The Court received a presentation from the University Chaplain on the role of the Chaplaincy in the modern university and its importance to the student experience and the staff community.

In discussion, it was noted that a key function of the Chaplaincy was to support an increasingly diverse, multi-faith community of students and staff. The importance of developing the Chaplaincy Centre building to better support the spiritual and pastoral needs of this increasingly diverse community was highlighted. In response to a query regarding the role of the Chapel Committee in relation to the evolving University community, the Court was reminded that during the last formal review of the University’s committee structure, it had agreed to retain the Committee but that this should be subject to review. The Court noted that such a review would be undertaken. The Court also noted the important role of paid and honorary denominational chaplains and suggested that further consideration be given to the formal oversight of their duties.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December were approved subject to Ms Craw’s attendance being correctly noted and minute 88 being amended to reflect the late Rector’s suggestion for information boards on campus to provide information not only regarding key buildings, but key events and people in the history of the University.

The Senior Governor noted the success of the event held to install Dr Mackie as Rector. The Senior Governor noted that it was Councillor Stewart’s last meeting and thanked him for his valuable contribution to the work of the Court and the University.

The Principal reported that the Chancellor, Professor Haites and the President of the Students’ Association were that day representing the University at an event for Privileged Bodies to present a Loyal Address to Her Majesty The Queen at Buckingham Palace as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

The Principal reported that since the last meeting of Court a number of league tables and rankings had been published, one of which ranked the University 2nd in the UK for collaboration.
The Principal noted that the Scottish Funding Council’s (SFC) indicative financial allocation to institutions for 2012/13, announced in December 2011 (See Minutes 179 & 194), had been positive. The Principal explained that the University’s increase was among the smaller percentage increases due to the reallocation of funding for RUK students. The final letter confirming all SFC funding lines was expected in late March 2012 but was unlikely to alter significantly from the indicative position.

The Principal reported on a number of recent important research grant awards, the broadly positive outcome of the National Student Survey, improvements in student retention figures, and fundraising. The Principal also provided the Court with an update on progress on a sector-wide issue relating to an EU Directive and Dentistry Training.

REPORT FROM THE RECTOR

The Rector noted his thanks and appreciation for the recent installation ceremony held by the University.

The Rector agreed to provide future written reports for inclusion in the circulation of Court papers.

The Rector noted that one of his key priorities would be to engage Court with proposals to continuously improve the student experience at Aberdeen. It was noted that there were a number of related qualitative performance measures most notably the National Student Survey and surveys undertaken by the University.

The Rector raised the development of theatre or performing space on campus and potential future use of King’s Pavilion. The Court agreed that performance space was of importance to the student community and noted that performance space was included in the capital plan as an unprioritised project but that further consideration was needed on what the purpose and function of such a space would be, how it compared to provision elsewhere in the City and whether it was a project that should be developed in partnership with others. The feasibility of such a project as a future fundraising priority would also need to be tested. Comments from other members of Court regarding the importance of community space and social space on campuses were also noted.

FINANCE

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL ALLOCATION FOR 2012/13

The Court received a paper on the indicative funding allocation from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for 2012/13, the key points of which were:

- Overall, Aberdeen’s teaching grant increased from £42M in 2011/12 to £45.4M in 2012/13. However, within this increase, the removal of SFC funding for entrants from the Rest of the UK (RUK), equated to a reduction of teaching grant of £3.1M.
- a full restoration of the 2011/12 reductions to the teaching unit of resource plus an uplift of 2.6% (£15.2M) to the sector-wide Main Teaching Grant.
- support for 300 additional funded places in science and engineering based subjects in 2012/13 (£1.9M) based on research strengths, 38 of which had been allocated to Aberdeen.
- an increase to Research Excellence Grant of £10M (5%) to £223M. 2* research had been removed from the quality profile and was no longer funded. Aberdeen’s funding for research increased by 4.9% from £22.5M in 2011/12 to £23.6M in 2012/13.
- the introduction of “Outcome Agreements” between the SFC and individual institutions.
The Court received papers providing a comparison of the University’s financial position with that of universities in Scotland and selected peer competitors from across the UK. In discussion, staff turnover was raised and it was agreed to receive a report on staff turnover at the next meeting of Court. It was also agreed that future versions of the accounts comparison paper should make wider reference to the University’s targets.

