

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 1998

Present: Miss C Dickson Wright (in the chair), Dr R Scott Brown, Principal, Professors I Macdonald, D Houlihan, S Logan, P Sloane, D Ogston, J Penman, Dr G McQuillan, Dr G Roberts, Councillor C Millar, Mr D Welsh, Ms M Watt, Mr J Grant, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Dr N Milne, Mr A Salvesen, Mr G Stevenson, Dr H Fullerton, Mr J Michie, and, by invitation, Professor G Catto, Professor A Forrester and Mr H Trench with Mr S Cannon, Mr R Murray, Mr M Ord, Mr R Taylor, Mr D Yule, Mrs M Barraclough and Ms M Strachan (Clerk)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Clyne, Professor B MacGregor and Mrs A Skene.

WELCOME

63 The Principal welcomed the Rector-Elect and the Rector's Assessor Designate to their first meeting of the Court.

MINUTES

64 The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 1998 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

65 The Principal expressed the Court's gratitude to Ms Watt for her service to the University as Rector's Assessor to the late Dr Allan Macartney and voiced the hope that the close relationship she had formed with the University would continue into the future.

66 At the Principal's invitation, Professor Macdonald reported that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's report on its audit in May 1998 of the University's quality assurance systems had been published. Its very favourable conclusions were the result of much hard work by many members of University staff.

SIXTH CENTURY CAMPAIGN
(See minutes 48-53 of 3.11.98)

67 Following the presentation about the Sixth Century Campaign on 3 November 1998, the Court approved the Principal's formal recommendation that the Campaign should be launched as planned early in 1999. He made clear that further information would be presented to Court in the near future.

MARISCHAL COLLEGE

68 The Principal reported that the University was continuing its discussions with the Jarvis Group and that a report would be brought back to the Court at an appropriate time.

ACCOUNTS AND ENDOWMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 1998

- 69 Mr Mair presented the University's accounts. He drew members' attention to the short-term costs that had resulted from the need to refinance halls of residence and noted that, while the University's financial performance was sound, there was a long-term need to raise substantial additional funding. The Court approved the University's accounts for the year ended 31 July 1998.
- 70 The Court approved the endowments for the year ended 31 July 1998.
- 71 The Court noted the accounts for the year ended 31 July 1998 for the two subsidiary companies, Aberdeen University Research and Industrial Services Ltd and King's College Centre Ltd.

REAPPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS

- 72 Mr Grant explained that, following the merger of Coopers & Lybrand, the University's external auditors, and Price Waterhouse, the University's internal auditors, to form PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council had given permission for the University to continue with its present audit arrangements until the end of financial year 1998/99. Thereafter, the University would be allowed to retain PricewaterhouseCoopers' services in only one of the two audit roles. The Audit Committee recommended that the University move to appoint new internal auditors in consultation with its partners in the Audit Consortium.
- 73 The Court approved the Audit Committee's recommendation that PricewaterhouseCoopers (formerly Coopers & Lybrand) be reappointed external auditors for the year ending 31 July 1999.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 74 Professor Macdonald reported that the academic plan should be completed early in 1999, as would work on space issues, and that the due diligence had been received from Ernst & Young. It was hoped that the merger document could be approved by the Senate and the Court and by the Northern College Board of Governors, and submitted to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Office by the end of March 1999.
- 75 Dr Scott Brown reported that he had suggested to the Chairman of the Northern College Board that a small group of lay members from both governing bodies should meet periodically to receive reports from officers from both institutions.

CODE OF PRACTICE ON WHISTLEBLOWING
(See *minute 148 of 19.5.98*)

- 76 Mr Cannon reminded members that the draft Code of Practice on Whistleblowing had first been brought to the Court at its meeting on 19 May 1998. The document now presented to the Court had undergone slight modification in the light of guidance from the Association of Heads of University Administrations, from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Mr Cannon tabled two further minor revisions which arose from very recent discussions with the Aberdeen Association of University Teachers
- 77 The Court approved the Code of Practice on Whistleblowing as set out in the appendix to this minute.

JOINT INFRASTRUCTURE FUND
(See minute 147 of 3.11.98)

- 78 Following the report to the Court on 3 November 1998 regarding the bid to the Joint Infrastructure Fund (JIF) for funding for the construction of the Institute of Medical Sciences Phase 2, Professor Catto indicated that two further bids for JIF funding - for the Centre for Research on Arctic and Alpine Environments and for the Deep Ocean Environment Centre - were reasonably well advanced, while bids for the Centre for Research on Clinical Imaging and for the Digital Library Project were at an earlier stage of preparation. Progress reports would be brought to Court over the next months.

