

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 1998

Present: Dr R Scott Brown, Principal, Professors I Macdonald, D Houlihan, S Logan, P Sloane, B MacGregor, J Penman, Dr G Roberts, Dr G McQuillan, Ms M Watt, Mr D Welsh, Mr J Grant, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Mr A Salvesen, Mr G Stevenson, Mr J Michie, Mrs A Skene, Sir Robert Smith, Councillor C Millar and, by invitation, Professors G Catto, A Forrester and D Ogston with Mr S Cannon, Ms C Cook, Dr P Murray, Mr R Murray, Mr M Ord, Dr J Rogers, Mr R Taylor, Mr D Yule, Mrs M Barraclough and Ms M Strachan (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Clyne, Dr H Fullerton, Dr N Milne and Mr D Waters.

DEATH OF THE RECTOR

- 1 The Court recorded its deep sorrow at the sudden death on 25 August 1998 of the Rector, Dr Allan Macartney. Dr Scott Brown recalled how important the welfare of the whole University had been to the Rector. He had presided at Court meetings with great skill and had been a sound and sympathetic adviser to all. The Court resolved to send its condolences to Mrs Macartney.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

- 2 The Court welcomed Mr David Welsh, the President of the Students' Representative Council, to his first meeting of the Court as a full member. The Court noted with pleasure that Mrs Alison Skene had been re-elected to serve as a General Council Assessor and welcomed Professor Derek Ogston, who had also been elected as a General Council Assessor with effect from 1 October, and who was in attendance by invitation. Both Mrs Skene and Professor Ogston would serve for the period 1 October 1998 to 30 September 2002.

SIR ROBERT SMITH

- 3 The Court noted that Sir Robert Smith would conclude his service as a General Council Assessor on 30 September 1998 and thanked him for his contribution to the work of the Court, which had been much appreciated.

UNIVERSITY SECRETARY

- 4 The Court welcomed Mr Steve Cannon, who was in attendance at his first meeting of the Court as the new Secretary to the University.

MINUTES

- 5 The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 1998 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

- 6 The Principal welcomed Mr Steve Cannon, the new Secretary, and looked forward to a fruitful working partnership.
- 7 The Principal reported that the situation regarding admissions for 1998/99 was still subject to change. He would brief the Court more fully at the meeting to be held on 3 November 1998.
- 8 At the Principal's invitation, Professor Macdonald reported that in the Teaching Quality Assessments carried out in session 1998/99, German and Spanish had been rated excellent (complementing the excellent grading already obtained for French), and Land Economy and Psychology had been rated highly satisfactory.
- 9 At the Principal's invitation, Professor Macdonald reported that, while the final report of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education' institutional review of the University was not yet available, the draft report was helpful and complimentary.
- 10 The Principal reminded the Court of the importance of successful commercialisation to the University and invited Professor Forrester to report to the Court regarding the Challenge Fund, which was designed to help universities develop research. The Fund would total £50M, with £20M being contributed by the Government, £20M from the Wellcome Foundation, and £10M from the universities. Aberdeen had formed a partnership with Heriot-Watt University, Stirling University, the Robert Gordon University and Napier University to submit a bid covering oil and gas, environmental diagnostics and engineering, medical imaging, food, agriculture and aquaculture. Participating universities were required to find 20% of the funding and the Senior Lay Member had

already been most helpful in suggesting possible sources of finance. Professor Forrester hoped to report on progress at the 3 November 1998 meeting of the Court.

- 11 The Principal informed the Court that the University hoped to receive three significant bequests in the near future. He drew the Court's attention to the change in format of the report from the Director of External Relations on funds raised. The practice would now be to report on a quarterly basis and to list charitable awards as well as gifts and benefactions. Proposals regarding the future recording of gifts, benefactions and charitable awards would be brought to Court in the near future. At the Principal's invitation, Mr Taylor reported that the 3 November 1998 meeting of the Court would be given a brief presentation on the Sixth Century Campaign, the University's forthcoming major fundraising campaign.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 12 The Principal reported that negotiations regarding the possible merger with Northern College were progressing more slowly than had been expected for reasons outwith the University's control. It seemed likely that any merger could not now take place until a year later than had originally been envisaged. Professor Macdonald confirmed that all efforts were being made to expedite matters.

STUDENT DEBT

- 13 The Principal reminded members of the report to the Court on 30 June 1998 regarding student debt. Since then, a considerable improvement in the level of outstanding debt had been achieved. Mr Ord confirmed that, with support from officers of the Students' Representative Council, the sum of £3.385M outstanding at the end of May 1998 had been reduced to £2.600M at the end of August, with further improvement since then. Most students who owed money to the University were responding positively to requests for repayment. While it was too early to confirm a final figure for bad debt provision, a increase in provision of approximately £200K would be discussed with the auditors.
- 14 In response to a question from the President of the SRC, Mr Ord confirmed that, subject to assurance that such use of public funds was permissible, 5% of debt collected (net of any collection costs) would be paid into the student hardship fund, in accordance with the Court's earlier decision (*see minute 162 of 30.6.98*).

ELECTION OF RECTOR

- 15 The Court approved a recommendation that, subject to the concurrence of the Senate and of the Students' Representative Council, the election of a Rector of the University in succession to the late Dr Allan Macartney, MEP, would take place on Thursday 26 November 1998.

