

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 1999

Present: Rector, Principal, Dr R Scott Brown, Professors I Macdonald, D Houlihan, S Logan, J Penman, Dr G Roberts, Dr G McQuillan, Mr D Welsh, Mr J Grant, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Dr N Milne, Mr A Salvesen, Mr G Stevenson, Dr H Fullerton, Professor D Ogston, Mrs A Skene, and, by invitation, Professor G Catto and Mr P Dickson with Mr S Cannon, Mr S Gordon, Dr P Murray, Mr M Ord, Mr R Taylor, Mr D Yule, Mrs M Barraclough, Ms K Eldridge, Ms E Morton and Ms M Strachan (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clyne and Johnston, Professors Forrester, MacGregor and Sloane, and Mr J Michie.

MINUTES

173 The minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 1999 were approved.

COURT MEMBERS

174 The Court warmly endorsed the appreciation expressed by the Rector of the contribution made by Mr Welsh to the business of the Court and of the diligence and hard work which he had devoted to his role of SRC President over the past year.

175 The Rector also expressed her gratitude for the service given by Paul Dickson and Hamish Chenevix-Trench, and reported that she had appointed Ms Lisa Dromgoole as her new Assessor.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

176 The Court approved the Principal's suggestion that the Court's congratulations be conveyed to Professor Elizabeth Russell, on the award of the CBE, and Honorary Professor Ian Bremner, on the award of the OBE, in the recent Queen's Birthday Honours.

177 Mr Cannon reported that, following the AUT's rejection of the employers' offer of a 3.5% salary increase for academic and academic-related staff, a one-day national strike had been held on 25 May. Approximately 140 (slightly less than 10%) of the University's academic and academic-related staff had taken strike action, but AAUT officials had co-operated with management in working constructively to minimise disruption to students. The AAUT's avoidance of a further four-day period of industrial action in June, while securing agreement to press ahead with local negotiations on issues of particular relevance to staff at Aberdeen, was particularly appreciated. There remained the possibility of disruption in the summer, especially in relation to the intention of the AUT nationally to target the admissions process, but it was to be hoped that, with goodwill on both sides, any disruption could be minimised.

178 Mr Cannon confirmed a decision on the deployment of salary costs saved through docking the pay of staff on strike would not be taken until the balance between the savings accrued and the additional costs incurred in avoiding disruption had been calculated. He believed that it would be inappropriate to spend public funds on external charities, no matter how worthy, but other possibilities could be considered.

- 179 The Principal expressed his satisfaction with the high standard of recent academic appointments. Grant income for research was increasing and further improvement was a priority. Teaching standards were also high and the University had received an outstanding QAA assessment. A thorough analysis of the University's residential and catering provision was being undertaken and changes in the structure of other student welfare services was planned. External Relations were continuing to progress well in developing the University's fundraising effort. Relations between the University and the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils were very positive as were relations with the business community.
- 180 The Principal reported that the Senior Management Group would shortly introduce structural changes to strengthen and streamline governance and management.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

- 181 Mr Cannon reminded the Court that the PricewaterhouseCoopers review of management and administrative structures had included clear recommendations that senior management should work to eliminate an existing confusion between policy and operational matters and that organisational structures should be remodelled to reflect organisational priorities more closely. A review of governance had already begun as had a review of organisational structures. Human Resources and the Estates Section would be reorganised during the summer vacation and Faculty teams would be established with effect from the autumn.
- 182 The Senior Management Group, chaired by the Principal, would meet fortnightly and an Implementation Group, convened by the Senior Vice-Principal, would be responsible for ensuring that business was taken forward between meetings. Senior officers would continue to provide expert and professional advice to these groups.
- 183 Mr Cannon indicated that proposed revisions to the committee structure would be brought to the Court in the autumn.

BETT REPORT

- 184 The Principal intimated that the Bett Report on the Independent Review of Higher Education Pay and Conditions had been published on 23 June. The report's recommendations were broadly positive, but the coincidence of the publication of the report with a period of industrial dispute was not propitious.

