

APPENDIX TO MINUTE 93

SHORT STRATEGIC PRESENTATION TO COURT

Because so much of our conversation, at most meetings, focuses on issues of detail or issues which have short term importance, I think it very important that I restate some points about the general direction of the University. I will be doing the same at our next Senate meeting, and subsequently putting my statement out on the web. There is a big picture, and during this meeting we will be able to give various pieces of news that suggest that it is coming together to our advantage.

Our objective is to be the dominant provider of educational and research services north of the central belt, and a serious competitor to Edinburgh both in teaching and research. We want to serve the northern and Scottish economy, but also be academically distinguished at the international level.

The major means of bringing this about is simply to ratchet up our quality, both in research and teaching, although our funding is declining. Our rise in grant funding, the honours and awards secured by our staff, our success in recruiting at both the professorial and junior level, our commitment to success in Subject Review and RAE, and certain capital projects like IMS, are all part of that quality agenda.

A second means of achieving what we want is to increase our critical mass and our dominance in this region of the country through alliances or mergers. The merger with Northern College, about which I have very good news, is the first step in this direction. We are also working and will continue to work on bringing ourselves closer to the Scottish Agricultural College, as well as to the scientists in the Rowett and Macaulay. Another area of co-operation is that with the University of the Highlands and Islands, which has a significance for our presence in the areas to the north and west of us.

A corollary is that all four of our faculties must be kept equally strong. Social Science and Natural Sciences are the core activities of every serious University. Medicine is a great strength and part of our history, but it also gives us the means to go through the glass ceiling which holds back all but a tiny number of those universities which do not have medical schools. The Arts are also part of our history, but they are also one of our competitive advantages over universities which do not have strong humanities staff. Moreover they provide that important range of thought systems which are critical in teaching students how to reason. We will soon have a fifth faculty, in Education, and it will be equally important that we make that as strong as possible, because of its importance to the country and region, and because it makes a critical contribution to the ordering of human societies. All the faculties are in it together, and must not rise or fall at

other's expense.

Another imperative connected with our research quality and our attractiveness to students, in a competitive world, is the upgrading and rationalisation of our physical plant. One of the first steps in this direction is the settlement of Marischal College, about which I hope soon to have good news. Further commitments will flow from our merger with Northern College. Our capital investment in IMS II is of central importance to the quality agenda. The Pathfinder Project is part of an effort to find a way of producing catering and residential facilities of a sort we need for our students, in a way we can afford. Addressing the more modest project of the Town House is another step in this area. I continue to insist that in the long run we will have to confront the problem of upgrading the library to a level appropriate to a highly competitive institution with responsibilities to maintain its historic collections.

I would also like to draw your attention to two preconditions without which we are not going to be able to push on with a competitive agenda.

The first of these is that we have become responsive to our market – both in terms of selling research services, and making ourselves intellectually attractive to students at all levels. This carries with it a commitment to upgrade our status through projecting our image, and to be effective in our public relations. These two issues are connected, and our professional monitoring of our media visibility suggests that we are making huge progress, though there will always be more to be done.

The second precondition is that we manage to diversify our income streams. There is absolutely no way that the University can accomplish what we want without third stream income. Indeed, since we cannot stay still, we will slide into mediocrity if we are not able to attract new resources. These resources will come from recurrent sources of income like continuing professional development, taught masters programmes, commercialisation, and so on. Other recurrent income, together with our capital needs, are going to depend on the success of the private sector fundraising drive behind the Sixth Century Campaign.

I describe these as preconditions. For the purposes of this summary, the only thing I have to add is that the initial objective, the means to that objective, and the preconditions all depend on two background conditions – that we continue to strive for more efficient management, and that we return quickly to a budgetary surplus which must be maintained into the foreseeable future. These are absolutely essential.

Obviously there is all sorts of overlap between the different points I have made, but none of them can be restated too often. I have a fair degree of confidence that all of them are accepted by the University community. But it is essential that we constantly test where we are going by discussing the kinds of things I have mentioned here, which I see as the core of our agenda. I will share copies of this statement with you, and hope it can be the basis of a future discussion.