

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 31 October 2006

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Mr A Amooore, Professor P Beaumont, Mr T Brotherstone, Lady Catto, Sir Donald Cruickshank, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Mr J Leiper, Professor S Logan, Ms C Macaslan, Dr M Mackie, Dr A Mair, Mr R Miller, Mr M Moir, Mrs M Ross, Professor C Secombes, 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 and Mrs L Manders.

Apologies: Apologies were received from Professor I Booth, Ms J Craw, Mr M Lockhead, Professor A Rodger and Mr R Ruddiman.

MINUTES

31 The Minutes of meeting held on 12 September 2006 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

32 The Principal informed the Court that the University had been shortlisted by the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* for the award of Institution of the Year and the award for Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community in respect of the Word Festival. He also noted that the University had been ranked as one of the Top 200 Universities in the world by the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*.

33 The Principal also informed Court of a number of significant research grants that had been won, which confirmed the progress that was being made in growing research income.

STRATEGY DAY - NEXT STEPS

34 Mr Cannon introduced a paper which included an *aide memoiré* of the discussion at the Court's Strategy Meeting on 12 September 2006, a discussion paper on variable tuition fees and a discussion paper on The Robert Gordon University.

35 The Court noted the *aide memoiré*.

*Variable Tuition Fees*

36 In discussion, it was accepted that there was currently no support among Scottish political parties for the introduction of variable fees. This was unlikely to change before the May 2007 Scottish Parliamentary elections.

37 The Court noted that the issue of variable tuition fees could not be considered in isolation. It was also agreed that, whatever future position the University might adopt, it would be preferable to do so with the support of other institutions.

38 The Court, therefore, agreed that it should receive in due course a paper which considered together the issues of funding, the size and capacity of the Scottish Higher Education sector, reform of the regulated market for student numbers, and the current agenda of the Scottish Funding Council set against what the University believed it's mission should be.

*The Robert Gordon University*

39 The Court received a paper that outlined the background to the most recent merger discussions with The Robert Gordon University and the potential for future collaboration.

- 40 In discussion, it was noted that the University should consider the potential for closer collaborative relationships with a range of institutions. The Court agreed that it favoured the University exploring the potential for a merger with The Robert Gordon University, if future circumstances so allowed.

#### ROWETT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

- 41 Mr Cannon introduced to Court a brief update paper on the progress of discussions with the Rowett Research Institute, following approval by Court at its previous meeting of a recommendation that the two institutions should agree, in principle, to pursue a formal institutional merger.
- 42 The Governing Board of the Rowett Research Institute had since considered the same recommendation. The Court noted a letter from the Rowett Research Institute's Governing Body which indicated the Institute's acceptance of the recommendation to pursue a formal institutional merger. The letter also presented the Institute's proposed mechanism and route by which a full institutional merger could be achieved.
- 43 The Court agreed that the two institutions should develop a non-binding Heads of Agreement, which sets out the key deliverables that needed to be in place as a pre-condition to full institutional merger.

#### JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEE REPORT

##### *Monthly Management Accounts 2005/06*

- 44 Ms Bews reported to Court the main items from the Monthly Management Accounts for the year ending 31 July 2006. These reported an historical cost surplus of £3.1million against a budgeted surplus of £3 million, a favourable variance of £0.1million. The Management Accounts were still provisional, subject to a final assessment of the impact of FRS 17 on UASLAS.
- 45 The Court also noted that research grants and contracts income and Campus Services had performed ahead of target for the year. However, core funds had been overspent by £0.7million, primarily as a result of the lower than budgeted student numbers, higher staff costs in one College and higher than anticipated utility costs. Provision had been made in the 2006-07 accounts for increased utilities costs and possible clawback of grant by the Funding Council.
- 46 The Court also noted that cash balances had been reduced to £7.7 million after planned capital spend of £32.8 million.

##### *Library Project*

- 47 Professor Gane introduced a paper that summarised an interim progress report on the Library Project that had been received by the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee. The Court noted that the University Project Board and the Design Team were concentrating on meeting the challenge of ensuring that, as far as possible, key functional and design requirements of the approved design brief could be delivered within the budget approved by Court. The Project Board was also reviewing savings that could be made through using off-site storage facilities.
- 48 The Court also noted that the Stage C report setting out outline proposals would be available in November, and the report on detailed proposals (Stage D) would be available in March 2007.
- 49 The Court noted that it would receive a full report at its next meeting.

## JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE &amp; ESTATES COMMITTEE REPORT

*UASLAS: Statement of Investment Principles*

- 50 The Court received a copy of the University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS) Statement of Investment Principles (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) which had been considered by the Committee. The Trustees had approved this statement at their meeting on 26 September 2006, and were now required to consult formally with the University.
- 51 The Court approved the Committee's recommendations that the Trustees should review the second half of paragraph 29 in the Statement and that subject to this the University accept the Statement of Investment Principles.

*Borrowing Facility*

- 52 The Court received a copy of a paper considered by the Committee regarding the University's Borrowing Facility. The Court noted that the Scottish Funding Council had, at its meeting on 24 February 2006, granted consent for the University to borrow up to an additional £35 million to finance investment in infrastructure.
- 53 The Court homologated the Committee's decision to approve the Borrowing Facility with Barclays, the terms of which had been agreed during the summer, under delegated vacation powers, approved by Court at its meeting on 27 June 2006. The final legal agreement had been formally signed off by the Senior Vice-Principal and University Secretary on 20/21 September 2006 in line with the procedure specified in Ordinance 113, Execution of Deeds.

