

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 26 September 2000

Present: Mr A Mair (in the Chair), Principal, Mr D Cockburn, Dr A Dawson, Dr H Fullerton, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Miss A Harper, Dr D Heddle, Councillor P Johnston, Professor S Logan, Dr M Mackie, Miss M Main, Mr J Michie, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Dr G Roberts, Professor T Salmon, Mrs A Skene, Mr G Stevenson, Professor I Torrance, Mr S Varwell, with Professor D Houlihan, Professor J Sewel, Mr S Cannon, Dr P Murray and Mrs H Stephen (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from the Rector, Councillor D Clyne, Dr P Kinnear, Mr J Leiper, Professor I Macdonald, Mr A Salvesen, Professor P Sloane and Professor A Forrester.

Mr Mair welcomed Dr Dawson and Professor Salmon as new members to their first meeting.

FAREWELL TO RETIRING MEMBER

- 1 Mr Mair, noting that Mr Michie was attending his last meeting of Court after serving as a General Council Assessor for eight years, expressed the Court's thanks to him for his contribution during that period.

MINUTES

- 2 The Minutes of the meetings held on 27 June 2000 and the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 8 August 2000 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

- 3 The Principal referred to a tabled paper on the current position on admissions and registrations for entry in September 2000. It was noted that the final intake could be around 100 over target and 200 ahead of the 1999-2000 intake. The increased applications reflected the institution being well marketed and the considerable efforts of the Student Recruitment and Admissions team in converting applicants into entrants. There had been no significant drop in entry standards to achieve the intake.
- 4 The Principal reported that, following a tendering process in which presentations from three firms had been considered, Quayle Munro had been appointed as consultants to take the Pathfinder Project on Residences and Catering to the next stage.
- 5 With reference to Marischal College, the Principal reported that the University had been encouraging on Jarvis to produce a revised proposal, failing which other options would be vigorously pursued.
- 6 The Principal noted that due to matters outwith the University's control little progress had been made with the proposed merger with Northern College and the likely vesting date was now August 2001.

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY

- 7 The Secretary referred to the disappointing placing of the University in the recent league tables published by the Sunday Times, and noted that the major detrimental factor had been the inclusion of non-completion rates as a performance indicator. The University had been particularly adversely affected by the loss of mature students at the end of Level 1. Additional factors had been the heavy weighting of two other indicators, A-level scores where Scottish universities tended to recruit from weaker candidates, and Teaching Quality Assessment where until recently the Scottish system differed from the rest of the UK, with little credit given to TQA scores other than 'excellent', resulting in depression of the Scottish rankings. Although methodology of the league tables was flawed the University drop out rates were unacceptably high and urgent action was being taken to remedy this.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Audit Committee

- 8 The Court received a report by the Audit Committee (28.9.00) informing the Court of matters, considered at its recent meeting.
- 9 The Court noted the Audit Committee's approval of internal audit reports.
- 10 The Court noted that the Committee had undertaken a self-assessment of its effectiveness, on similar lines to the exercise undertaken by the Court. This had indicated a high level of satisfaction with the current operation of the Committee. However, there were a number of areas for improvement. The possibility of appointing an additional member to the Committee would also be explored.
- 11 The Court noted that the Committee had approved the Internal Auditor's Operational Plan for 2000-2001 which would be brought forward to the Court in December, together with the Internal Auditor's forthcoming Annual Report for 1999-2000.
- 12 The Court noted that in response to a SHEFC circular, the Committee had compared the University's existing practices in the conduct of its legal affairs and its relationships with providers of legal services with *Guidance on Legal Services* prepared by the Association of Heads of University Administration. The exercise had established an already high level of compliance and appropriate action would be taken to formalise practice in certain areas to ensure full compliance.
- 13 The Court noted that the Committee had approved documentation for performance measures and indicators for the ongoing review of the efficiency and effectiveness of both the internal audit service and the external audit service.
- 14 The Court noted that the Committee had confirmed the annual renewal of the appointment of Deloitte & Touche as the University's internal auditors for the second year of their three year contract.
- 15 The Court noted that the Committee had approved draft tender documentation for the quinquennial market testing of external audit services to the University from 2001-2002.

SHEFC GUIDE FOR MEMBERS OF GOVERNING BODIES OF HEIs
AND GOOD PRACTICE BENCHMARKING

- 16 The Court, noting that there were now few exceptions to the University's compliance with the SHEFC Guide for Members of Governing Bodies of Higher Education Institutions and Good Practice Benchmarks, considered possible further action, as under:

Review of Standing Orders

- 17 The Court noted that its Standing Orders should be reviewed every five years. The previous review had been undertaken in June 1995 and since then an amendment had been made in 1997 to reflect the Court's decisions on the conduct of its business and the delegation of routine decision-making to the Principal.

Removal of Members of Court

- 18 In discussion at its "Away-Day" the Court had noted the suggestion that the Standing Orders should include arrangements for a mechanism for the removal of members of Court. A position paper would be brought forward on the possible introduction of such a mechanism.
- 19 The Court had no other comments to make.

**Openness to Consider Allegations of
Misconduct from the General Public**

- 20 The Court noted that the SHEFC *Guide for Members of Governing Bodies* encouraged the development and publication of the policy and procedure which would allow any member of the institution or the public to raise matters of concern relating to the reputation and well-being of the institution. The Court, noting that its Code of Practice on Whistleblowing reflected its openness to consider legitimate concerns raised by staff or by students or by members of the Court but did not extend to consideration of concerns or allegations of misconduct made by members of the general public, approved the following statement:

"The University Court adopted in 1998 a formal Code of Practice on Whistleblowing in which it recognised that the raising of legitimate concerns (by staff, students or lay members of Court) in the interests of the University, its staff or students, or of the general public is a practice which should be encouraged. The Court has now further affirmed its openness to consider allegations of misconduct from the general public and, in so doing, to refer to the process available for staff, students and members of Court under the Whistleblowing Code."

RESOLUTION NO 224
[CHANGES IN GENERAL REGULATIONS FOR FIRST DEGREES AND
TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE AWARDS]

- 21 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.

VACATION POWERS

- 22 The Court homologated the decision, taken by the Principal and the Senior Lay Member under vacation powers and on the unanimous recommendation of the Working Party on Legal Services following a tendering exercise, that Ledingham Chalmers be appointed to provide legal services to the University for a period of five years from 1 October 2000, subject to a satisfactory review of performance after three years.

STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

- 23 The Court approved a recommendation that its previous approval of a transitional arrangement whereby the University Union and its existing constitution be retained and the Union run in accordance with its existing constitution by the Union Management Council, be extended by one month until 1 December 2000.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN SUPERANNUATION AND
LIFE ASSURANCE SCHEME
APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEE

- 24 The Court approved the appointment of Mr Mair as one of the five Trustees of the Scheme in succession to Dr R Scott Brown, with immediate effect, and noted that the Trustees would be invited at their meeting on 5 October to agree to the appointment of Mr Mair as the Chairman of the Trustees.

AURIS BOARD

- 25 The Court noted that the AURIS Board had appointed Miss Anne C Harper to the AURIS Board with effect from 1 September 2000.

GIFTS, BENEFACTIONS AND CHARITABLE AWARDS

- 26 The Court received a report from the Director of External Relations on gifts, benefactions and charitable awards received by the University in the quarter to 31 July 2000.