UNIVERSITY OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS PROJECT
(UHIP)

- 16 Professor Macdonald explained that the Memorandum of Understanding had been circulated to all members of the Senate before being brought before the Court. Of the five responses received from Senate members, only one could be construed as a vote against acceptance of the Memorandum. The document did not constitute a detailed agreement, rather it indicated areas in which both institutions could benefit from the other's expertise in given areas. The University of Aberdeen would receive a fee for services rendered to the UHIP and would itself benefit from the use of the UHIP's IT network.
- 17 The Court approved the Memorandum of Understanding between the University of the Highlands and Islands Project and the University of Aberdeen.

INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES (IMS): PHASE 2

- 18 The Court considered plans for the second phase of IMS and for a new Institute of Applied Health Sciences (IAHS). The Principal reported that, while research activity in the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences had increased hugely in the last two years, space at Foresterhill was now overcrowded. If the situation were not rectified, there was a real danger of the University's losing outstanding research staff. There was a very strong academic case for developing Phase 2, both as a base for new laboratory-based research areas and to free space within the Polwarth Building for the establishment of an Institute of Applied Health Sciences which would parallel and complement the IMS. Professor Macdonald confirmed that the analysis undertaken and detailed in the paper before the Court indicated that the best return on investment would be achieved by meeting the academic plan in full.
- 19 The cost of the proposed development would be approximately £13M, assuming that additional car parking facilities could be provided on a cost-neutral basis and that the development of Phase 2 would be zero rated for VAT. At least £7.5M additional funding would have to be raised in order to ensure that the development as envisaged could be achieved without financial detriment to the other Faculties. While estimates for future research income were ambitious, they were judged capable of achievement given the Faculty's track record of increases in such income over the last two years.

- 20 In a wide-ranging discussion, members expressed strong support for the proposal to enhance further the research profile of the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences through the development of IMS Phase 2. At the same time, the importance of avoiding a cost to other Faculties was emphasised, as was the need to undertake further detailed planning and to identify sources of funding before taking any decision to proceed to construction. In particular, there should be detailed discussions with Aberdeen City Council regarding the provision of car parking and with the VAT authorities regarding the VAT status of Phase 2. It was acknowledged that further analysis should include discussions with relevant staff to establish clear and realistic models of space needs and usage patterns.
- 21 Dr Scott Brown reminded the Court that the decision as to whether or not to proceed to construction of IMS Phase 2 would be brought back to the Court when the additional analysis and planning proposed had been completed.
- 22 The Court approved the recommendation of the Advisory Group, convened by the Senior Vice-Principal and with membership drawn from the University Court, the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences, Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, AURIS Ltd, and the Finance and Estates Committee, that:
- the development of a plan for IMS Phase 2 and the IAHS be undertaken, proposing the construction of a second phase of the IMS building as set out in the paper presented to the Court;
 - a project board and, in due course, a project manager be appointed;
 - work begin immediately on outstanding tax and planning issues;
 - the contract for the construction of the building be put to tender;
 - preparation of a financing plan be remitted to the Director of Finance;
 - a report on these matters be brought to the Court in six months so that a decision on whether or not to proceed to the construction stage at that point might be taken.

REVISED FINANCIAL MEMORANDUM BETWEEN
THE SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL (SHEFC)
AND INSTITUTIONS
(See minute 184 of 30.6.98)

- 23 Following a recent consultation process, the Court decided to approve the revised terms and conditions of the Financial Memorandum between SHEFC and institutions.

REVISED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE
CONDUCT OF COURT BUSINESS

(See minute 169 of 30.6.98)

- 24 In accordance with its decision of 30 June 1998 and in the absence of further comment from members, the Court approved arrangements for the conduct of Court business incorporating minor amendments.

STUDENT PROGRESS APPEALS TO THE COURT

- 25 The Court endorsed the appointment of the following Court Appeal Committees to hear appeals from students against decisions by the Senate regarding academic progress in session 1997/98 and noted that no appeals were submitted to the hearing arranged for 18 September.

Friday 18 September 1998

Professor A Forrester (*Convener*)

Dr N Milne

Mr J McPherson

Monday 12 October 1998

Professor I Macdonald (*Convener*)

Mrs A Skene

Professor D Ogston

Monday 26 October 1998

Professor I Macdonald (*Convener*)

Mrs A Skene

Mr J McPherson

VACATION POWERS

(See minute 187 of 30.6.98)

- 26 The Court endorsed the decision taken under delegated powers by the Principal, the Chancellor's Assessor and the Senior Vice-Principal at a meeting of the Finance and Estates Committee held on 5 August 1998 to approve the Business Plan submitted by AURIS Ltd. (The relevant documents were circulated to the Court on 7 August 1998.)

VICE-PRINCIPALS

- 27 The Court noted that, in accordance with its decision (*see minute 131 of 19.5.98*), Professor S Logan, having been appointed Dean of the Faculty of Medicine & Medical Sciences,

would serve as Vice-Principal from 1 August 1998 to 31 July 2001, the period of his Deanship.

28 The Court noted that the terms of office served by the recently-appointed central Vice-Principals would be as follows:

Professor G Catto 1 August 1998 to 31 July 2000

Professor A Forrester 1 August 1998 to 31 July 2000.

GIFTS, BENEFACTIONS AND CHARITABLE AWARDS

29 The Court noted the report from the Director of External Relations concerning gifts, benefactions and charitable awards in the quarter to 31 July 1998.