

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 6 February 2001

Present: Mr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Dr A Dawson, Professor G Graham, Dr D Heddle, Dr P Kinnear, Professor I Macdonald, Miss M Main, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Professor P Sloane, Mr G Stevenson, Mr S Varwell, with Professor A Forrester, Professor Houlihan, Professor Sewel, Mr S Cannon, Mr M Ord, Mr S Gordon, Dr P Murray, Mr R Taylor and Mrs H Stephen (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received (mostly due to adverse weather conditions) from the Rector, Councillor D Clyne, Mr D Cockburn, Dr H Fullerton, Mr J Grant, Miss a Harper, Councillor P Johnston, Mr J Leiper, Professor S Logan, Dr M Mackie, Mr A Salvesen, Mrs A Skene and Professor I Torrance.

MINUTES

91 The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2000 were approved. Dr Kinnear's name would be included in the list of apologies for absence. In min 57, the figure £1.34M should read £1.034M.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

92 The Principal was pleased to draw to the Court's attention the appointment of the Chancellor to the Order of the Thistle, the highest honour in Scotland.

93 The Principal made a short strategic presentation to the Court in which he included reference to the University's overall objective to be the dominant provider of educational and research services north of the central belt, and a serious competitor to Edinburgh in teaching and research. It wished to serve the northern and Scottish economy as well as being academically distinguished at the international level. The means of achieving these institutional objectives included the continuing ratcheting up of quality in research and teaching, and through alliances or mergers with other institutions (very preliminary discussions were being held with the Scottish Agricultural College), and the maintenance of the University's academic strengths and attractiveness to students. On the financial side it was essential, in addition to returning to a budgetary surplus in the short term, to diversify income streams and

attract new resources. The University would not be able to fulfil its aims without third stream income.

[Note: A copy of the Principal's full presentation is set out as an Appendix to this minute].

- 94 In discussion Professor Salmon while supporting the Principal's statement, also commented that he believed staff morale to be low, particularly in the light of the recent teachers' pay settlement and he hoped that after two decades of periodic financial crises in universities, the future would be more settled.

SECRETARY'S STATEMENT

- 95 Mr Cannon reported that, following informal comments at the previous Court lunchtime presentation, an initial analysis of staff turnover had been prepared and would be discussed by the Staffing and Development Committee which would then report to a future meeting of Court.
- 96 With regard to pay negotiations, no settlement effective from April 2001 had yet been reached, and he reminded the Court that neither had there been a final national settlement from April 2000, from when the University had paid an interim 3% on account.

- 97 Mr Cannon also noted that while the recurrent grant settlement for 2001-02 for the Scottish higher education sector included a headline figure of 8% the actual increase in the unit of resource would be no more than 3.5%, the difference having been allocated by SHEFC for specific purposes. The Court would be kept informed on developments in relation to the continuing pay negotiations and industrial relations issues.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Joint Planning, Finance Estates Committee (JPFEC)

- 98 The Court received a report from the Committee's meeting held on 16 January 2001.

Strategic and Operational Planning

- 99 The Court noted that planning guidelines had been circulated to Deans and Heads of Administration and the DISS in connection with the preparation of the Strategic Plan 2001-05.

- 100 The Court received from the JPFEC a copy of the Operational Plan 2000-01 which indicated that implementation of commitments in the current Strategic Plan during the present session appeared to be on target.

Admissions 2001-02

- 101 The Court noted that the JPFEC, for its part, had approved and forwarded to Senate (i) admissions targets for 2001-02 for fundable (UK/EU) undergraduate and postgraduate students and (ii) proposals on the recruitment of international students for 2001-02 which had been prepared in the context of agreed strategy on income generation and included incentives for individual Departments.

