

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 14 December 1999

Present: Dr R Scott Brown (in the Chair), Principal, Mr A Cole-Hamilton, Ms L Dromgoole, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Dr P Kinnear, Professor S Logan, Professor I Macdonald, Dr M Mackie, 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 G Catto and Professor J Sewel, with Mr S Cannon, Mr M Ord and Mr D Yule (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from the Rector, Councillor D Clyne, Dr H Fullerton and Professor A Forrester.

RECTOR

- 54 The Court decided to send to the Rector its best wishes for a full and speedy recovery from her recent illness.

WELCOME

- 55 On behalf of the Court Dr Scott Brown welcomed Dr Maitland Mackie to his first meeting of the Court.

MINUTES

- 56 The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 1999 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

- 57 The Principal drew attention to the Treasury initiative *Getting Britain Giving*, and the related forthcoming tax changes, which would facilitate the charitable donation of securities as well as money.
- 58 The Principal outlined to the Court the highly competitive nature of the Joint Infrastructure Fund Initiative. There had been more than 200 bids, of which 45 had been funded at only 25 institutions, including 10 funded bids at Oxford and Cambridge and a slightly smaller number in London. The University had made three bids in the first round, and while one was rejected early, it was gratifying that, in the face of fierce competition, the bid of £14M for IMS Phase 2 had been carried over for consideration in the next round. The Principal added that he understood that it was the feeling of the Court that the University should proceed with IMS Phase 2, whatever the outcome of the JIF bid, and that it was important, therefore, to determine a fall-back position in the event that the JIF funding might not be available.
- 59 Bearing in mind the distribution of JIF awards outlined above, it was a cause for special congratulation that the JIF bid for £4.2M led by Professor Priede for deep sea studies had been successful. The project combined important high quality science with state of the art technology. The Court agreed to convey its warm congratulations to Professor Priede.
- 60 A further JIF bid for the Institute of Applied Health Sciences would be considered at the JIF meeting in March.

- 61 Referring to the publication of statistics on wastage rates of higher education institutions, Professor Macdonald emphasised that the figures given were statistical projections based on information on past performance which might not be consistent across the sector. Nevertheless, the figure of 6% wastage by the end of year one was disappointing and was being taken seriously. It was difficult to identify the principal reasons for student wastage, but closer monitoring of mature students in particular was now in place, and further information was being sought on student withdrawals.
- 62 Professor Graham expressed the view that the financial imperative for students to spend time in employment imposed a greater strain on students than previously, and that the University's bursaries initiative could be very important in student retention.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 63 Professor Sewel reported that representatives of the University and of the Northern College had met with the SHEFC Mergers Committee on the previous day. The Committee had indicated its satisfaction with the underlying argument for merger and its judgement that the merger was in accordance with the recommendations of the Sutherland Report. There would be further scrutiny of the financial aspects of the merger at officer level, and it had been made clear once again to the SHEFC representatives that the merger could not proceed, if it would be to the financial detriment of the University.
- 64 The formal proposed vesting day for the merger continued to be 1 August 2000, although it was known that a recommendation on the merger to the Funding Council would not be made until June, and the Scottish Parliament was in recess in July. In those circumstances, SHEFC had been asked to inform the University and the Northern College by March whether any major difficulties had been identified, so that every effort could be made to maintain a smooth process for the merger.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

- 65 The Secretary reported on the recent electrical fault in the MacRobert Building. For reasons which were still unclear, there had been an explosion in the MacRobert Building switch-gear, which in turn had caused the switch-gear at the local Hydro-Electric sub-station to fail. Both the University and Hydro-Electric were re-examining their systems.
- 66 In the meantime, the MacRobert Building was being served by a stand-by generator until the end of the week, when new switch-gear would be installed. Staff of the Health and Safety Executive had visited the University for two days immediately after the incident, but a report was not expected until the New Year.

ACCOUNTS AND ENDOWMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 1999

- 67 It was noted, that in general, the University Accounts represented a good outturn for the year ended 31 July 1999 with a historical surplus in excess of the budgeted figure.
- 68 The AURIS results were less favourable and, as the Court had agreed at its previous meeting, the opportunity had been taken to restructure the company.
- 69 The Finance Director agreed to provide further information to members on more detailed questions raised on the accounts.

