

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 25 March 2014

Present: Sir Moir Lockhead (in the Chair), Principal, Rector (Dr M Mackie - for mins 234-239 only), Mr A Arthur, Dr A Baxter (except for mins 234-243), Dr C Black, Dr C Brittain (except for mins 234-243), Ms J Craw, Cllr B Crockett, Mr C Duncan, Ms M Dunn, Mr J Hall, Professor P Hannaford, Professor S Heys, Mr G Hunter (except for mins 225-233), Professor N Hutchison, Professor S Logan, Mr D MacFarlane, Professor P McGeorge, Cllr R McKail, Mrs K McPhail (present by teleconference except for mins 178-201), Mr K Murray, Mr B Pack, Mr B Paterson, Mrs J Shirreffs, Professor J Skakle and Mr D Steyn.

In attendance: Miss E Beever, Ms I Bews, Mr A Donaldson, Mrs D Dyker, Mrs K Fowler (for Minutes 177 to 182) Mrs C Inglis, Professor S Kunin, Mr M McCorkell, Professor A Rodger (for Minutes 211 to 213), Mr J Scrimgeour (for Minutes 177 to 182), Ms J Sewel and Mr B Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies were received from Professor P Edwards

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

177 Mr Arthur and Professor Skakle declared an interest as local officials of the University and College Union. Mr Paterson declared an interest as a local official of UNITE the union.

PRESENTATION ON THE ABERDEEN INSTITUTE OF ENERGY

178 Mr J Scrimgeour, Executive Director of the Aberdeen Institute of Energy, provided Court with a presentation and paper on the Aberdeen Institute of Energy (AIE) (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

179 The Court noted the AIE had been established to be the physical embodiment of energy teaching and research at the University of Aberdeen and to provide a focal point for energy programmes offered across the University. A key objective was to increase the profile of the University as a centre of excellence in the area of Energy locally, nationally and internationally.

180 The presentation outlined the main activities undertaken by the Institute and the Director since his appointment in September 2013. These included significant networking with Energy Industry contacts and the identification of a series of overseas opportunities linked to countries with developing hydrocarbon industries. Such countries were known to have both a skills shortage and a training need which in-country higher education institutions lacked the expertise to deliver. The Institute had also been working to draw together and present the academic capacity that Aberdeen had to offer both in terms of research and teaching programmes. The presentation also highlighted the advantage the University had in brand terms by virtue of being based in "Europe's Energy Capital". It was vital, however, that the Institute developed a comprehensive marketing strategy to make best use of the University's location and its academic strengths in Energy.

- 181 In discussion, the need for academic engagement and support to realise the vision of the Institute was noted and a number of ways to encourage and facilitate academic involvement were suggested. In addition to raising the profile of the University in Energy, the aim of the Institute was to generate revenue for the University and it was noted that a business plan and KPIs in support of this were under development. The importance over the longer term of the new Science building to both facilitate the underpinning academic activities of the Institute and its profile was noted. The Court also discussed the importance of the Institute having the necessary resources to achieve its objectives and it was noted that the University was in discussions with the Director regarding this.
- 182 The Court agreed that it would receive, at an appropriate point, a further report on the development of the Institute and its supporting business plan and KPIs.

MINUTES

- 183 The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2013 were approved.
- 184 The Court also noted an updated Action Log (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

REPORTS ON INCIDENTS

- 185 The Court received and noted a paper (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) which provided detailed reports on the circumstances of two recent accidents which were reportable to the Health and Safety Executive and the actions which had subsequently been taken to prevent recurrences. The Court noted that the incidents were:
- A member of staff had been caught by a strong gust of wind while leaving the Sir Duncan Rice Library and blown into a metal railing;
 - A member of staff slipped and fell on the roof of the Fraser Noble Building.
- 186 The Court also noted a report on the Operating Board's consideration of the issues arising from the incidents.
- 187 In discussion, it was suggested that the incidents highlighted the importance of the University recording 'near misses' if not already the practice to do so. The Court noted that measuring of near misses would be included in the current review of safety culture.

SAFETY CULTURE

- 188 The Court received and noted a paper (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) on the further steps that had been taken by senior management to enhance the health and safety culture in the University.
- 189 The Court noted that the University had engaged in discussions with a number of organisations, including a major Energy company, regarding their approach to fostering a strong health and safety culture. The Court noted the main points arising from those discussions. These would inform the University's ongoing enhancement of its health and safety culture.
- 190 The Court noted that the University would undertake a survey of staff to understand the existing safety culture and to evaluate where there were areas of strength and areas for further improvement. To support this, the University would use consultants from the Health and Safety Laboratory and their Safety Climate Tool which was designed to facilitate such surveys. The survey would run from 28 April to 10 May.
- 191 The Court also noted the steps the University was for its part taking to promote student safety.