Funding of Scottish Higher Education Institutions

- 102 The Court was informed that draft University responses to two consultation documents issued by SHEFC in December 2000 on its Review of Teaching Funding and on its Review of Research Policy and Funding, (copies of which were available for members of Court on request) would be brought forward for consideration in the next round of meetings in order to comply with the Funding Council's deadline of 30 March 2001 for institutional responses.

Financial Reports

- 103 The Court noted that in reviewing the monthly management reports for the first four months of the financial year the JPFEC had noted that the budgetary position was likely to continue to tighten during the year. In the light of additional factors which had impacted adversely on the financial outlook the University Management Group had recently agreed to increase the institutional savings target to £1.4M and would allocate target savings across the University, in order to achieve the planned surplus by the financial year end.

Insurance Renewals

- 104 The Court noted that the JPFEC had approved recommendations for the renewal of insurance premiums for the 2001 calendar year at a total cost of £297.3K - representing a £70K increase in line with a general hardening of the insurance market - and had further agreed that a review of insurance requirements be undertaken by Senior Management in advance of the next annual renewal.

Purchasing Services

- 105 The Court noted that the JPFEC had received the Purchasing Services Annual Report which summarised procurement activity during 1999-2000 session and current projects. The Committee had welcomed the report and had noted that every 1% reduction in the cost of goods and services produced savings for the University of over 360K.

Student Organisations

- 106 The Court noted that the JPFEC had received the audited annual accounts for the financial year 1999-2000 for the SRC, which had achieved a surplus, and for the University Union and the Athletic Association, both of which had returned deficits. Remedial action had been taken in light of the deficits, to achieve an improved financial position in the current year.

Aldroughty

- 107 The Court noted that the University had received formal offers for most of the lots for sale at Aldroughty, totalling almost £400K. and that the residual lots – the main House and the Lodge - were currently being remarketed.

Bridge of Don

- 108 The Court noted that, following the decision to sell the Bridge of Don site for residential use, a provisional strategy for disposal had been established. Marketing of the site had been postponed however, pending clarification of the separate proposal from the Ministry of Defence (MOD), incorporating a partial land excambion between the University and the MoD with a view to disposal as a joint venture.

NB See also Min 115 below.

Reports from Project Groups

- 110 The Court noted that the JPFEC had received the following project reports: IMS2 and MRF, Marischal College), Pathfinder (see Mins 118-119 below), AutoMERS and ACES.
- 111 Institute of Medical Sciences Phase II and Medical Research Facility The IMS2 building work was proceeding well and steps were being taken to address the disruption caused to the ongoing work at IMS Phase I and the existing Medical Research Facility. An application for planning permission for a new MRF would be made in the near future and was expected to be secured by February 2001, in which case work on site would start in early March. With regard to financing the project, SHEFC had advised

that its award of £2.5M towards the cost of IMS Phase II would be paid before March 2001. A further £1.25M (against a total commitment of £1.5M) had been secured from the Development Trust, and negotiations were continuing to secure a flexible borrowing package from the banks.

- 112 Marischal College A further report from Jarvis, who were seeking to finalise an agreement with the funder for the proposed hotel development, was awaited. Exploration of other options was continuing in the meantime.

NB See also Min 115 below.

- 113 AutoMERS The building project was currently three to four weeks behind schedule as a result of adverse weather conditions and ground conditions on site, but the delay was not expected to have any adverse impact on academic activity. There had also been some delay in the receipt of funds from award from the Natural Environment Research Council, and agreement was being pursued with NERC on a schedule for the payments.

