

Approved



## UNIVERSITY COURT

### MINUTES

of the meeting of the University Court held on 22 October 2014 at 2pm in the Boardroom of the University.

Chair: Mr E Frizzell  
Vice-Chair: Professor L Wilson

Mr M Batho	Mr C Macdonald	Dr A Samuel
Mrs L Baxter	Mr D McLaren	Mrs S Scott
Ms A Boyle	Mr J Nicholson	Professor N Seaton
Mr J Burt	Professor S Olivier	Mr M Shaw
Ms R Donoghue	Right Rev. Dr N Peyton	Mrs H Smith
Mr R Fletcher	Dr J Rees	

Clerk to Court: Dr A Ramsay  
In attendance: Mr K Coe (item 6)  
Mrs C Summers (items 7 & 8)

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Dorward, Mr G MacDougall, Mr M Grossi, Mr A Macmillan Douglas and Mr J Reid.

### ***NON-RESERVED AREAS OF BUSINESS***

#### 1 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and, in particular welcomed Ms R Donoghue (Students' Association President) to her first meeting of Court. On behalf of Court, Mr Frizzell expressed condolences to the Principal on his recent family bereavement.

#### 2 DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Chair reminded members of their responsibility to indicate if they had, or could be perceived to have, a conflict of interest in relation to the items for discussion. None was declared.

#### 3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIR'S COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 OCTOBER 2014

Court noted the above minutes, submitted for information as Enclosure 1.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY COURT HELD ON 18 JUNE 2014

Court approved the above minutes, submitted as Enclosure 2, as an accurate record, subject to one minor amendment.

5 MATTERS ARISING FROM THESE MINUTES

Members were advised that there were no matters arising which were not already on the agenda.

6 ANALYSIS OF LEAGUE TABLES

CT/1014/03

The Principal introduced the above paper as one of an occasional series of reports to Court on the University's league table performance. In addressing the report, Professor Seaton noted that league tables provided a useful synthesis of HESA data to guide the public and that universities should remain vigilant to the influence the league tables have.

Court was advised that evidence suggested that improvement in performance had greater impact amongst the most highly-placed institutions, although this should not deter the University from seeking to advance in the rankings. Members noted that the institution was reviewing tactical issues around the reporting of data but that league table performance should not be employed as a management tool.

The Director of Communications apprised Court that, between about 2008 and 2012, Abertay had been on a clear downward trend in terms of its overall position within the tables; slow at first but steeper after 2011. However, since 2012 Abertay's ranking had, broadly speaking, begun to recover significantly, particularly in the Complete University Guide and the Guardian University Guide but somewhat less so in the Times and Sunday Times University League Table.

Members were advised that the exact criteria used varied from guide to guide but that, broadly speaking, they all included measures of student experience, research achievement, entry grades, expenditure, and employability outcomes. The research score was based on RAE 2008 outcomes and had therefore remained unchanged since then. The student satisfaction measure also remained static until Abertay joined the NSS in 2012, because non-participating institutions received either no score or the sector average score.

The key variables that had most influenced the University's ranking in the various tables over recent years were noted as: entry grades, graduate employment rates (in graduate-level jobs), proportion of graduates gaining 1sts or 2:1s (so-called "good honours"), staff-student ratio (SSR), completion rates, expenditure on student learning environment and, since 2012, the NSS score. However, the weightings given to the different measures when calculating overall ranking varied from table to table, accounting for the variation in rankings from one table to the next.

The Vice-Principal (Academic) apprised Court of conscious interventions made by the University in each of these key areas which would have an amelioratory effect on its position. Members noted that "good honours" had increased by 6% on the last data set, entry grades were significantly higher

and the recent round of academic appointments would have the effect of improving SSRs, as well as enhancing the student experience.

In discussion, members sought clarification of those criteria which might be optimised in data returns and noted that initiatives introduced by other universities would not necessarily be an institutional fit for Abertay. Court requested agreement from the Executive that the University intended to improve its performance in national league tables and gave consideration to whether Abertay would wish to formalise its aspiration. The Principal advised that the University's ambition in this regard would be enshrined in the draft Strategic Plan.

Court thanked the Director of Communications for his comprehensive analysis of this important issue. Thereafter, Court noted that the University intended to improve its position in national leagues tables and expressed its support for management's efforts in this area.

*[Secretary's note: The Director of Communications left the meeting at this point.]*

## 7 STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2020

CT/1014/04

Court received and considered the above discussion paper from the Director of Strategic Planning, intended to provide members with the opportunity to consider a number of strategic issues and the assumptions on which the Strategic Plan 2015-2020 should be based. The paper also included a draft of the Strategic Plan for consideration. Mrs Summers advised members that the draft Plan would be further developed in the light of Court's deliberations and that the final detailed plan would be brought to Court in December for consideration and approval.