STANDING REPORTS

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR GOVERNOR

- 192 The Senior Governor welcomed Ms Emily Beever who was attending the meeting as President-Elect of the Students' Association.
- 193 The Senior Governor reported that a further meeting with the governors and management of The Robert Gordon University was scheduled to take place later that day to discuss issues of mutual interest to the two universities.

REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL

- 194 The Principal introduced his written report (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) on recent developments within the University.
- 195 The Principal reported on a recent meeting he had held with the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education, where they discussed the issue of widening access to higher education. The Principal noted that he had highlighted the University's concerns regarding the inadequacies of the Scottish Government's definition of rural poverty.
- 196 The Principal reported on the UK Government Budget Statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which had contained few significant announcements affecting higher education.
- 197 The Principal reported on the progress of student admissions noting that the University had managed successfully its 'home' undergraduate population which was now within SFC limits. As reported previously, Rest of UK (RUK) undergraduate numbers had increased but the University was reviewing the retention rate of RUK students which was not as high as would be expected. As had been reported previously to Court, the recruitment of Postgraduate Taught students, particularly international students, remained a challenge.
- 198 The Principal noted that Research Income was increasing. In addition, there was underlying growth in the number of applications and research activity which was encouraging for the continuing increase in income.
- 199 The Principal highlighted a number of matters arising from his report, including the very positive outcome of the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) and some recent staff successes. The Principal also reported on the International Women's Day Conference which the University had organised. The Court noted its congratulations to the University on the success of this conference.
- 200 The Court discussed the Principal's report on the QS World Rankings, the results of which were encouraging with twelve subject areas at Aberdeen ranked among the top 200 universities in the world. It was noted that although the performance of subject areas at Aberdeen which were outwith the Top 200 was not known, it was the case that no subject areas at Aberdeen had dropped out of the Top 200.
- 201 In discussion, the Court noted that the Principal was leading a further UK wide review of efficiencies in higher education and the Principal would report on this following the conclusion of that review. It was also noted that the Principal was leading a review of the funding system for higher education in Wales.

RISK AND STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

- 202 Ms Sewel introduced an enhanced six monthly Planning and Risk Report, which included a mid-term review of the University's progress against the targets in the Strategic Plan 2011-15 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). This considered how successful the University had been in meeting the challenges of achieving its ambition as represented by the Strategic Plan. It also included consideration of which areas of activity required a greater concentration of effort or resource, or a revised approach, if the University was to achieve its goals.
- 203 The Court discussed whether there were strategic targets that the University was unlikely to achieve and also whether the University should revise these, while acknowledging that these targets were in support of the achievement of the University's overall strategic ambition. The Court agreed that the University's overall strategic ambition, the supporting targets and timeframe for their achievement should be the subject of a further report and discussion at a future meeting.
- 204 In further discussion, the Court considered the means by which the University's strategic targets were communicated and shared with staff. It was agreed that, while there were a variety of means by which staff could be engaged with these issues, it was important that staff across the institution understood the University's strategic ambition and the key priority areas for achieving it. The Court noted that the University's appraisal/annual review system for staff was linked to the strategic plan for this reason.
- 205 In discussion of the Corporate Risk Register, the Court noted that underpinning risk management procedures were in place to monitor emerging risks such as new Financial Accounting Standards.
- 206 The Court approved the reports and the Corporate Risk Register.

INTERNATIONALISATION

- 207 Professor Kunin, Vice-Principal for Internationalisation, gave a presentation and paper outlining his initial thoughts on the challenges and opportunities of Internationalisation for the University (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 208 The Court noted that since commencing his appointment in January 2014, Professor Kunin had been reviewing Internationalisation activity to date and developing a series of work streams to help progress priority areas for Internationalisation. These included:
- Profile/World League Tables;
 - Student Recruitment – programmes, processes, the Student Experience, targets, networks, branch campuses;
 - Research, Business and Governmental/International Body Impact;
 - Student Mobility;
 - Staff Mobility;
 - Staff Recruitment;
 - The Alumni Community.
- 209 Professor Kunin highlighted issues in relation to the University's market share for international students, trans-national education in areas that had a strategic fit with the University, the importance of online delivery and the continuing challenge posed by UKBA immigration controls. Professor Kunin emphasised that the University's response to the challenge of growing international student numbers required to be market research led, with a focused strategy that built on academic strengths. Professor Kunin argued that internationalisation extended beyond student recruitment. It included research and collaboration, the global profile of the University and the strength of its alumni community. The importance of the student experience and the need to give non-overseas students at Aberdeen an international experience were also noted. Professor Kunin also highlighted the importance of providing the necessary level of resource to support Internationalisation and the need for the

University to have a positive risk appetite for the challenges and opportunities that would emerge.

