

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 19 March 2002

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Cllr D Clyne, Mr D Cockburn, Dr A Dawson, Dr N Dower, Mr H Duncan, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Miss A Harper, Cllr P Johnston, Dr P Kinnear, Professor S Logan, Mr R McGregor, Mr A Mair, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Dr JG Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Professor JB Sewel, Mrs AJK Skene, Professor W Cairns Smith, Mr G Stevenson and Professor I Torrance, with Professor D Houlihan, Professor A Rodger, Professor P Sloane, Mrs C Macaslan, Mr J Graham, Mr S Cannon, Ms I Bews, Mr JS Gordon, Mrs C Inglis, Dr PJ Murray and Mrs HE Stephen (Clerk).

The Rector welcomed Mr J Graham to his first meeting.

Apologies were received from Dr H Fullerton, Mr J Leiper, Dr M Mackie and Miss M Main.

MINUTES

127 The Minutes of meeting held on 5 February 2002 were approved.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

128 The Principal congratulated Mr Cockburn on his re-election as President of the Students' Association for a second year.

129 The Principal referred to major research grants which had recently been secured. These included a £0.5 million commercial award to Professor Reid, Department of General Practice & Primary Care, and a smaller but significant £90K research grant to Dr John Swinton in Divinity, indicating increasing success within the Faculty of Arts & Divinity in attracting external funds to support its research activity.

130 The Principal noted that the announcement of SHEFC's Funding for teaching and research in Higher Education Institutions in 2002-03 was expected at the end of the week.

131 The Principal reported that in contrast to the assumed expansion in student numbers in teacher education, as advised by the Funding Council prior to the merger of the Northern College with the University, there were now indications that there were likely to be cuts in teacher education funded numbers for 2002/03. The Universities affected would wish to engage with the Funding Council to clarify the position and

the implications of the reduced numbers, as a significant change at this stage would be disruptive for both institutions and potential students.

- 132 At the Principal's invitation, Mr Cannon outlined arrangements for the meeting of the Scottish Parliament in Aberdeen on 28, 29 and 30 May 2002. The venue for the Parliament would be the King's Conference Centre, with supplementary events in the Linklater Rooms and Elphinstone Hall, a media centre in the Old Senate Room, with King's Hall serving as office accommodation. Considerable efforts were being made to ensure that the arrangements would minimise disruption in University activity. It would be necessary to use the Beach Ballroom for examinations during the period and transport for students would be provided.
- 133 The Principal reported that he, together with Mr Mair and the Rector, on behalf of the University, would present a Loyal Address to the Queen on Thursday, 21 March, to celebrate her Golden Jubilee.
- 134 The Principal reported that there were likely to be a number of vacancies on the Court in the current and following year. He reminded the Court that the Nominating Committee, convened by Mr Mair, would welcome suggestions of individuals who might be considered for co-option to the Court. The Principal also expressed the view that there would be merit in seeking to increase the involvement of individuals with business expertise, in particular those with experience of managing large organisations. He invited Court members to forward suggestions to himself or Mr Mair within the next few weeks for consideration by the Nominating Committee in the first instance.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Joint Planning, Finance & Estates Committee (5.3.02)

Residential & Catering Budget and Hall Fees 2002/03

- 135 The Court received a paper, considered by the JPFEC, which forecast an improved residential and catering budget outturn for the current financial year (a deficit of £102.8K against a budgeted figure of £140.9K) and, for the 2002-03 financial year, put forward a cost-neutral budget which also took account of increased utilities costs and informed assumptions on Hall void rates. The Court noted that, in order to achieve a balanced budget, below inflation increases of 1.6% for Johnstone Hall, reflecting the condition of the accommodation, and of 2.4%-2.6% for other Halls, had been agreed by the JPFEC, and had been welcomed by the student representatives.

136 In response to a question from Councillor Johnston it was noted that in future it was intended that a zero based approach to budgeting be introduced across all areas of the administration.

137 The Court approved the recommendations as set out in the paper, on Residential & Catering Budgets and Hall Fees for 2002-03.

Strategic Planning 2002-06

138 The Court was informed that the JPFEC had received an initial draft of the Strategic Plan 2002-2006 which had been circulated at a considerably earlier stage than in previous years in order to provide an opportunity for early input into its development. The Plan would be developed further also to take account of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council's planning requirements and to embed a University response to SHEFC's new condition of grant which required institutions to demonstrate that they were fulfilling criteria relating to the key policy areas of equality of opportunity and widening participation; continuous improvement of learning and teaching; research and knowledge transfer; and human resource policies and management. Analysis of the impact of forthcoming announcements of the main teaching and research funding for the financial year 2002-03 would also inform the development of the Plan. Members of the JPFEC and of the Court were invited to forward any further comments direct to the Senior Vice-Principal. Revised drafts would be circulated to future meetings of the JPFEC and Court.

