

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 15 May 2001

Present: Mr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Mr D Cockburn, Dr A Dawson, Dr H Fullerton, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Miss A Harper, Dr D Heddle, Councillor P Johnston, Dr P Kinnear, Mr J Leiper, Professor S Logan, Professor I Macdonald, Dr M Mackie, Miss M Main, Professor D Ogston, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Mr A Skene, Professor P Sloane, Mr G Stevenson, Professor I Torrance, Mr S Varwell, with Professor Forrester, Professor Houlihan, Professor Sewel, Mr S Cannon, Mr Ord, Mr S Gordon, Dr P Murray and Mrs H Stephen (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from the Rector, Councillor Clyne, Dr N Milne and Mr A Salvesen.

MINUTES

187 The Minutes of the meeting on 20 March 2001 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

188 The Principal warmly welcomed Professor Salmon back to the Court after his absence through ill health.

189 The Principal congratulated Mr Duncan Cockburn on his election as President of the Students' Association for session 2001-2002.

190 The Principal congratulated Professor Torrance on his appointment to the Deanship of the Faculty of Arts & Divinity (*see min 224 below*).

191 The Principal referred to a number of major prestigious awards, shortly to be announced, which reflected the importance of alliances with other institutions, in particular, (i) Department of Trade and Industry funding (a total of £1.2M) for a Faraday Partnership with the University of Oxford as the coordinating institution and (ii) a Wellcome Programme grant (£1.5M) to Professor Huhtaniemi (Reproductive Science) again in collaboration with the University of Oxford. In addition confirmation from SHEFC was awaited that the University would receive four Research Development Grants in collaboration respectively with the Universities of Stirling, RGU, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

192 At the Principal's invitation, Professor Macdonald reported that the overall picture on undergraduate admissions remained encouraging with the previously reported upsurge in undergraduate applications continuing through to firm admissions. Considerable efforts also continued to drive forward postgraduate and overseas student recruitment. He commented that the professionalism of the admissions system was reflected in the new format and content of the revised undergraduate prospectus, copies of which had been provided to Court members.

193 The Principal indicated that discussions on potential institutional alliances were continuing with the Scottish Agricultural College, the University of Highlands & Islands, and the Robert Gordon University.

194 The Principal drew attention to *Word 2001* (16-20 May). It was hoped that this second Word Festival, involving Scottish and Irish writers, would become an annual event.

- 195 The Principal informed the Court that the Finance Director would retire at the end of the current financial year. He expressed the Court's appreciation of Mr Ord's contribution and commitment to the University, and wished him well in his retirement.

SECRETARY'S STATEMENT

- 196 Mr Cannon reported that a final offer had been made by UCEA to the joint unions for a salary settlement of 3% with effect from 1 April 2001 plus 1% from 1 September 2001 and another 1% from 1 February 2002. The package included unification of settlement dates with effect from 1 August 2000. It was understood that the offer was likely to be favourably received.

JOINT PLANNING, FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEE

- 197 The Court received a report of the meeting of the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee held on 25 April 2001 as under:

Financial Regulations

- 198 The Court, having noted that the Committee had considered and approved draft University Financial Regulations, which had also been approved by the Audit Committee, approved the Financial Regulations, as set out in the Appendix to the original of this Minute). These would be made widely available within the University.

Northern College

- 199 The Court noted that the Committee had been informed that when the merger proposal, with SHEFC's positive recommendation, had been approved by Ministers, it would be considered by the Scottish Parliament, and that, given the General Election campaign, there would almost certainly be slippage in the proposed 1 August 2001 Vesting Date.

Internal Audit Investigation: Financial Management Information and Budgetary Control

- 200 The Court noted that the Committee had been informed that, following the Audit Committee's approval of the internal auditors' report of their investigation to review the adequacy and effectiveness of management information and control together with the management response, the Audit Committee would receive a progress report on implementation. A report would be made to the next regular meeting of the JPFEC.

Strategic and Operational Planning

- 201 The Court received for information a copy of the Operational Plan 2000-01, which indicated that, while a small number of actions had been delayed for good reason (eg introduction of a student satisfaction questionnaire had been postponed due to restructuring of Student Support Services), satisfactory progress had been made with implementation of the Strategic Plan 2000.

Borrowing Facilities

- 202 The Court noted that the Committee had received two documents on borrowing facilities. The first, an assessment of the University's overall borrowing requirements, had indicated funding gaps on different scenarios over the next five years. The paper was an evolving management tool which provided at any one time a 'snapshot' of the changing position with regard to major capital projects and the potential impact on the University's capital and borrowing requirements, and any offsetting grants or awards. The second paper provided a summary of all existing loans and their associated terms and conditions.

Debt Management and Monitoring

- 203 The Court noted that the Committee had received for information a factual summary of the University's procedures for dealing with debt management, including credit control and bad debt provision.

Mid-Year Financial Return to SHEFC FY2000-01

- 204 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the University's Mid-Year Return to the Funding Council.

