

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 2 November 1999

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Dr R Scott Brown, Principal, Councillor D Clyne, Mr A Cole-Hamilton, Ms L Dromgoole, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Dr P Kinnear, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Mr J Michie, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Professor J Penman, Dr G Roberts, Mr A Salvesen, Mrs A Skene, Professor P Sloane, Mr G Stevenson, Professor I Torrance and, by invitation, Professor A Forrester, with Mr S Cannon and Ms M Strachan (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Dr H Fullerton, Professors S Logan, I Macdonald and G Catto.

WELCOME

- 21 The Court welcomed Dr Paul Kinnear to his first meeting of the Court as a Senate Assessor.

MINUTES

- 22 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 1999 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

- 23 The Principal reported that the King's College Campus Commission was seeking to determine medium term priorities for campus developments in the Old Aberdeen area. A position paper would be presented to the Court at its next meeting.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 24 The Principal reported that the merger proposal was now being considered by relevant bodies outwith the University. He had asked Professor Sewel to take over responsibility for planning for merger with Northern College from Professor Macdonald.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

- 25 The Secretary drew the Court's attention to the agenda item regarding reports from Committees and confirmed that, in future, the Court would receive regular reports from Court and joint Court-Senate Committees.
- 26 The Secretary reported that the AUT had suspended the current nationwide industrial action. UCEA, the employers' body, and the AUT had signed a Memorandum of Understanding which gave a commitment that areas of mutual concern would be addressed. He commended the local AUT branch for its constructive handling of a difficult situation, which had helped to minimise disruption to students.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Vice-Principal

- 27 The Court approved the recommendation that Professor John Sewel be appointed a Vice-Principal for the period 1 August 1999-31 July 2002.

Co-option to the Court

- 28 The Court approved the recommendation that Dr Maitland Mackie be co-opted to the Court for the period 3 November 1999-31 July 2002.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Audit Committee

- 29 Mr Grant reported that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council's new Code of Audit Practice required that the Court receive the Audit Committee minutes, either in full or abridged. The report before the Court demonstrated that internal audit constituted a large part of the Committee's business, although it reviewed both internal and external audit services.

Student Organisations Committee

- 30 Mr Mair explained that, while the Committee normally met once each term, three meetings had been timetabled for the current term in order to expedite business related to the creation of the Students' Association. The Association would see not only the merger of the Students' Representative Council, the Union and the Athletic Association but also the incorporation of the Aberdeen Students' Charities Campaign as a constituent part of the Association. The sabbaticals were devoting a great deal of effort to the formation of the Association and it was hoped that its draft Constitution could be brought to the 14 December Court meeting.
- 31 Both Mr Mair and Mr Cole-Hamilton confirmed the need for accommodation for the Association on the Old Aberdeen campus. In the short term, office space for the sabbatical officers was required. In the long term, there was a need for more extensive accommodation suitable for the provision of a wide range of student services. The Secretary confirmed that the Association's accommodation needs would be considered within the context of the University's Estate Strategy.

Joint Policy and Resource Committee

- 32 The Principal reported that the approval of budgets had been routine other than the allocation of £3M to Deans for preparations for the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. Attention was being devoted to subject areas in which admissions had declined to see whether Aberdeen, in common with other Scottish universities, should adjust its entry standards for certain degrees. Permission was also being sought from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to redistribute funded numbers. The Committee had approved a schedule for strategic planning for the current year. They had noted the review of AURIS Ltd, which would be considered by the Finance and Estates Committee and by the Court, and the final management reports for the financial year 1998/99.
- 33 Professor Graham asked that it be recorded that, at a recent meeting of the Senate, concern had been expressed about the 'research centres' model of strategic research funding. In addition, there was a widespread academic view that careful thought be devoted to the issues underlying the decline in admissions before remedial action was taken.
- 34 In response to a query, the Secretary confirmed that the University would be developing performance indicators both to fulfil the requirements of the Funding Council and to address the constant challenge of media league tables.

Finance and Estates Committee

- 35 Mr Mair reported that the Committee had approved an amendment to the Capital Programme for the financial year 1999/2000 to provide the additional funding required for design work on the Institute of Medical Sciences Phase 2. The outcome of the bid to the Joint Infrastructure Fund should be known by the end of November.
- 36 The Estates Director reported that the University had submitted a planning application in its own name to the Aberdeen City Council regarding the proposed Bridge of Don retail development. The application would be considered by the Council's Planning Committee within the next few months.
- 37 The King's College Campus Commission was working to provide a 20- to 25-year framework within which King's College Campus could be developed. Major issues under consideration included: the relocation of Northern College, in the event of the proposed

merger being approved; the improvement and expansion of library facilities; and the improvement of student facilities.