Court discussed the assumptions made by the University as follows:

### External Environment

These were felt to be broadly correct. Members considered the potential economic effects of the UK withdrawing from the EU and requested that consideration be given to the UK Government's policies on immigration. Noting that Scottish Government policy on HE funding could change in challenging times, Court observed that the University should be sufficiently agile to react accordingly.

### Size and Shape

Court was generally content that the University's assumptions regarding its future size and shape were realistically ambitious. In discussion, members noted the University's intention to realise larger numbers of Overseas students and to increase the taught postgraduate population through the introduction of a new portfolio. Court welcomed the continued commitment of the institution to provide entry routes to all stages of degree programmes and requested that the regionalisation agenda of the University be made more explicit.

### Future Portfolio

Court welcomed the University's aspiration to strive for excellence in all areas of the curriculum and commended the analysis of the areas in which Abertay might achieve prominence. One member requested that Court receive a detailed business case to underpin any significant investment in specific areas of the portfolio and was advised that expenditure proposals were

communicated to Court through the annual budgeting process with, as appropriate, reference to the relevant Committee. It was agreed that a paper on strategic academic developments would be brought to Court in April 2015.

In other matters, Court noted that it would receive a presentation on philanthropic giving activities at the February 2015 meeting and requested that due importance be given to the framework supporting the implementation of the Plan.

Moving to the content of the Strategic Plan, Court was advised that the Statement of Purpose proposed was intended to replace the mission and vision of the current Plan. Although the main principles of the mission and vision remained broadly the same, these had implications for the way in which the University might prioritise its activities depending on the external environment. One member questioned whether the Executive had resolved not to explore distance / online learning and was advised that, although this had not been precluded, it was felt that the investment required to resource such a development could be more meaningfully utilised elsewhere.

In discussion, Court requested that more emphasis be given to staff development and to recognising and developing potential in staff in a way that was indicative of the Abertay ethos. Thereafter, Court gave its approval to the principles of the draft Strategic Plan and thanked the Director of Strategic Plan for a reassuring and detailed document.

## 8 SFC OUTCOME AGREEMENT 2013/2014 SELF-EVALUATION

CT/1014/05

Court received and considered the above draft of the University's self-evaluation report to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on progress made against the outcome agreement for 2013-14. Members noted that the format of the report followed the guidelines set out by SFC and that the deadline for submission of the self-evaluation report to SFC was the end of October.

The Director of Strategic Planning advised Court that progress had been discussed regularly with SFC throughout the year. Where there had been issues surrounding particular targets these had been discussed and, in some cases, revised targets had been agreed as part of the negotiation of the 2014-15 outcome agreement.

Members noted that the process of developing the outcome agreement for 2015-16 had commenced and that a draft would be brought to the December meeting of Court for discussion and approval.

Thereafter, Court approved the report.

*[Secretary's note: The Director of Strategic Planning left the meeting at this point.]*

## 9 SENATE

### 9.1 Report of meeting held in October 2014

CT/1014/06

Court received and noted a report on issues discussed at Senate's meeting in October 2014.

## 9.2 Senate Annual Report to Court

CT/1014/07

Court considered the above report, which provided an overview of the work of Senate during 2013/14 in order to provide Court with a means of satisfying itself that the responsibility delegated from Court to Senate in relation to the planning, co-ordination, development and supervision of the academic work of the University had been properly exercised. In addition to providing reassurance that the quality of provision was maintained and verified through many independent external specialists, the report also noted activity undertaken to enhance teaching and research, and thus student learning and the overall student experience.

The report also included the annual statement to the SFC on internal-led review activity, which was endorsed by the Court.

Thereafter, Court commended what it considered to be a most comprehensive report.

## 10 PROPOSAL REGARDING VICE-PRESIDENT OF STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS OF COURT

CT/1014/08

Court received and considered a proposal from the President of the Students' Association that the Vice-President of the Students' Association become an observer at all meetings of Court. The Chair of the Governance & Nominations Committee indicated that the Committee was supportive of this proposal as it would give Court assurance that discussions were being broadly disseminated.

Following clarification that the Vice-President of the Students' Association would have no voting rights, Court approved the proposal.

## 11 AUDIT COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

The minutes of the above meeting, submitted as Enclosure 9, were approved. The following matters were noted:

### 11.1 Review of Schools and Services

(paragraph 8.2 refers)

Court noted that the Audit Committee had considered a review of Schools and Services. The auditors had identified two moderate and two low-risk control recommendations, all of which had been accepted by management. The review also acknowledged areas of good practice.

