

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 23 March 1999

Present: The Rector, the Principal, Dr R Scott Brown, Professors I Macdonald, D Houlihan, S Logan, B MacGregor, D Ogston, P Sloane, Councillor Clyne, Ms M Main, Mr A Mair, Dr N Milne, Mr A Salvesen, Mr G Stevenson, Dr H Fullerton, Mr J Michie, Mrs A Skene and Mr P Dickson, and by invitation Professor G Catto with Mr S Cannon, Ms C Cook, Dr P Murray, Mr M Ord, Mr R Taylor, Mr S Gordon, Mr D Yule, Mrs M Barraclough and Ms M Strachan (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J P Grant, Dr C Millar and Professors Forrester and Penman.

MINUTES

113 The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 February 1999 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

114 The Principal reported on the successful formal launch of the Sixth Century Campaign in King's College Chapel on the previous evening.

115 The Principal said that, in addition to the major estates developments currently being advanced, for example, the issues relating to the proposed merger with the Northern College and the development of Marischal College, it was desirable that the University should take a more comprehensive view of the structure and composition of the Old Aberdeen campus. In particular, there was a need to consider how the University might physically present itself more favourably to visitors and the world at large. Clearly, such an ambitious review of the physical structure of the campus could have major, and possibly prohibitive, financial implications but, in the meantime, the Principal had asked the Senior Vice-Principal and the Secretary to consider how such a review might be carried out.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

116 Introducing the proposal that the University proceed towards participation in the Investors in People Scheme, the Secretary explained that whilst formerly it had been necessary for the entire institution to commit to achievement of the IIP standard as a single entity, a new "building block" approach permitted an incremental progression towards the standard. Already three areas of the University were keenly interested in working towards the standard, and the Court's endorsement of the proposal was sought, in order that the first stages of implementation (including the important step of consultation with the campus unions) might proceed.

117 A number of members expressed their warm support of the University's commitment to achieving the IIP standard, commending the IIP scheme from personal experience as a highly relevant people orientated initiative. Attention was drawn, however, to the vital importance of full engagement of senior management and of the top level in each department and unit if the standard were to be achieved, and it was questioned whether the target of completion in as long as five years might fail to invest the initiative with sufficient impetus and commitment.

118 The Court approved the proposal subject to further consideration by senior management of the recommendation of several members that the target completion period should be three years, taking account also of the other major exercises, for example, preparation for the RAE and implementation of the finance system, which would be occupying the University at large in the immediate future.

STRATEGIC ISSUES FOR SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION

- 119 The Court approved the University's draft responses to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council's Consultation Paper 5/98, *Funding for the Future*, and 6/98, *Strategic Issues for Scottish Higher Education*, with the addition to the former of a statement to the effect that any revision of rates of funding within the Council's funding formula should take account of the rates of funding by HEFCE, in order to avoid anomalies which create unreasonable disadvantage for Scottish Universities competing in the same fields with institutions south of the border.

DRAFT RESOLUTION No OF 1999
 [SECOND AMENDMENT TO RESOLUTION No 50 OF 1972
 (MATRICULATED STUDENTS – STATUS DEFINITION)]

- 120 Introducing the Draft Resolution, the Secretary said that the intention was to clarify and formalise the current practice, by which full registration was withheld from those in debt to the University, thus effectively denying the status of matriculated student by stating that, in addition to the existing requirements for qualification as a matriculated student, the University might withhold matriculated student status from any person in debt to the University.
- 121 Mr Welsh expressed his concern at the use of the term "at its entire discretion" and at the failure to mention specifically debt on account of accommodation fees.
- 122 The Court agreed that the Secretary should discuss such drafting matters and the advisability of including some form of appeals procedure with the Senior Lay member of Court and the President of the SRC, and that thereafter the draft Resolution be forwarded to the Senate and to the General Council and be made generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

- 123 Mr Welsh reported that, on the initiative of the Presidents of the SRC, the Union and the Athletic Association, a referendum of students had been held on Thursday 18 March 1999 to seek student opinion on the proposal that the three principal student organisations be merged to form Aberdeen University Students Association. He said that while the existing separate arrangements for the three organisations had worked well in the past, tightening budgets and decreasing participation argued for a more integrated arrangement in which the benefits of support staff and of fund raising potential could be shared and deployed more effectively in the student interest. The turnout of 24% for the referendum was the highest in any Scottish student poll for the past twenty years, and a large majority had voted in support of the proposal. The students were now looking to the University for assistance in bringing the proposal to reality including, if possible, relocation to shared premises.
- 124 Members welcomed Mr Welsh's report, noting that the Student Organisations Committee would be asked to take a more proactive role with this new development, and that it was intended to bring the Aberdeen Students Charities Campaign within the remit of the Student Organisations Committee at an early stage.
- 125 The Court commended an expeditious approach to the promotion of the development, and agreed that appropriate planning should move forward quickly and be reported to the Court in due course.

