

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 11 December 2012

Present: Sir Moir Lockhead (in the Chair), Principal, Rector (Dr M Mackie), Mr A Arthur, Dr A Baxter, Ms J Crow, Ms A-C Deseilligny, Mr C Duncan, Professor P Edwards, Mr J Hall, Professor P Hannaford, Professor S Heys, Mr G Hunter, Professor N Hutchison, Professor S Logan, Mr D Macfarlane, Professor P McGeorge, Cllr R McKail, Mrs K McPhail, Mr K Murray, Mr B Pack, Mr B Paterson, Mrs J Shirreffs, Dr J Skakle, Mr D Steyn and Dr N Vargesson.

In attendance: Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mrs C Inglis, Ms J Sewel and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Dr C Brittain and Cllr B Crockett.

MINUTES

93 The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2012 were approved.

PRESENTATION FROM STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

94 The Court received a presentation from Miss Anne-Claire Deseilligny, President of the Students' Association on the Association's Strategic Plan for 2011-2016. The presentation highlighted the key features of the organisation and structure of the Students' Association. The presentation also highlighted the Students' Association's priority campaign for 2012/13 of access to higher education; the steps the Association was taking to address the future challenges of representing an increasingly diverse and international student body; reforming the governance of the Association; and lobbying for a new Student Union facility.

95 In discussion, the Court noted that the Association measured its performance through a variety of indicators across its core activities. These included the number and membership of societies and turnout at elections. The Court also noted the Association's view that there should be a second place for a student member within Court. In further discussion, the role of the Association in promoting the University and working with it to enhance the student experience were also noted.

REPORT FROM SENIOR GOVERNOR

96 The Senior Governor noted that the Chancellor, Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, had announced his retirement from 31 December 2012. The Court agreed to record its thanks and appreciation for the significant service that Lord Wilson had dedicated to the University both as Chancellor and previously as a member of Court.

97 The Senior Governor reported that informal meetings between a small group of members of Court and the governors of RGU were being arranged to discuss issues of mutual interest to the two governing bodies.

98 The Senior Governor noted that a further induction event for members had been held by the University and that the Clerk would circulate the induction material to all members.

99 The Senior Governor noted that later that day a number of members of Court would participate in meetings with the consultant appointed to assist the Scottish Committee of University Chairmen in developing a Code of Higher Education Good Practice.

## REPORT FROM PRINCIPAL

- 100 The Principal briefed Court on the key features of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill which had recently been published and the key implications for universities which were around widening access, governance and the role of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in reviewing the pattern of funded higher education provision.
- 101 The Principal reported that the University had been advised of the outcome of its bid to SFC for additional funded student places. This had been generally positive with the University being allocated 75 additional places for MD40 undergraduate students, 50 additional undergraduate places in priority skills areas and 10 places for articulation students with Aberdeen College. A decision on additional postgraduate taught places was awaited.
- 102 The Principal reported on developments in higher education in England and drew Court's attention to the expected market uncertainty for RUK students which would follow from the decision to allow English institutions to recruit without restriction students with ABB A- Levels. The Principal noted that as was reported in the Operating Board's Report, the University had recently recruited more RUK students than in the previous year but this had been less than the target required to replace lost SFC funding. The University had exceeded its target for Scots/EU students and it would be considering how to manage its population going forward as part of preparations for the forthcoming admissions cycle.
- 103 The Principal reported to Court that the University, RGU and Aberdeen College were working together to establish an Oil and Gas Academy for Scotland to help address the expected skills shortage in that area. This had the support of the Scottish Government and was intended to be a 'one stop shop' for education and training in oil and gas related areas. The University was also progressing the establishment of its Institute for Energy.
- 104 The Principal noted that research income was up £5M on the same period last year. The Principal also reported on the University's continuing efforts to meet the Government's target of generating 2% efficiencies.
- 105 The Principal also reported on recent visits to China and South East Asia where he had undertaken a range of meetings relating to fundraising and collaborative opportunities with Asian universities. The Principal provided further reports on the University's Sound Festival and recent student sporting achievements.