- 210 In further discussion, the Court noted that having identified the high level challenges and issues, it was crucial that there was a focused and prioritised plan that set out how the University would seek to address Internationalisation in the short, medium and longer term. It was noted that this would be the subject of a further more detailed report to Court at its next meeting.

REPORT ON OFFSHORE GRADUATE SCHOOL SOUTH KOREA

- 211 Professor Logan introduced a paper informing Court that the University was investigating a potential opportunity to establish a transnational education campus in South Korea (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 212 The Court noted that the proposal involved the establishment of an Offshore Graduate School as a branch campus of the University and that a Memorandum of Understanding had been signed to enable the discussions to progress and a University project board had been established to undertake due diligence work.
- 213 The Court noted that discussions were at an early stage but that it, the Operating Board, and the Governance and Nominations Committee, would be kept informed as the project progressed and that both bodies would be required to approve the project prior to it being recommended to Court. In discussion, it was confirmed that the University did evaluate proposals of this type against a number of criteria and it was agreed that at the appropriate next stage the Court would receive a more detailed report on the project and the University's evaluation of the business case.

ESTATES

ESTATES DEVELOPMENT

- 214 Professor Logan introduced a paper which included for approval Draft Framework Area Design Guidelines (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). Following approval by the Court in December 2013 of a new Estate Strategy and a revised Ten Year Capital Plan, the Design Guidelines had been developed to support the delivery of these plans and to ensure that the King's College Campus was developed in a cohesive manner and that design and design quality standards were considered fully in any new development proposals.
- 215 The Court noted that the Guidance set out the University's campus design objectives and outlined the key principles that would influence future projects. It would be incorporated into the King's Campus Framework Plan, which would be used to assist and inform future designers in the development and delivery of major projects. The Design Guidance and the underpinning qualities would also inform other forms of investment, including recurrent capital programmes, in relation to the amenity and aesthetic enhancement of the campus.
- 216 In discussion, the Court welcomed the approach of the Guidelines. The Court was assured that following approval of the Guidelines the University would engage with the local community council on the approach. It was suggested that the University should consider how similar guidelines might be developed or applied to the design and design quality of internal space.
- 217 The Court approved the Framework Area Design Guidelines.

UPDATE ON TEN YEAR CAPITAL PLAN

- 218 The Court received a paper which outlined the governance arrangements and key milestones for projects in the University's 10 Year Capital Plan (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). The paper also provided an update on the establishment of 4 Project Boards to take forward the priority projects with the Capital Plan, these being the New Science Building, Student Union Centre, Central Teaching Facilities and Modernisation of the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The Court noted that the first meetings of these project boards had either taken place or been scheduled.
- 219 The paper also provided an update on the establishment of 3 Project Development Groups to develop project briefs to underpin delivery of a Cultural Centre (including Performance Space), a Multifaith-Interfaith Centre, and a Student Accommodation Strategy and Staff Housing.
- 220 The Court noted the four key stages of construction projects were: Stage A – Appraisal, Stage B – Strategic Briefing, Stage C – Outline Proposals and Stage D- Detailed Proposals. The paper confirmed that the timelines for key decisions would be determined by progress against each of these stages. Project Boards reported routinely, together with general progress reports from all projects, to the Operating Board via the Advisory Group on Capital Expenditure and the University Management Group. Stage D was considered to be a pivotal point in any construction project and a detailed report would be received by Court at this point for each project.

IMPLICATIONS OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

- 221 The Principal introduced a paper (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) which presented an initial high level analysis of potential implications of Scottish Independence for Higher Education and the consequent risks and opportunities for the University. The paper also outlined the Scottish Government's position on particular questions regarding higher education in an Independent Scotland as stated in the White Paper 'Scotland's Future'.
- 222 The Court noted that the paper outlined several key potential issues with regard to: RUK student fees and the fee status of students from other EU states, the future operation of a common research area across the UK and continuing access to UK Research Council funding, and the opportunities that a new system of immigration policy in an Independent Scotland might provide for international student recruitment. The paper also considered a number of further areas of relevance to higher education including, the branding and marketing of UK and Scottish higher education, the attitude of UK based charities to funding work undertaken in universities in an independent Scotland, and the taxation environment for commercial investment in research and encouraging philanthropic giving.
- 223 The Court also noted that there were potential implications for higher education resulting from a 'No' vote, particularly if there were to be a referendum on EU membership and further devolution of UK Government powers to the Scottish Parliament.
- 224 The Court noted the paper.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE SCOTTISH CODE OF GOOD HE GOVERNANCE

REPORT FROM GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE ON SIZE OF COURT

- 225 Mr Hall introduced a paper which had been prepared following recent discussions at the Governance and Nominations Committee on the size and composition at Court (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 226 The paper noted that discussions thus far on the issue had focused on the size of Court rather than being an analysis of how well the current composition and arrangements would support effective future governance of the University. The paper sought to address that point and to set out a future direction for the composition of the Court based on some guiding principles.