139 The Court also noted that the JPFEC had received a progress report on the preparation of the University's Estates Strategy for the period 2002-07 which was being developed conjointly with the Strategic Plan. An Estates Strategy Project Board had been established under the convenership of the Senior Vice-Principal and key findings would be integrated with relevant sections of the Strategic Plan.

Relocation of Faculty of Education: Project Logistics

140 The Court received for information a paper which set out a complex series of issues consequent upon the Court's decision (5.2.02) to relocate the Faculty of Education from the Hilton Campus to the MacRobert Building in Old Aberdeen. The Court noted that the JPFEC had approved the appointment of a Project Board for the relocation project, which would report to JPFEC through its new Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee (see Minute 152 below) and the appointment of a Design Team for the project. The Project Board was likely, in itself, to appoint project teams for

individual sub-projects and might wish to appoint a Project Manager and a Construction Project Manager. The Design Team would take the various projects to feasibility and then to planning application stage, at which point more robust financial information would be available. The costs of the Design Team and the appointment of Project Managers would be funded from the Strategic Change Grant.

Collaboration with The Robert Gordon University

- 141 The Court was informed that a joint application by the University and The Robert Gordon University to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council for a Strategic Change Grant to fund an appraisal of the five collaborative options identified by the Inter-University Group on Collaboration had been approved by SHEFC. A grant of £160K would be made available.

Student Recruitment 2002

- 142 The Court was informed that, as at 22 February 2002 compared to the previous year, home undergraduate applications (excluding the Faculty of Education) had increased by 2% compared to 17% in 2001. The lower increase was a matter of concern but considerable effort would continue to convert applications into firm acceptances; two successful applicant days had already been held and parent evenings were taking place that week. Overseas undergraduate applications continued to show strong growth, with increases at 23% compared to the previous year.

Financial Reports 2001-02

- 143 The Court noted that the Management Accounts for the six months to 31 January 2002 reported a continuing satisfactory financial position, currently with an historical cost surplus of £1.68M against a budgeted surplus of £636K, and that it was expected that the University would achieve its planned overall target by the end of the financial year.

Purchasing Policy and Procedures

- 144 The Court noted that the JPFEC had approved a draft Purchasing Policy and Guide for Procedures to replace the University's 1995 Purchasing Guide. The new document, copies of which were available for Court members on request, would also be referred to the Audit Committee for consideration. In order to ensure its full implementation, the new Purchasing Policy and Guide to Procedures would be disseminated widely throughout the University, with comprehensive training provided for the main users.

Marischal College

- 145 The Court was informed that further to planning permission having been granted in principle by Aberdeen City Council, Historic Scotland had raised concerns about roof design, which were being addressed. In discussions with Aberdeen Asset Managers it was intended to appoint a joint agent to market the accommodation which would not be required by AAM, before proceeding with the refurbishment project.

Bridge of Don

- 146 The Court was informed that the required formal tripartite agreements and missives relating to the sale of the Bridge of Don site, at an agreed price of £4.525M, had been concluded. A planning application had been submitted to Aberdeen City Council on 1 February 2002.
- 147 With reference to residential accommodation provided by the University for married students and international student families at the Bridge of Don, current leases would expire on 31 August 2002 and would not be renewed. Various options were being pursued in order to secure alternative accommodation for current and future residents. Professor Sewel had met with the residents and in light of their concerns about the original intention to seek to use nearby Council flatted accommodation, it was now proposed to bring Carnegie Court at Hillhead halls, suitably upgraded, back into use.

IMS2

- 148 The Court was informed that the Project Board was overseeing an investigation into the delays in the IMS2 project, with a total overspend estimated at £500K, to establish how the situation had arisen and to formulate a strategy to minimise exposure on future projects. Recovery of the overspend would be pursued retrospectively through legal channels, and opportunities for savings on the overspend were also being explored. The completion date for the project remained the end of June 2002.

King's Pavilion

- 149 The Court noted that investigation had revealed that extensive work on the King's Pavilion was required, increasing the estimated cost of the refurbishment by approximately £1M. In the circumstances, the revised project would be reconsidered with other bids for the 2002-03 capital programme.
- 150 The Court noted that the JPFEC had also been informed of the current position on a range of other projects, including the planned replacement of the Chapel Organ; the archaeological investigation at Dunbar Hall prior to the granting of local authority permission for the Hall's demolition; the Pathfinder Project on student residential accommodation and University catering; the Old Aberdeen Town House; the proposal for a new Health Centre; the renewal of dialogue with Aberdeen City Council and The Robert Gordon University regarding the strategic provision of sports facilities across the city; the Medical Research Facility project; the Vertical MRI Scanner project; options for consideration for the relocation of Anatomy; and the proposed refurbishment of the Arts Lecture Theatre.
- 151 In response to comments from Dr Kinnear, it was noted that the refurbishment project did not provide for an expansion in the capacity of the Arts Lecture Theatre; any proposal for expansion would need to be assessed and prioritised as a separate project.