## REPORT FROM THE RECTOR

- 106 The Rector introduced his report to Court. The Court also received a tabled paper which provided a summary of the Court's previous consideration and position regarding RUK fees and the funding of higher education in Scotland. (*Copies filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 107 The Court noted that the issue of whether international student fees should be fixed for the duration of a course had been considered by the Operating Board and was to be considered further.
- 108 The Court discussed the Rector's request that there be an in-depth discussion of the philosophical issues surrounding the charging of tuition fees. The Rector further noted that he did not consider the paper that had been tabled provided the means for Court to have such a discussion. It was agreed that a further paper should be prepared and that the Court would revisit the issue at its next meeting.

- 109 The Court also discussed the SFC cap on the numbers of Scots/EU students that the University could recruit and whether this was appropriate. The Court noted and welcomed that management were in dialogue with the Scottish Funding Council regarding this.
- 110 The Court noted the Rector's suggestion that a Student Sabbatical Officer should be a member of the University Development Trust but agreed that this was a matter for the Trust to consider.
- 111 The Court noted the Rector had been advised of concerns regarding the proposed new structure of the academic year. (*See Minutes 116-119*)
- 112 The Court noted the Rector's report included the issue of a performance space and that as reported in the revised 10 year capital plan, an options appraisal was being undertaken by senior management.

## STRATEGIC PLAN & RISK REGISTER UPDATE

### SIX MONTHLY PLANNING & CORPORATE RISK REGISTER REPORT

- 113 Ms Sewel introduced a report on actions being taken in support of the Strategic Plan and to mitigate against identified risks within the Corporate Risk Register. The report also included an assessment of current performance as measured by the University's Key Performance Indicators (*copies filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 114 The Court discussed the Corporate Risk Register and Key Performance Indicators. A number of members welcomed the report and noted that it enabled Court to focus its attention on key issues. The Court agreed that it should receive an update on the top 3 risks at its next meeting. It was also suggested that the cumulative impact of the individual risks should be considered and monitored.
- 115 The Court approved the University's Corporate Risk Register and agreed that the University's current level of Risk Appetite was appropriate.

## LEARNING AND TEACHING

### REVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR

- 116 Professor McGeorge introduced a paper proposing a new structure for the academic year from 2014/15 which had been considered and approved by Senate at its meeting of 14 November 2012 (*copies filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). The proposals had been developed as part of a wider consideration of measures that might improve the University's student retention rates and following requests by the previous executive of the Students' Association to consider a review.
- 117 The Court noted that a University Teaching and Learning Committee Working Group had undertaken the review of the structure of the academic year with appropriate representation from across the University and from the Students' Association. The Working Group had developed two possible models and consulted on these with, amongst others, the University Management Group, College Executives, the University Teaching and Learning Committee, University Schools, and the Student Affairs Committee. The Students' Association had also held a referendum on the issue. The consultation process had indicated a clear preference for the model which proposed the second-half session teaching preceding the Easter vacation . The key changes which were proposed as part of this model in relation to the current academic year structure were:

- (i) First half-session examination diet brought forward to before Christmas.
  - (ii) Teaching semesters decreased from 12 to 11 weeks.
  - (iii) Maintaining a revision period for all examination diets, and introducing this for the summer resit diet.
  - (iv) Specifying an induction period for second half-session entrants.
  - (v) Bringing the summer resit diet forward to immediately post-graduations.
  - (vi) This combination of features necessitates Freshers' Week being one week earlier than currently scheduled.
  - (vii) All second half-session teaching taking place before the Easter vacation.
- 118 In discussion, it was noted that the changes were based around pedagogical considerations and a structure which facilitated a better student experience. The President of the Students' Association noted however, that the result of its referendum suggested students were not supportive of the change. The Students' Association accepted that the Senate had approved the changes and that the Association's concerns had been debated there. The President noted that the Students' Association now wished to focus on working with the University to implement the new structure and this was welcomed by the Court. A number of members also noted that the University should consider how to communicate the advantages of the new structure to students and potential students. The Court also discussed the implications of a reduction in the number of teaching weeks for students and staff.
- 119 The Court approved the proposed new structure for the academic year and that the University now work towards implementation for academic year 2014/15.