- 227 The Court noted that particular consideration to the following had been given:
- The Court's function and role;
 - The implications for size;
 - The implications for elected/non-elected members;
 - The potential for any new composition to better address the gender/diversity balance and skills needed in the membership of Court.
- 228 The paper proposed a 27 member Court with a revised composition, which included 14 appointed independent members to provide a lay majority of appointed independent members.
- 229 The Court considered and endorsed the function, role and aspirations of Court as articulated in the paper and that its size and composition should support these.
- 230 In discussion of the proposed model of 27 members, a number of views were expressed. It was noted by a number of members that 27 remained above the Code of Good HE Governance's recommended maximum of 25 and that this was not desirable. A number of members noted that the representation of Senate Assessors was unchanged while other constituencies had been reduced.
- 231 The Court discussed the position of the Local Council Assessors on Court. The importance of the University maintaining close links with both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council was acknowledged. While some members felt this was best achieved through the current approach, a number of members noted that the relationship could be equally well maintained by means other than Court membership or, if required, by appointment to one of the appointed independent positions.
- 232 The Court discussed whether as many as 14 appointed independent members were required. Some members noted that the General Council Assessors and Local Authority Assessors were both independent (as they could not be staff or students) and, therefore, contributed to the achievement of an independent majority. The point was also noted, however, that Court could not control elected or externally appointed members which in turn lessened its ability to achieve the desired balance of skills and diversity.
- 233 The Court agreed that a further proposal should be developed, which:
- (a) complied with the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance's recommended maximum of 25 (or less); and
 - (b) provided for a guaranteed majority of independent members but gave further consideration as to whether this should be achieved by appointed independent members or by all independent members. The Court also agreed that this would include clarification of the requirements of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance with regard to whether, in this regard, independent members could be 'elected';
 - (c) that the paper would consider the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance's recommendations on limits of terms of office of members;
 - (d) the Court agreed it should, if possible, receive a further proposal by circulation prior to the next meeting.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY: COURT STATEMENT OF INTENT

- 234 The Court received a paper from the Governance and Nominations Committee which enclosed a draft Court Statement of Intent on Equality and Diversity (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 235 The Court noted that the Statement had been prepared following the Court's consideration of the new Scottish Code of Good HE Governance, as a result of which the Court had agreed that such a statement should be prepared and that it should articulate the Court's goal of securing a minimum of 25% female representation on Court. The Committee had also agreed that there was a need for baseline data to monitor progress against this and future goals in relation to diversity. The paper, therefore, also included a recommendation that Court should approve the collection of Equality and Diversity monitoring data from its members.
- 236 The Court noted the proposed plan of actions and timeframe to achieve the gender goal of 25% in the context of the expected rotation in Court membership in the forthcoming years. The Court also noted that if it were to amend its composition and size to a model with a greater proportion of its members being directly appointed by Court, it would have more control over the diversity of its membership. The paper also outlined the context, current practice and actions proposed to ensure that the University's process of appointment of members to its governing body reflected the commitment of Court to become more diverse, and more representative of the University's staff and student community.
- 237 In discussion, it was noted that the gender balance and diversity of the membership of sub-committees was also important, particularly with regard to the Governance and Nominations Committee which made recommendations to Court on the appointment of members.
- 238 In discussion, it was suggested that the inclusion of 'notice periods' in the appointment of independent members might help to address the rotation of members. It was further noted that the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance included guidance regarding limits on the number of terms of office that could be served by any member of Court and that these issues were being considered by the Governance and Nominations Committee.
- 239 The Court agreed to:
- approve the statement of intent;
 - approve the collection of equality and monitoring data from members of Court.

