

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 14 May 2002

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Mr D Cockburn, Mr H Duncan, Dr H Fullerton, Mr J Grant, Miss A Harper, Cllr P Johnston, Dr P Kinnear, Professor S Logan, Mr R McGregor, Dr M Mackie, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Professor J Sewel, Mrs A Skene, Professor W Cairns Smith, Mr G Stevenson and Professor I Torrance, with Professor D Houlihan, Professor P Sloane, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr JS Gordon, Mrs C Inglis, Dr PJ Murray, Mr B purdon, Mr R Taylor and Mrs HE Stephen (Clerk).

Apologies were received from Cllr D Clyne, Dr A Dawson, Dr N Dower, Professor G Graham, Mr J Leiper, Mrs C Macaslan, Professor A Rodger, and Mr J Graham.

Declarations of interest were recorded by Mr Cockburn (min 213) Mr McGregor (min 213) and Dr Mackie as Chairman of the Scottish Agricultural College.

MINUTES

181 The Minutes of meeting held on 19 March 2002 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

182 The Principal warmly congratulated Ms Dickson-Wright on her Installation as Rector for a second three-year term from 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2004. Congratulations were also due to Professor Sloane on his appointment as Director of the Welsh Economy Labour Market Evaluation and Research Centre (WELMERC), and to Professor Graham who had been invited to deliver the Stanton Lectures at the University of Cambridge in 2005.

183 The Principal was very pleased to report that a Heritage Lottery Fund award of £209K, together with £150K University endowment funding, had been secured for the University to purchase the remarkable Lloyd collection of material on Walter Scott, and congratulations were due to Professor David Hewitt on this success.

- 184 The Principal noted that in the recently published Times Guide the University had been placed at 19 in the composite ranking. While league tables should be treated with caution, the University's placing could nevertheless be viewed with satisfaction.
- 185 At the Principal's invitation, the University Secretary confirmed that arrangements for the sitting of Scottish Parliament in the Kings' Conference Centre on 28-30 May, including the Queen's visit on the opening day, were now being finalised. There were a series of events associated the Parliament's visit and invitations had been sent to members of Court. Staff were also being advised of the associated parking and movement restrictions within the campus. It was hoped that the event, which had been complex to organise, would prove to be highly successful and beneficial to the University and to the North-East of Scotland

## REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

**Joint Planning Finance & Estates Committee**

186 Before introducing the JPFEC report from its meeting on 30 April 2002, Mr Mair took the opportunity to express the appreciation of Court members for an interesting and exciting visit to the Department of Zoology earlier in the day. These information sessions, in addition to the lunchtime presentations on specific topics, were very useful and provided lay members in particular with a better understanding of the University.

*Strategic Plan 2002-2006*

187 The Court considered the second draft of the Strategic Plan 2002-2006, the development of which reflected the iterative process initiated with earlier circulation of the planning principles to the JPFEC and Court and the invitation to Court to comment on the current plan at its December meeting. It also received a summary of amendments to be made to reflect the JPFEC discussion.

188 The draft Plan reviewed the environment in which the University was operating, identified strategic aims and objectives for the period up to 2006 and actions in the immediate year ahead. It also included reference to achievement of aims and objectives identified in earlier Plans; SMART targets, required to satisfy the SHEFC Conditions of Grant, measured success in achieving planned objectives. The draft would be further amended in light of the outcome of the option appraisal on future collaboration with The Robert Gordon University which would be known in advance of the required date of submission of the final Plan to SHEFC.

189 In discussion it was agreed that, although the University remained committed to national collective bargaining, it would be appropriate to include a general reference to difficulties experienced by the higher education sector in the recruitment and retention of staff due to uncompetitive salary levels.

190 The Court noted that Financial Forecasts consistent with the draft Plan would come forward via JPFEC to the Court in June. As in the current year, a separate Implementation Plan would identify individuals' responsibilities for the actions set out in the Plan.

*Estate Strategy 2002-2007*

191 The Court considered the draft Estate Strategy for the five year period 2002-07, Sections 1 to 5 of which had been considered by the JPFEC; subsequently, a conclusion and

executive summary had been included. The document provided a framework for the consideration of the University's estate in the light of the strategic priorities, a context for more detailed capital investment plans and business cases to be developed and implemented, and the basis for the day to day management of the estate and the allocation of resource to it.

- 192 The Estate Strategy had been due to be submitted to SHEFC eighteen months earlier but had been deferred, pending the proposed merger with Northern College. It had been developed by the Estate Strategy Project Board in accordance with HEFCE and SHEFC Guidance. The final draft Strategy would be circulated for comment to the relevant committees in the last committee cycle of the session, prior to its submission to Court in June for formal approval.
- 193 In discussion it was acknowledged that the planned relocation of the Faculty of Education into the MacRobert Building, and consequential moves, would impact on all current users of that Building and a number of other departments in Old Aberdeen.