MANAGEMENT REPORT TO JANUARY 2012

The Court received a summary of the management report to January 2012 and noted that:

- the results to date showed a £1.3M surplus before exceptional items compared with a target surplus of £0.8M as a result of underspends in operating expenditure budgets;
- the management actions being taken were expect to return the University towards target surplus before year end;
- the bank balance as at 31st January 2012 was £28M with new borrowings of £10M at a fixed interest rate;
- capital spend is £3.8M behind budget due to delayed spend.

STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

The Court received a paper outlining further detail on the Strategy for Growth considered by Court at its meeting in December 2011. The paper set out actions being taken in relation to areas where there were opportunities for growth, in particular RUK student recruitment, distance-learning online provision, international student recruitment and research, and a proposal to target investment of £3M in staff recruitment to strategically important areas.

DISTANCE LEARNING

The Court noted that the University had been approached by a distance learning/online provider to explore the potential for a partnership to exploit opportunities for the provision of fully online degrees, an area in the UK where there were relatively few competitors to the Open University.

The Court noted that discussions were at an early stage and further due diligence was required on the scope, complexity, marketing and opportunities and risks of the potential partnership. The Court agreed that the University should continue to take forward the discussions with a view to Court considering more detailed proposals in due course.

INTERNATIONALISATION

The Court noted that the University was reviewing its strategy for international student recruitment particularly in relation to the postgraduate taught market. This was being informed by an externally commissioned review under consideration by management. The Court noted there could be resource implications for implementing the reports’s recommendations including a review of the postgraduate portfolio, and that this would be reflected in the budgets presented to Court for approval in June.

The Court noted that it would discuss a draft Internationalisation Strategy at its next meeting.
RESEARCH

188 The Court noted an update on preparations for the forthcoming 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). Regular progress reports on REF preparations would be brought to the Operating Board and at an appropriate stage the Court would also be invited to discuss the University’s planned submission.

INVESTMENT IN STAFFING

189 The Court agreed that the University should invest in capacity in priority areas, and proceed with the staff appointments summarised in the paper. It noted the intention was to recruit at least 50 posts at a cost of £3M to ensure the University had the capacity to:

− pursue the specific opportunities that had been identified for growth and the achievement of targets in relation to the Research Excellence Framework; and
− build on the interdisciplinary research themes identified in the Strategic Plan.

190 In addition to targeted recruitment aimed at growing intellectual capital the University would continue to recruit high calibre academic staff in response to voluntary staff turnover.

191 The Court noted that the 2012/13 budget paper presented to the June Court would reflect these plans.

192 The Court agreed that it would receive a paper outlining the process undertaken by University management to identify the areas for the targeted recruitment.

REPORT FROM THE OPERATING BOARD

193 The Court received a report on items considered at the meetings of the Operating Board on 25 January and 6 March 2012.

FINANCE AND FUNDING

SFC Funding Announcement

194 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered a summary analysis of the indicative funding allocation from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for 2012/13. (See Minutes 173 & 179).

Universities’ Accounts Analysis

195 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered an analysis of the University’s financial position compared to all Scottish and selected UK competitor universities. (See Minute 180).

Monthly Management Accounts

196 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered the Monthly Management Reports for the periods ending 31 December 2011 and 31 January 2012. (See Minute 182).

STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

197 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered an update on the Strategy for Growth at its meeting on 25 January, and had noted that a further more detailed update would be presented to the meeting of Court on 27 March 2012. (See Minutes 183-192).
RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK UPDATE

The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered a report on preparations towards the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It had discussed the likelihood of the University achieving its REF targets, and the actions being taken to monitor the risks associated with the exercise. The Board had noted the proposals being developed to ensure appropriate capacity in strategic areas. The Board would continue to monitor preparations and REF targets as work progressed towards submission in 2013.

STUDENT POPULATION PLANNING

The Court noted the Operating Board had reviewed admissions statistics for September 2012, entry which overall indicated that the University had increased slightly its share of the Scottish market and was on target to achieve its approved intake of students from the Rest of the UK (RUK), although RUK applications were down against competitors. The Board had also noted that applications from postgraduate students were slightly up against the same time last year, but this remained an area where further growth was required.

The Court noted that the Board had also discussed the likelihood of the University over-recruiting against its Government limit for Scottish/EU undergraduates. The combination of buoyant intakes in previous years and a Government-set target in 2011/12, to maintain the 2010/11 population size, meant that remaining within limit in 2012/13 would require a significantly reduced intake. Discussions with the Scottish Funding Council had resulted in the University being given a temporary uplift to its limit of 300 to ease this situation. The Operating Board agreed that over-recruitment remained a risk and as such, should be added to the University’s Corporate Risk Register.