## RESEARCH & THEMES

### RESEARCH THEMES

- 120 Professor Hannaford introduced an update on progress within the University's four institutional research themes (*copies filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 121 The Court discussed the content of the four themes. In relation to the Environment and Food Security and Energy themes, individual members with links to those industries expressed their interest in engaging further with the Themes and that there were significant opportunities to harness industry support for these. It was also suggested that greater clarity regarding the relationship between the Energy Theme, the Energy Institute and the Oil and Gas Skills Academy would be helpful. The Court noted that the Themes were still developing and that these suggestions would be considered and that Court would receive presentations from each of the Theme Leaders at future meetings.
- 122 The Court noted the update.

## INTERNATIONALISATION

- 123 Mr Cannon introduced a business plan in support of the University's internationalisation strategy and further information on its proposed management structure. (*copies filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 124 In discussion, the Court welcomed the plan but suggested that the University's proposed marketing budget might not be sufficient and that this should be reviewed, particularly given that international student recruitment was currently the University's highest scoring risk. It was also suggested that the University's marketing approach should be culturally sensitive to each of the geographical markets in which it was operating, and utilise opportunities to market and partner with industries linked to specific disciplines. It was suggested that the Court should not lose sight of the student as an individual and the specific educational experience being offered to international students, not only their importance to the institution financially. It was also noted that internationalisation was extremely wide ranging and would need further and regular consideration by the Court

and management. In discussion of the proposed future leadership structure of internationalisation, the Court was assured that this was being addressed as a priority. It was also noted that internationalisation and online education would be included in a general paper on online education development which would be brought to a future meeting.

125 The Court noted the business plan for internationalisation.

## FINANCE

### ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

126 Ms Bews introduced the University Group Consolidated Annual Accounts for the financial year 2011/2012, which had been considered and approved by the Audit Committee and considered by the Operating Board (*See also Minute 146*). The Court also received a commentary from the Finance Director which highlighted key audit and accounting issues and the External Auditors' Report which provided an unqualified audit opinion and which included the Management Letter.

127 The Court noted the key points arising from the results which were:

- A decrease in operating surplus of £0.8M and a historical cost surplus of £6.9M.
- A decrease in recurrent teaching, research excellence and postgraduate grants of £4.1m (-5.6%), primarily due to reduction in teaching grant of £4m;
- An increase in income from tuition fees and support grants of £0.3M (0.7%) with overseas fee income increasing by £0.6m (3.4%);
- A decrease in income from research grants and contracts of £6m (-9.4%)
- An increase in other income of £5.7m.

128 The Court approved the Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2012.

### TEN-YEAR CASH FLOW PLAN/CAPITAL PLAN

129 Ms Bews introduced a revised 10 Year Capital Plan and associated cash flows. (*Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). The Plan had been updated to incorporate the planned investment in student residences as agreed by Court in September 2012.

130 The Court noted that the Operating Board had considered the Plan and had welcomed the clear link between it and the University's Strategic Objectives. The Board had agreed to recommend to Court that it approve the Plan.

131 In response to a question as to whether the University was being too cautious in its planned capital expenditure. It was noted, that the Plan allowed flexibility in the timing of commencing projects and if financial assumptions changed projects could be brought forward or new projects planned.

