

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 5 February 2002

Present: Mr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Mr D Cockburn, Dr A Dawson, Dr N Dower, Dr H Fullerton, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Miss A Harper, Dr P Kinnear, Mr J Leiper, Professor S Logan, Mr R McGregor, Miss M Main, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Professor J Sewel, Mrs A Skene, Professor W Smith, Mr G Stevenson, with Professor D Houlihan, Ms C Macaslan, Professor A Rodger, Professor M Sloane, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr S Gordon, Dr P Murray, Mr B Purdon and Mrs H Stephen (Clerk)

Apologies were received from the Rector, Councillor D Clyne, Mr H Duncan, Councillor P Johnston and Dr M Mackie

MINUTES

98 The Minutes of meeting held on 11 December 2001 were approved

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

99 The Principal thanked Professor Ogston for his further generous donation to the University of the painting "Holy Family, Belem" by Anne Redpath, currently on display in the reception area of the University Office.

100 The Principal proposed that, in view of Sir Graeme Catto's longstanding connection with Aberdeen and his distinguished contributions to medicine and to the University, the Court send him a letter of congratulations on the award of a Knighthood in the 2001 New Year honours. The Court readily concurred that the Senior Lay Member sign such a letter on its behalf.

101 At the Principal's invitation, Professor Houlihan reported that, while it was too early to draw firm conclusions, the current student recruitment position was looking positive, with increases of 7% and 28% respectively in home and overseas undergraduate applications for 2002-03 entry.

102 The Principal was pleased to report that he had received written confirmation from the Mellon Foundation that morning that a formal recommendation was to go forward to its Board to invite Dr Howard Hotson of the University's Centre for Early Modern Studies to present one of the Sawyer Seminars. The award, while not substantial in monetary terms, was a significant academic accolade and represented a most important breakthrough in support for humanities research in the University.

103 The Principal drew attention to a tabled report, prepared by Professor Houlihan, which summarised progress in the University's commercialisation activities. Professor Houlihan commented that the report indicated a change in culture and awareness throughout the University community in relation to the potential commercialisation of academic activities. The University was well on the way to meeting annual targets for patent and licensing activity and for company formations.

104 The Principal noted that continuing consideration was being given to potential capital projects including a Humanities Research Centre, requirements within Economic Social Sciences, Pathfinder, and sports facilities. Reports would be brought forward to the Court in due course.

## REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

### **Joint Planning Finance & Estates Committee**

#### *Research Assessment Exercise*

- 105 The Court received a paper on the outcome of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and was pleased to note that compared to the previous RAE there had been an overall improvement in the University's performance, which was reflected over those four Faculties which had made submissions. The University's target to achieve ten 5-rated Units of Assessment had been achieved. The percentage of the staff in 4 and 5 rated Units of Assessment had increased, albeit a reduced number had been submitted on a more selective basis. In terms of "research power" Aberdeen University was now 29th in the UK and fourth in Scotland
- 106 The Court noted that written feedback from the RAE panels was awaited and that the financial implications of the outcome of the Exercise were not yet known. It had to be assumed that SHEFC would take a similar approach to the Higher Education Funding Council for England; contrary to earlier indications HEFCE had decided not to support 3b Units of Assessment, in order to protect 5 star UNITS and to limit funding reductions for 5 and 4 rated Units.
- 107 The RAE outcome represented a significant achievement for the University. It would be important nevertheless to achieve further improvements in the next Exercise. Current discussions were being taken forward with Heads of Departments about strategies for the next RAE, including potential changes to departmental structures, and research staffing strategies.

#### *AURIS Ltd*

- 108 The Court noted that the JPFEC had considered a paper on the future of AURIS Ltd and included a detailed financial analysis of the company's performance over the last five years. It had also received documents from the AURIS Board which included a series of recommendations and options on the future of the company.
- 109 In order to progress matters and allow full consideration of all the issues, the Court agreed:
- (i) that the University purchase the AURIS building from the company for the sum of £687,000;
  - (ii) that part of the proceeds should be used by the company to settle all outstanding financial transactions (estimated at £120,000);
  - (iii) that the Chairman and Chief Executive of AURIS Ltd be invited to enter into detailed discussions with the University Management Group on the way forward for the company.

#### *Humanities Research Centre: Concept*

- 110 The Court was informed that, following the informal presentation made to the Court prior to its meeting on 11 December 2001, the JPFEC had received a report from the Group charged with the task of developing a concept for a University facility for humanistic research. The concept paper, copies of which were available to Court members on request, represented the first stage of a proposal for the establishment of a Humanities Research Centre. The concept would now be developed further in order to clarify the nature of the proposed activity, how it would contribute to Faculty and institutional research plans and priorities and to assess the capital and recurrent funding implications.

#### *Operational Planning*

- 111 The Court received for information a copy of the Implementation of Strategic Plan 2001 as received by the JPFEC (22.1.02).

### *Admissions Targets and Going Rates*

112 Further to its earlier approval of overall undergraduate admissions targets, the Court noted that the JPFEC had approved recommendations from the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee (SRAC) on detailed targets for entry in 2002-03.

113 The Court also noted that the JPFEC had approved the SRAC's approved recommendations on "going rates" for admission in 2003-04.

### *Financial Reports*

114 The Court noted that the management accounts for the five months to 31 December 2001 showed the current financial position to be ahead of target, with an historical cost surplus of £1.483m against a target of £568K.

