

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 30 October 2007

Present: The Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Mr A Amoore, Lady Catto, Sir Don Cruickshank, Dr P Edwards, Ms A Fraser, Professor C Fynsk, Mrs S Grant, Miss A Harper, Councillor P Johnston, Professor S Logan, Ms C Macaslan, Dr A Mair (in the Chair for minutes 34-38), Mr M Moir, Professor G Robinson, Professor C Secombes, Mr J Wilson, with Professor N Haites, Professor B MacGregor, Professor A Rodger, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr A Donaldson, Mrs C Inglis, Dr G Mackintosh, Mrs L Manders, Dr P Murray and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies were received from Professor I Booth, Ms J Craw, Professor C Gane, Professor D Houlihan, Mr J Leiper, Mr M Lockhead, Dr M Mackie, Mr R Ruddiman and Councillor J Stewart.

MINUTES

24 The Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2007 were approved.

NEW MEMBERS

25 The Rector welcomed Professor Robinson and Dr Edwards, who were attending their first meeting as Senate Assessors.

The Rector also welcomed Mr Wilson to his first meeting as the Rector's Assessor.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

26 The Principal reported that the University was in discussions regarding the creation of a School of Dentistry in Aberdeen. This followed a commitment by the new Scottish Government to establish such a facility in Aberdeen. The University was in contact with the University of Dundee and NHS Grampian to take the matter forward.

27 The Principal noted that the University's Oceanlab had recently begun a 25-year deep sea environmental monitoring project in collaboration with BP.

28 The Principal informed Court that the University's museums collections had been awarded Recognised Collection of National Significance status.

29 The Principal also informed Court that a University spin-out company, Haptogen, had recently been bought by Wyeth Pharmaceuticals. The deal would increase the profile of Aberdeen as a City with significant life sciences activity.

30 The Principal, invited Mr Cannon to provide Court with a brief update on the significant progress that had been made in managing the shortage of accommodation for new students.

31 The Principal noted that the University's ten year capital plan was an ambitious programme, intended to create the level of facilities necessary to be internationally competitive in the future. He added that it was important to keep in mind, however, that outwith the ten year plan there remained other areas where the University needed, if it were financially able, to improve its Estate.

PRESENTATION ON CURRICULUM REFORM

- 32 Professor MacGregor gave a presentation on the Curriculum Reform project.
- 33 In discussion, it was noted that any recommendations for change to the curriculum would need to take resource into account. It was agreed that Court should receive regular reports and that individual members could make valuable contributions to the project as it progressed.

ROLE OF THE RECTOR AS CHAIR

- 34 Mr Cannon introduced a paper proposing the removal of the Rector's automatic right to Chair the Court and the associated casting vote (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 35 The Rector informed Court that due to his particular interest in the item in question he would not Chair this discussion and the Chair was taken by Dr Mair, as Vice-Chairman of Court.
- 36 Mr Cannon reminded Court that the paper followed a report from the Court Effectiveness Working Group which had been discussed at the Court's informal strategy meeting in September. At that time the will of Court had been to consider at this meeting a formal recommendation to change the position of the Rector as Chair. A draft Ordinance was proposed for submission to the Privy Council to take forward the changes and to also define the process by which the Court would appoint its Chair and Vice-Chair in future. Mr Cannon noted that should Court approve the proposal and the draft Ordinance in which it was contained, there would follow a process of iteration with the Privy Council.
- 37 In discussion, it was noted that the proposal would mean that the Rector could still be appointed Chair by the Court, if it were so minded. It was also noted that the draft Ordinance made reference to the 'Governance Committee' which had been discussed as part of a new governance structure but was not yet established. It was agreed that the draft Ordinance be amended to refer to the Nominating Committee.
- 38 The Court, thereafter, agreed:
- (i) to remove (a) the automatic right of the Rector to Chair the Court and (b) the associated casting vote.
 - (ii) to effect this on the basis of legal advice received, through approving the draft Ordinance, subject to the replacement of 'Governance Committee' with 'Nominating Committee' (*attached as an appendix to this minute*) for submission to the Privy Council and for communication to the Senate, to the General Council and for public display within the University for the statutory period of eight weeks.