### 11.2 Prototype Fund

(paragraph 10 refers)

Court was apprised of the Committee's consideration of a report in relation to the Prototype Fund. Members noted that the Committee had not been satisfied with the quality of feedback and had requested a detailed financial breakdown be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

The following matter was approved:

- 11.3 Review of Value for Money Strategy (paragraph 13 refers)  
Court noted that the Committee had considered the revised University Value for Money Strategy, which had been reviewed and amended with reference to the Scottish Government revised 'Best Value in Public Services' guidance.

12 FINANCE & CORPORATE PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2014

The minutes of the above Committee, submitted as Enclosure 10, were approved. The following items were noted:

- 12.1 University Environmental Policy (paragraph 14 refers)  
Court noted the Committee's approval of the University Environmental Policy, which had been revised to incorporate very minor corrections and the new University logo.

- 12.2 University Sustainability Policy (paragraph 15 refers)  
Court noted the Committee's approval of the University Sustainability Policy, which had been revised to incorporate very minor corrections and the new University logo.

- 12.3 Bad Debt Provision (paragraph 18 refers)  
Court noted the Committee's approval of the proposed bad debt provision at 31 July 2014.

13 GOVERNANCE & NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2014

The minutes of the above Committee, submitted as Enclosure 11, were approved. The following item was noted:

- 13.1 Scottish Code of Good HE Governance (paragraph 6 refers)  
Court noted the Committee's commendation of the good progress made with regard to the approved implementation plan for complying with the new Scottish Code of Good HE Governance.

The Chair of Court advised members that the Code has been discussed at the Committee of Scottish Chairs of Court and advised that Abertay was one of the few institutions to have indicated its commitment to 40% of Court members being women. The Vice-Chair apprised Court of discussions at the recent CUC meeting regarding achieving BME representation on governing bodies.

Mr Frizzell requested that the Governance & Nominations Committee take responsibility for this issue and produce an action plan for achieving the proposed gender balance. This was agreed.

14 PEOPLE, HEALTH & EQUALITY COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 OCTOBER 2014

The minutes of the above meeting, submitted as Enclosure 12, were approved. The following matter was approved:

14.1 Flexible Working Policy

(paragraph 7 refers)

Court endorsed the recommendation of the Committee that the Flexible Working Policy be approved.

The following matter was noted:

14.2 Race Equality Charter

(paragraph 8 refers)

Court noted the Committee's consideration of report on the University's participation in the development of a Race Equality Charter Mark.

15 REMUNERATION COMMITTEE REPORT

CT/1014/13

Court received and considered the above report. Whilst there were no matters for which Court approval was sought, the Chair reminded Court that this had been the first meeting of the Committee at which the broader remit - approved last year by Court – covering decisions on the principles for determining salaries on the discretionary range was in place.

Mr Shaw advised members that the Committee had considered a proposed process for the annual review of the salaries of the Professors of the University (i.e. those Professors who do not have a role as Head of School or member of the Executive) and had concluded that it was fair and transparent. Court noted that the Committee had further agreed to meet later in the session to consider the approach adopted for reviewing the salaries of other senior staff.

16 ELECTION OF MEMBER AND APPOINTMENT OF LAY MEMBERS

Court received an oral report from the University Secretary on preparations for the forthcoming election of a member of academic staff to Court and the selection process for new lay members of Court. Members noted that Dr A Samuel's period of office would end on 31 December 2014 and that the result of any election would be communicated to Court at its meeting in December. Members were further advised that the Governance & Nominations Committee had approved the inclusion of part-time staff in the voting process for the first time.

Mrs Stewart apprised Court of applications for lay membership received thus far and noted that interviews would be held shortly in respect of two vacancies.

17 REPORT ON COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN SESSION 2013/2014

CT/1014/14

Court noted the above report which provided a summary of complaints that had been received in the first year of operation of the new Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP), which had been in place since 31 August 2013.

Members were advised that, although the total number of complaints appeared to have risen, these figures included those complaints received and dealt with at frontline stage, which were now being recorded for the first time. In real terms, the number of complaints requiring formal investigation had decreased.

18 GRADUATION CEREMONY

The Chair encouraged members to attend the winter graduation ceremony, which would take place on Friday 28 November 2014.

19 ROLE OF INTERMEDIARY

CT/1014/15

Court received the above paper, intended to apprise members of the role of Court intermediary, Mr John Burt, in session 2014/2015. Court noted the paper and was advised that there would be an opportunity at the next meeting of Court for Mr Burt to lead a discussion on the effectiveness of the Chair without the Chair present.

20 ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Members were advised that BBC Radio 4 would be recording 'Any Questions' live from the main lecture theatre on Friday 14 November and were encouraged to attend.

One member invited Court to thank Rev L Barrett for his loyal and committed service to the University. It was agreed that a letter of thanks would be sent from the Chair to Rev Barrett in due course.

21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Court noted that the next scheduled meeting would take place on 17 December 2014.

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**CHAIR**