Financial Reports FY 2000-01

- 205 The Court noted that the Committee had received Management Accounts for the seven months to 28 February and the eight months to 31 March 2001 and had noted that the favourable variances were largely attributable to timing, planned temporary underspends and commitments to spend later in the year, and would disappear by the year-end. The Finance Director was reasonably confident that, provided budget holders operated within budget, the financial outturn for the year end should be close to forecast.

Mr Ord also pointed out, however, that accounting requirements in relation to the Pathfinder Group's proposed disposal of satellite halls might have a significant impact on the 2000/01 Accounts. The position, with advice from the Auditors, would be discussed by the Pathfinder Group.

Reports from Sub-Committees and Project Groups

- 206 The Court noted that the Committee had received satisfactory progress reports from the Estates Advisory Group and from the Project Groups for the IMS Phase 2 and MRF, for the Pathfinder Project, and for the AutoMERS Project.

SHEFC Recurrent Grant for Scottish Higher Education Institutions for the Financial Year 2001-02

- 207 The Court noted that the Committee had received a copy of the Funding Council's announcement (23.3.01) of recurrent grant for Scottish higher education institutions for FY2001-02, together with an internal commentary, and had noted that approximately half of the increase was earmarked for specific purposes.

The SHEFC Grant letter had announced an overall 8.5% cash increase for 2001-02 against the background of a 14% planned increase in funding over the three year period to 2003-04. The Funding Council had signalled that it expected institutions to address key priorities such as widening access and social inclusion, quality enhancement, development of the nation's knowledge base, and human resource management. The cash increase for the University in 2001-02 was 4.27%.

Fee waivers for overseas Placement Students

- 208 The Court was informed that the Committee had approved a recommendation that self-funded undergraduate students classified as 'overseas' or 'islands' for fees purposes and who studied off-campus for a full year would have their tuition fees for that year abated to the same fee rate charged to UK/EU students undertaking an equivalent period of study. This change in fees policy had been supported by the relevant Deans and agreed by the University Management Group.

Marischal College

- 209 Mr Mair reported that negotiations were being taken forward with regard to a possible office development at Marischal College.

ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

- 210 The Deans, in turn, made presentations to the Court on major issues and academic developments within their Faculties in 2001 and beyond. The main points covered included the following:
- 211 The financial difficulties facing Faculties were serious and while through various budgetary measures, such as the non-filling of Chairs, it should be possible to meet the University's financial targets in the short term, continuation reduced levels of funding would impact adversely on academic activity.
- 212 The Faculties were confident, to varying degrees, of achieving improved performances in the current Research Assessment Exercise. The Faculties of Arts and Divinity, Social Sciences and Law, and Medicine and Medical Sciences all saw possibilities of achieving a number of grade 5 Units of Assessment as well as grade 4s; the Faculty of Science and Engineering however was more cautious about the outcome. Social Sciences and Law, in particular, anticipated that higher ratings together with the higher numbers of research-active staff included in the Exercise should attract significant increased annual funding. The Court also noted that it was difficult to predict accurately the overall outcome for the University, there being a range of relevant factors including the performance of other universities and SHEFC funding policy towards grade 3 Units of Assessment. Science and Engineering was embarking now on scenario planning in order to be in a position to respond appropriately to the RAE results. Arts and Divinity also expected that an important task in the coming year would be a critical review of RAE performance and revision of the Faculty's research and investment strategy.

Arts and Divinity

- 213 As part of its investment in research excellence the Faculty of Arts and Divinity planned to increase its support for the *Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies* and to launch a new interdisciplinary *Centre for Early Modern Studies*. Two major contributions to cultural life were the *Elphinstone Institute* and the *Word 2001 Writers Festival* (see 194 above).
- 214 On student recruitment, retention and access the Faculty was heartened that current applications and admissions figures indicated that its recent weakness in undergraduate recruitment was being successfully addressed and it planned to increase its total student population by 8% over the next few years. The Films Studies programme was being expanded to meet student demand. A new three-year Bachelors degree, which was designed for students with lower entry qualifications than required for the MA but thereafter provided a transfer route to the MA for able students, was being developed with Social Sciences. The Faculty was well placed both to contribute to the wider access agenda, and to work with the new Faculty of Education to enhance the academic programmes for BEd students.
- 215 A serious threat, in particular to Modern Languages, was the potential reduction in teaching grant due to the proposed change in the methodology used by SHEFC to calculate teaching funding.
- 216 The Faculty's new school structure would promote collaboration and the more effective use of resource. Its management structure should encourage the development and delivery of a coherent and co-ordinated strategy to invest in distinctive research excellence, broaden the Faculty's student base, enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and increase earned income through the recruitment of part-time and overseas students.

Social Sciences and Law

- 217 New undergraduate degree programmes had been introduced in Anthropology, Finance and Sport and Leisure Management in order to improve attractiveness to students. In the difficult postgraduate market the Faculty was re-badging its MSc (Econ) degree in Business and Management Studies as a full-time MBA and applications had again increased. It was also focussing on the development of a named Graduate School, the first of its kind in the UK. The Faculty was in the process of applying for recognition of its postgraduate research training from the ESRC which was introducing a 1+3 model of a one year's research training masters and then a three year PhD. In general the Faculty was not short of initiatives, with plenty of growth in the system and, with appropriate resources, the Faculty would continue to meet its commitments.