ESTATES AND CAPITAL

The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered updates on the following major projects, Rowett Estate Disposal, Institute of Nutrition & Health Building, New Library, Fraser Noble Refurbishment, 50/52 College Bounds, the Aquatic Centre and Student accommodation.

INTEGRATED IT SOLUTION: UNIVERSITY RESOURCE PLANNING

The Court noted that the Operating Board had received a presentation and paper on the University Resource Planning programme (URP). The Operating Board had agreed that the presentation of the overall costs, direct and indirect, should be reviewed in future reporting. It had also recommended that the cost benefit analysis be revisited to ensure that all benefits were captured in addition to the direct financial benefits.

The Court noted that the Operating Board had discussed the governance structure and arrangements for the management of the programme, emphasising the transformational change to existing processes that would be required to ensure the success of the programme. The programme was therefore less about IT, and more about change management, and the Board agreed that the governance structure needed to reflect this. Following this feedback, University management had reviewed the role and structure of the URP Programme Board and had reported back to the Operating Board on 6 March.

The Court noted that the Board had approved the release of funding from the approved budget of [ ] to take forward the specification and tendering process. [Minute redacted: commercially sensitive]
GOVERNANCE REVIEW

205 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered a paper on the Scottish Higher Education Governance Review. In general the Board felt that the Review report lacked clarity and did not provide a convincing case in support of all its conclusions and recommendations. The Board discussed a number of specific issues arising from the report, noting that the University’s position would be considered by the Governance and Nominations Committee and discussed in detail by Court at its meeting in March 2012. (See Minutes 215-219).

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL: STRATEGIC DIALOGUE MEETING

206 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered a paper outlining arrangements for the Strategic Dialogue Meeting with the Scottish Funding Council on 4 April 2012.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

207 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received reports from the following sub-committees: Health and Safety Committee, Risk Management Committee and Strategic Business Ventures Group.

208 The Court noted that the Operating Board had discussed the remit of the Strategic Business Ventures Group, which had been approved by Court in 2008, and recommended that the Group review the remit to ensure it remained appropriate and report back to the Operating Board.

DENTISTRY DEGREES

209 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received an oral update on a sector-wide issue that had arisen relating to an EU Directive on Dentistry Training. The University was taking action to address this with the General Dental Council, Health Department and other UK Higher Education dentistry degree providers.

TUITION FEES: BSc FOUNDATION YEAR

210 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and approved a proposed tuition fee of £13,900 for the International BSc Foundation Year Programme, subject to the description of the costs associated with additional tutorial sessions being amended.

UPDATE ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

211 The Court noted that the Operating Board had received and considered updates on developments relating to industrial relations.

212 The Unite union had been unable to note or agree the 2011 offer of a salary uplift of £150 to all staff, and had secured a mandate for industrial action (action short of a strike). At the University’s Partnership Negotiating and Consultative Committee (PNCC) Unite had requested an additional £100 payment to all staff at Aberdeen, thereby enhancing the national pay offer from £150 to £250, which Unite considered was consistent with the minimum pay offer in the public sector to lower paid staff. If unaffordable, Unite had urged consideration to be given to an additional £100 payment for all lower graded staff i.e. Grades 1-4. This proposal had been endorsed by PNCC and the Court approved a recommendation from the Operating Board to make an additional one off payment of £100 to such staff at a cost of £79k. In discussion, it was also agreed to consider whether approval for such payments should continue to be a matter for Court decision.

213 The Court noted that the Operating Board had also considered an update on the dispute between the University and College Union (UCU) and higher education employers on changes that had been made to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS).
STAFFING POLICIES

214 The Court noted that the Board had received, and for its part, approved proposed revisions to the following staffing policies and procedures; Disciplinary Procedure, Grievance Procedure, Policy and Procedure for the Management of Dismissal on the Grounds of Redundancy and Policy and Procedure for Hearing an Appeal. (See Mins 237-239 & 254)

SCOTTISH REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

215 The Court received a paper on the Report of the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland, including a draft University response to the recommendations which had been requested to inform further discussions between the Scottish Committee of University Chairmen (SCUC) and the Scottish Government. The Court also received a briefing on the Hutton Review of Fair Pay in the Public Sector. The Court was also advised of comments that had been received from three members who were absent regarding the review of Higher Education Governance and the Universities suggested position.

