

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Meeting held on 26 June 2001

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Councillor D Clyne, Mr D Cockburn, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Mr A Harper, Dr D Heddle, Councillor P Johnston, Professor I Macdonald, Dr M Mackie, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Mrs A Skene, Professor P Sloane, Mr G Stevenson, Professor I Torrance, Mr S Varwell; with Professor Forrester, Professor Houlihan, Professor Sewel, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr S Gordon, Dr P Murray, Ms N Coghill and Mrs H Stephen (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Dr A Dawson, Dr H Fullerton, Dr P Kinnear, Mr J Leiper, Professor S Logan and Mr A Salvesen.

MINUTES

233 The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2001 were approved subject to the following correction to Minute 191: In lines 4 and 5 amend £1.5m to £1.124M and, delete "again in collaboration with the University of Oxford".

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

234 The Principal drew the Court's attention to a number of academic achievements.

235 In the sphere of teaching and learning, the admissions picture was encouraging, the University had achieved its highest ever ranking in Times leagues tables, and under the new QAA system on teaching quality the University's first two reviews, in Divinity and Geology, had both achieved the highest of the three categories available.

236 On research the overall level of external grants had increased to £30M and was twice the level it had been a few years earlier; the proportion of University income from Research Councils and from major institutions such as the Wellcome Foundation had also increased in recent years. Notable individual achievements included the award to Professor Tom Devine of the Royal Medal of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Indeed the Irish Prime Minister had recently referred in his address to the Scottish Parliament to the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies as the central example of cultural co-operation between Scotland and Ireland.

237 With regard to matters regularly discussed at Court the budgetary position remained tight but it was expected that the target historical cost surplus of £1.1M for the current financial year would be achieved. Capital funding needs were difficult to analyse fully while the Pathfinder programme was being developed, but because of the Court's decision to invest in IMS 2 and the success of the Medical Faculty in attracting external funding for the project the University's capital funding requirement had been significantly reduced compared to the position a year earlier.

238 On Northern College the Principal was pleased to draw attention to a tabled letter, dated 21 June 2001 from Wendy Alexander, Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, which gave formal approval to the proposed merger of Northern College with the Universities of Aberdeen and Dundee. Written confirmation would be sought from the Funding Council that the University correctly interpreted the reference in the letter to repayment of the Strategic Change Grant to mean that the financial investment in the merger would pay for itself within the initial seven year period and that thereafter real savings were expected to accrue. A precise date for the merger had not yet been set. It was understood that the Board of Governors of Northern College had agreed to a closure date of 31 October 2001.

- 239 The Principal reported that progress had also been made in pursuing other institutional alliances. A proposal for exploring an alliance agreement with the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) would be considered by the Court later in the meeting (see min 247 below). It was understood that the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHIMI) would wish to take forward discussions on a potential Partnership. Also, new areas of co-operation with The Robert Gordon University were being explored, including those between the medical school and the RGU's departments involved in studies allied to medicine. Co-operation on a basis of complementary provision would contribute to a general strengthening of the University's relationships with institutions in North-East Scotland.

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY

- 240 Mr Cannon reported that agreement had been reached between the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and the higher education unions on new industrial relations machinery - a Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) - and on a staged pay award for 2001/02. The award also harmonised settlement dates in the sector, with the next pay review date for all groups of staff (except clinical academics) being 1 August 2002.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2001-2005

- 241 Professor Macdonald introduced the draft planning documentation which required by SHEFC by the end of June 2001. This consisted of the narrative of the Strategic Plan 2001-2005, Financial Forecasts, Student Number Projections, a Wider Participation Strategy Statement (the thrust of which was also embedded in the narrative), and an Estate Management Action Plan providing technical information required by the Funding Council. Comments were invited from the Court on the draft Plan, which was a substantially revised version of the 2000 Strategic Plan. The slightly revised format, with objectives for the planning period and actions for the coming year, would facilitate the preparation of an operational plan for 2001-2002. The Financial Forecasts which in past years had been submitted direct to the Court, had been considered and approved by the Joint Planning Finance & Estates Committee. The Senate had also approved the narrative Plan and the Wider Participation Strategy Statement.
- 242 In an extended discussion, Court members commented both on the planning process, including the Court's input to institutional strategy, and on various aspects of the Plan, including reference to the University's current and future commitment to IT, the embedding of C& IT in teaching and learning, the University's contribution to the needs of the oil industry and oil-related technology, and the adoption and implementation of the wider participation strategy.
- 243 The Court approved the planning documentation for submission to SHEFC.

SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE: PROPOSAL FOR AN ALLIANCE AGREEMENT

- 244 The Court considered a paper which reported on the outcome of preliminary talks with representatives of the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) to explore developing relationships between the College and the University with a view to exploiting synergies to the benefit of both institutions. The principal conclusion of a joint meeting on 4 June 2001 had been that no obvious and insurmountable obstacles existed to the development of a Partnership.
- 245 The Principal indicated that the proposal, which was for an alliance with SAC and not a merger, was an important and exciting one. Closer co-operation between the two institutions, with their range of expertise in agriculture forestry and related matters, would enhance their contribution to countryside development issues and the delivery of services on a more efficient and cost-effective basis.

- 246 Dr Mackie, who declared his interest as the current Chairman of the SAC, expressed his view as a Court member that it would be beneficial to the University to pursue an alliance with the SAC given its scale of operation and range of activities. He believed that for both institutions there would be real intellectual synergy, and potential financial economies.
- 247 The Court approved the recommendation that the University enter into formal negotiations with representatives of the Scottish Agricultural College with a view to the development of a formal Partnership Agreement for approval in due course by the governing bodies of the two institutions.
- 248 The Court also agreed to the release of a joint press statement - tabled for members and embargoed until the following day - which announced that the two institutions had entered into discussions on closer collaboration in the delivery of services to rural Scotland.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Audit Committee

- 249 The Court received a report from the Audit Committee's meeting held on 29 May 2001. Mr Grant highlighted the following matters.
- 250 The Court noted that arrangements were in hand to appoint new members to the Audit Committee following the resignations of Mrs Linda Cranna and Mr Derek Marnoch.
- 251 The Court received a progress report, with which the internal auditors and the Audit Committee had been satisfied, on the implementation of the special internal audit investigation into Financial Management and Control. The Court noted that a budgeting/control workshop which had been held in June was regarded as a key part of a revision of the budget-setting process to be implemented over the course of the forthcoming year.
- 252 Mr Grant also reported that he had met with representatives of the Funding Council's Financial Appraisal and Monitoring Service (FAMS) during their recent visit to the University as part of SHEFC's rolling programme. They had appeared to be satisfied with the action taken by the University in light of the previous year's financial outturn and he therefore anticipated that the FAMS report would be neutral.
- 253 The Court noted the Committee's approval of internal audit reports.

Student Affairs Committee

- 254 The Court received a report from the Student Affairs Committee meeting held on 29 May 2001 which, in the Convener's absence, had been chaired by the University Secretary.
- 255 The Court, noting that under the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999, effective from 1 May 2001, immigration advice and services should be offered to students by specified employees under an agreed institutional policy, approved a policy statement on Immigration Advice, prepared by the International Student Centre, as set out in the Appendix to this Minute.
- 256 The Court noted the disbursements approved by the Committee to the Students' Association and to other student organisations for 2001-2002.

Staffing and Development Committee

- 257 Professor Macdonald presented a report from the Staffing & Development Committee's meeting held on 29 May 2001, with which four policy and procedure documents were put forward to the Court for approval, as follows:
- (i) The proposed policy on *Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying*, reinforced the University's commitment to equal opportunities, and would be underpinned by training programmes for 'harassment' advisers and line managers.

- (ii) The proposed policy on *Management of Work Related Stress* would ensure that the University met its legal requirements to ensure that the health of its employees was not adversely affected by their work. Implementation procedures, including guidance for managers, was being finalised in light of discussion with the campus unions.
 - (iii) The *Procedure for the Hearing of Appeals from Academic and Academic-Related Staff* had been revised following concerns expressed at a staffing appeal in the light of extensive consultation and legal advice.
 - (iv) The *Redundancy Policy and Procedure*, approved by the Court in June 2000, had been revised in light of further consultations with the campus unions during the past year.
- 258 Professor Macdonald commented on the notable achievement of Human Resources and of the Committee in the development of these institutional policies, and the range of other matters listed in the Committee's report. These reflected well on the University.
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- 259 The Court approved the four documents, as set out in the appendix to this minute.

Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee

- 260 The Court received a report from the meetings of the Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee held on 15 May and 6 June 2001, which included recommendations for the approval of the Strategic Plan 2001-05 and the Risk Management Strategy proposals (see min 243 and 273).
- Pathfinder Project*
- 261 The Court noted that, following receipt of a satisfactory offer with potential proceeds of £5.75M, the Committee had approved a recommendation to dispose of the Spring Garden Hall of Residence, subject to the Funding Council's approval of the University's disposal and supporting financial strategy.
- 262 The Court approved the Committee's recommendation that powers be delegated to the Principal and to the Senior Lay Member to authorise further disposals of satellite halls on the same basis.
- Financial Reports 2000-01*
- 263 The Court had noted that it remained the expectation that the outturn for the financial year-end should be close to the forecast £1m historical cost surplus.
- Resource Allocation and Budget-Setting 2001-04*
- 264 The Court noted that the Committee had approved a resource allocation package to Faculties and Central Services consistent with the delivery of the historical cost surpluses indicated to SHEFC in the 2000 Strategic Plan Financial Forecasts, and had delegated authority to the Principal to give final approval to the budgets for 2001-2002. The Committee had also agreed that the target historical cost surplus for FY 2001-2002 be reduced from £2.5M to £2.1M. The revised figure had been reflected in the draft 2001 Strategic Plan Financial Forecasts.
- Core Capital Programme 2001-02*
- 265 The Court received a summary of the core Capital Programme for the financial year 2001-2002 which the Committee had approved on the recommendation of the Investment Appraisal Committee.
- Subsidiary Companies: AURIS Ltd*
- 266 The Court noted that the AURIS Ltd Annual Accounts 1999-2000, which the Committee had forwarded to the Court together with a report for the nine months of the current financial year to April 2001, showed a loss of almost £183K .

MEMBERSHIP OF COURT

- 267 The Court approved a recommendation from the Nominating Committee that, exceptionally in view of his expertise and experience and in the interests of continuity in the membership of the Audit Committee, Mr John Grant be co-opted as a member of the Court for a further period of one year to 30 September 2002.
- 268 The Court was informed that the Senate had elected Dr Nigel Dower (Philosophy) and Professor W Cairns Smith (Public Health) as Senate Assessors to the University Court (replacing Professor Logan and Dr Heddle) for the period 1 October 2001 to 30 September 2005.

MEMBERSHIP OF COURT AND COURT-SENATE COMMITTEES AND REPRESENTATION ON EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER OUTSIDE BODIES 2001-02

- 269 The Court approved recommendations from the Nominating Committee on membership of the Court Committees and joint Court-Senate Committees 2001-02 (as set out in the appendix to this minute), and representation on educational and other outside bodies. It noted the Senate's decisions on its representation on joint Court-Senate Committees and on Court Committees with Senate members.
- 270 In response to a question from Mr Cockburn it was noted that the appointment of the Rector's Assessor as one of the Court nominees on the Union Management Committee was not *ex officio* and would be subject to annual review.
- 271 The Court endorsed the Nominating Committee's approval of a change in the Students' Association's representation on the University Health and Safety Committee to comprise the President, the General Manager and the Vice-President (Sport) of the Association.

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH AND COMMERCIALISATION

- 272 The Court approved proposals, which the Senate for its part had previously approved at its meeting on 13 June 2001, for a revised remit and composition of the University Research Committee and the renaming of the Committee as the University Committee for Research and Commercialisation.

RISK MANAGEMENT

- 273 The Court, noting that the JPFEC and the Audit Committee for their parts had indicated their agreement, approved proposals for a University Risk Management Policy, as set out in the Appendix to this Minute, and the establishment of a Risk Management Committee as a Sub-Committee of the JPFEC which would also report to the Audit Committee.

ACQUISITIONS AND DISPOSALS POLICY: REVISION

- 274 The Court, noted that the University's existing Acquisitions and Disposals Policy (approved by the Court in May 1998) had been updated to take account of the need to register the University's collections by September 2001 with Resource, the Government's Council for museums, archives and libraries. With such registration the collections would continue to be eligible for grant aid from SHEFC, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Scottish Museum Council and other major awarding bodies.
- 275 The Court approved the revised Acquisitions and Disposals Policy as set out in the appendix to this minute. (Note: Appendices 1 to 7 to the Policy document are retained with the original of this minute in the Court Office.)