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT
AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

- 79 Mr Cannon introduced the Review of Management and Administrative Services prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers. It assessed the University's ability to deliver effective administrative and management support, and the extent to which the overall management structure facilitated effective and appropriate decision-making. The report suggested two options for the development of new organisational arrangements for the central support functions. Underlying the recommendations was the need both to differentiate clearly between strategic and operational responsibility, and to set objectives and monitor progress towards their achievement. Members of the Court were invited to comment on the recommendations and on management's response to them.
- 80 In discussion, there was agreement that any further devolution of authority to faculties should be carried out within a strong central framework. It was made clear that a review of student support services that was in progress would be completed in the context of the PricewaterhouseCoopers review. Mr Welsh expressed concern that student support services might not be well served by the suggested arrangements but Mr Cannon confirmed that Professor Catto, as Vice-Principal (Welfare), would retain overall responsibility for the area. The Principal confirmed that, while the review did not address issues at sub-faculty level, Deans might wish to discuss related issues within their faculties. Mr Cannon confirmed that the intention was to strengthen faculty teams by more direct estates and human resources input in addition to the present administrative, financial and planning support provided. Committee structures would be reviewed and appropriate recommendations would be brought back to the Court.
- 81 In response to a question from Mr Grant, Mr Cannon confirmed that the team from PricewaterhouseCoopers who had undertaken the review and prepared the report had maintained a strict separation from the PricewaterhouseCoopers team who provided external audit services to the University.
- 82 Mr Cannon confirmed that the review was regarded as a catalyst for internal change and that a process of consultation would take place to inform the adoption of more effective administrative and management structures and practices. He was invited to bring periodic reports to the Court regarding the implementation of the review's recommendations.

RESOLUTION NO OF 1999
[CHAIRS OF PSYCHOLOGY - AMENDMENT OF TITLE]

- 83 The Court noted the draft Resolution No of 1999 [Chairs of Psychology - 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.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
(See minute 148 of 19.5.98)

- 84 On the recommendation of the Senate, the Court approved the students' complaints procedure as set out in the appendix to this minute.

AURIS LTD

- 85 The Court approved the draft University Memorandum of Understanding with AURIS Ltd which had been drawn up in accordance with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council's Recommended Practice Guidelines on Related Companies.

GENERAL COUNCIL
WINTER STATUTORY MEETING

- 86 The Court approved the recommendation of the Business Committee of the General Council that the date of the General Council Winter Statutory meeting be changed from the last Saturday in January to the first Saturday in December. The Court noted that the change, if approved by the General Council Statutory Meeting to be held on 30 January 1999, would take effect from the following Winter Meeting which would, in consequence, be held on Saturday 4 December 1999.

ELECTION OF RECTOR

- 87 The Court noted that, on 26 November 1998, Miss Clarissa Dickson Wright was elected to serve as Rector for the period 1 January 1999 to 31 December 2001.

TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
SUPERANNUATION AND LIFE ASSURANCE SCHEME

- 88 The Court noted that Mr Steven Cannon had become a Trustee *ex officio* with effect from 17 August 1998 and that Mrs Doris Duncan had been re-elected a Member Trustee for a further period of three years from 1 October 1998 to 30 September 2001.

SENATE REPRESENTATION
ON JOINT COURT-SENATE COMMITTEES

- 89 The Court noted Senate representation on joint Court-Senate Committees.

ABERDEEN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL

- 90 The Court noted that the Principal, on the advice of Professor Macdonald and with the agreement of Dr Scott Brown, Convener of the Nominating Committee, had approved the appointment of Mr C McLaren, University Librarian, as a University representative on the Trust governing the Aberdeen International Youth Festival in place of Mr H Wight.

PROFESSOR MAXWELL IRVINE

- 91 Dr Scott Brown reported that the former Principal, Professor Maxwell Irvine, was making a good recovery following his recent heart surgery and thanked the Court for their messages of good will.

GIFTS, BENEFACTIONS
AND CHARITABLE RESEARCH AWARDS

- 92 The Court noted the report from the Director of External Relations concerning gifts, benefactions and charitable research awards that were received by the University in the quarter to 31 October 1998.