*Funding for Teaching and Research*

- 194 The Court noted that SHEFC had announced a 4% increase in funding for Scottish higher education institutions for teaching and research for 2002-03. The JPFEC had received copies of the Funding Council's press release, together with an internal analysis of the SHEFC funding letter. Copies of these documents, and of the full SHEFC Circular Letter HE/15/2002, dated 20 March 2002, 'Main Grants in Support of Teaching and Research for Academic Year 2002-2003' were available on request from the Court & Planning Office.
- 195 The Court was advised that the SHEFC grant settlement had reflected the outcome of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and also a change in the methodology of funding for teaching. While the SHEFC summary had indicated that the increase in resources for the University was 5.1%, the pattern of increase across the various areas of main and special grant funding meant that the overall uplift for the University was 4.2% in cash terms. Also, in anticipation of an academic and related staff pay settlement involving restructuring of pay scales, it was possible that the increase for the University would only be around 0.5%, in real terms. These figures took no account of the national insurance increases announced in the Chancellor's Budget, there being only a part-year impact in 2002-03
- 196 With reference to SHEFC funding for research, based on the outcome of the Research Assessment Exercise, it was noted that, compared with the Funding Councils for England and Wales, SHEFC had funded only improving 3A-rated units of assessment in new universities and had provided support for new research activity in 'new' universities but not for similar activity in 'old' institutions. The JPFEC had agreed that representations be made to SHEFC about its more selective and less equitable funding approach which could be potentially damaging to research in Scottish HEIs in the longer term.
- 197 The Court supported the JPFEC's decision and agreed that the letter be sent with the authority of the Court.

*Intakes to Initial Teaching & Education (ITE) Courses*

- 198 The Court noted that the JPFEC had received a copy of SHEFC Circular Letter HE/13/02 of 14 March announcing reduced target intakes for initial teacher education (ITE) courses for 2002-03; a letter from the University Secretary to the Chief Executive of SHEFC dated 21 March 2002; and an internal paper on the impact of the change in funded numbers for postgraduate teaching. Copies of the documents were available from the Court & Planning Office.

- 199 In letters of guidance to SHEFC, dated 11 February and 7 March 2002, the Scottish Executive had first recommended increases in funded numbers for initial teacher education and had then significantly revised these numbers downwards. The change would have serious implications for the University both in respect of the financial loss on funded numbers and also the shortfall in relation to the Strategic Change Grant for the merger with the College of Education which had been predicated on assurances of increased student intakes. A number of institutions, including Aberdeen, had made offers to applicants on the basis of the initial guidance, thereby technically exposing themselves to potential clawback of grant for over-recruitment of students. The Principals of the Universities adversely affected by the change had already met with SHEFC and strong representations had been made for rectification of the position.
- 200 The Court was informed that informal advice had just been received from SHEFC indicating that there would be no clawback in respect of over-recruitment of students. In addition to formal confirmation of this outcome, further clarification of the funding position was required.

*Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees 2002-2003*

- 201 The Court approved the JPFEFEC's recommendations for tuition and miscellaneous fees for 2002-03. These excluded the undergraduate re-examination fee pending consideration of a paper to be prepared by the President of the Students' Association setting out a case for its abolition.

*Residences Tariffs, Hilton Campus, 2002-2003*

- 202 The Court approved increased tariffs for the residences, Hilton Campus, for 2002-3.

*Formation of Schools in Faculties*

- 203 The Court noted that the JPFEFEC had received a paper on the proposed formation of Schools in the Faculties of Arts & Divinity, Social Sciences & Law, and Science & Engineering. The paper, which had been circulated previously to Deans for consideration within their Faculties, indicated the thinking of senior management on the advantages of moving to larger academic units, and referred to the principles underlying Schools. The argument for Schools rested on the need to continue to improve research quality to enhance the quality and delivery of teaching, and to gain administrative efficiencies. The School would become the primary management and budgetary unit. Heads of Departments would maintain leadership in their academic discipline.
- 204 Professor Sewel and Professor Houlihan had met the Faculties, and a number of Departments and individuals, and had received considerable and helpful feedback. In two Faculties, namely Arts & Divinity and Science & Engineering, there appeared to be general agreement on the shape and size of Schools, and the Faculty of Social Sciences & Law was also likely to accept the proposal. A progress report on development of the School concept had been made to the Senate (1.5.02) with a view to formal approval in June and the appointment of Heads of Schools shortly thereafter.
- 205 In response to a question from Miss Main, it was noted that the University sought to maintain an appropriate relationship between academic and non-academic staffing levels. The structure of academic activity would always affect that relationship, but the introduction of Schools was not expected to have a direct impact on support staffing levels.

*Student recruitment*

- 206 The JPFEC had noted the latest position with regard to student recruitment for the 2002 entry. The University should achieve its full-time home undergraduate target for 2002 entry, as the increased number of applications appeared to be feeding through to acceptances. The overseas position also remained buoyant. The Court also noted that the greater input of Faculties and Departments into the student recruitment process, including applicant days, had been warmly received by potential students and their parents.
- 207 Postgraduate research recruitment, in which there had been a marked and continuing decline remained an area of concern; if the trend continued the University was unlikely to reach its PGR intake targets. The Deans had undertaken to provide Faculty funding for research students, in order to try to increase PGR numbers. More generally, other ways of attracting students needed to be addressed.