- 114 ACES Following the unsuccessful application, despite its scientific acceptance, for funding from the Joint Infrastructure Fund, and subsequently for Wellcome funding for biomedical research, the proposal for an ACES building adjacent to Zoology was currently 'on hold' and would be reviewed in light of implementation of the University's estate strategy associated with the proposed merger, if approved, with Northern College.
- 115 The Court in view of the current position in regard to the possible disposals of Marischal College (see Min 112 above) and of the Bridge of Don site (See Min 108 above) agreed to delegate powers to the Senior Lay Member and to the Principal to approve disposals on its behalf on the basis of the achievement of best possible value.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 116 The Court was informed that a tripartite agreement had been reached during the week ending 12 January 2001 between the three participating institutions (University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, Northern College) on a response to the strategic issues which SHEFC had raised with them in April 2000 in relation to the merger proposal. The Court received a copy of the final version of the response submitted to SHEFC, which had been agreed for the University in accordance with the powers delegated by the Court (Dec 2000). The revised proposal met the conditions previously set by the University Court, principal amongst which was that of no financial detriment to the University. It was hoped that it would be acceptable to SHEFC and that the Council would reach an early decision as to whether or not it would recommend to the Scottish Executive that the mergers proceed. The proposed vesting date remained 1 August 2001.
- 117 The Court endorsed the revised merger proposal. It was also informed that SHEFC was understood to be willing to approve the proposal in principle, subject to advice from its Mergers Committee and Strategic Change Grant Committee.

PATHFINDER PROJECT

- 118 The Court considered a progress report on the Pathfinder Project, forwarded from JPPEC together with a report from Quayle Munro and an outline schedule for implementation of the Pathfinder programme.
- 119 The Court approved the recommendations that the project be sub-divided into four distinct elements and that the first of these, namely the disposal of satellite Halls, be initiated. It noted that further specific approval would be sought from the Court on the sale of individual residences.

- 120 The Court also noted that the Project Board would work towards parts two and three of the Project (respectively, the redevelopment of the Crombie-Johnston site, and the disposal of the Hillhead site) and it encouraged the Project Board to make early progress on part four (provision of catering by a private sector partner).

FACULTY OF ARTS & DIVINITY RESTRUCTURING

- 121 The Court approved a proposal from the Faculty of Arts & Divinity, endorsed by the JPFEC, for the internal restructuring of the Faculty. In giving its approval the Court agreed that for the purposes of Ordinance No 122 of 1979 (Amendment to the Composition of the Senatus Academicus) and of Resolution No 129 of 1988 on 'Deans, Faculties and Boards of Studies', Heads of Schools in the restructured Faculty should be deemed to be Heads of Departments. Accordingly, Heads of Subject Groupings within the Faculty should not receive honoraria or *ex officio* membership of the Senate.

RESOLUTION NO OF 2001

[CHANGES IN REGULATIONS FOR VARIOUS DEGREES]

- 122 The Court, having received the draft Resolution from the Senate, decided to forward it to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

ELECTION OF THE RECTOR

- 123 The Court noted that the Senate had approved a timetable in respect of a Rectorial Election, in view of the expiry of Miss Clarissa Dickson Wright's period of office as the Rector of the University on 31 December 2001, as follows:

Date of Election	Thursday 15 November 2001
Last date for receipt of nominations	1.00pm on Thursday 1 November 2001

- 124 The Senate had also agreed that the date for the Installation of the Rector be set provisionally for the afternoon of Wednesday 30 January 2002.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN ORDINANCE
REMOVAL OF MEMBERS OF COURT

- 125 The Court noted that the Senate had received the draft University of Aberdeen Ordinance and had agreed that it had no comments to make. The draft had also been sent to the General Council and made generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, and would come back to Court for approval before submission to the Privy Council.

ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSORS TO COURT

- 126 The Court was informed that the Senate had approved the following timetable for the election of Senate Assessors to the University Court from 1 October 2001 to 30 September 2005 *vice* Professor Logan and Dr Heddle. At least one of those elected must be a non-professional member of the Senate:

Friday 20 April 2001	Issue of Nomination Papers to all Electors
Wednesday 2 May 2001 at 5.00pm	Last date for receipt of Nominations by the Secretary
Friday 4 May 2001	Issue of Voting Papers to all Electors
Wednesday 16 May 2001 at 5.00pm	Last date for receipt of Voting Papers by the Secretary.