

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 20 March 2007

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

Apologies were received from the Rector, Professor I Booth, Ms J Craw, Mr R Ruddiman and Mrs S Grant.

MINUTES

178 The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2007 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

179 The Principal reminded Court that the University was to undertake a fundamental review of its curriculum in the coming academic year. He also noted that Harvard University had recently announced that it would conduct a similar review.

180 The Principal also informed Court of a number of significant recent collaborative grant awards that the University had been successful in winning.

PRESENTATION ON RECENT COMMERCIALISATION ACTIVITY

181 Professor Houlihan provided the Court with a presentation summarising the University's most recent commercialisation activities.

182 In discussion, the Court noted that the University was reviewing the framework within which its commercial and other 'spin-out' businesses were developed and that this would be considered by Court in due course. Members of Court also noted that the University needed to consider carefully the extent and nature of its involvement within spin-out companies and that Court should, as a matter of governance, be aware of where particularly significant decisions regarding these were likely to be made within the University.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2007-2010

183 Professor Logan introduced a draft of the Strategic Plan for 2007-2010 which was intended to be a starting point to allow Court and thereafter the wider academic community to contribute to its development and refinement.

184 In discussion a number of points were made by members, which would be considered in the evolution of the Plan, the principal of these being:

- to refine references to the 'North' within the Plan
- to consider further the role of information technology within the Plan
- to include a commitment towards achieving Investors in People status
- to consider whether the Plan could include a commitment to being 'Carbon Neutral'
- to include a commitment on the safety and security of staff and students in the Quality People section.

185 The Court was assured that the Plan would also be supported with measurable targets in an Operational Plan.

LIBRARY PROJECT

- 186 Professor Gane introduced an update report to Court on the Library Project which summarised the work that had taken place to clarify likely costs and to review the design, the brief and the financial assumptions underpinning them.
- 187 The Court noted that the University remained committed at this point to building a facility based on the Schmidt Hammer Lassen design. A firm of international cost consultants had reviewed the reasonableness of the Stage C cost plan and inflation assumptions and had concluded that they were accurate.
- 188 The Court also noted that the Library Project Board had, therefore, considered a range of options and had concluded that a single-phase construction of a scaled-down version of the current design, with offsite storage was to be preferred. Indicative costs for such a revised design were £58-59 million, with further work being conducted to refine that estimate.
- 189 In discussion, it was agreed that the affordability of the project was of crucial importance. The Court received an update on the progress of the fundraising to date. It was assured that as part of the next steps the Court would receive a full financial analysis and design information to enable it to make the necessary decisions in terms of the redefinition of the project. It was also agreed that the University should also consider whether there were ways in which the original design for the building could be shaped to rationalise other areas of the University's Estate.
- 190 The Court, for its part, approved a request that the Development Trust be asked to release funds of £470K already raised for the project to cover the costs of redesign after completion of Stage D and to enable costs to be reported to Court with a greater degree of certainty before going ahead with Stage E and submission of a planning application.

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

- 191 Professor Houlihan introduced a paper, detailing the University's preparations for the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise and outlining the expected future arrangements for Research Assessment beyond 2008.
- 192 The Court noted the report.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Quarterly Financial Update

- 193 The Court received a summary of the University's management accounts for the first six months of financial year 2006/07, ending 31st January 2007. These reported a historical cost surplus of £431k, against a budgeted deficit of £234k. The budgeted surplus target for the year of £3,500k represented an ambitious savings target in the first year following restructuring, with the current forecast for year end being a surplus of £3,355k.
- 194 The Court noted the financial update.
- Scottish Universities – Accounts Comparison 2005/06*
- 195 The Court received and considered a paper which analysed the financial statements of all the Scottish universities as at July 2006.
- 196 The Court noted the paper. (See also Minute 227).