### *IMS2*

115 The Court noted that as a consequence of delays with the IMS2 Project, there was a projected over-run of £250K on the new-build construction costs. A detailed report from the Quantity Surveyor was expected by the end of January and action had been initiated through the University solicitors. A further report would be brought forward in due course.

### *Marischal College*

116 The Court was informed that the JPFEC had received a report recording the initiation and progress of discussions between the University and Aberdeen Asset Management (AAM) regarding the proposed refurbishment of Marischal College. Planning permission for the development had been granted, in principle, by Aberdeen City Council on 6 December 2001, subject to approval by Historic Scotland and the Scottish Executive. A date of 29 July 2002 had recently been agreed with AAM for the commencement of the proposed refurbishment project. Accommodation at Marischal College would therefore continue to be available for University use throughout the current session, including the summer 2002 examinations and graduations.

### *Papers for Information*

117 The Court noted that the following papers had been circulated to the JPFEC for information and were available to Court members on request from the Court & Planning Office, (i) *Institutional Strategic Planning 2001*, SHEFC Circular letter HE/51/2001, dated 13 November 2001, informing institutions of the Funding Council's consideration of institutional plans 2001; (ii) *Scottish Higher Education Institutions Estate Management Plans: analysis of 2001 Returns*, SHEFC Circular HE/04/02, dated 14 January 2002, setting out key findings from higher education institutions 2001 Estates Management Action Plan returns; (iii) *Additional Non-Recurrent Grant for AY 2001-02*, SHEFC Circular letter HE/53/01, dated 15 November 2001 announcing the allocation of an additional one-off recurrent grant; (iv) Universities UK's submission to the Government's 2002 Spending Review; (v) *New Condition of Main Teaching and Research Grants: Outcome of Consultation and Council Decision*, SHEFC Circular letter HE/57/2001 dated 12 December 2001, informing institutions of the outcome of the Council's consideration of the responses to the recent consultation on a new condition of main teaching and research grants and (vi) *Review of Arts and Humanities Research Funding*, Department of Education and Skills letter dated 14 December 2001, announcing a Review of Arts & Humanities Research Funding and seeking views from UK higher education institutions.

## COLLABORATION WITH THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

- 118 The Court considered a paper from the Inter-university Group on Collaboration between The Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen. The Group had explored the range of existing collaborations, potential means of enhancing collaboration and a number of collaborative models. Its initial conclusion was that there were no obstacles to pursuing further each or any of five collaborative models; general collaboration (the *status quo*), strategic alliance, federal structure, traditional merger, or a new model institution. The Group proposed to submit a Strategic Change Grant bid to SHEFC to fund an appraisal of options, and analysis of a preferred option, to be undertaken during the remainder of the current academic year.
- 119 The Court approved the recommendation of the JPFEC that both institutions should appraise each of the five collaborative options against a number of basic agreed principles, namely that:
- (i) Educational provision is enriched, academic programmes are complementary, and quality is safeguarded or improved;
  - (ii) Access for students to higher education is maintained or improved;
  - (iii) Financial health is maintained or improved and financial risk reduced;
  - (iv) Resources, including capital, are better employed;
  - (v) The proposed changes take into account the likely long-term changes in higher education;
  - (vi) The proposed changes do not unacceptably reduce the diversity of the sector as a whole.
- 120 In discussion a range of views was expressed. Professor Graham highlighted what he believed to be deep anxiety in the academic community that, while the pursuit of greater collaboration might be politically expedient, it would detract from achievement of the University's strategic aims, particularly in relation to maintaining and further improving the University's research performance. He was also concerned that while the intention was simply to explore options, the initiative could gather its own momentum. Lay members indicated that increased collaboration between the two universities was likely to be viewed positively by the wider community, and expansion of opportunities for students was also likely to be welcomed
- 121 It was emphasised that the matter was at an initial stage, and that no proposal would be brought forward for formal consideration until analysis of the options had been completed. Thereafter any proposal to pursue a preferred option would be a matter for wider debate with stakeholders. It was also emphasised that academic considerations would be fundamental to the analysis.

## ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY, FACULTY OF EDUCATION

- 122 The Court considered a strategy paper on the future provision of accommodation for the Faculty of Education. Analysis of the two options, namely for the Faculty to remain at Hilton Place or to move into the MacRobert Building in Old Aberdeen had shown that the balance of advantage, both financial and academic, clearly favoured the move to Old Aberdeen. This would achieve a key objective of the merger– integrate teacher education into the heart of a multi-faculty university – and was also the preferred option of staff and students of the Faculty of Education. Implementation of this option would necessitate the relocation of staff currently accommodated in the MacRobert Building.
- 123 The Court approved the recommendation that the Faculty of Education be relocated from Hilton Place to the MacRobert Building in Old Aberdeen.

DRAFT RESOLUTION NO     of 2002  
[CHANGES IN REGULATION FOR VARIOUS DEGREES]

- 124     The Court received the above draft Resolution from the Senate and 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.
- 125     It noted that Dr Kinnear had raised concerns with the Senate Office about possible ambiguities within the text.

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

- 126     The Court noted that Ordinance No 134 [Removal of Co-opted Members of Court] had been passed by Her Majesty in Council on 11 December 2001.