RESIDENTIAL AND CATERING BUDGETS 1999/2000: HALL FEES

- 126 In presenting the recommendations from the Finance and Estates Committee for charges for session 1999/2000, Mr Mair referred to the importance of the ongoing major review of the provision of residences and catering for students. A highly expensive refurbishment requirement had been identified, and already, with a need to finance the more recently-acquired additional residential accommodation, residences and catering had been in deficit in recent years. Rises in charges had been too low to match rising costs, despite the introduction of economies and efficiencies, which, for example, seemed likely to reduce the current year planned deficit from £822K to approximately £548K.

- 127 Regrettably, simply in order to take the first step towards the ultimate aim of a balanced budget, an increase in charges averaging 6% was required for the coming year. The preparation of the recommendations had benefited from substantial discussion with student representatives and, in particular, from input from the President of the SRC. His help had been particularly valuable in determining the proposed differential increases within the overall increase of 6% approved by the Finance and Estates Committee.
- 128 The Secretary undertook to provide the Rector with answers to more detailed questions including the provision of the most recent internal audit report on the residences and catering area.
- 129 The Court approved the recommendations from the Finance and Estates Committee for charges for session 1999/2000, representing an average increase of 6%.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 130 Introducing the progress report and the summary of the intended merger proposal document, Professor Macdonald expressed his regret that it had proved impossible to bring the full merger proposal to this meeting of the Court, as had been intended. He stated his conviction, however, that, following a further meeting of the Tripartite Group (representatives of the University of Aberdeen and Dundee and the Northern College of Education), the merger proposal would be complete before the end of March.
- 131 Professor Macdonald was confident also that the proposal would comply fully with the conditions for the merger stipulated by the Court. More particularly, the Northern College staff were enthusiastic about the academic benefits of merger, the planned increase in funded numbers for teacher training would enhance the rigorously assessed financial viability of the new Faculty of Education, and the proposal would include the recommendation that the capital receipts from the sale of the Northern College campus be deployed to create accommodation for the new Faculty of Education on the Old Aberdeen campus. It was clear, however, that the merger was only viable with appropriate input of transitional funding from the Funding Council through the Strategic Change grant initiative.
- 132 The Court approved Professor Macdonald's recommendation that its authority be delegated to a group consisting of the Senior Lay Member, the Principal and the Chairman of the Finance and Estates Committee to approve the release of the merger proposal document for the purposes of consultation, noting that, thereafter, the document would be made widely available around 19 April in all three institutions and to interested external bodies before final consideration by Senate and Court in June.

NAMING OF BUILDINGS

- 133 The Court agreed, in the light of the current working practice, that in future the naming of parts of the University estate should normally be associated with funding or an appropriate gift to the University, noting that any exception would require the approval of the Court.

CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF RESEARCH STAFF

- 134 The Court approved for immediate implementation the amended Code of Practice on the Employment of Research Staff as agreed by the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee, and as set out in the appendix to this minute.
- 135 Professor Macdonald welcomed Ms Main's suggestion that the approach taken in the Code to the employment of academic research staff be extended to non-academic staff on fixed-term contracts, and said that the suggestion would be taken forward in the context of the ongoing consideration of conditions of employment for non-academic staff.

RESOLUTION NO 213 OF 1999 [CHANGES IN REGULATIONS FOR VARIOUS DEGREES]

- 136 The Court, having noted that the Resolution had been approved by the Senate, and that a number of textual amendments had been included in the light of comments made by the Business Committee of the General Council, decided to pass the Resolution as set out in the appendix to this minute.

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ASSEMBLY:
AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION AND LAWS

- 137 On the recommendation of the Student Organisations Committee, the Court approved amendments to the AUSA Constitution and Laws, which had been approved, for their part, by the Students' Representative Council as set out in the appendix to this minute.

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY DEBATER: REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTION

- 138 On the recommendation of the Student Organisations Committee, the Court approved a revision of the Debater Constitution, which had been approved, for their part by the Debater, as set out in the appendix to this minute.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS HEALTH RESEARCH INSTITUTE

- 139 On the recommendation of the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences, the Court approved the establishment of a Highlands and Islands Health Research Institute as a collaborative development to promote health-related research and development in the Highland region, involving as partners the University, Raigmore Hospital (where the Institute would be based) and the Chief Medical Officer's Resource Centre with input from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and other partners.

SIGNING AUTHORITIES FOR RESEARCH APPLICATIONS AND AWARDS

- 140 The Court approved a procedure to be followed for signing applications and awards for the University of Aberdeen as set out in the appendix to this minute.

APPOINTMENT OF DEANS: SELECTION COMMITTEE

- 141 The Court approved the appointment of Dr Scott Brown, Professor Macdonald and Professor Houlihan (in addition to the Principal as Convener) as the Court's representatives on the Selection Committee for the appointment of the Deans of Arts & Divinity and Social Sciences & Law.

GUIDE FOR MEMBERS OF GOVERNING BODIES OF
SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICE BENCHMARKS

- 142 The Court received a copy of the SHEFC Guide for Members of Governing Bodies of Scottish Higher Education Institutions and Good Practice Benchmarks, and noted that a working party consisting of Dr Scott Brown (Convener), Mr Mair, Professor MacGregor, Dr Milne and Mr Cannon would examine the University's practice in comparison with the SHEFC benchmarks and report to the Audit Committee before onward transmission of the group's deliberations to the Court.