## RAE SELECTION POLICY

- 54 The Court received from the RAE Steering Group and the Committee on Research, Income Generation and Commercialisation a draft Policy for the Selection of Staff for Submission to RAE 2008.
- 55 The Court approved the Policy for the Selection of Staff for Submission to RAE 2008.

## DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

- 56 The Court received for approval from the Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities a draft Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan.
- 57 The Court approved the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE

- 58 The Court received recommendations from the Nominating Committee regarding appointments to Court and Court-Senate Committees. The Court approved the following recommendations:

Remuneration Committee

- 59 The Court approved the appointment of Mr Mike Moir as a member of the Remuneration Committee.

Health & Safety Committee

- 60 The Court approved the appointment of Professor Chris Secombes as a member of the Health & Safety Committee.

Joint Committee on Research Ethics and Governance Committee

- 61 The Court approved the appointment of Ms Jacquelyn Crow as a member of the Joint Committee on Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

Research Assessment Exercise submission appeals panels

- 62 The Court approved the appointment of Mrs Margaret Ross, Dr Maitland Mackie and Lady Catto to a pool of members to serve on Research Assessment Exercises Submission Appeals Panels.

*Representation on External Bodies*

University of Stirling General Convocation

- 63 The Court approved the appointment of Dr Stephen Hill to the University of Stirling's General Convocation.

University of Strathclyde Convocation

- 64 The Court approved the re-appointment of Miss Anne Harper to University of Strathclyde Convocation.

ORDINANCE No 137  
(USE OF SURPLUS ENDOWMENT REVENUE)

- 65 The Court received a revised Draft Ordinance No 137 [Use of Surplus Endowment Revenue], which it had previously approved in March 2005 and which had subsequently been approved by the Senate and the Business Committee of the General Council. Following substantive consultation with advisers to the Privy Council the revised draft Ordinance was presented to Court for submission to the Privy Council.
- 66 The Court approved the draft Ordinance for submission to the Privy Council as set out in the Appendix to this minute.

RESOLUTION NO 246 of 2006  
[REGULATIONS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF ENGINEERING (Eng D)]

- 67 The Court, having noted that the draft Resolution No 246 of 2006 [Degree of Doctor of Engineering] had been approved by the Senate, and had been considered by the Business Committee of the General Council, and that no other representations had been received, approved the Resolution as set out in the appendix to this minute.

STAFFING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

*Staffing Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace*

- 68 The Court received a paper detailing minor amendments to the previously approved Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace.
- 69 On the recommendation of the Staffing and Development Committee the Court approved the amendments to the Policy.

*Arrangements for Special Leave Policy*

- 70 The Court received a paper that recommended amendments to and the consolidation of the University's Compassionate Leave Policy and Urgent Domestic Distress Policy to create a new single Policy on Arrangements for Special Leave.
- 71 The Court approved the Policy on Arrangements for Special Leave.

*Staff Relationships Policy*

- 72 The Court received a draft Staff Relationships Policy. The Court was informed that the University and Colleges Union (UCU) had raised issues regarding the wording of the Policy and it was agreed that, in light of these, the Policy should be brought back to a future Court meeting, following further discussion with representatives of the UCU.

## JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE &amp; ESTATES COMMITTEE REPORT

*Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report*

- 73 The Court noted that, in general, spend against the annual capital programme and institutional projects in 2005/06 had been as planned. It had been agreed that a number of capital budgets be rolled forward from 2005/06 to 2006/07.
- 74 The Court also noted progress reports on various projects, including the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES); Regional Sports Facilities; Matthew Hay; Central Heating Station; 50-52 College Bounds; Student Accommodation; the Hub; and the Oceanlab Facility.
- 75 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had approved a recommendation that £75K of the £200K capital element of the ACES Strategic Research Development Grant award be used to meet the cost of VAT, as it was anticipated that this would not be reclaimable for the part of the building to be occupied by University staff; and £50K of the capital element be used to meet professional fees, planning and statutory fees, and legal costs.

*University Register of Strategic Risks*

- 76 The Court noted that the Committee had approved an extract from the University's Register of Strategic Risks, which identified those elements for which the Committee was responsible.

## OPERATIONAL PLAN

- 77 The Court noted that the updated version of the Operational Plan was available for review at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/operational-plan.shtml>

## PAPERS FOR INFORMATION ON REQUEST

- 78 The Court was informed that the following papers were available on request from the Court Office:
- (i) DEVELOPING A NEW STRATEGY: PERFORMANCE MEASURES: SFC Circular Letter (SFC/42/2006).
  - (ii) REVIEW OF PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN SCOTLAND (THE McCLELLAND REPORT): SFC Circular Letter (SFC/40/2006).
  - (iii) STRATEGIC RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT GRANT 2006 (SRDG): Update on the current position regarding proposals submitted to the SRDG 2006 competitive round.
  - (iv) CHANGES TO THE FUNDING FOR RESEARCH POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS: SFC Circular Letter (SFC/41/2006).

## FUTURE BUSINESS

- 79 Members of Court were invited to forward to the Clerk any matters which they felt should be included in Court papers as future business

## DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 80 It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 12 December at 2pm.