

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 1999.

Present: Dr R Scott Brown (Chairman), Principal, Professor I Macdonald, Professor D Houlihan, Professor S Logan, Professor B MacGregor, Professor Penman, Professor P Sloane, Dr H Fullerton, Mr J Michie, Professor D Ogston, Mrs A Skene, Dr G McQuillan, Dr G Roberts, Mr D Welsh, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Dr N Milne, Mr G Stevenson and, by invitation, Mr P Dickson, Professor G Catto and Professor A Forrester, with Mr S Cannon, Dr P Murray, Mr M Ord, Mr R Taylor, Mr S Gordon, Mr D Yule, Mrs M Barraclough and Ms M Strachan (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from the Rector, Mr J Grant, Mr A Salvesen and Councillor D Clyne.

MINUTES

142 The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 1999 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

- 143 The Principal reported that the Association of University Teachers (AUT) had announced that it would hold a one-day strike on Tuesday 25 May in protest against the national pay offer of 3.5%. The Principal invited the Court to note that, as a member of the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association Board, he might be perceived to have a partial conflict of interest in the matter. The Secretary confirmed that the Aberdeen branch of the AUT was working with University management and the SRC to ensure that, while AUT members would not invigilate exams on 25 May, there would be no picketing of exam venues. Alternative arrangements for invigilation would be put in place.
- 144 The Principal reported that a grant of £750K had been awarded jointly to the Departments of Chemistry and Engineering for research into new materials for use off-shore. Professor Penman confirmed that there was significant support for the work from industry, local enterprise and other institutions in the area.
- 145 At the Principal's invitation, Dr Roberts reported that Word, the Scottish Writers' Festival, had been very successful. He also reported that the Directorship of the Elphinstone Institute had been filled by the appointment of Dr Ian Russell.
- 146 At the Principal's invitation, Mr Cannon reminded the Court that, as part of the need to make economies that would help reduce the rate of increase in accommodation charges, the linen service to part of Hillhead Halls had been withdrawn. Some students had written to the press and had returned approximately 200 sheets in protest. Management had undertaken to discuss the issues underlying the protest with the students and had restored the linen service to those parts of Hillhead where first-year students were accommodated. An alternative means of achieving savings was being investigated. The students involved had particularly requested that the matter should be drawn to the Court's attention.
- 147 The Principal informed the Court that discussions were being held with the Robert Gordon University to investigate ways in which the two institutions might co-operate on issues such as estates, residences, purchasing and physical education facilities in order to achieve economies of scale. The two institutions already worked together and opportunities to expand such co-operation were being actively pursued.
- 148 The Principal reported that the Sixth Century Campaign was making excellent progress in identifying major donor prospects.

GRADUATION FEE

- 149 Referring to the proposed increase in fee from £30 to £40 for those graduating in person, Mr Dickson asked whether the costs of graduation were sufficient to justify the increase and whether Ministers had already proscribed fees for those graduating *in absentia*. Mr Cannon explained that the current fee, which had remained unchanged since 1991, was insufficient to cover the direct and indirect costs which totalled c£86K. The proposed increase would help redress the imbalance. The charging of fees for those graduating *in absentia* had been proscribed in England and Wales, and it was expected that the Scottish Parliament would make a similar decision.
- 150 The Court approved the proposed increase.
- 151 The Court noted that, in future, fees should be increased by small amounts at more frequent intervals, to avoid the need for a steep increase after a long period without fee revision.

YEAR 2000:
INSTITUTIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN

- 152 In answer to a question from Miss Main, Mr Cannon confirmed that, once departments and units had identified their contingency arrangements, management would discuss any issues arising with the trades unions.

EQUIPMENT PROCUREMENT SCHEME

- 153 In response to a question from Miss Main, Dr Scott Brown repeated that the scheme was a tax-efficient method of procuring equipment.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 154 Professor Macdonald reminded the Court that the Northern College would be the major item for discussion at the meeting to be held on 29 June 1999. In the meantime, the merger document had been circulated for consultation in the three institutions, the Universities of Aberdeen and Dundee, and Northern College. Staff had been invited to submit comments by 14 May and, on that date, there had been an open meeting for the University of Aberdeen staff at which questions raised had been about matters of detail and the overall process of implementation. All comments received would be considered by a tripartite meeting of the institutions involved at which the merger document would be finalised. In response to concern from some trades unions, it had been demonstrated that staff turnover in secretarial and clerical grades was such that any economies in staffing needed could be achieved through natural wastage. In Professor Macdonald's view, SHEFC continued to view the process towards merger favourably.
- 155 The Court noted Professor Macdonald's report.