AURIS BUSINESS PLAN

- 185 The Court noted that the AURIS Business Plan for the forthcoming year had not been completed in sufficient time for scrutiny and approval by the Court by the June meeting. The Court approved the arrangement proposed by the Finance and Estates Committee, whereby the Plan would be circulated for scrutiny and comment by members of the Finance and Estates Committee and forwarded for consideration in the light of the comments received to the Principal and the Convener of the Finance and Estates Committee, to whom the Court delegated authority to approve the Plan, if appropriate, on behalf of the Court.

CONDUCT OF COURT BUSINESS

- 186 The Principal reminded the Court that, following the decision in 1997 to rearrange the conduct of Court business, it had been agreed that the arrangements should be reviewed annually. Mr Cannon indicated that, in the autumn, Dr Scott Brown and he would bring forward further recommendations regarding Court business and invited members to comment on present arrangements in the interim.

ALDROUGHTY HOUSE

- 187 The Principal reported that Aldroughty House had incurred losses of c£10K a year over the preceding two decades and that it was expected that the loss in 1998/99 would be £18K-£20K. The level of usage by present and retired members of staff was very low and, consequently, it was difficult for the University to justify the substantial investment required to implement the improvements recommended by the Fire Department in an area which was not part of the University's core business. The University had received advice that it could legally dispose of Aldroughty.
- 188 Members of Court, including the Principal, reported that they had received a number of representations from staff and students expressing the view that further effort should be devoted to exploring possible future uses for the House and Estate that might allow Aldroughty to continue in University ownership. Mr Cannon reminded members that, two years ago, the Finance and Estates Committee had charged the Aldroughty Management Committee with seeking ways to make the operation of the House and Lodge cost neutral. In the event, the losses incurred had increased over the period and the Finance and Estates Committee had concluded that the House and Lodge should be shut. The Committee's recommendations to the Court had been carefully drafted to ensure that due care was devoted to ensuring that best value be obtained in the event of disposal of Aldroughty. The House would be considered in relation to the rest of the Estate, part of which was currently let to the Scottish Agricultural College on an agricultural tenancy. Alternative uses for the Estate, excepting the House and Lodge, had been considered and found to be impractical. The Finance and Estates Committee thought it imprudent to commit the Court to a specified use of the proceeds of an eventual sale, given that it was impossible to predict the circumstances that might obtain at that time. However, it was emphasised that, when the House and, possibly, the Estate were sold, consideration would be given to all the concerns raised. Dr Scott Brown emphasised that the wording of the recommendations was designed to include the donor's wishes as a factor to be taken into account.
- 189 Members agreed that it was important that a full explanation of the circumstances that had led to the Finance and Estates Committee's recommendations should be made available to all those concerned about the issue.
- 190 The Court approved the recommendation that Aldroughty House and Lodge be closed with effect from September 1999.
- 191 The Court agreed that the Principal, the Convener of the Finance and Estates Committee and the Senior Lay Member investigate how to achieve best value in disposal of the asset (including, if appropriate, the Estate) and return with a recommendation to the Court.
- 192 The Court agreed that, after Aldroughty had been disposed of, further consideration would be given to how any receipts from such a sale might be used, taking account of all relevant interests.

FRANCHISE/VALIDATION AGREEMENT WITH PROPOSED NEW
MEDICAL SCHOOL IN COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

- 193 In response to a question from Miss Main, Professor Logan confirmed that the costs of the feasibility analysis would be 50% of a Faculty Officer's time plus materials. Those costs would be borne by the Institute of Medical Studies in Sri Lanka. The Court approved the recommendation that all the elements required to set up and run a self standing medical school be costed in detail and that a comprehensive feasibility analysis exploring the benefits and consequences of entering into such an agreement be conducted. The costs of the exercise would be borne by the Institute of Sri Lanka.