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH BANFF & BUCHAN COLLEGE

- 276 The Court considered a draft Partnership Agreement with Banff & Buchan College in regard to the specification of articulation routes by which HNC and HND students would be admitted to the University's degree programmes, with advanced standing where applicable. It noted that the Senate for its part had approved the draft Agreement at its meeting on 13 June, and that the specifications in Appendix 2 of the Agreement had been approved in principle by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee. These might be subject to minor amendment following further discussion with the University's Admissions Selectors and with Banff & Buchan College. The final specifications would, in all cases, be approved by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee.
- 277 The Court approved the proposed Partnership Agreement.

SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMME

- 278 The Court received the first draft of a University strategy for the development and implementation of a policy of sustainable development, together with a sustainability work programme for 2001-2002. These reflected the commitment to developing a programme for sustainability made by University through its successful bid to SHEFC in September 2000 to join the Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability. Over recent years sustainable development had become mainstream policy for government and a wide range of institutions and organisations.
NB An informal presentation to Court members had been made prior to its meeting by the Deputy Director of the SHEFC-funded Higher Education Programme for Sustainability.
- 279 In discussion it was noted that the planned co-ordination of the programme by the Director of Facilities Management reflected the way in which the programme had been developed, but that the arrangement would be reviewed. Professor Graham expressed serious concerns that the programme would create additional burdens on staff throughout the institution; he noted for example that heads of departments would be asked to appoint sustainability programme co-ordinators. It was noted that the University Management Group, which for its part had approved the scheme, would monitor it closely. In giving its approval the UMG had also aired a number of the concerns expressed by Professor Graham but had concluded that the University should move forward with the programme and review the position at the end of the pilot phase.

VACATION POWERS

- 280 The Court decided that, in accordance with its customary procedure, for the period between its meetings on 26 June and 18 September 2001, it should delegate authority to act on its behalf on any matter of particular urgency to a small committee composed of the Principal, the Senior Lay Member and/or the Senior Vice-Principal. This however would not preclude the convening of an emergency meeting of Court during the vacation period should the need arise.

HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

- 281 The Court received the annual report of the University's Health & Safety Committee for the 2000-01 session.
- 282 A member drew attention to concern that there was a lack of resource available for certain safety improvements. Professor Macdonald indicated that the Investment Appraisal Group had had to make difficult judgements regarding priorities for in the 2001-02 capital programme. However, he undertook to review the matter.

PROMOTIONS

- 283 The Court approved recommendations for the promotion of members of staff 2000-2001 as set out in the Appendix to this Minute (Confidential).

FACULTY OF ARTS & DIVINITY: HEADS OF SCHOOL

- 284 The Court noted that as part of the restructuring process within the Faculty of Arts & Divinity, the Principal had confirmed the appointment of Dr Seth Kunin as Head of the School of Divinity and Religious Studies (in addition to the appointments of four Heads of Schools reported to the Court's previous meeting) with effect from 1 August 2001 for a period of three years.

GIFTS, BENEFACTIONS AND CHARITABLE AWARDS

- 285 The Court received a report from the Director of External Relations on gifts, benefactions and charitable awards received by the University in the period 1 November 2000 to 30 April 2001.

DRAFT ABERDEEN CITY COMMUNITY PLAN

- 286 The Court received a copy of the Draft of the first Community Plan for the City of Aberdeen, which set out a vision for the future and how it was intended to be achieved. The planned vision - for a vibrant, dynamic and forward-looking city had been developed by a group of the City's main organisations, led by Aberdeen City Council, and informed by the views of individuals, communities and businesses in the City. Due to timing constraints the draft Community Plan had been accepted by the Principal on behalf of the University Court.

DATES OF COURT MEETINGS &
STRUCTURE OF COURT BUSINESS 2001-02

- 287 The Court noted that its scheduled meetings for 2001-02 would be held on the dates listed below and received an outline structure of the Court's programme of business during the session.

18 September 2001	5 February 2002
30 October 2001	19 March 2002
11 December 2001	14 May 2002
	25 June 2002

FAREWELL TO MEMBERS

- 288 The Rector, on behalf of the Court, expressed thanks and good wishes to Professor Forrester and to Mr Varwell who were attending their last meeting as members of Court. The Rector also thanked Mr Cockburn for his input as her Assessor; he would continue on the Court during 2001-02 as President of the Students' Association.