Science and Engineering

- 218 Against a background of difficulties nationally in undergraduate recruitment considerable efforts had gone into adjusting teaching provision to offer attractive programmes. The re-organisation of teaching at levels 1 and 2 would be completed in 2001-02. In general the growth areas were psychology, computing science, some of the life sciences and sports studies, with agriculture, forestry and soil science in slow decline.
- 219 The structure of the Faculty was under review and it was planned to introduce Schools on a basis similar to that implemented in Arts and Divinity. With regard to physical structure Science and Engineering was likely to be directly affected by the reallocation of space consequent upon the planned merger with Northern college. An important issue was the question of a new building for life sciences, and the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability.

Medicine and Medical Sciences

- 220 The Faculty was continuing to focus its research strategy on themes and research centres. Funding for the IMS 2 had been secured and the Faculty was grateful for the Court's support for investment in the project. The Faculty continued to aim to achieve an Institute for Applied Health Sciences and had already made considerable progress in developing an IAHS structure headed by a Director. With its major imaging facilities - the Medical Resonance Imaging (MRI) Centre and the Positron Emission Tomography (PET) Centre - the three main elements of the Faculty's research strategy was in place, and would be further developed in future.
- 221 On teaching the Faculty had recently introduced a sports science degree, and there was an issue to be addressed as to whether the academic development of sports based studies should be on an institution-wide basis. There was no difficulty in recruitment to the MBChB and the Scottish Medical Deans were exploring with the Scottish Executive whether there should be an increase in medical student numbers in Scotland, following the substantial uplift in England. The Faculty would also consider, with the other Deans, the development of a graduate entry programme for clinical teaching. With reference to the anatomy teaching still undertaken at Marischal College, a new location would need to be found.
- 222 Externally, the Faculty continued to develop strong research links with the Rowett Research Institute, and teaching links with Raigmore Hospital, and with the RGU in the area of nursing and professions allied to medicine.

APPOINTMENT OF DEANS

- 223 The Court approved the membership of Selection Committees for the Deanship vacancies in the Faculty of Arts & Divinity and the Faculty of Science & Engineering.
- 224 The Court approved recommendations from the Selection Committees that Professor Iain R Torrance be appointed Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Divinity for a three year period from

1 August 2001 and that Professor Albert A Rodger be appointed Dean of the Faculty of Science & Engineering for a three year period from 1 August 2001.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COURT 2001-02

- 225 The Court approved a recommendation from the Nominating Committee that for session 2001-02 Professor Sewel, Professor Logan and Dr Roberts occupy the three places on Court for Vice-Principals *ex officio*, and that Professor Houlihan, Professor Sloane and the two new Deans of Arts & Divinity and of Science & Engineering be invited to be in attendance at the Court.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN ORDINANCE NO 134
[REMOVAL OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS OF COURT]

- 226 The Court having noted that the draft Ordinance had been agreed without amendment by the Senate and by the Business Committee of the General Council and that no representations had been received during the required period of consultation, approved the draft Ordinance for submission to the Privy Council, as set out in the Appendix to the original of this Minute.

RESOLUTION NO 225 OF 2001
[CHANGES IN REGULATIONS FOR VARIOUS DEGREES]

- 227 The Court having noted that the draft Resolution had been approved by the Senate and by the Business Committee of the General Council and that no other representations had been received, decided to pass the Resolution as set out in the Appendix to the original of this Minute.

DEGREE AND DIPLOMA REGULATIONS

- 228 The Court approved further changes in degree and diploma regulations which had been approved by Senate at its meeting on 2 May 2001 and would be included in the next annual Resolution.

FACULTY OF ARTS & DIVINITY: HEADS OF SCHOOL

- 229 The Court noted that as part of the restructuring process within the Faculty of Arts & Divinity, the Principal had confirmed the following appointments which would be effective from 1 August 2001 for a period of three years:

Professor John Dunkley	Head of School, School of Modern Languages
Dr Barbara Fennell	Head of School, School of English and Film Studies
Professor Gordon Graham	Head of School, School of Philosophy & Cultural History
Professor Jane Ohlmeyer	Head of School, School of History & History of Art

- 230 The appointment of the Head of School of Divinity and Religious Studies would be confirmed in due course.

STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION: SABBATICAL ELECTIONS

- 231 The Court noted that, in the sabbatical elections held on Thursday 26 April, the following had been elected to office within the Students' Association during session 2001-02:

President	Duncan Cockburn
Vice-President (Services)	Duncan Stuart
Vice-President (Representation)	Lyndsay Smith
Vice-President (Sport)	Kim Atkinson

COURT AWAY DAY

- 232 The Court noted that the Special Meeting of Court at the start of session 2001-02 would comprise a full-day meeting on Tuesday 18 September 2001 to be held in the Medico-Chirurgical Hall at Foresterhill, followed by a Court Dinner in the Linklater Rooms. Overnight accommodation, if requested by members in advance, would be available in Kings Hall.