STRATEGIC PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

- 194 In response to a question from Miss Main, Mr Gordon explained that the University was to lease the Old Aberdeen Town House from Aberdeen City Council on a long-term basis. The purchase of 9 Dunbar Street was needed to release space presently occupied within the Town House by a third party, and the purchase of 15 and 17-19 High Street was designed to enable the University to consolidate its presence at the heart of the Old Aberdeen campus.

COMMITTEE REPORTS 1998/99

Finance and Estates Committee

- 195 Mr Mair reported on the year's work undertaken by the Finance and Estates Committee. An important item at each meeting had been the report from the Chairman of the project board overseeing the installation of the QSP financial systems software. During the year, the amount of outstanding debt had been significantly reduced and new credit control arrangements were now in place. The Committee had also devoted considerable time to possible developments regarding residential accommodation, the Bridge of Don site, the Balgownie playing fields and Marischal College. Normally, a full review of the University's estates strategy would have been prepared and submitted to the Funding Council by the end of the session. However, this had been delayed with the Funding Council's agreement in view of the possibility of merger with Northern College.

Information Management Committee

- 196 Professor Macdonald reported that the Committee, which oversaw the Directorate of Information Systems and Services, had approved the development of an institutional information strategy. It had also been involved in the oversight of the installation of both the Finance and Human Resources software systems. The Information Management Committee oversaw both the Library Users Committee and the Information Systems Users Committee, and the former in particular had been very active throughout the session, for example, in addressing problems of library access and user discipline and regulation.

Student Organisations Committee

- 197 Mr Mair reported that the Committee had continued its work on the revision of student organisation constitutions during the year. The Aberdeen Students' Charities Campaign and the Students' Representative Council had decided that the Campaign would establish formal links with the SRC. The Committee welcomed the decision and the President of the Charities Campaign would henceforth be a member of the Committee *ex officio*. The Committee also welcomed the decision of the major student organisations to merge to form the Students' Association and would actively support the work needed to achieve that merger.

Personnel Policy and Staff Development & Appraisal Committee

- 198 Professor Macdonald reported that considerable progress had been made on developing a revised scheme of staff appraisal though the final stages had been delayed by the AUT's current industrial action. The Committee had reviewed the Staffing Principles, which formed part of the Northern College merger document, and would be responsible for monitoring the University's progress towards achieving the Investors in People award. Work was progressing on the establishment of a programme of activities for academic staff development linked with the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. The Committee received regular reports regarding the institution's participation in Scotland's Health at Work scheme, the University recently having attained the bronze award.

STRATEGIC PLAN 1999-2003

- 199 Professor Macdonald explained to the Court that, while there was strong continuity between the 1999 Strategic Plan and the 1998 version, the former placed a greater emphasis on commercialisation than the latter, and treated managerial and organisational topics at somewhat greater length. The Court agreed that it would be appropriate that an explicit commitment to equal opportunities be included in the Plan. It was made clear to members that the smaller surplus detailed in the financial forecasts reflected the channelling of greater resources to support research in the build up to the next Research Assessment Exercise.
- 200 The Court approved the Strategic Plan 1999-2003 and the Estates Management Action Plan for forwarding to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

PROPOSED MERGER WITH NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 201 Professor Macdonald reminded the Court that work towards the merger of the Universities of Aberdeen and Dundee and Northern College had been in progress for 18 months. The proposed merger presented a welcome opportunity to incorporate teacher education within the University's sphere of academic activity, though it was clear that, if the merger were to go ahead, much hard work would be needed to enable those joining the University from Northern College to achieve the desired standard of research excellence towards which the whole University was striving.
- 202 In commending the merger document to the Court, Professor Macdonald made clear that it had been approved by the Senior Management Group, by the Joint Policy and Resource Committee, by the Finance and Estates Committee and by the Senate. In addition, it had been approved by the Northern College Board of Governors and would be considered by the Court of the University of Dundee on 30 June 1999.
- 203 Professor Macdonald drew the Court's attention to the financial aspects of the merger and emphasised that the proposal for merger rested on the precondition that the University should not suffer financial detriment. While it was expected that the Funding Council would ensure that any merger would be cost neutral to the University, it would be important for Aberdeen to ensure that it remained free to withdraw from merger plans if the funding were to prove insufficient.
- 204 The Court thanked Professor Macdonald for his leadership of the University's part in the merger process and echoed his warm appreciation of the work undertaken by the administrative staff who had supported the project.
- 205 The Court approved the merger document for forwarding to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and to the Scottish Executive.

