

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 11 December 2001

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Councillor D Clyne, Mr D Cockburn, Dr A Dawson, Dr N Dower, Mr H Duncan, Dr H Fullerton, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Councillor 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 Smith, Mr G Stevenson, Professor I Torrance, with Professor D Houlihan, Professor A Rodger, Professor P Sloane, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr S Gordon, Dr P Murray, Mr B Purdon, Mr R Taylor and Mrs H Stephen (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Miss A Harper, Mr J Leiper, and Ms C Macaslan.

MINUTES

67 The minutes of meeting held on 30 October 2001 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

68 The Principal congratulated the Rector on her re-election as Rector for a further three-year period (see Minute 96 below).

69 The Principal was pleased to confirm that the merger of Northern College with the University had taken formal effect on 1 December 2001.

70 The Principal reported that individual higher education institutions had received their results from the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) that morning and while there had not yet been an opportunity to analyse the University's results it appeared that its research ratings had significantly improved since the previous RAE. The full sector results would be published on 14 December. Professor Sloane confirmed that the University had achieved its target to achieve ten grade 4 and 5 units of assessment and that 85% of the staff submitted were in departments graded 4 or 5, in line with the national average. The Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences had done very well and all four Faculties now had grade 5 departments. There had been upward movement across the sector as a whole and the funding implications could not yet be assessed. The Court agreed to record its congratulations to all involved in the RAE.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Joint Planning Finance & Estates Committee

- 71 The Court received a report from the Joint Planning Finance & Estates Committee's meeting on 22 November 2001.

Scottish Agricultural College

- 72 The Court considered a paper setting out draft proposals whereby the Scottish Agricultural College and the University of Aberdeen could provide educational and academic research services conjointly across the full range of activities of the two institutions by means of a joint vehicle, a Scottish Institute for Rural Affairs of the University of Aberdeen. Initially at least the arrangement would be simply an academic one, and should have no adverse impact on the SAC's relationship with the relevant Government funding department, the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), nor involve the transfer of assets or staff. The essence of the proposal was that an Institute would be created for academic purposes within the Faculty of Science & Engineering which would pool the resources of the University and the College in the sphere of educational provision. Those College staff who teach on degree and diploma programmes would become honorary staff and recognised teachers of the University and the University would take full and direct responsibility for academic quality assurance. The arrangement should harmonise the strengths of both institutions and meet the needs of Scotland in the 'rural plus' area. Dr Mackie, as Chairman of the SAC, indicated that its Board of Governors had endorsed the proposal and that, subject to approval from SEERAD, it could be taken forward.

- 73 The Court agreed to the proposal to establish the joint vehicle. It noted the intention that a Resolution to establish the Institute would be brought forward via Senate.

Establishment of a Technical University in Kazakhstan

- 74 The Court considered a paper setting out proposals for the University to participate in the establishment of a "British-style" technical university in Almaty, Kazakhstan. It noted that there was considerable interest in developing links with Kazakhstan at United Kingdom Government, Aberdeen City and oil industry level. In discussions involving representatives of the Kazakh authorities, a number of UK universities and the British Council a framework had been developed which would enable the University, in partnership with other institutions and notably with The Robert Gordon University, to provide academic programmes and services on the basis of fully-costed individual

contracts. Such an arrangement would avoid exposing the University to undue financial risk.

- 75 The Court approved the recommendation that the University participate in the venture on this basis.

Admissions Targets 2002

- 76 The Court considered a paper which analysed factors to be taken into account in setting admissions targets for 2002 entry and identified issues to be addressed before decisions could be taken on specific targets. Without either an increased intake or amelioration in the worsened non-completion rates in the current year, the University could be at risk of underachievement in its overall population projections as contained within the Strategic Plan, but it was thought unlikely that the University would be able to increase its 2002 intake beyond the higher targets which had been achieved in 2001 against tough competition. The JPFEC had agreed that in order to address the non-completion problem it was essential that further action be taken at Faculty level, and through the Working Party on Retention.

- 77 The Court approved the recommendation that the full-time undergraduate UK/EU admissions targets for entry in the academic year 2002-03 remain at the same levels as those for entry in 2001-02.

Overseas Tuition Fees

- 78 The Court approved recommendations forwarded by the Committee for a 2.5% increase in overseas tuition fees for session 2002-2003. The revised fee levels had been calculated, as in previous years, in line with other UK universities, and now included an element of flexibility in offering fees packages (for tuition and accommodation) for potential students from areas in which it was traditionally difficult to recruit.

Insurance Broking, Claims and Risk Management Contract Renewal

- 79 The Court noted that, following a tendering exercise, the JPFEC had agreed to appoint Marsh to provide insurance broking and risk management services to the University for the three-year period commencing 1 January 2002. The Court endorsed the appointment.