*Proposal to institute the status of Associate Student*

- 208 The Court noted that consideration of a proposal to institute the status of Associate Students, which the JPFEC for its part had agreed, had been deferred until the June meeting of Senate. It also agreed by the Senate, the proposal would be forwarded to the Court for approval.

*Budget-setting*

- 209 The JPFEF had received the financial assumptions underlying the budget-setting exercise for 2002-03. The Court also noted that the JPFEF, having considered a paper on 'Financial Strategy-Cash', had agreed to increase the funding available for the annual capital programme in 2002-03 by £1m (ring-fenced for functionality improvements) to £4m provided the University generated its planned surplus of £2.1m in the current financial year with a closing cash balance exceeding £10m. Recommendations designed to reduce the University's loan finance burden, and to achieve a higher return on cash balances, had also been approved.

*Financial reports*

- 210 The JPFEF had received the University's mid-year return to SHEFC, which projected a financial year-end historical cost surplus of £4.35m compared to the Strategic Plan forecast of £2.1m. The material variance was due to the sale of the satellite halls of residence under the Pathfinder programme. At an operational level, the forecast financial year-end historical cost surplus remained £2.1m. The Committee had also considered the management accounts for the eight months to March 2002.

*Other matters*

- 211 The JPFEF report also referred to progress reports on other matters, including the work of the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee, the Investment Committee and the Commercialisation Steering Group.
- 212 The Committee had approved a proposal to link the salaries of student Sabbatical Officers to the University clerical salary scale.
- 213 The Court's attention was also drawn to a number of, mostly external, papers which were available to members of JPFEF and Court on request from the Court & Planning Office.

**Audit Committee (23.4.02)**

- 214 The Court received a report from the Audit Committee's meeting of 23 April 2002.
- 215 The Committee had approved three internal audit reports from Deloitte & Touche, on the Kings Conference Centre, on Payroll, and on Endowment Funds. Mr Grant informed the Court that the report on KCC had appeared to be most adverse. Advice had also been taken from the external auditors with regard to whether the Centre should continue to trade as a separate limited company, as originally set up for tax reasons,

or be brought back within the University. It had been agreed that the company be retained but that its Board of Directors be restructured and its management strengthened.

- 216 The Committee had considered and for its part approved the University's revised Purchasing Policy and Guide to Procedures (*see also Court min 144 of 19.3.02*).
- 217 The Audit Consortium between the University of Aberdeen and The Robert Gordon University had met on 26 February 2002.

#### **Research and Commercialisation Committee**

- 218 The Court received a report which summarised the work of the new Research and Commercialisation Committee during the nine months since its inception, and which included a report from the Commercialisation Steering Group which had also been submitted to the JPFE.

- 219 In presenting the Committee's report Professor Houlihan indicated that, while it had been largely concerned with the outcome of the 2002 Research Assessment Exercise, the Committee was also beginning to provide an appropriate focus for the development of research policy and the promotion of the University's research and commercialisation activities.
- 220 On specific matters the Committee had provided a forum for the development of guidelines on good research practice, including a draft statement on procedures for the investigation of alleged research misconduct, to be in place by a Research Councils' deadline of 1 October 2002. The Committee was participating in the Scottish Research information System, and in relevant external bodies including the Scottish Universities Research Policy Consortium which had been reconvened to work on a SHEFC-sponsored review of research infrastructure in Scottish higher education. The Commercialisation Steering Group's report included reference to the University's success in securing Scottish Enterprise Proof of Concept awards, to patent and licensing activity and to targets for spinout company formations.

GENERAL COUNCIL: REGISTRAR

- 221 The Court approved the appointment of Mr S J Cannon as Registrar to the General Council, in succession to Mr NRD Begg who had retired, with immediate effect.

RESOLUTION NO 227 OF 2002

[REGULATION OF STUDENTS' PROGRESS FOR FIRST DEGREES]

- 222 The Court approved the draft Resolution which had been updated to incorporate changes to Supplementary Regulations requested by Undergraduate Programme Committees, and was approved by in this form by both Senate and the Business Committee of the General Council.

DRAFT RESOLUTION NO OF 2002

[DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC (B MUS)]

- 223 The Court agreed to forward the draft Resolution 'Degree of Bachelor of Music (B MUS)' to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act, 1966.
- 224 It was noted that the new degree, which had a complex title because it provided a teaching qualification, indicated the new Faculty's integration into the University's teaching provision and the development of attractive degree programmes for students.

## STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION: BY-ELECTIONS TO COUNCIL

- 225 The Court homologated a decision to waive the 28 day notice period and the 10 day period for nominations specified in the Constitution of the Students Association, in order that a by-election for vacancies to the Council of the Association to be held on 9 May 2002.

## GIFTS, BENEFACTIONS AND CHARITABLE AWARDS

- 226 The Court received for information a report from the Director of External Relations on gifts, benefactions and charitable awards received by the University in the period 1 August 2001 to 1 January 2002. It noted one correction to the report, namely that the purpose of funds raised through the Ladies Lunch was to support student hardship.