132 The Court approved:

- 1) The refurbishments of student residences and the central building at Hillhead at a cost of £20M over three years, commencing with the refurbishment of Hector Boece and Keith House.
- 2) To commit in principle to the allocation of £4M to commence the investment in the co-location and refurbishment of academic facilities in the College of Arts and Social Sciences in support of the strategy to grow international student numbers.
- 3) That a budget to be set aside for the following proposals to be developed:

- i. Development of teaching facilities following on from the Science and Energy Institute, refurbishing Meston and other consequential moves.
- ii. Student facilities (performance and social space)
- iii. Interfaith centre.

#### UPDATE ON STAFFING MATTERS

- 133 Mrs Inglis introduced a paper which updated Court on a range of staffing matters that were being progressed. (*Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). These included the 2012 National Pay Negotiations, and the University having taken a decision to implement the 1% uplift in pay in November salaries; various staff development activities, the review of promotion procedures; Athena Swan Charter; Staff Health and Wellbeing activities and the staff survey follow-up work.
- 134 The Court noted the report.

#### NOMINATION & ELECTION PROCESS FOR THE CHANCELLOR

- 135 Ms Sewel introduced a paper which provided Court with a report on the nominations and elections process for the appointment of a Chancellor following the announcement by Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, that he was to retire on 31 December 2012. (*Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 136 The Court noted the key points of the nominations and electoral process as regulated by University Ordinance No123. In accordance with the procedures, the Business Committee of the General Council had been consulted and had agreed that a Chancellor Nominations and Elections Committee with representation from both Court and the Business Committee be established to oversee the process.
- 137 Mr Duncan as Convener of the Chancellor Nominations and Elections Committee reported that it had met earlier that day and had agreed on the timeframe for the process and a nominations close date of 4 February 2013.

#### CHAPEL COMMITTEE

- 138 Ms Sewel introduced a paper which provided Court with a report on a review of the Chapel Committee. The review recommended that the remit and composition of the Committee be amended and that it cease to be a joint committee of Senate and Court and instead become a Chapel and Chaplaincy Advisory Group.
- 139 The Court approved, in principle, the recommendation that the remit and composition of the Chapel Committee be amended to become a Chapel and Chaplaincy Advisory Group prior to the proposal being presented to Senate for its endorsement.
- 140 The Court also approved the appointment of Professor Neva Haites, Vice-Principal, as Interim Convener of the Chapel Committee with effect from 23 November 2012.

#### REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

##### **Operating Board**

- 141 The Court received and noted a report of the meetings of the Operating Board held on 11 October 2012 and 27 November 2012 (copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes). This included reports of the Board's consideration of the following items:
- Student registrations for 2012/13
  - Planning of 2013/13 Student Recruitment
  - SFC Outcome Agreements 2013/14 and Allocation of Additional Funded Student Places
  - Consideration of a paper from the Students' Association on International Tuition Fees

- Student Residences Strategy
- Updates on the Disposal of the Rowett Estate
- Staffing Policies
- Six Monthly Planning and Risk Report
- 10 Year Capital Plan and Cashflow
- Review of Appraisal

#### **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

- 142 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Audit Committee at its meetings on 3 October and 5 November 2012. The Court also approved or noted the following:

*Audit Committee Annual Report for 2011-12*

- 143 The Court approved the Audit Committee's annual report for 2011-12.
- 144 The Court noted that the Committee had reported that it was satisfied with the work of the internal and external auditors.

*Internal Auditors' Annual Report 2011-12*

- 145 The Court approved the Internal Auditor's Report for 2011-12.

