UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
UNIVERSITY COURT  
Minutes of meeting held on 25 September 2012

Present: Sir Moir Lockhead (in the Chair), Principal, Rector (Dr M Mackie), Dr A Baxter, Ms J Craw (for minutes 1-8), Cllr B Crockett (for minutes 1-16), Miss A C Deseilligny, Mr C Duncan, Professor P Edwards, Mr J Hall, Professor P Hannaford, Mr G Hunter, Professor N Hutchison, Mr B Lockhart, Professor S Logan, Mr D MacFarlane, Professor P McGeorge, Cllr R McKail, Mrs K McPhail, Mr K Murray, Mr B Pack, Mr B Paterson, Mr R Ruddiman, D J Skakle, Mr D Steyn, Dr N Vargesson, Professor N Webster.

In attendance: Mr A Arthur, Professor S Heys, Mrs J Shirreffs, Mr S Cannon, Ms J Sewel and Mr B Purdon (Clerk) with Professor Haites and Mrs E Bowie (for minutes 12-16) and Ms Sandison and Ms Forster (for minutes 84-88)

MINUTES

1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2012 were approved.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2 Mr Ruddiman declared an interest as a Partner of Pinsent Masons who had provided legal advice in relation to the University’s revised borrowing facility (Minutes 34-37 refer)

STRATEGIC PLAN: OVERVIEW

3 The Principal provided Court with an overview of the Strategic Plan and highlighted a number of key future challenges for the University’s development over the medium to longer term in relation to the strategic objectives within the Plan.

4 The Principal also highlighted actions to improve the University’s League Table performance with the aspiration by 2020 of being ranked between 9th and 15th in the UK and 2nd in Scotland.

TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE  
(Strategic Objective 1)

5 Professor McGeorge provided the Court with a presentation and discussion paper on the student experience within the context of the Strategic Plan’s ten aims for teaching and learning (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). This included a detailed report on student satisfaction as monitored by the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Institutional Student Survey and key areas where the University was seeking to improve upon its current performance. The paper also set out key issues in the areas of retention, employability, recruitment and widening access.

6 In an extended discussion, it was suggested that, while acknowledging the influence that NSS results had in student recruitment, the University should not define its strategy solely around the outcome of surveys. The Court also discussed the survey’s findings in relation to “staff enthusiasm” and noted that the University was undertaking further analysis at Schools level to better understand the results in respect of this issue. It was also noted that a number of actions were being undertaken to raise awareness amongst students of the Graduate Attributes, to address concerns around assessment and feedback and retention.
Professor Hannaford provided the Court with a presentation and discussion paper on research (Strategic Objective 2) and Interdisciplinary Themes (Strategic Objective 3) (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). This summarised the University’s current research performance against its strategic targets, identified areas where the University had seen growth in recent years and its areas of competitive strength, and set out the key challenges of growing research income; increasing postgraduate research student numbers; retaining and recruiting excellent academic staff; open access publishing and research data management. The University’s priority areas for development as part of its research strategy to respond to these challenges was highlighted.

In discussion, the Court discussed how the success of Themes would be evaluated and noted that the Themes would be reviewed approximately every three years to assess whether they remained the correct focus for the University. It was agreed that Court should have a more detailed discussion of the individual Themes and that over a series of future meetings it should receive presentations from the Theme Leaders.

INTERNATIONALISATION (Strategic Objective 4)

Mr Cannon provided the Court with a presentation and discussion paper on the Internationalisation Objective. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The paper outlined the progress that the University had made since the Court agreed a detailed Internationalisation Strategy in June 2012 and set out key issues in the areas of international partnerships, staff recruitment and retention, the development of an international perspective in the University’s students, and international student recruitment.

The Court discussed in detail the challenges facing the University in the area of international student recruitment and noted that the University had identified a four stage strategy, namely; (i) a comprehensive review of the existing product portfolio; (ii) an enhancement and acceleration of “conventional” recruitment activity; (iii) the development of new and innovative regional strategies with in-country support and (iv) the achievement of a step change through the development and enhancement of transnational and partnership activity.

The Court agreed that it should receive a business plan and further information on the management structure for Internationalisation.

DELIVERING OUR ACADEMIC VISION: FUNDRAISING
(Enabling Objective)

Professor Haites provided Court with a presentation and discussion paper on performance against strategic targets relevant to funding and the priorities for fundraising and development in the coming year (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

The Court noted that the Development Trust was a separate trust to the University.