- 38 The Project Board for the SHEFC Pathfinder Project on Residences and Catering had commissioned a feasibility study from PricewaterhouseCoopers for a private public partnership scheme. It was expected that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Finance and Estates Committee.
- 39 The Court endorsed the revised structure of AURIS Ltd as approved by the Committee.
- 40 The Committee had expressed its gratitude to the QSP Project Board for its success in implementing the system on time and within budget. Some problems remained to be addressed but the position had improved and would continue to do so.
- 41 The Committee had noted the financial reports for the year ended 31 July 1999, which indicated a satisfactory position for the year.

INDEPENDENT COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO STUDENT FINANCE

- 42 The Court considered the Second Consultation Paper circulated by the Committee of Inquiry. The Principal expressed the view that it would not be appropriate for the Court to take a position on the possible options for student finance as opinions within the University community might legitimately differ.
- 43 Mr Cole-Hamilton said that it was the view of the SRC that the current system of student finance was so structured that all students had to bear costs at an early stage for benefits which might later accrue unevenly with, for example, a doctor in private practice benefiting more from investment in higher education than a teacher. Both business and society benefited from increased levels of higher education paid for by the individual. Fee rates were based on parental income and disregarded the possibility that parents might not contribute to the costs of their child's education. Furthermore, the abolition of the maintenance grant had caused greater levels of student hardship than had the introduction of tuition fees. The prospect of incurring debt discouraged those from less privileged backgrounds and also discouraged students from undertaking postgraduate research. Mr Cole-Hamilton circulated copies of the Students' Representative Council's (SRC's) response to the Committee of Inquiry.
- 44 The Principal noted that the principles expressed in the SRC's document were close to those in the University's submission in reply to the Committee of Inquiry's first consultation paper. He pointed out that, were tuition fees to be abolished, it was by no means certain that the income lost to universities would be replaced from other sources. The Secretary emphasised the importance of access to higher education being available to those qualified to benefit from it.
- 45 The Principal invited Court members who might wish to respond as individuals to seek guidance from the Secretary.

THE MILLENNIUM BUG

- 46 In response to a query, the Secretary confirmed that the Personnel Policy and Staff Development & Appraisal Committee would shortly consider a recommendation that premium payments be made to members of staff who were either required to work over the Millennium or who would be on call at that time. The recommendation, which was in line with practice at other universities, would be considered by the Personnel Policy and Staff Development & Appraisal Committee and their decision would be reported to the Court. Academic and academic-related staff would not be eligible for premium payments.

COMMERCIALISATION

- 47 Professor Forrester emphasised the important role of universities in the Scottish economy. Commercialisation of research would take place largely in science and engineering, although there would also be wider opportunities. Currently, imaging and civil engineering were among fields in which Aberdeen was in the process of commercialising its IPR. While the University had not had the resource to develop commercial opportunities successfully in the past, it was now seeking and gaining funding from a range of sources that had recently become available. Aberdeen shared a productive Teaching Company Centre with the Robert Gordon University that was engaged in technology transfer to the oil and gas industry. The University had also been awarded £540K over the next three years to help develop commercialisation. Development of research for commercial purposes would increasingly join research and teaching as the third main activity of UK universities and it was to be expected that commercialisation would bring additional income to the University in due course.
- 48 It was acknowledged that appropriate expertise was needed to support academic excellence in order to achieve the transition from research to full commercial development. An additional officer, funded by Grampian Enterprise, would be appointed to AURIS Ltd to assist with managing the process.

RESOLUTION No 215 OF 1999
[CHAIRS OF COMPUTING SCIENCE - AMENDMENT OF TITLE]

- 49 The Court, having noted that the draft Resolution had been approved by the Senate and by the Business Committee of the General Council, and that no other representations had been received, decided to pass the Resolution as set out in the appendix to this minute.

RESOLUTION No 216 OF 1999
[REPEAL OF ORDINANCE No307 (ABERDEEN No 82)]
(LIBRARY COMMITTEE)

- 50 The Court, having noted that the draft Resolution had been approved by the Senate and by the Business Committee of the General Council, and that no other representations had been received, decided to pass the Resolution as set out in the appendix to this minute.

DRAFT RESOLUTION No OF 1999
[CHAIR OF PHARMACOLOGY - AMENDMENT OF TITLE]

- 51 The Court decided to forward the draft Resolution 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.

DRAFT RESOLUTION No OF 1999
[CHAIR OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY]

- 52 The Court decided to forward the draft Resolution 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.

NORTHERN EUROPEAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH NETWORK

- 53 The Court approved the recommendation in principle that the University become a partner institution of the Northern European Historical Research Network, enabling candidates to obtain concurrently with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of this University, the degree "Doctor Communitatis Europae (DCE) in Northern European History". The Court noted that the required amendments to the General Regulations for Postgraduate Qualifications would be submitted to the Senate and the Court in due course.