RAE 2008

- 39 Professor Logan introduced a paper summarising the University's likely submission to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008.
- 40 The Court noted that it was expected that the results of the RAE would confirm the strengthening of research quality within the University although other competitors would be likely also to have improved their position.

ROWETT RESEARCH INSTITUTE MERGER

- 41 Professor Logan introduced a paper summarising the progress of discussions relating to the proposed merger between the University and the Rowett Research Institute (RRI).

- 42 The Court noted that significant progress regarding a number of important issues had been made. Discussions with senior officials from the Scottish Government had taken place and a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment had been arranged.

JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEE

Revised Financial Regulations

- 43 The Court received a paper from the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee recommending approval of amendments to the Financial Regulations.
- 44 The Court approved the amendments.

RESEARCH MISCONDUCT GUIDELINES

Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice and Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Research Misconduct

- 45 The Court received a paper from the Joint Committee on Research Ethics and Governance, recommending approval of the revised Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice and a Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Research Misconduct.
- 46 In discussion, it was confirmed that the Code of Practice on Student Discipline would need to be reviewed in light of the changes being proposed.
- 47 The Court, for its part, approved the revised Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Practice and the Statement on the Handling of Allegations of Research Misconduct, subject to minor amendments.

RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- 48 The Court received from the Risk Management Committee the University's Risk Register.
- 49 In discussion, it was noted that there were a number of risks categorised as being both high impact and high likelihood. It was agreed that the Court should in due course receive a paper that explained the actions taken to improve student retention. It was also noted that with respect to the potential for loss of key staff the University was in fact taking more mitigating action than was described in the paper.
- 50 The Court approved the University's Risk Register.

INFORMATION STRATEGY COMMITTEE

- 51 The Court received a paper from the Information Strategy Committee recommending that the composition of the Committee be amended to include the Vice-Principals for Learning and Teaching and for Research and Commercialisation.
- 52 The Court, for its part, approved the appointment of these Vice-Principals. The Court also agreed to forward the matter for approval to the Senate.

FINANCIAL YEAR END REPORT

- 53 The Court noted the Management Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2007. The accounts had reported a surplus of £3.7M against a budgeted surplus of £3.5M.

SKILLS STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND

- 54 The Court noted a paper summarising the key areas of interest arising from the Scottish Government's recently published *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy*.

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL QUALITY REVIEW CONSULTATION

- 55 The Court noted a paper summarising the main issues arising from the Scottish Funding Council's Joint Quality Review Group consultation. The Court also received a summary of the Joint Quality Review Group proposals. Members of Court were invited to submit to the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching any comments regarding the recommendations relating to the role of governing bodies for incorporation into the University response to the consultation.

JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEE

Rowett Research Institute Merger

- 56 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a paper outlining progress relating to the proposed merger between the Rowett Research Institute and the University. (See *Minutes* 41-42)

Student Admissions

- 57 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a paper setting out applications and admissions to the University at the start of the 2007/08 academic year.

Student Accommodation

- 58 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a paper setting out current issues with over-subscription for places in University student accommodation, together with an analysis of the financial impact of the measures taken to address these issues.
- 59 The Court noted that the Committee had also discussed issues to be taken into account in considering the longer-term accommodation strategy.

Monthly Management Accounts 2006-07

- 60 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received copies of the Management Accounts for the year ending 31 July 2007.

Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee Report and Other Issues Arising

- 61 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a report from the meeting of Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee.

Matthew Hay

- 62 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received and considered a report for the Matthew Hay project, together with a paper on the undernoted changes to the funding of the project which had been approved in July 2007 under the authority delegated from Court at its meeting on 20 March 2007:
- an increase in the University's capital contribution to the project of £1.031M, from £9.672M to £10.703M, subject to confirmation from NHS Grampian (now received) that it would underwrite its additional contribution; and
 - support for continued fundraising to the end of the project in order to maximise external funding and to allow the direct institutional contribution to be maintained at £1.347M.

- 63 The Court noted that the Committee had approved an increase to the budget of £859K, in order that additional features could be included in the project which met the conditions of a potential donation of £2M.