The Court noted that over the past two years over £31M had been raised through giving directly to the University or through the University Development Trust. The Development Trust had identified four priorities in its Strategic Plan for the period 2012-2014 these being: completion of the library project; raising £30M for three key priority areas (students, academic expertise and heritage); excellent donor care programme; and building a long term support base. The Court noted the main opportunities and challenges for growth in fundraising.

In discussion, it was noted that the Development Trust was considering how the longer-term fundraising priorities could be aligned with the strategic priorities of the University and that the £30M objective for the short-term had been agreed to support immediate priority areas.

The Court agreed that it should receive a further briefing on the Development Trust strategy to enable members to act as ambassadors in fundraising for the University.
DELIVERING OUR ACADEMIC VISION: PEOPLE
(Enabling Objective)

REPORT ON ACADEMIC RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

17 The Court received and noted an update on the progress of the academic recruitment campaign ‘Shape the Future’ (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The Court noted that over 50 appointments had been made to date, and new staff would be in post by the REF census date.

REPORT ON FRAMEWORK OF ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

18 The Court received and noted an update on progress with the implementation of the Framework of Academic Expectations. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

19 In discussion, the Court was assured that any implications of the Framework of Academic Expectations for the operation of the Remuneration Committee were being considered.

REPORT ON FOLLOW UP TO STAFF SATISFACTION SURVEY

20 The Court received and noted an update on the progress of actions in response to the 2012 staff satisfaction survey. The Court noted that the University wished to improve upon the current response rate of 28% but that this level of response was comparable with the average response rate for such surveys.

SUMMARY REPORT OF GOVERNOR APPRAISAL QUESTIONNAIRE

21 The Court received and discussed a report on responses to the Court’s governor appraisal questionnaire. The Court noted the key generic issues arising from the exercise were around more effective use of Court time and discussion of strategically important issues within Court business. The exercise had also identified that members of Court would value more opportunities to meet and canvass opinion with fellow Court members.

22 The Court noted that in response to these points the University had introduced a new structure for the Court agenda and had revised presentation of reports from the Operating Board. The Court also agreed to extend the timing of meetings to 9am to 1pm. The University would further consider how best to provide opportunities for members increased engagement with fellow members outside meetings of Court. (See Minute 58)

REPORT FROM SENIOR GOVERNOR

23 The Senior Governor noted the success of the visit of Her Majesty The Queen to open the Sir Duncan Rice Library and also the success of the British Science Festival. The Court recorded its congratulations to all staff who were involved in these successful events.

REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL

24 The Principal recorded his own thanks to all involved in the visit of Her Majesty the Queen and reiterated the success of the British Science Festival indicating that officials from the British Science Association regarded it as one of the most successful festivals in the event’s history.

25 The Principal noted that the Minister of State for Universities and Science had announced funding of £10m in support of open access publishing and that the University was one of only 30 institutions in the UK to be eligible for support through the fund.

26 The Principal advised Court of major scholarship announcements in relation to the Brazilian ‘Science without Borders’ initiative and with Halliburton.

27 The Principal noted that the Scottish Government had recently announced its support for an Energy Skills Academy based in Aberdeen in which the University would be a partner.
The Principal indicated that following further consideration by the EU, concerns regarding the professional accreditation of the University’s Dentistry degree as a graduate programme had been resolved.

REPORT FROM THE RECTOR

The Rector introduced his report to Court. *(Copy filed with principal copy of the minutes).*

The Court noted that in relation to points raised in the report regarding students’ access to the planned Aquatic Centre the University routinely monitored University usage of the facilities at the Aberdeen Sports Village.

The Rector noted and welcomed the consideration being given to the Arts Lecture Theatre as a potential performance space. He encouraged the University to consider this as a project which could be used to commemorate the late Rector Mr Robertson, suggesting the potential for fundraising in support of this. The Court noted that performance space would be included in its discussion of capital priorities at its next meeting.

The Rector reported on the main points arising from a recent meeting of Scottish Rectors; namely the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland, the development of a Rector’s Charter, the UK Border Agency’s approach to student immigration and the funding of higher education. The Rector shared with Court a paper that the Scottish Rectors had discussed regarding the issue of the funding of higher education in the UK and the operation of the differing tuition fee policies of the UK and Scottish Governments. The Court noted that the Scottish Rectors were considering whether to seek further debate within their respective Court’s regarding the current funding regime for undergraduates in the UK.

REPORT FROM OPERATING BOARD

The Court received a report of the meeting of the Operating Board held on 7 September 2012 *(copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).*

UNIVERSITY BORROWING FACILITY

The Court received and considered a letter of variation dated 6 September 2012 from Barclays Bank PLC (the “Bank”) to the Borrower setting out the amendments to a facility agreement dated 20 September 2006 pursuant to which the Bank had offered the Borrower the facilities of £40 million (the “Letter of Variation”).

