

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 6 February 2007

Present: Dr Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Mr A Amoore, Professor P Beaumont, Professor I Booth, Mr T Brotherstone, Lady Catto, Sir Don Cruickshank, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Professor S Logan, Ms C Macaslan, Dr M Mackie, Mr M Moir, Mrs M Ross, Mr R Ruddiman, Professor C Secombes, Mr S Styles, with Professor C Gane, Professor N Haites, Professor A Rodger, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr A Donaldson, Mr J Hardey (*vice* Mr R Miller) Mrs C Inglis, Mrs L Manders, Dr P Murray and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from the Rector, Ms J Craw, Mr J Leiper, Mr M Lockhead, Professor B MacGregor, Mr R Miller, Councillor J Stewart and Dr T Webb.

MINUTES

134 The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2006 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

135 The Principal reported that the University was involved in three successful research pooling initiatives, one in Engineering, one in the Life Sciences and one in Economics. These would create new academic posts in the University and represented progress in terms of both research quality and in building critical mass.

136 The Principal also noted that in terms of aggregate peer reviewed research income, the University was for the first time in a number of years ahead of Dundee, St Andrews and Strathclyde universities.

PRESENTATION ON E-PROCUREMENT

137 The Court received a presentation from Mr Brian Baverstock regarding E-Procurement. The University was to be one of the pilot institutions for the initiative which was expected to deliver significant savings and efficiencies for institutions.

FUTURE CURRICULUM REVIEW

138 The Principal introduced a paper which outlined a wide range of issues that the University might consider in a future review of the curriculum.

139 In discussion, members welcomed the paper and noted that it would be shared with the academic community. Members also noted that the review would take into account how the expectations of students in the future might change.

140 The Court noted that the review would be taken forward in the next academic year.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

*Scottish Funding Council Corporate Plan*

141 The Court received a summary copy of the Scottish Funding Council Corporate Plan for 2006/09.

142 The Principal introduced a commentary on that plan which outlined a number of issues that could be discussed further by Court, particularly in the context of the future development of the University's own Strategic Plan. The Court also received a copy of a paper the Principal had previously shared with Court in September 2006 which considered some of the characteristics that might be thought to be fundamental to how the University defined itself.

- 143 Following discussion, it was agreed that the University should seek to influence, whenever possible, the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish Executive and public debate in general on the future direction of higher education policy.

*Update of University Strategic Plan*

- 144 Professor Logan informed Court that preparation of an updated version of the University's Strategic Plan for 2004-2009 was now underway. The Court noted that members were invited to contribute comments and suggestions.

HUMAN RESOURCE MODERNISATION REPORT

- 145 Mrs Inglis presented to Court a draft Report to the Scottish Funding Council on the modernisation of pay structures and Human Resource Management.
- 146 The University had received £375k from the Scottish Funding Council to assist with this process. As a condition of accepting the funding the University had agreed:
- 1) To implement the new pay arrangements detailed within the National Framework Agreement, according to the timescales and mechanisms set out in the Agreement;
  - 2) To use the Funding Council grant only for additional costs of activity;
  - 3) To provide the Funding Council with:
    - (a) The University's HR policies and strategies, following implementation of the Framework Agreement;
    - (b) The University's end of project evaluation of pay structures and HR modernisation, as provided to the University Court; and
    - (c) A breakdown of expenditure against the grant.
- 147 The Report provided a summary and evaluation of the work undertaken at Aberdeen in relation to the Funding Council's *Pay Structure and Human Resource Management* initiative and the related reporting requirements.
- 148 The Court approved the Report for submission to the Scottish Funding Council.

ROWETT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

- 149 Professor Logan introduced a copy of Heads of Agreement, agreed between the Rowett Research Institute and the University. The Heads of Agreement were non-binding, but set out the key deliverables that needed to be in place as a pre-condition to full-institutional merger, together with a route map to take forward the merger negotiations.
- 150 In discussion, concern was expressed regarding the tenor of certain aspects of the document, which suggested that a 'state within a state' might exist following merger. The Court hoped, however, that the fullest integration would be achieved.
- 151 The Court noted the non-binding Heads of Agreement.

JOINT PLANNING FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

*Regional Sports Facilities*

- 152 The Court noted a report from the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee on the Regional Sports Facilities. It noted that construction and management of the facilities would be carried out by a new company (Special Purpose Vehicle) which would be a 100% subsidiary of the University, and from which Aberdeen City Council would purchase sports services. The Court noted that over the 25 year lifetime of the project, if the University operated the facility in line with conditions set out in the services contract, both parties would make an equal financial contribution to the costs.

- 153 The Court further noted that Planning permission had been granted for the Facilities on 18 January 2007, subject to the external colour scheme of the west elevation of the building being reviewed.
- 154 With the approval of the additional £2M from **sportscotland**, the project was now fully funded, and the Court approved a recommendation from the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee to release the remainder of the University's funding for the project.
- 155 It was expected that there would be a period during the project where access to the full running track at the proposed site of the new facility would not be available. The University would explore all options to minimise disruption to existing and future students.
- 156 Concerns were raised over the risks associated with the proposed arrangement. The project would be very carefully monitored in terms of the management of potential risks to the institution.

*Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report: SRIF and LTIF Funding*

- 157 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had considered a report from the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee concerning changes in the allocation of Scottish Research Infrastructure Funding (SRIF3) to capital projects, and proposals for the allocation of the 2007-08 Learning and Teaching Infrastructure Funding (LTIF) award.
- 158 The Court noted that development appraisals had been carried out for the proposed SRIF3 funded projects, Oceanlab and Luthuli House. These had established that neither project as originally presented was capable of delivering all the long-term functional requirements of the users within the budget available, and, in the case of Luthuli House, within the SRIF3 timescale. As previously reported, a revised proposal had been developed for Oceanlab.
- 159 The Funding Council had confirmed 95% of the University's 2007-08 LTIF award as £4.3M, with the award of the remaining 5%, expected to be £0.2M, to be announced after the publication of the 2007-08 main grant letter. The 2007-08 LTIF allocation was required to be spent or fully committed by 31 March 2008.
- 160 The Court, on the recommendation of the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee, agreed that:
- (i) £1.1M of the University's SRIF3 award, and £0.5M of the University contribution to SRIF3, currently allocated to the Luthuli House project, be reallocated to support the revised proposal for Oceanlab;
  - (ii) the Luthuli House project be progressed to Stage D and planning approval obtained, with the aim of achieving the long-term objective of co-location for the School of History, Divinity and Philosophy;
  - (iii) that a budget of £0.2M be allocated for the development phases of the Luthuli House project;
  - (iv) provision of up to £0.5M per annum for three years from 2007-08 be made from the recurrent capital programme to underwrite the development of Luthuli House. Receipt of new funds under SRIF or LTIF might form an alternative funding stream which would allow the recurrent capital programme funds to be released; and
  - (v) £3M of the 2007-08 LTIF award be allocated to the Matthew Hay Project, and £1.5M to Fraser Noble.

*Note by Clerk:* Subsequent to the meetings of JPFEC and Court, it was noted that the breakdown of funding had been incorrectly reported. It is intended that the budget of £0.2M for the development of Luthuli House be funded from the proceeds of Culterty House, which are expected to be in the range of £0.35M to £0.75M; and that £0.6M of the University's contribution to SRIF3 be allocated to Oceanlab.

## STAFFING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

*Promotion Procedures*

- 161 The Court approved, on the recommendation of the Staffing & Development Committee, an amendment to the Promotions Procedures.

*Maternity and Adoption Leave and Pay Arrangements*

- 162 The Court approved, on the recommendation of the Staffing & Development Committee amendments to the Maternity and Adoption Leave and Pay Arrangements. The amendments were required in order to comply with changes introduced by the Work and Families Act 2006.

*Disclosure Scotland*

- 163 The Court approved, on the recommendation of the Staffing & Development Committee, the amendments made to the Disclosure Policy.

*Staff: Staff Relationships Policy*

- 164 The Court approved, on the recommendation of the Staffing & Development Committee, the Staff Relationships Policy.

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE

*Audit Committee*

- 165 The Court approved, on the recommendation of the Nominating Committee, the appointment of Mr Richard Bickerton and Mr Brian Lockhart as co-opted members of the Audit Committee for terms of 3 years, commencing with immediate effect.

## MUSEUMS, COLLECTIONS AND GALLERIES COMMITTEE

- 166 The Court approved, on the recommendation of the Museums, Collections and Galleries Committee, the Acquisition and Disposals Policy.

## JOINT PLANNING FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

*Rowett Research Institute*

- 167 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received a report on progress with the planned institutional merger with the Rowett Research Institute. (See *Minutes* 149-151 above)

*Monthly Management Accounts 2006/07*

- 168 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received copies of the Monthly Management Accounts for the period ending 31 December 2006, together with a paper setting out research grants awarded for the period 1 August 2006 to 19 January 2007. The accounts had reported an historical cost deficit of £591K against a budgeted surplus of £143K, a negative variance of £734K which had included the provision for clawback of £250K of main teaching grant by the Funding Council and a projected shortfall in tuition fee income of £346K. The Court noted that, once actual half-year figures and second half-session student numbers were known, further work would be carried out to identify management actions.

- 169 The Court noted that a further restructuring programme had been undertaken, with the total cost over the present year expected to be £647K. The timing of this restructuring was beneficial, as changes announced by the Universities Superannuation Scheme on 7 December 2006 would, in future, significantly increase the costs to the University of early retirements. (*See Minute 175 below*) It was anticipated that this restructuring would generate recurrent savings of £700K from 2007-08 onwards in addition to reduced payroll costs in the current year.
- 170 The Court also noted that income from research grants and contracts was £589K below budget for the year to 31 December 2006. Research council awards made under full economic costing were announced on a timescale which was behind expectations. However, the most recent information on research grants awarded showed some significant successes which were not yet reflected in the forecast figures.

*Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report*

- 171 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received progress reports on various projects including the Hub, the Central Heating Station, the Fraser Noble Building and the Hillhead Student Accommodation project.

*Reform of Higher Education Research Assessment and Funding*

- 172 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received a paper that summarised the Government's plans for the future of research assessment beyond 2008.

*RAE 2008 Planning*

- 173 The Court noted that the full Committee had received a paper that outlined progress with the University's preparations for RAE 2008. (*See Minute 174*)

RAE 2008 PREPARATIONS

- 174 The Court noted a paper which provided an update on progress with planning towards the Research Assessment Planning Exercise (RAE 2008)

USS: CHANGES TO ARRANGEMENTS FOR FUNDING EARLY RETIREMENTS

- 175 The Court noted a paper which set out changes being introduced by the Universities Superannuation Scheme to the arrangements for the funding of early retirements.

FUTURE BUSINESS

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

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 177 It was noted that the next meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 20 March 2007 at 2.00pm in the Court Room.