

10 April 2003

Mr Richard Lambert
The Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration
1 Horse Guards Road
LONDON
SW1A 2HQ

Dear Mr Lambert

BUSINESS-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

I am replying on behalf of the University of Aberdeen to your invitation to comment on present and possible future relationships between universities and the business sector. Our response has been informed by our own experience of working with industry and the professions and through the close links which we have with those members of the local and national business communities who give up their time to work with us in furthering our aims and objectives. The Senior Lay Member of the University Court (Mr Alistair Mair, a former Chairman of CBI Scotland and a businessman with many years of experience) has had considerable input into the content of this letter and, as indicated in our recent response to a questionnaire issued by Universities UK, is happy to respond to the Committee on an individual basis. Rather than attempt to reply to the considerable number of discrete questions posed in the attachment to your letter, I thought it would be more helpful to the Committee if we simply commented on those areas where we feel we have particularly relevant experience, strong views, or helpful suggestions.

May I first of all emphasise how much we value our contacts with business. Since its foundation over 500 years ago, we have had at the core of our mission the requirement to provide professional education across a range of disciplines. Initially these included Law, Medicine and Divinity. While today we still cover these disciplines, our range has vastly increased to encompass subjects, such as Engineering, Land Economy and Teacher Education. These disciplines and the wide range of others which we provide today, including the Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, lie at the core of our mission. In all areas, both the more overtly vocational and the less immediately so, we seek to provide a challenging education which will produce independent and flexible graduates with the knowledge and skills to stand them in good stead throughout a working life which will assuredly require changes of career direction and knowledge base. To inform our thinking, where appropriate, we have established subject liaison committees with representatives of business and the professions. These help to keep academic staff appraised of current workplace needs, to inform teaching content and practice and to create useful networks for both staff and students.

Our second core objective is, of course, the production of excellent research, be it near market or more "blue sky". Institutional strategy is developed and co-ordinated by a Vice-Principal who is able to call on the advice and experience of lay members whose input has been particularly beneficial. This activity is also supported by a cadre of dedicated professional staff within the University's administration. We do much to encourage and develop ties with industry. We actively encourage consultancy where we undertake over

£0.5M worth per annum and vigorously pursue research contract work especially in areas such as biotechnology, health-care and energy. We particularly welcome the Teaching Company Scheme as a bridge between University researchers and the world of industry. Another strand of knowledge transfer is effected through our substantial work in the area of continuing professional development where we annually earn around £2.8M. Commercialisation of our research is encouraged through company formation and licence deals. Recently, we formed seven new companies and secured £2M in licences. Access to the expertise of the business community in the company formation process is invaluable.

Links with the business community are also furthered through membership of and regular contracts with bodies, such as Scottish Enterprise National, its regional companies, the Chamber of Commerce and local authorities. A recent example of highly successful collaboration was the success in bringing to Aberdeen the Intermediary Technology Institute for Energy.

Our lay members also contribute directly to the governance of the University in a host of different ways. Half of the membership of the University Court (governing body) is lay. They bring experience from spheres which currently include manufacturing, construction, public relations, agribusiness, transport, law, local government and school education. All major University Committees whose role is other than wholly academic, have lay members, some of them, such as the Audit and Remuneration Committees, with a lay majority. Our lay members, who freely give of their time and advice, have a major impact on the way in which the University is governed and managed. In addition to the technical and market experience which they bring, their impact on governance and strategic planning is crucial. Their ability to test and challenge management plans and assumptions is invaluable. Additionally, of course, they provide direct links into business, professional and community networks.

Recently, there has been some adverse comment in government and in the press about university governance, management and leadership. Much of this may have been driven by concerns about the antiquated governance practices of a small number of universities. In this context, I attach a brief note describing this University's managerial and governance structures which hopefully will be of interest.

We recognise that the traditional mechanisms for identifying and cultivating university leaders and managers are no longer appropriate in the complex world of present day higher education. Training and staff development is a requirement for those who aspire to these roles. We believe that it is particularly important that future leaders at Dean and Vice-Principal level should have appropriate development opportunities. Administrative and other support staff have similar requirements. For this reason we regularly support the attendance of senior academic and administrative staff at senior national training programmes, which have recently included ones mounted by the Higher Education Staff Development Agency and by the Cabinet Office.

I hope that my comments are of assistance to the work of your Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Professor DF Houlihan
Vice-Principal (Research & Commercialisation)

DFH/mg

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

1. Attached is a table which identifies the principal governance committees of the University of Aberdeen. The Governing Body is the University Court, which has 28 members, of whom approximately half are lay. It includes six Senate Assessors, four Assessors from the General Council (the body of graduates), two representatives of local government, representatives of the academic management and a number of co-opted members who are selected for their business or other experience which it is judged will be beneficial to the University.
2. After the University Court itself, the key committee in University governance and management terms is the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee. Its membership of 13 includes four Court lay members, one of whom is convener. It is the committee where issues relating to academic, financial, physical and human resource planning come together. The titles of the other committees are, hopefully, self-explanatory. Other than the three Academic Standards Committees and Senate itself, all other committees specified have lay membership, in some instances, such as the Audit Committee and the Remuneration Committee, a lay majority. The main committees meet six times per annum in a regular cycle (Court meets seven times) and it would be true to say that lay involvement in the University's governance is all-pervading.
3. With regard to the management of the University, the principal group is the University Management Group, which brings together the Principal, Vice-Principals, Deans and senior administrative officers, to develop and to process the University's business. This committee meets every two weeks throughout the year. Technically, it is advisory to the Principal on whose authority its decisions are implemented.
4. There are three Vice-Principals. The Senior Vice-Principal is responsible for planning and resource matters: of the two others, one is responsible for Learning & Teaching and one for Research. In addition, the Provost of the Medical School has the status of a Vice-Principal. Much of the University's business is driven by the Vice-Principals who have considerable decision-making powers. Below the Vice-Principals are the Deans of the Faculties, who are responsible for managing the business of their Faculties and similarly hold extensive decision-making powers. The ethos and style of the University management is collegial. However, its decision-making structures are streamlined.
5. The University Secretary, who carries the status of a Vice-Principal, is head of a unitary administration, whose role is to assist in the development of policy and its implementation.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