RELATIONSHIP WITH UHI MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE

- 197 The Court received a request for adjustment of the arrangements agreed in 2005 in regard to its support for the development of the University of the Highlands & Islands Millennium Institute, notably its achievement of University status. Identical proposals had been put to the Courts of the Universities of Edinburgh and Strathclyde. Edinburgh University had agreed to support the proposed new arrangements.
- 198 The Court was invited to agree in principle to the request from UHIMI, and that authority for final agreement to proceed should be delegated to the Principal, following resolution of some issues relating to the UHIMI request. These included:
- (a) The possibility of strengthening the powers of the Title Management Group, which currently is intended to have power to direct UHIMI's research development, with the three partner Universities having majority membership, and convenorship, of this body.
 - (b) The need for a closer understanding of the prospective involvement of Aberdeen staff in the development of UHIMI's teaching capacity, and particularly its quality assurance arrangements for which the University would not take any formal responsibility.
 - (c) UHIMI's willingness, and that of the other partner Universities, to accept a review of these arrangements after a suitable period, probably 2 to 3 years, if taught degree awarding powers had not been secured by that time.
- 199 The Court approved the following recommendations:
- To Agree:
- (i) That in principle, the UHIMI request for accelerating its membership of UHIMI be approved.
 - (ii) That the Principal be given delegated authority to reach a final decision on this matter, in the light of the outcome of pursuit of points a) – c) above.

JOINT PLANNING FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report

- 200 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had noted that the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee had received and considered a paper on market conditions in the construction industry and the likely impact on the University's capital programme. Recent tender returns for University capital projects had been significantly over estimated costs and the number of expressions of interest to tender at prequalification stages of the procurement process were much lower than in recent experience.
- 201 The Court noted that the JPFEC had been informed that during May 2007, tenders would be received for three institutional projects: Fraser Noble, Matthew Hay, and the Regional Sports Facilities, and that it seemed highly likely that there would be extreme pressure on the budgets for these projects. In order to meet the timescales, the Committee recommended that powers be delegated to accept or reject tender returns for these three projects, and to approve any revisions to design specifications required to reduce costs, to the Principal, Senior Vice-Principal, Convener of the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee, and Convener of the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee.
- 202 The Court agreed that powers be delegated to accept or reject tender returns for the three projects, namely Fraser Noble, Matthew Hay and the Regional Sports Facilities and to approve any revisions to design specifications required to reduce costs, to the Principal, Senior Vice-Principal, Convener of the Joint, Planning, Finance & Estates Committee and to the Convener of the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee.

Campus Services: Residences and Catering Budget

- 203 The Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a paper on the Campus Services budget for 2007-08, including increased residences fees and other assumptions.
- 204 The Committee recommended approval of the 2007-08 Campus Services budget, while noting the importance of presenting the fee increases within the context of the University's longer-term plans for improvement of student services and facilities.
- 205 The President of the Students' Association noted his concern regarding the increases in charges for student services and that the University should demonstrate improvements in existing services to justify the increases. A meeting between the President of the Students' Association and the University Secretary was to take place to discuss the issue.
- 206 The Court approved the Campus Services budget.

Tuition Fees for 2007-08

- 207 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had recommended approval of tuition fees for 2007-08. (see Minutes 208-210 below).

TUITION AND MISCELLANEOUS ACADEMIC FEES FOR 2007-08

- 208 The Court received a paper setting out Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees for the year 2007-08.
- 209 In discussion, concern was expressed at the continuing mismatch between 'home' fee levels, that were in effect being fixed by the Scottish Executive, and the year on year inflationary increases to core costs of the University.
- 210 The Court approved the Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees for 2007-08.

ORDINANCE NO 138
[AMENDMENT TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS]

- 211 The Court received a revised Draft Ordinance No 138 [Amendment to the Composition of the Senatus Academicus], which it had previously approved in May 2006 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.
- 212 The Court approved the draft Ordinance for submission to the Privy Council as set out in the Appendix to this minute.

SENATE REPORT

Draft Resolution No of 2007
[Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees]

- 213 The Court received the draft Resolution No of 2007 (Changes in Regulations for Various 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.