The Court noted that the Letter of Variation had been approved, subject to finalisation of paragraphs 4 and 5 covering documentation required by Barclays to signify acceptance, under the delegated authority of the Convenor of the Audit Committee, the Convenor of the Operating Board, Mr David Steyn and the Director of Finance of the University of Aberdeen on 6 September 2012.

The Court noted that conditional on satisfactory resolution over paragraphs 4 and 5 with Barclays, the Operating Board had advised the Principal that agreement to the Letter of Variation was required and had requested that he authorise the Letter of Variation to be executed on behalf of the Borrower. It was anticipated that the Letter of Variation would be duly executed on behalf of the Borrower on 17th September by the University Secretary and Senior Vice-Principal on the instruction of the Principal.

The Court agreed that the amendments set out in the Letter of Variation were in the interests of and for the benefit of the Borrower and were most likely to promote the success of the Borrower and that the entry into and execution of the Letter of Variation be and is hereby approved and ratified.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN OUTCOME AGREEMENT WITH THE SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL

The Court noted that, after discussion, the Board had approved the University’s 2012/13 Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council. *(See Minutes 73-76)*
NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

39 The Court noted that the Board had noted the University's performance in the 2012 UK-wide survey of final year undergraduates, and that actions were being taken to address areas of concern.

STUDENT ADMISSIONS

40 The Court noted that the Board had discussed the current position with Student Admissions for 2012/13. (See Minutes 84-88)

MONTHLY MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

41 The Court noted that the Board had discussed the year end outturn for 2011/12, which was forecast to show an historic cost surplus of £4.158M before exceptional items, against a budget of £4M. (See Minute 90)

RESIDENCES STRATEGY

42 The Court noted that the Board had considered a draft Student Residences Strategy and requested a number of amendments to it, before it was presented to Court. (See Minutes 77-79).

STRATEGIC BUSINESS VENTURES GROUP

43 The Court noted that the Board had received a report on University spin-out activity from the Strategic Business Ventures Group, including the creation of one new spin-out; and new investment made in existing spin-outs

REMIT AND COMPOSITION

44 The Court noted that the Board had noted its remit and composition.

ESTATES AND CAPITAL

45 The Court noted that the Board had noted progress with ongoing capital and estates projects.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

46 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Governance and Nominations Committee at its meeting of 7 September 2012 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

47 The Court also approved or noted the following:

Membership of Court

48 The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee, reappointed Dr Audrey Baxter for a further term of three years as an independent co-opted member of Court with effect from 1 October 2012.

Appointments to Committees

49 The Court noted that the Committee had discussed vacancies on joint committees of Court and Senate for independent members of Court and had given consideration to nominations that had been received from members of Court. The Committee had also received, for information, a paper outlining the Court membership of Committees for 2012/13.
The Court, on the recommendation of the Governance & Nominations Committee approved the following appointments to vacancies on committees:

**Remuneration Committee:**

Ms Jacquelynn Craw, General Council Assessor on Court.

**Student Affairs Committee:**

Mrs Jennifer Shirreffs, General Council Assessor on Court, as a member and as the Convenor.

**Teaching & Learning**

Mr Colin Duncan, General Council Assessor on Court.

**Senior Independent Member**

The Court noted that no nominations from Court members had been received to undertake the role of Senior Independent Member.

The Court noted that the Committee had agreed that given the absence of any nominations for this role no appointment should be taken forward. The Court noted that the Committee had further agreed that the role had been presented to comply with the Financial Reporting Council Corporate Governance Code but was in many respects more appropriate to the context of a listed private sector company. The Committee had agreed that through the Convenor of the Governance and Nominations Committee and the Convenor of the Operating Board, there were members of Court who could fulfil the functions of a Senior Independent Member if and when required.

The Court on the recommendation of the Governance & Nominations Committee, agreed that no appointment need be made to the role and that the University’s Corporate Governance Statement be amended to reflect this.

**Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland**

The Court noted that the Committee had considered a paper which had provided an update on the current status of the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland. The Committee had also noted the key points arising from the Scottish Government’s response to the Review and that as part of the next steps, the Scottish Committee of University Chairs had been asked to lead a working group for the development of a Scottish Code of Good Governance in Higher Education.