Merger of Sub-Committees of JPFEC

- 152 The Court was informed that the JPFEC had approved a proposal to merge two of its sub-committees, namely the Estates Advisory Committee and the Investment Appraisal Committee, to form a new Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee to provide a more coherent capital expenditure management procedure for the University. A suggestion from Mr Cockburn that the merged committee should include a student member had been taken away for consideration.

Graduation Ceremony Fee

- 153 The Court also noted that the JPFEC had considered a proposal from the President of the Students' Association for abolition or reduction in the Graduation Ceremony Fee. It had not brought forward a recommendation to the Court as it had concluded that no change be made in the current arrangement, already approved by the Court.

Papers for Information

- 154 The Court noted that the following papers had been circulated to JPFEC for information, and were available to Court members on request from the Court & Planning Office:
- *Minister's Letter of Guidance to SHEFC:* Universities Scotland circular, 11 December 2001 enclosing and commenting on the annual letter of guidance from the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning to SHEFC on the funding of higher education 2002-03.

- *Guidance on Institutional Strategic Planning 2002-06 and Implementation of New Condition of Grant.* SHEFC circular letter HE/07/2002, dated 7 February 2002 setting out the Council's requirements for institutional strategic plans for the period 2002-06 and outlining changes to strategic planning requirements arising from SHEFC's new condition of grant with effect from academic year 2002-03.
- *Review of Teaching Funding.* SHEFC circular letter HE/08/2002, dated 8 February 2002 announcing the way forward on the review of teaching funding. Following the Minister's annual letter of guidance, the Council had confirmed that it would implement the in principle decisions which it had taken in 2001, after considering the response to previous consultation, including revised subject funding groups. A decision had also been reached on treatment of fees-only students (option A as outlined in consultation paper HE/02/01 - and supported by the University – to convert an element of undergraduate fees-only to student places). The revised funding method would be put in place from academic year 2002-03.

Staffing and Development Committee (19.2.02)

Sickness Absence Policy

- 155 The Court considered a draft policy statement on sickness absence, which would reinforce the University's commitment to best practice in this matter. The introduction of the new policy would involve a move from manual to computerised record keeping and would facilitate the computerised provision of management information on sickness absence. The implementation process would include the provision of management guidelines and training for line managers.
- 156 In response to comments from Professor Salmon it was noted that an individual member of staff had a right to see a report from Occupational Health on his/her fitness to return to work
- 157 The Court approved for immediate implementation the Sickness Absence Policy and procedure, as set out in the Appendix to this Minute.

Redundancy Committee

- 158 The Court approved the establishment of a University Redundancy Committee with a remit and composition as set out in the Appendix to this Minute, which would ensure University compliance with its obligations under the University Commissioners (Statute Modifications) (University of Aberdeen) Order 1992, and assist in proper and

meaningful consultation in redundancy situations which include the termination of fixed-term contracts.

Staff Appraisal

- 159 The Court considered draft appraisal schemes which would apply to academic (excluding clinical academic) and academic-related staff. These had been developed in full consultation with the AAUT.
- 160 In discussion Professor Graham expressed profound disappointment that the proposed appraisal system excluded any link between appraisal and promotion.
- 161 It was noted that whereas the appraisal scheme operated in the civil service was closely tied into promotion, appraisal schemes in higher education differed and the University had a separate promotion exercise with detailed feedback on career advancement prospects. The proposed appraisal scheme was seen as a developmental exercise. It was less complex, with less paperwork than the scheme proposed four years earlier(which had included a management proposal to link appraisal to promotion). It did refer to potential bridge-building between staff development and promotion but not to discipline, and it had the support of the AAUT. The scheme would be kept under review. It was also confirmed that training budget funds would be set aside to support the appraisal scheme. Training expectations would need to be moderated.
- 162 The Court approved the appraisal schemes for academic (excluding Clinical Academic) staff and academic-related staff, as set out in the Appendix to this Minute.
- 163 The Court also noted that the Staffing and Development Committee had oversight of a range of additional ongoing work within Human Resources, including the negotiation of Appraisal schemes for Secretarial, Technical and Manual staff for implementation during 2002; the launch, in March and April 2002 respectively, of the policies on Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying and Stress, supported by programmes of training and information sessions; progress in a pilot scheme of flexible working for secretarial staff in the University Office and other support areas; the commencement of the 2001/02 Promotion and Discretionary Award Exercise; and the Committee's decision that Contract Research Staff be permitted to take up to three days per annum as development time.