Life Sciences Innovation

- 64 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received an oral report on progress of the planned Life Sciences Facility at Foresterhill.
- 65 The Court noted that it had approved a recommendation to increase the University's contribution from £350K to £450K, noting that Scottish Enterprise had confirmed an increase of its contribution from £1.6M to £1.75M.

Ten Year Capital Plan

- 66 The Court noted that the changes in the funding of the Matthew Hay Project and the Life Sciences Innovation project would be reflected in the 10 year cashflow plan.

Regional Sports Facilities

- 67 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance and Estates Committee had received and considered a Project Board Report for the Regional Sports Facilities. It noted that a tender price had been agreed with Barr Construction. This price was fixed, and therefore the majority of risks would pass to the contractor. Those risks which would not pass to the contractor would be closely monitored by the Project Board.
- 68 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had been informed that Barr Construction had started work on site with an estimated completion date of Summer 2009. The Court also noted that, under its delegated authority, it had been agreed to establish a Joint Venture Company equally owned by the University and the City Council to construct and run the Regional Sports Facilities.

Investment Committee

- 69 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a report from the Investment Committee. It noted that the Committee had agreed that the Investment Committee should investigate different investment opportunities and management arrangements, and report back to a future meeting.

Research Assessment Exercise 2008

- 70 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a paper which provided an estimate of the possible outcome of the Research Assessment Exercise. (*See Minutes 39-40*)

Commercialisation Activity

- 71 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had received and considered a report summarising commercialisation activity.

University Register of Strategic Risks

- 72 The Court noted that the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee had considered an extract from the University's Register of Strategic Risks, which identified those elements for which the Committee was responsible. (*See Minutes 48-50*)

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Internal Audit Reports

- 73 The Court noted that the Audit Committee had approved the following internal audit reports from Deloitte & Touche:

Project Management: Framework and Payroll (Report No. 5 of 2006/07)
 Payroll and Personnel (Report No. 6 of 2006/07)
 Working Capital Management (Report No. 7 of 2006/07)

Procurement (Report No. 9 of 2006/07)
Top 5 Research Grants (Report 10 of 2006/07)

- 74 The Court also noted that the Committee had approved Follow-Up Report 2 of 2005/06 Recommendations (Report No. 13 of 2006/07), in respect of the following areas: TRAC Income Allocation, Internal Recharging and Stores Review.

Internal Audit Service

- 75 The Court noted that the Audit Committee had received a response from Deloitte to its concerns over the quality of the Internal Audit Service in 2006/07, with a reassurance of improved service in 2007/08. It noted that the Committee would review the situation again in January 2008.

Internal Audit Operational Plan Update

- 76 The Court noted that the Audit Committee had considered and approved an update to the Internal Audit Operational Plan for the audit year 2007-2008.

PAPERS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

- 77 The Court was informed that the following papers were available on request from Policy, Planning & Governance:
- (i) UNIVERSITIES LEGAL BULLETIN: AUGUST 2007
 - (ii) PATTERNS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE UK: SEVENTH REPORT is available online at <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/>
 - (iii) KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER GRANT 2008/09
SFC Circular *Knowledge transfer grant: collection of activity data from higher education institutions* (SFC/46/2007) is available online at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_circulars/sfc/2007/circulars_2007.html
 - (iv) MINOR VOLUME INDICATORS
SFC Circular *Main quality research grant: updating minor volume indicators* (SFC/47/2007) is available online at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_circulars/sfc/2007/circulars_2007.html
 - (v) MONITORING, EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY (MEA) CONSULTATION UPDATE
SFC Circular, *Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability (MEA) Consultation Update* (SFC/48/2007), is available online at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_circulars/sfc/2007/circulars_2007.html.
 - (vi) ESTATE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION
http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2007/nr_070913_estate_management.pdf

FUTURE BUSINESS

- 78 The Court agreed that it should receive a paper on the issue of part-time student numbers at a future meeting. The Court also noted that a paper on Corporate Social Responsibility, including sustainability, was scheduled to come to the February meeting of Court.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 79 It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 11 December 2007 at 2.00pm.