REPORT FROM REMUNERATION COMMITTEE: SENIOR STAFF PAY POLICY

- 240 The Court received a paper from the Remuneration Committee outlining its recommended Senior Staff Pay Policy for 2014 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).
- 241 The Court noted that the Remuneration Committee had agreed that the following principles should be taken into account when considering nominations and/or applications for salary uplifts for individuals at Grade 9 level: Retention cases; Increased responsibility; Exceptional performance, Outstanding REF submission; Activities undertaken to enhance the student experience; and Equal Pay considerations.
- 242 The Court noted that the Remuneration Committee proposed as part of the Policy to allocate a fund of up to £320k to recognize, reward and incentivize senior members of staff. The general principles of this policy would be promoted to all Grade 9 Senior Staff and applications would be invited for consideration by the Committee.
- 243 The Court approved the proposed Senior Staff Pay Policy for 2014.

REPORT FROM THE OPERATING BOARD

- 244 The Court received a report from the Operating Board meetings of 3 February 2014 and 4 March 2014 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*), the principal items of which were:

Health and Safety:

- Reverse Car Parking;

Finance and Planning:

- Monthly Management Reports
- Scottish Funding Council
- Funding Letter
- Tuition Fees for International Undergraduate and Postgraduate Research Students
- Planning Assumptions 2014/15 – 2016/17
- Fee for MBA Energy Management
- UASLAS – Triennial Valuation

Estates and capital:

- Disposals and Acquisitions
- Ongoing Capital Projects
- ASV Business Plan and Update

Staffing:

- Industrial Relations and Pay negotiations
- Final Report of the Working Group on Appraisal
- Sickness Absence Report

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

- 245 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Governance and Nominations Committee at its meeting of 3 February 2014 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). In addition, the Court approved the following:

Vacancy on the Governance and Nominations Committee

- 246 The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee, agreed that Mrs Jennifer Shirreffs be appointed to the vacancy on the Committee.

Ethical Statement

- 247 The Court received from the Committee a recommendation to approve a draft Institutional Ethical Statement. The Court noted that the statement had been prepared following a review by the Committee of issues arising from the Woolf Inquiry into the London School of Economics' links with Libya and a subsequent benchmarking review of the University of Aberdeen's ethical policies and procedures. The Committee had noted from this that the University had extensive and well developed policies and procedures for a range of ethical issues. It had, however, agreed to recommend that these policies and procedures be reflected in an overarching ethical statement which could guide staff and students to relevant policies and which could be highlighted in the University's corporate governance statement.

- 248 The Court approved the Institutional Ethical Statement.

PARTNERSHIP, NEGOTIATING AND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

- 249 The Committee noted a report (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) of the principal items of business considered by the Partnership, Negotiating and Consultative Committee at its meeting on 27 February 2014.

Annual Review

- 250 The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee, approved the implementation of a proposed process for staff Annual Review which would replace the previous appraisal process.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 251 The Court noted a report (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) of the principal items of business considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting held on 22 January 2014.

STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

- 252 The Court noted a report (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) of the principal items of business considered by the Student Affairs Committee at its meeting held on 17 February 2014.

COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH, IMPACT AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

- 253 The Court noted a report (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) of the principal items of business considered by the Committee for Research, Impact and Knowledge Exchange at its meetings on 9 December 2013 and 14 February 2014.

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

- 254 The Court noted a report (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) of the principal items of business considered by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting held on 22 January 2014.

ROUTINE BUSINESS NOT PROPOSED FOR DISCUSSION

REPORT ON ONLINE EDUCATION DELIVERY

- 255 The Court received and noted a paper which provided an update on the Online Delivery Strategy presented previously and endorsed by Senate and which outlined the steps and resources necessary to realise the strategy (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

SIX MONTH REPORTS FROM COLLEGES

- 256 The Court received and noted reports on progress and developments within the three Colleges since the last presentation by the Heads of Colleges to Court in October 2013 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

ONESOURCE PROGRAMME UPDATE

- 257 The Court noted a paper which provided an overview of the OneSource programme and progress with the delivery of the project and its constituent work streams (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

UNIVERSITIES ACCOUNTS COMPARISONS

- 258 The Court noted a comparative analysis of the annual accounts for year ended 31 July 2013 for both the Scottish higher education sector and selected benchmark Universities across the UK (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*). The analysis provided key performance indicators for income, expenditure and financial strength of the institutions, and informed the University's position relative to the sector and its benchmark group.

SENATE REPORT

- 259 The Court noted a report (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*) of the principal items of business considered by the Senate at its meeting on 5 February 2014. This included a report on the outcome of the ELIR process which had resulted in the University receiving a positive endorsement of the University's arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORTS

- 260 The Court noted the Management Accounts and Reports for the period to 31 January 2014 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the minutes*).

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, 1 JULY 2014

- 261 The Court noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 1 July 2014, at 9.00am to 1.00pm.