Student Affairs Committee (19.2.02)

Committee on Disabilities

- 164 The Court, for its part approved a recommendation that the existing Sub-Committee on Disabilities of the Student Affairs Committee be discontinued and that its role be subsumed within a new Joint Committee on Disabilities, with the remit and composition set out in the Appendix to this Minute. The new Committee on Disabilities would report to the Senate and Court through the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Staffing & Development Committee and the Student Affairs Committee.

Students' Association: Termly Report

- 165 The Court received a copy of a Termly Report by the Students' Association. The Court endorsed the Student Affairs Committee's welcome of the introduction of such reports.
- 166 The Court also noted, in particular, the recent successes of Aberdeen University students in a range of sports competitions. A helpful analysis had been received from the Students' Association on sports and other facilities requirements.

Students' Association: Constitution

- 167 The Court noted that in the light of experience and as a consequence of the merger of Northern College with the University, the Students' Association had recently approved, for its part, a substantially revised version of its Constitution and related Schedules. The documentation was being scrutinised by a Sub-Group of the Student Affairs Committee and would be forwarded to the Court for approval in due course.

Health and Safety Committee (15.2.02)

Revised Health and Safety Policy

- 168 The Court considered and approved, on the recommendation of the Health and Safety Committee a revised University Health and Safety Policy statement, as set out in the Appendix to this minute.

REPORT FROM SENATE (27.2.02)

University Committee on Teaching and Learning

- 169 The Court noted that, in accordance with a commitment in the Strategic Plan to 'review the role of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning and its links with Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees and central support services, to ensure that it could exercise its responsibilities more effectively', the Senate, for its part, had approved a revised remit and composition of the University Committee on Teaching & Learning.
- 170 The Court approved the UCTL's revised remit and composition as set out in the Appendix to this Minute.
- 171 The Court also noted that in approving recommendations in regard to an *Institutional Policy on the Provision of Career Education, Information and Guidance* and a *Plan for Provision of Career Education, Information and Guidance*, the UCTL had invited the Court to include amongst its nominated representatives on the UCTL a local or regional employer whose expertise could inform the Committee's work. This matter would be referred to the Nominating Committee.

Draft Resolution No of 2002: Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees

- 172 The Court approved the draft Resolution 'Changes in Regulations for Various Degrees', which had been agreed with minor amendments by the Business Committee of the General Council, and included amendments to Supplementary Degree Regulations as approved by the Senate.

Draft Resolution No of 2002: Regulation of Students' Progress for First Degrees

- 173 The Court agreed to forward the draft Resolution 'Regulation of Students' Progress for First Degrees' to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act, 1966.

Job Description: Adviser of Studies

- 174 The Court approved the Senate's recommendation for a revised Job Description for Advisers of Studies, as set out in the Appendix to this Minute.

Library Services Regulations

- 175 The Court approved revised draft Library Services Regulations which had been agreed by the Information Management Committee and by the Senate, as set out in the Appendix to this Minute.

LUCY FELLOWSHIP IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

- 176 The Court received a proposal from the Head of the Department of English that changes be sought to the terms of the Professor AA Jack Trust which governed the Regulations for the Lucy Fellowship in English Literature.
- 177 The Court agreed the proposal, in principle. It also agreed that Professor Torrance, as Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Divinity, approve final amendments to the revised Regulations for the Fellowship.

TRADE UNION RECOGNITION: FACULTY OF EDUCATION:
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND/UNIVERSITY LECTURERS ASSOCIATION (EIS/ULA)

- 178 The Court was reminded that, in June 1981, it had agreed to recognise the AAUT as the sole agent to represent academic and academic-related staff. Following the merger with Northern College of Education and the establishment of the Faculty of Education, another academic trade union, the EIS/ULA, had recognition rights, detailed in a Collective Recognition Agreement between the Northern College of Education and EIS/ULA. While the recognition agreement had transferred across to the University under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, it was not legally enforceable and either party could withdraw from it by giving not less than six months notice in writing. At meetings of the JNCC in November 2001 and February 2002, it had been stated that the University had no intention of recognising the EIS/ULA, but that trade union officials from these unions could be in attendance at University Committee meetings.
- 179 The Court also noted that Dundee University which was in a similar position was not currently prepared to recognise EIS/ULA, and that Edinburgh University had not recognised the EIS/ULA since merger with Moray House College of Education.
- 180 The Court approved a recommendation that formal notice be served on EIS/ULA, terminating the recognition agreement. It also agreed that the AAUT be advised accordingly and encouraged to involve EIS/ULA representatives in consultative processes.