**Report on Governor Questionnaire**

The Court noted that the Committee had considered a summary report on the governor appraisal questionnaire. (See Minute 21-22)

**Development of a Code of Ethics/ethical statement**

The Court noted that the Committee had received a paper which gave an overview of the University’s policies and procedures which related to institutional Ethics. The paper had also outlined potential issues for consideration on how the University might proceed toward developing a Code of Ethics or an Ethical Statement that built on the existing policies, procedure and practice.

The Court noted that the Committee had agreed that the University should develop a brief ethical statement that could in due course also be reported in the corporate governance statement in the University’s annual financial statements.
Disaster Scenarios

61 The Court noted that the Committee had previously agreed that it should consider possible ‘disaster scenarios’ so as to better understand the governance implications and the responsibilities of Court in relation to these. A number of potential scenarios had been suggested, including a financial failure, a major reputational issue, and a major incident on campus.

62 The Court noted that the Committee had received and considered a paper which focused on a major incident on campus scenario and which outlined the key aspects of the University’s emergency management planning and business continuity arrangements.

Ordinance and Procedures for Chancellor/General Council Assessor Elections

63 The Court noted that the Committee had, for its part, considered the proposed revised Ordinance for the Election of Chancellor and General Council Assessors, and that the Committee’s comments were included in a separate report on this item. (See Minutes 80-82)

Review of Corporate Governance Statement for Annual Accounts

64 The Court noted that the Committee had received a draft Corporate Governance Statement for inclusion in the University’s annual financial statements. The Committee had also received a benchmarking review with the revised UK Code on Corporate Governance (Revised 2010) and the Committee of University Chairmen’s Guide for Members of Higher Education Governing Bodies in the UK.

65 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the Corporate Governance statement which had been amended to take into account new practices that the University had implemented in the course of the past financial year, subject to further amendment to reflect the Committee’s recommendation to Court regarding the Senior Independent Member.

Scott Brown Quadrangle

66 The Court noted that the Committee had received and considered a proposal to name the quadrangle partly encircled by the Taylor Building on the King’s College campus in recognition of the long history of support for the University provided by Dr Ronald Scott Brown. It had been proposed that the quadrangle be renamed the ‘Scott Brown Quadrangle’.

67 The Court noted that the Committee had agreed to approve the University’s proposal, which was supported by the Development Trust.

Removal of Scottish Governance Review from Risk Register

68 The Court noted that the Committee had received and considered a paper which briefed the Committee on recent work to review the University’s Corporate Risk Register, and which drew its attention to Corporate Risk 2012-22, “Uncertain outcome of the Government’s review of governance, and changing requirements of institutions”.

69 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the recommendation of the Risk Management Committee that this Risk would now be removed from the University’s Corporate Risk Register.

Appointments to External Bodies

70 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the following appointments to external bodies:

(1) To extend Dr A Mair’s (former Chancellor’s Assessor on Court) current term as the University nominated member of the Court of the University of the Highlands and Islands Court for a further year to 31 July 2013.
To appoint Professor Stephen D Logan, Senior Vice-Principal to the Board of Directors of the Aberdeen Sports Village.

Attendance at Court and Key Committees 2011/12 (For Disclosure in the Annual Accounts)

The Court received from the Committee a draft record of members’ attendance at meetings of the Court and selected key Court committees during the period 1st August 2011 to 31st July 2012, which would be included in the University’s published annual accounts.

Report from the Committee on Research, Income-Generation and Commercialisation

The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Committee at its meeting of 27 June 2012. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes)

Routine Business Not Proposed for Discussion

SFC Outcome Agreements

The Court received and considered a paper on the Outcome Agreement (OA) 2012/13 that the University was required to have in place with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as a condition of grant (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

The Court noted that the draft OA had been developed following consultation with the SFC and discussions with Student Association Officers. The Court also noted a report of the principal points that the Operating Board had discussed regarding the draft OA at its meeting on 7 September 2012, which included a detailed discussion of indicators relating to widening access and the University's position on why the 'MD20' indicator was not appropriate given the socio-economic and geographical character of the North-East of Scotland.

The Court noted that the Students' Association welcomed the draft OA but had concerns regarding the University’s decision not to include specific targets in relation to the 'MD20' population.

The Court approved the Outcome Agreement for submission to the SFC. (See Minute 38)

Residences Strategy

The Court received and considered a paper on Student Residences Strategy which had been considered by the Operating Board on 7 September 2012 (copy filed with the Principal Copy of the Minutes).