DRAFT RESOLUTION NO OF 1999
[CHAIRS OF COMPUTING SCIENCE – AMENDMENT OF TITLE]

- 206 The Court noted the draft Resolution No of 1999 (Chairs of Computing Science – Amendment of Title] and decided to forward it to the Senate and to the General Council, and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

SAFETY COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT 1998/99

- 207 The Court approved the Safety Committee's Annual Report 1998/99.

UNFAIR DISMISSAL WAIVER CLAUSE

- 208 The Court approved the recommendation from the Convener of the Personnel Policy and Staff Development & Appraisal Committee that the unfair dismissal waiver clause in fixed term contracts of employment be abandoned from 1 August 1999.

MEMBERSHIP OF COURT AND JOINT COURT-SENATE COMMITTEES
COURT REPRESENTATION ON EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER BODIES

- 209 The Court approved the recommendations from the Nominating Committee as set out in the appendix to this minute.

VACATION POWERS

- 210 The Court approved a proposal by the Principal that, for the period between its meetings on 29 June and 28 September 1999, the Court delegate authority to act on its behalf on any matter of particular urgency which might arise during the interval to a small committee composed of the Principal, the Chancellor's Assessor and/or the Senior Vice-Principal.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COURT

- 211 The Court noted that Professor Gordon Graham and Professor Iain Torrance had been elected as Senate Assessors to the University Court for the period 1 October 1999 to 30 September 2003.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 1999/2000

- 212 In response to a question from Miss Main, Professor Logan confirmed that listed expenditure for improvements in the Polwarth Building were necessary to meet safety requirements for additional research in Medical Microbiology and to provide additional practical classroom space as a consequence of increased recruitment.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 1998/99

- 213 The Court noted the change to the current year's capital programme, approved by the Finance and Estates Committee at its meeting on 15 June 1999.

PROMOTIONS

- 214 The Court noted the promotions approved by the Principal under delegated powers on the recommendation of the Staff Grading and Promotions Committee as set out in the appendix to this minute.

SENATE REPRESENTATION ON COURT COMMITTEES
SENATE REPRESENTATION ON JOINT COURT-SENATE COMMITTEES

- 215 The Court noted Senate representation on the above bodies as set out in the appendix to this minute.

DATES OF COURT MEETINGS 1999/2000

- 216 The Court noted that Court meetings in session 1999/2000 will be held on the following dates:

28 September 1999	6 May 2000
2 November 1999	27 June 2000
14 December 1999	8 February 2000
21 March 2000	

APPENDIX TO MINUTE 209

MEMBERSHIP OF COURT AND JOINT COURT-SENATE COMMITTEES
COURT REPRESENTATION ON EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER BODIES**1 Membership of Court Committees 1999/2000**1.1 Audit Committee

Mr Derek Marnoch to be appointed in place of Mr A Ledingham.

1.2 Remuneration Committee

1.2.1 In accordance with SHEFC guidance on good practice, the composition to be changed from:

Vice-Chairman of Court (Convener)

Principal

Four lay members including:

Convener: Audit Committee

Convener: Finance and Estates Committee

two others

to (changes marked in bold):

Vice-Chairman of Court (Convener)

Four lay members including:

Convener: Finance and Estates Committee

three others

In attendance:

Principal

1.2.2 The following two lay members of the Court to be re-appointed:

Dr Fullerton

Dr Milne

1.2.3 The remaining vacancy be considered further in September.

1.3 Staff Grading and Promotions Committee

Mr Stevenson to be appointed to fill the existing vacancy.