*Draft Annual Accounts Year Ended 31 July 2012*

- 146 The Court noted that the Committee had considered the University's Draft Annual Accounts for the financial year 2011-12, together with a commentary from the Director of Finance. Subject to a few minor amendments, the Committee, for its part, had approved the accounts. (See *Minutes* 126-128)

*External Auditors' Report*

- 147 The Court noted that the Committee had received the External Auditors' Report and had considered the issues that had been highlighted in the audit and that the external auditors anticipated issuing an unqualified audit opinion. (See *Minutes* 126-128)

*Internal Audit Reports*

- 148 The Court noted that the Committee had received and approved the following Internal Audit Reports as follows:
- Internal Audit Report: ASV Partnership Governance
  - Internal Audit Follow Up Report

*Audit Report to the European Commission*

- 149 The Court noted that the Committee had received and noted an Audit Report to the European Commission RTD Audit Framework Services Contract.

*Internal Audit Plan 2012-13*

- 150 The Court noted that the Audit Committee had received and approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2012-13.

### *Statement of Corporate Governance*

- 151 The Court noted that the Committee had received the University's Corporate Governance Statement, which would be included within the Annual Accounts.
- 152 The Committee had noted that the Statement had already been approved by the Governance and Nominations Committee. The Audit Committee had approved the Statement subject to some minor amendments.  
*Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing)*
- 153 The Court noted that the Committee had received and discussed a Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing). The Audit Committee had agreed that it should be notified of any incidences of Whistleblowing and asked to receive an annual report of all invocations of the Policy. The Court noted that the Committee had, for its part, approved a revised Draft Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) subject to a few minor amendments.

### **GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

- 154 The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee approved the re-appointment of Mr Richard Bickerton, as an external lay member of the Audit Committee, for a further term of three years with effect from 6 February 2013.

### **COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH, INCOME-GENERATION AND COMMERCIALISATION**

- 155 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Committee at its meeting of 5 October 2012. (*Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

### **STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

- 156 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Committee at its meeting of 15 October 2012. (*Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

### **UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING**

- 157 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Committee at its meeting of 31 October 2012. (*Copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

### **ROUTINE BUSINESS NOT PROPOSED FOR DISCUSSION**

### **SENATE REPORT**

- 158 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Senate at its meeting on 14 November 2012. The Court also approved or noted the following:

*Draft Resolutions Nos of 2012 [Changes to Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic)] and [Changes to Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic)]*

- 159 The Court approved Draft Resolutions Nos of 2012 [Changes to Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic)] and [Changes to Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic)] and agreed to forward them to the General Council and to make them generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

*Election of Senate Assessors to the University Court*

- 160 The Court noted that Senate had approved the appointment of Professor Stephen Heys as the professorial Senate Assessor from the College of Life Sciences and Medicine until 1 October 2016 and of Dr Chris Brittain as the non-professorial Senate Assessor for the College of Arts and Social Sciences until September 2013.

*Enhancement Led Institutional Review*

- 161 The Court noted that the Senate had approved, for its part, the proposed approach and schedule for consultation on the Enhancement Led Institutional Review due in October and November 2013.

*Ordinance for the Election of the Chancellor and Election of General Council Assessors to the University Court*

- 162 The Court noted that the Senate, for its part, had approved the draft Ordinance on the Election of the Chancellor and the Election of the General Council Assessors to the University Court, approved by Court on 26 June and 25 September 2012.

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF REDUNDANCY ACTIVITIES**

- 163 The Court received and noted a paper which provided an overview of redundancy activities over the last year and reported on the continuing development of the consultation processes with campus Trades Unions and the work of the committees supporting the process of redundancy avoidance.

**LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & MUSEUMS USAGE**

- 164 The Court received and noted a paper which gave a summary of key access, occupancy and other statistics for The Sir Duncan Rice Library, the Special Collections Centre, and Museums from September 2011 to August 2012, a period which covered the first academic year of operation for King's Museum and The Sir Duncan Rice Library.

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORTS**

- 165 The Court noted a summary of the management accounts for the period to 31 October 2012.

**CONSULTATION ON DEVELOPMENT OF A SCOTTISH CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION**

- 166 The Court noted a report on the development of a new Scottish Code of Good Practice for Scottish Higher Education.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 167 The next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 26 March 2013 at 9.00am.