed to highlight the option for staff to refer complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) at the appropriate stage. (See also Minutes 190-193 and 209-210)

Appraisal Scheme for Support Staff

- 207 The Court was informed that whilst a system of appraisal for Academic and Academic-Related Staff was embedded across the University, there was currently no appraisal mechanism for Support Staff. To ensure consistency across all staff categories, discussions had taken place with the campus Trades Unions to agree documentation outlining an appraisal scheme for Support Staff.
- 208 The Court approved the implementation of the scheme for Support Staff across the University.

SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

- 209 The Court received a paper setting out the extended remit of the Scottish Public Services ombudsman (SPSO) to include further and higher educational establishments and replacing the Universities Scotland Scheme for Independent Consideration of Student Complaints. The previous Scheme for Independent Review operated by Universities Scotland only addressed student complaints. The SPSO remit now included complaints from students, staff and members of the public.
- 210 The Court received and approved the Policy for Complaints by Members of the Public to comply with the new SPSO arrangements. (*See also Minutes 190-193 and 206*)

JOINT PLANNING FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEE

Strategic Alliances Update

- 211 The Court noted that the Joint Planning Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a progress report on collaboration with the Rowett Research Institute and Fisheries Research Services, and on the development of the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES) and the Life Sciences Enterprise Unit.

Admissions Targets 2006/07

- 212 The Court noted that the Joint Planning Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a paper on the 2005/06 student population and had approved admissions targets for entry in 2006/07.

RAE 2008

- 213 The Court noted that the Committee had received and considered an update on preparations for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008. (*See Min 165-166 above*)

Investment Committee Report

- 214 The Court noted that the Committee had received a report from the Investment Committee including a statement on investment performance for the quarter to 31 October.

Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report

- 215 The Court noted that the Committee, for its part, had approved the Matthew Hay Project. (*See Minute 167-171 above*)
- 216 The Court noted that total spend against the major capital projects to 30 November 2005 was £240k ahead of budget and that spend against the annual capital programme was generally as planned.
- 217 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the allocation of a budget of £160k over two years for the implementation of a new electronic document management system across the Administration, which would lay the foundation for the development of a future University-wide system.

218 The Court also noted that a conditional 175-year lease for Marischal College had been signed with Aberdeen City Council.

219 The Court noted that the Committee had noted progress reports on various projects including Education Relocation, Library, Student Accommodation, Institute of Applied Health Sciences (IAHS) 2, Zoology Building, Sports Facilities, Central Heating Station, the Hub and SRIF3-funded projects Oceanlab and 50-52 College Bounds.

Financial Planning Assumptions

220 The Court noted that the Committee had approved financial planning assumptions for 2006/07 to 2008/09.

Monthly Management Accounts 2005/06

221 The Court noted that the Committee had received copies of the Monthly Management Accounts for the period ending 31 December 2005. The accounts reported an historical cost deficit of £164k against a budgeted deficit of £553k, a favourable variance of £390k which had been largely due to underspends on discretionary budgets. It also noted that work was underway to establish how savings targets would be achieved by the Colleges and Administration.

Students' Association Annual Accounts 2004/05

222 The Court noted that the Committee had received for comment a copy of the Students Association Annual Accounts for the year 2004/05 which had been subject to external audit.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Review of University Stores

223 The Court noted that the Audit Committee had approved the draft report on University Stores carried out by Henderson Loggie, who had been engaged on a one-off contract to perform a detailed review following Deloitte's internal audit report on stores carried out in 2004.

Internal Audit Reports

224 The Court noted that the Audit Committee had approved the internal audit report, Institutional Projects (Report No. 18 of 2004/05) from Deloitte. A follow-up report would be carried out in due course.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Health and Safety Committee

225 The Court was informed that a vacancy for a Court member existed on the Committee.

Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities

226 The Court was informed that a vacancy for a lay member of Court existed on the Committee.

Joint Committee on Research Ethics and Governance

227 The Court was informed that it was anticipated that a vacancy for a lay member would arise on the Committee.

Joint Information Strategy Committee

228 The Court was informed that a vacancy for a lay member of Court existed on the new Committee.

Appeals Panels for the Research Assessment Exercise Submission Process

- 229 The Court noted that the Code of Practice on Equality and Diversity in the RAE Submission Process included provision for ad hoc Appeal Committees to be established, should members of staff appeal against a decision to exclude them from submission to the RAE.
- 230 The Court noted that there were three vacancies for Court members to join a panel from which Committees would then be populated.

SENATE REPORT

Annual Report from the University Committee on Teaching and Learning

- 231 The Court noted that the 2004/05 Annual Report from the University Committee on Teaching and Learning was available on the Court intranet.

Joint Information Strategy Committee

- 232 The Court noted that the Senate, for its part, had approved the proposal to replace the Information Management Committee with a Joint Information Strategy Committee, as approved by the Court, for its part, on 13 December 2005.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 233 It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 21 March 2006.