GOVERNANCE: SHEFC GUIDE FOR MEMBERS
OF GOVERNING BODIES OF SCOTTISH HEIs
AND GOOD PRACTICE BENCHMARKS

- 156 Dr Scott Brown noted that, in most areas, the University's practice accorded with the recommendations of the SHEFC guide for members of governing bodies of Scottish HEIs. In some instances where University practice differed from that recommended by the Funding Council, the working party appointed by the Court (Dr Scott Brown (Convener), Mr Mair, Dr Milne, Professor MacGregor and Mr Cannon) had recommended action to enhance current practice or to ensure that reasons for divergence from a given recommendation would be made clear, for example, by recording in the annual report and accounts that the Court's current constitution provided for 28 members (as opposed to the recommended 25).

- 157 Mr Cannon confirmed that Aberdeen, in common with the other Scottish ancients, differed from the Funding Council's recommendations on issues such as the removal of members and on performance measurement. The former would be discussed further by the four institutions with a view to achieving solutions which accorded with the governing legislation. The introduction of latter would need to demonstrate clear benefit to the institutions themselves. The Court agreed that the working party should continue to devote attention to these issues.
- 158 The Court agreed that an induction/briefing meeting for new and existing members of the Court should be held annually before the first meeting of the session.
- 159 The Court agreed that definition of the role and responsibilities of the Chairperson would, in the University of Aberdeen, follow the institution's established pattern. The Rector was President of the Court, while the Vice-Chairman (designated the Senior Lay Member) performed the role of Chairman between meetings.
- 160 The Court agreed to invite bodies electing or appointing assessors to the Court to reflect on the suggested limits on length of service and on the upper age limit for membership of governing bodies.

RESOLUTION NO 214 OF 1999
[SECOND AMENDMENT TO RESOLUTION NO 50 OF 1972
(MATRICULATED STUDENT – STATUS DEFINITION)]

- 161 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.

CLOSURE OF RESEARCH CENTRES

- 162 On the recommendation of Senate, the Court agreed that both the Centre for the Study of Religions and the Centre for Literature and Medicine be closed.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH ABERDEEN COLLEGE

- 163 On the recommendation of Senate, the Court approved the proposed partnership agreement with Aberdeen College.

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

- 164 The Court approved or, where appropriate, endorsed the recommendations from the Nominating Committee, as set out in the appendix to this minute.

SHEFC MAIN GRANTS IN SUPPORT OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH 1999/2000

- 165 The Court noted SHEFC press release 2/99 of 25 March 1999 about recurrent grants to HEIs.

JOINT INFRASTRUCTURE FUND (JIF) BIDS

- 166 The Court noted the paper on the University's JIF bids for IMS Phase 2, the Centre for Deep Ocean Research and the Centre for Arctic Research.

MARISCHAL COLLEGE

- 167 The Court noted the report on Marischal College.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 1998/99

- 168 The Court noted the report on Capital Programme 1998/99.

STRATEGIC PLAN 1998-2000: IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMME

169 The Court noted the report on the implementation programme.

PERSONNEL SERVICES :CHANGE OF NAME

170 The Court noted that as part of the restructuring of Personnel Services the name of the section had been changed to Human Resources with immediate effect.

AURIS LTD: APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTORS

171 The Court noted that two new directors of AURIS have been appointed, namely Mr Ed Gillespie, the Chief Executive of Grampian Enterprise Ltd and Professor Richard Harrison, Department of Management Studies.

GIFTS, BENEFUNCTIONS AND CHARITABLE AWARDS

172 The Court noted the report from the Director of External Relations concerning, gifts, benefactions and charitable research awards that had been received by the University in the period 1 February to 30 April 1999.