The Court noted that:

- Over the medium term the University required access to 3,000 beds, taking into account the current University strategy around RUK and Overseas student numbers and the external rental market. In order to achieve this, the University needed to refurbish the remaining 900 beds in order to get all accommodation to a basic quality threshold. In doing so, the University would lose a number of beds as some would be given up for communal kitchens and additional shower facilities. Including New Carnegie Court, the University currently owns or has access to around 2,575 beds with the remaining beds sought from the private sector. On completion of the proposed refurbishment, the University would have reduced its current bed total, and the aim would be to go ahead with a new 199 bed residence to retain owned/access to beds at around 2,500. None of the refurbished residences would be en-suite as this range of residence was being provided by New Carnegie Court. The remaining 500 beds required would be sought from external student accommodation providers, thereby ensuring the University retained a degree of flexibility in bed numbers.
The Court agreed:

- That the refurbishment of the residences was fully integrated into the overall estates strategy/master plan and seen as a key priority.

- That Hillhead be taken forward as an undergraduate village, and the Crombie/Johnston/King’s site developed as a mainly postgraduate facility, with appropriate facilities to enhance the postgraduate experience.

- That the central building at Hillhead was refurbished to incorporate student facilities that enhanced the overall student experience.

- That the refurbishment of the residences was fully incorporated into the 10 year plan as a key priority, with the aim of completing the refurbishment in a 10 year period and containing the overall capital requirements of the University within the existing Barclay’s loan facility. The Court noted that decisions would be required regarding the priorities within the capital plan, and this would be fully incorporated in the updated version of the 10 year plan presented in December.

- That the University pension scheme funds and University endowment funds were investigated as a way to finance the new build at Hillhead of 199 beds, on the same principle as a commercial third party proposal that had recently been made to the University.

- That the current potential third party option was not taken forward on the basis of the length of the lease and no breakage option resulting in a lack of flexibility for the University.

**Reform of Ordinances for Election of the Chancellor/General Council Assessors**

The University Court at its previous meeting of 26 June 2012 had authorised the University to take forward modernisation of its current regulations for the elections of Chancellor and General Council Assessors to Court (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

The Court received a draft Ordinance for the modernisation of its current regulations for the elections of Chancellor and General Council Assessors to Court. The Court noted comments that had been received from the Governance and Nominations Committee regarding the proposal to restrict General Council Assessors to two terms of office on Court whether consecutively served or not. The Court noted that the Committee had agreed the proposal was in keeping with best practice but that a number of other constituencies on Court were not subject to similar restrictions. It would in due course review the constitutional changes required to move towards all constituencies on Court complying with best practice in this regard. (See Minute 63)

The Court approved the draft Ordinance for formal submission to the Privy Council subject to the approval of Senate and the General Council, and public display within the University for the statutory period.


The Court received and approved the year-on response to the Enhancement Led Institutional Review Report which was to be submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency by the end of September 2012. (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

**Report on Student Admissions**

The Court received and discussed an interim summary report on undergraduate and postgraduate student admissions (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). The Court noted the 2012/13 applications cycle was still in progress and therefore there was still significant data analysis to be carried out.
The Court noted that the University had exceeded its intake targets for Scottish/EU undergraduates, and therefore was forecast to exceed its Scottish Funding Council (SFC) oversee population limit. The Court noted that the University was reviewing its approach to offer making offers and going rates for entry for Scottish/EU applicants.

The Court noted that the University had achieved 20% more firm entrant acceptances from Rest of UK (RUK) applicants than in 2011/12, however, the University had not achieved its RUK entrant target. The Court noted that the primary factors for the shortfall were (i) a higher than predicted number of applicants had failed to achieve their conditional offer and fell substantially short of the University’s entry requirements of 3B grades; (ii) a higher than normal percentage of insurance applicants had declined the University’s offer.

The Court discussed in detail the outcome of the admissions process and noted the unstable market conditions that were prevailing across the UK higher education system. The Court agreed to receive further analysis of the outcome of this year’s admissions cycle and to have further discussion around the changes in the market nationally and anticipated issues for the 2013/14 admissions cycle. The Court also agreed it would be helpful to receive a briefing on tariff scores to allow Court to understand the comparability of RUK qualifications to Scottish qualifications.

The Court noted that the University was forecasting underrecruitment in international postgraduate taught students in two Colleges with the remaining College being on target. (See Minute 40)

NATIONAL PAY NEGOTIATIONS

The Court noted a brief update on developments with regard to national pay negotiations. (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

MANAGEMENT FINANCIAL REPORT

The Court noted a summary of the year-end management accounts for the period to 31 July 2012 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes) (See Minute 41).

REPORT ON BRITISH SCIENCE FESTIVAL

The Court noted a report on the British Science Festival 2012. (Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes).

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 11 December 2012 at 9.00am.