216 In discussion, it was noted that the Court acknowledged the importance of increasing diversity in its membership but that the issue of how best to address this was for the University to consider separately to the national Review under consideration. Some members’ suggestion that the University’s response should oppose more strongly the proposal of a national advisory forum was noted. The Court was also assured that the University would continue the recently introduced increased level of transparency and reporting to Court from the Remuneration Committee. The Court noted Councillor Howatson’s support for the Review’s recommendations that meetings of Court should be open to the public and that Court membership should include trade unions representation.

217 At the request of the Senior Governor, Mr Pack to led the Court’s discussion of points in the review regarding the Chairs of Governing Bodies. In discussion of the appointments process for the Vice-Chair of Court, the Court was reminded that the appointment of the current Vice-Chair had followed public advertisement but that the Governance & Nominations Committee would be invited to review the current process.

218 The Court approved the draft response as the University’s ‘in principle’ institutional position and agreed that this should be shared with the Scottish Committee of University Chairmen.

219 The Court also agreed that should the University subsequently require, or be invited to present its institutional position to the Cabinet Secretary, that the ‘in principle’ response would be appropriately adapted under the authority of the Senior Governor, Convenor of the Governance & Nominations Committee and the Principal.

SPATIAL PLANNING

220 The Court received a paper seeking approval for the University to proceed with consultation on the cessation of Spatial Planning programmes, and discussions with staff about their future integration into other related areas of activity.

221 The University Court approved the following recommendations:

− That the College of Physical Sciences should undertake a planned and managed withdrawal from accredited provision of two Postgraduate Masters programmes (Urban Planning and Real Estate (UPRE) and Rural Planning and Environmental Management (RPEM)) with effect from 2012/13.

− That the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) accredited Postgraduate MLE Masters programme should be retained, strengthened and transferred into Geography.
That current UG students on Planning Degree programmes should be provided with appropriate courses to enable them to complete their programme of study. If students wished to transfer to other HEIs, this will be supported.

Consultation with members of Spatial Planning staff likely to be affected by the proposed changes should be initiated immediately to look at a number of potential options.

Prior to such consultation, the University should alert the Universities & Colleges Union (UCU) to the proposals and engage them in the consultation process. The Student Association should also be advised and consulted, as well as the small number of current undergraduate students who might be affected.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

AUDIT COMMITTEE

222 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting of 26 January 2012.

223 The Court also approved or noted the following:

*Internal Audit Service: Reappointment and Tendering*

224 The Court noted that the University’s contract with its Internal Auditor, Mazars was due to end on 31 July 2012 and that the University had the option to extend the contract for one year, in the first instance, or to go out to tender.

225 The Court, on the recommendation of the Audit Committee, agreed to extend the contract for one year.

GOVERNANCE & NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

226 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Governance and Nominations Committee at its meeting of 25 January 2012.

227 The Court also approved or noted the following:

*Vice-Principal Membership of Court*

228 The Court noted that, following a change in Vice-Principal portfolios, Professor Houlihan who had formerly been Vice-Principal for Research & Commercialisation, and was now Vice-Principal (Internationalisation), had stood down as *ex officio* member of Court. The Committee had agreed that, in keeping with past practice, a new Vice-Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange should be one of the three *ex officio* Vice-Principal members of Court alongside the Senior Vice-Principal and the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning.

229 The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee, agreed that Professor Hannaford, Vice-Principal for Research & Knowledge Exchange, be appointed a member of Court, *ex officio*, with immediate effect.

*Governor Appraisal Questionnaire*

230 The Court noted that one of the recommendations arising from the Internal Review of Governance had been to introduce a light touch approach to governor appraisal by means of an annual questionnaire.

231 The Court approved the draft questionnaire and noted that further consideration would be given as to how the questionnaire should inform any wider appraisal of members.
Provider of Legal Services to the University

232 The Court noted that the University had been advised that its recently reappointed external legal advisers, McGrigors, were expected to merge with another firm, Pinsent Masons.

233 The Court noted that the Committee had agreed that it had no concerns regarding this, provided the University was assured that it would receive continuity of service and that the pricing levels agreed through the recent tendering exercise would remain in force. The University had since received, in writing, confirmation that the merger of the two firms would take place with effect from 1 May 2012 and confirmation of the assurances sought by the Committee.