Draft Resolution No 1 of 2007

[Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Arts in Theology (with CertHE and DipHE Options) and Bachelor of Arts in Youth Work with Applied Theology (with CertHE and DipHE Options)]

- 214 The Court received the draft Resolution No 1 of 2007 [Regulations for the Degrees of Bachelor of Arts in Theology (with CertHE and DipHE Options) and Bachelor of Arts in Youth Work with Applied Theology (with CertHE and DipHE Options)] 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.

JOINT PLANNING FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme

- 215 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received and considered a report presented by PricewaterhouseCoopers on a review of University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme, which suggested means by which the FRS17 contributions deficit could be reduced.

Rowett Research Institute Merger

- 216 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received an oral report on progress with the merger with the Rowett Research Institute. It noted that regular meetings were being held between the two institutions and that a proposed governance structure for the merged institute was currently under discussion.

Monthly Management Accounts 2006-07

- 217 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received copies of the Monthly Management Accounts for the period ending 31 January 2007.

Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report

- 218 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received progress reports on various projects, including the Library (see Minutes186-190) the Hub, the Central Heating Station, and the Fraser Noble Building.

- 219 The Court noted that the Committee had been informed that the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee had received a project board report for the refurbishment of Hillhead Student Accommodation. A budget of £150K had previously been agreed for work to relocate utility infrastructure, based on comparable work recently undertaken. However, the lowest tender returned had costed the work at £380K. At the request of the Sub-Committee, alternative procurement routes had been investigated, including inviting Unite to contract for the work directly. This had resulted in a reduced estimate of £290K.

- 220 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the recommendation that the Convener of the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee and the Senior Vice-Principal be given the authority to release up to £230K over the original budget for this work, while noting that it was likely that only £140K additional budget would be required.

New Library

- 221 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received a report which proposed a way forward for the Library project. (See also Minutes186-190)

Student Population Planning

- 222 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received a paper on student population requirements for 2007-08, which included an analysis of the 2006-07 student population. It had noted that for 2006-07, the University was 3% below the priority subject population required by the Funding Council, which could result in clawback of around £300K by the Funding Council and withdrawal of up to 25 funded student places.
- 223 The Court noted that correspondence had recently been received from the Funding Council which indicated that for 2007-08, it intended changing its student numbers consolidation policy, and raising the threshold at which it applied financial penalties for over-enrolment of students. This was likely to have a negative impact on the University's student recruitment.
- 224 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the intake population requirements set out in the paper.

Planning Assumptions

- 225 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had approved the underlying financial planning assumptions to be used in preparing budgets for the years 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10.

Entry Requirements: BSc "Global Challenges" Degree Programmes

- 226 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had approved entry requirements for the new BSc degree programmes being offered under the "Global Challenges" theme.

Scottish Universities: Accounts Comparison 2006

- 227 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received and considered a comparative analysis of the financial statements of the Scottish Universities as at July 2006. (See also Minutes 195-196)

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT: SFC CIRCULAR SFC/10/2007

- 228 The Court noted the Scottish Funding Council Circular on Governance and Management Matters.
- 229 In discussion, it was noted that the Circular highlighted the governance responsibilities of Court members. The Court noted that a paper on governance issues, developing further the existing work undertaken by the Court Effectiveness Review, was being prepared for the Court to consider.

ORDINANCE NO 137
[USE OF SURPLUS ENDOWMENT REVENUE]

- 230 The Court noted that Ordinance No 137 [Use of Surplus Endowment Revenue] had been passed by Her Majesty in Council on 7 February 2007.

SENATE REPORT

- 231 The Court noted that the 2005/06 Annual Report from the University Committee on Teaching and Learning was available on the Senate website at:
<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/admin/senate/documents/UCTLAnnualReport.doc>

FUTURE BUSINESS

- 232 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

- 233 It was noted that the next meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 22 May 2007 at 2.00pm in the Court Room.