1.4 Student Organisations Committee

Mr McPherson and Mrs Skene to be re-appointed.

2 Court representation on joint Court-Senate committees 1999/20002.1 Chapel Committee

Mr Michie to be appointed to fill the current vacancy.

2.2 Continuing Education Policy Committee

Mr Michie to be appointed in place of Mr Mair.

2.3 Personnel Policy and Staff Development & Appraisal Committee

Professor A Forrester to be appointed in place of Dr McQuillan.

2.4 Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee

Professor Torrance to be appointed in place of Dr McQuillan.

2. Welfare and Academic Services Consultative Committee

The Rector's Assessor, when appointed by the Rector, to be appointed to fill the existing vacancy.

3 Court representation on educational and other bodies3.1 Divinity Chairs: Board of Nomination

Dr Scott Brown to be re-appointed to serve until 31 July 2000.

- 3.2 Heriot-Watt University: General Convocation
Professor Milne to be re-appointed to serve until 31 July 2002.
- 3.3 Scottish Museums Council
Dr Alan Knox to be appointed in place of Mr Neil Curtis.
- 3.4 University of Strathclyde: General Convocation
Miss Harper to be re-appointed to serve until 31 July 2000.

APPENDIX TO MINUTE 214

PROMOTIONS

(Confidential Minute)

APPENDIX TO MINUTE 215

COMMITTEES OF THE COURT WITH SENATE MEMBERS

1. Finance and Estates Committee

Professors MacGregor and Prosser.

2. Staff Disciplinary Tribunal Panel

Professors Fergusson, Russell, Pennington, Cusine, Thomson, MacGregor and Fraser and Dr G P McQuillan.

3. Staff Grading and Promotions Committee

The Deans of the Faculties.

4. Staff Grievance Committee Panel

Professors Duff, Mordue, Penman, Ritchie and Saunders, and Mrs M Ross.

JOINT COURT-SENATE COMMITTEES (SENATE REPRESENTATIVES)

1. Chapel Committee

Dr J G Roberts (*Convener*), Professors Johnstone and Beaumont, Dr A Main, Dr E J Powell and Dr I R Torrance.

2. Committee on Biological Services Units

The Deans of the Faculties of Medicine & Medical Sciences and of Science & Engineering, Professors Lomax, Matthews and Russell.

3. Continuing Education Policy Committee

Professor Macdonald, Dr J Darling and Dr G P McQuillan.

4. Joint Policy and Resource Committee

The Deans of the Faculties, plus two further members elected from amongst the Senate assessors on the University Court (Professors Penman and Graham).

5. Library Committee

As nominated by the Faculties.

6. Military Education Committee

Professors Salmon and Swanson, Dr K R Page, Dr I R Torrance, Mr J H Wyllie and Dr G Herd.

7. Museums, Collections and Galleries Committee

Dr J G Roberts (*Convener*), Mr J Gash, the University Librarian, Mr G Pryor, Dr M Gorman, Dr J S Reid, Dr N H Trewin and Dr C C Wilcock.

8. Research Committee

Professors Devine, Gow and Ingram.

In attendance: The Deans of the Faculties.

9. Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee

The Deans of the Faculties, two Selectors for undergraduate degrees, elected from the Panel of Selectors (Dr S P Townsend and Mr A W Gray), the Convener of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the Director of Student Recruitment Services, one other representative of the student recruitment function and the President of the SRC.

In attendance: The Academic Registrar, the Director of External Relations and the Director of the Centre for Continuing Education.

10. Personnel Policy and Staff Development & Appraisal Committee

Professors Houlihan, Logan and Sloane and Dr J G Roberts.

11. University Committee on Teaching & Learning

The Conveners of the Academic Standards Committees and of the Undergraduate Programme Committees, the Deans of the Faculties, the President of the SRC and one other student member.

12. Welfare and Academic Services Consultative Committee

The Conveners of the Academic Standards Committees and of the Undergraduate Programme Committees, Dr N Dower and Dr JB Craig.