234 The Court agreed that the appointment of McGrigors should continue and transfer to Pinsent Masons on merger.

Honorary Degree Process

235 The Court noted that the Committee had received and noted a paper which detailed the background and procedures underlying the Senate's decision for the award of Honorary Degrees.

236 The Court noted that the Committee had discussed whether Court should be made aware of decisions of the Senate regarding the award of Honorary Degrees. It was agreed that at an appropriate point following approval by the Senate of nominations, the University Secretary should advise Court of such decisions, whilst also recognising the need for confidentiality to be protected.

Revised Staffing Policies and Procedures: Redundancy Committee

237 The Court noted that the Committee had received a paper on revised policies and procedures on staff discipline, grievance, redundancy and appeals, which had been agreed in principle with campus trades unions following Privy Council approval of the Ordinance to replace the 1992 University Commissioners Ordinance. (See Minutes 214 & 254)

238 The Committee had noted that under the terms of the new Ordinance and related policy and procedures, the Redundancy Committee would cease to exist, and would be replaced by an internal Redundancy Dismissal Panel, which would act on behalf of, and report its decisions to the Court on a regular basis.

239 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the proposed composition of the Panel to be a Vice-Principal (Convenor) and one other member of staff at the level of Head of School/Section. The Convenor would have the discretion to invite one additional member of staff to assist in the decision making process.

Woolf inquiry into LSE’s Links with Libya

240 The Court noted that the Committee had received, for information, a paper on the outcome of the Woolf Inquiry into the London School of Economics’ links with Libya.

241 The Court noted that the Committee had discussed the implications of the report for higher education institutions. The Committee had agreed that it would, at a future meeting, consider the procedures the University of Aberdeen had in place to address points raised by the Woolf Inquiry, together with the possible development of a related Code of Ethics.

242 The Court also noted that the Committee had agreed that it should receive a paper which outlined the relationship between the Development Trust and the University, and the procedures the Trust had in place for reviewing gifts and donations.
CHAPEL COMMITTEE

243 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Chapel Committee at its meeting of 21 February 2012.

Proposal for the Development of the Chaplaincy Centre

244 The Court noted:

(i) a recommendation of the Chapel Committee regarding the potential development of a refurbished and extended Chaplaincy Centre; and

(ii) that further work would now be undertaken to develop a case for the project through the University’s capital planning and prioritisation process.

STAFFING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

245 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Staffing & Development Committee at its meeting of 28 February 2012.

STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

246 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the Student Affairs Committee at its meeting of 20 February 2012.

Aberdeen University Students’ Association (AUSA) Constitution

247 The Court noted a report on revisions to the AUSA Constitution, and in particular changes made to demonstrate AUSA independence from the University. The Court noted that it was for the University to attach conditions to the annual grant to AUSA to ensure as far as possible, that the University can comply with the Education Act 1994.

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

248 The Court noted a report of the principal items of business considered by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning at its meeting on 25 January 2012.

ROUTINE BUSINESS NOT PROPOSED FOR DISCUSSION

APPOINTMENT OF VICE-PRINCIPAL

249 The Court, on the recommendation of the Principal, approved an extension to the period of appointment of Professor Bryan MacGregor as Vice Principal and Head of College (Physical Sciences) for a further period of 3 years to conclude 31 March 2015.

PROCUREMENT POLICY AND GUIDE TO PROCEDURES

250 The Court approved revisions to the Procurement Policy and the associated Guide to Procedures.

SENATE REPORT

Draft Resolution No of 2012 [Supplementary Regulations First Degrees in Education]

251 The Court approved the draft Resolution No of 2012 [Supplementary Regulations First Degrees in Education] from the Senate and agreed to forward it to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

Draft Resolution No of 2012 [Supplementary Regulations for First Degrees in Science]
The Court approved the draft Resolution No of 2012 [Supplementary Regulations First Degrees in Science] from the Senate and agreed to forward it to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

Draft Resolution No of 2012 [Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees]

The Court approved the draft Resolution No of 2012 [Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees] from the Senate and agreed to forward it to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

STAFFING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Court received and approved the following staff policies and procedures which had been developed to harmonise with the revised Employment Ordinance approved by the Privy Council in December 2011 as the replacement for the 1992 University Commissioners Ordinance:

- Disciplinary Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Policy and Procedure for the Management of Dismissal on the Grounds of Redundancy
- Policy and Procedure for Hearing an Appeal

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Tuesday 26 June 2012.

The next scheduled meeting of Court would be held on Tuesday 26 June 2012 at 9.00am in the Linklater Rooms.