Financial Reports

- 80 The Court noted that the Management Reports for the three months to October 2001 indicated an overall financial position ahead of Plan, and that no problems were currently envisaged in the achievement of the projected £2.1M historical cost surplus for the 2001-02 financial year.

Papers for Information

- 81 The Court noted that a number of papers had been circulated to the JPFEC for information and were available on request from the Court & Planning Office, including (i) a reply from USS Ltd to the University's interim response on the USS consultation document on the USS Accrual Rate; (ii) a copy of the University's response to a SHEFC Consultation paper on Research Infrastructure and (iii) the University's final response to the SHEFC Consultation paper on the Funding Council's proposal to introduce a new Condition of Grant.

Audit Committee

- 82 The Court received a report from the Audit Committee's meeting on 13 November 2001.

Annual Report 2000/02

- 83 The Court considered the Audit Committee's Twelfth Annual Report to the Court, to which were attached the Internal Auditors' Annual Report 2000/01, the Internal Auditor's annual plan 2001/02, the External Auditors' Audit Strategy 2000/01 and their Management Letter and Report of Significant Audit Issues arising from their audit of the University's Annual Accounts 2000/01.
- 84 In presenting the Annual Report Mr Grant confirmed that the Committee had no adverse matters to be drawn to the Court's attention. He noted that the Committee was satisfied with the University's response and ongoing implementation of the report of the special audit investigation, undertaken following the 1999/00 financial outturn. The report of the review of the University's arrangements for financial control, corporate governance and audit undertaken by SHEFC's Financial Appraisal and Monitoring Service in June 2001 had also indicated that FAMS was satisfied in this regard.
- 85 The Court approved the Committee's Annual Report.

Review of the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee

86 The Court noted that in accordance with a recommendation of the FAMS Report, the Committee had reviewed its own remit to incorporate changes required to ensure that it explicitly complied with the SHEFC Code of Audit Practice.

87 The Court approved the revised remit of the Audit Committee, as set out in the Appendix to this Minute.

Review of the Terms of Reference of the Remuneration Committee

88 The Court approved a recommendation from the Committee, in light of an audit report on the University's severance arrangements, that the remit of the Remuneration Committee be extended to include consideration of severance arrangements in accordance with the SHEFC guidelines. The revised remit is set out in the appendix to this Minute.

Annual Reappointment of External Auditors

89 The Court approved the annual reappointment of PricewaterhouseCoopers as external auditors to the University for the second year of their three-year contract.

Staffing and Development Committee

- 90 The Court received a report from the Staffing and Development Committee's meeting on 12 November 2001 which indicated progress in policy development work being taken forward within Human Resources in a range of areas including Absence Management, Appraisal, Harassment and Stress, and Redundancy Policy and Procedures.
- 91 In discussion it was noted that consultation on the introduction of an appraisal scheme for academic staff was being undertaken with the local AUT as the recognised representative union and thereafter would be made widely available to Departments.

UNIVERSITY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2000/01

- 92 The Court considered the University's Annual Accounts for the financial year 2000/01, which had been scrutinised by the Audit Committee, and forwarded by the JPPEC with a recommendation for their formal approval by the Court. A covering Commentary from the Finance Director highlighted key audit and accounting issues. The Court was pleased to note that the outcome for the year was satisfactory. An historical cost surplus of £1.562m had been achieved, compared to an historical cost deficit of £1.739m in the previous financial year. A significant increase in research income had also been achieved.
- 93 The Court approved the University's annual accounts for the financial year 2000/01. It noted the annual Report on Endowments.

SUBSIDIARY COMPANIES ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2000/01

- 94 The Court received the 2000/01 Annual Accounts for King's College Conference Ltd which showed a loss of £18,164 for the financial year 2000/01. The Court noted that in view of the unsatisfactory position the future of the KCC, including its company status, would be reviewed. A report would be brought forward to the Court in due course.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2002

- 95 In accordance with an earlier Court decision that the next Strategic Plan for 2002/06 be prepared through a fully iterative process, members were invited to assess critically the existing Strategic Plan (further copies of which had been circulated) and to forward to the Senior Vice-Principal, or to Mrs Schofield, Court & Planning Office, their comments and suggestions which might inform the development of the 2002 Plan. It was intended that draft versions of the 2002 Plan would come forward to the March and May meetings of the Court before final approval by the Court on 25 June 2002, and submission to SHEFC.

ELECTION OF RECTOR

- 96 The Court was informed that Clarissa Dickson Wright had been re-elected to the post of Rector for three years from 1 January 2002 (See Minute 68 above).

UNIVERSITY STATISTICAL REPORT 2000/2001

- 97 The Court received for information the University's Statistical Report for 2000/2001.