- 70 The Court approved the University accounts and the statement of endowments and noted the accounts of the subsidiary companies, AURIS Ltd and King's College Centre Ltd.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Audit Committee

- 71 The Court received a report by the Audit Committee (23.11.99) including the Committee's Annual Report and the Internal Auditors' Strategic Plan.
- 72 The Court noted that the ten year old internal audit consortium, of which the University had been a member, had been dissolved and had been replaced by a smaller consortium consisting of the University and the Robert Gordon University.
- 73 The Court approved the Annual Report of the Audit Committee and the Internal Auditors' Strategic Plan. The Court asked Mr Grant to convey the Court's gratitude to the members of his Committee for the demanding and painstaking work which they had undertaken on the University's behalf.

Student Organisations Committee

- 74 The Court received a report from the Student Organisations Committee (12.11.99 and 1.12.99) including the final drafts of the core constitution and the election procedures for the proposed Students' Association.
- 75 The Court approved the draft constitution and the draft election procedures on the following three conditions:
- (i) both documents must be regarded as providing only an interim framework to permit elections for the Students' Association to be held in Spring 2000;
 - (ii) both documents might be subject to amendment in the light of the completion of the necessary supporting schedules of the constitution;
 - (iii) before giving full and final approval to the constitution and its supporting schedules, the Court should give further consideration to the aspiration expressed in the draft constitution that the Students' Association should have the power to own property.
- 76 It was noted that the student sabbatical officers were addressing the place of the Charities Campaign within the new Students' Association as part of the ongoing constitutional discussions.

Joint Policy and Resource Committee

Admissions

- 77 The Court received a report from the Joint Policy and Resource Committee (2.12.99) from which it noted a further decline in undergraduate admissions during 1998/99 and the action which was being taken to increase the number of applications and to improve further the relatively successful record of the University in converting applications to entrants. In addition to those measures, Councillor Johnston commended the development of an active strategy on the use of the internet.

Tuition Fees for Overseas Students

- 78 The Court approved the Committee's recommendations for the rates of overseas tuition fees in 2000-2001 as follows: Arts based programmes: £6,840; Science based programmes £9,000; Clinical Medicine: £16,920 (on the understanding that Deans would have authority to offer remission of the rates proposed in the light of market conditions, where this would not constitute indirect discrimination).

Transparency Review

- 79 The Court noted that the University was participating in the Transparency Review initiated by the Treasury to demonstrate value for money in the public funding of research, and was required to report by January 2002. It was noted that compliance with the Transparency Review, which was being led within the University by a working group chaired by Professor Logan, would involve substantial commitment and co-operation by academic staff.

Finance and Estates Committee

- 80 The Court received a report from the Finance and Estates Committee (1.12.99) including a position paper on the work of the King's College Campus Commission, a report of the Committee's consideration of the financial planning implications of the proposals for the development of IMS Phase 2, and notification of the intention to explore a Foresterhill site transportation policy in collaboration with Aberdeen City Council and Grampian University Hospitals NHS Trust.

Student Residences and Campus Catering

- 81 It was also noted that the Committee had received the initial report of consultants on possible Public/Private Partnership (PPP) solutions for the future of student residences and campus catering, and the Court received two papers on future strategy and objectives. It was noted that best estimates were that, in order to guarantee student residential accommodation for undergraduate and postgraduate freshers and non graduating students, plus a small additional capacity for returning students, the supply of bedspaces could be reduced from around 4,000 to between 2,500 and 2,800, and that the Project Board was giving detailed consideration to the University's specific requirements with a view ultimately to pursuing the possibility of managing changes in student residential and catering structures by means of joint ventures with private sector partners.
- 82 It was noted that the degree of control which the University would retain on the setting of accommodation fees would vary depending on the kind of solution ultimately selected. It was confirmed also that account was being taken of the increasing prevalence of the need for student family accommodation, though for this kind of provision it might be more appropriate to pursue local authority and housing group links. It was being borne in mind that receipts in respect of the disposal of married accommodation at the Bridge of Don needed to be acknowledged in the planning for future provision of student accommodation.
- 83 It was confirmed that the University staff concerned would be kept informed of any significant developments.

Marischal College

- 84 The Court noted that, in the light of recent information from Jarvis that it had not yet been possible to confirm an hotel operator's commitment to Marischal College, the Marischal College group was being reconvened, to draw up a statement of development opportunities on which the University might open discussions with other interested parties, while maintaining contact with Jarvis.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION PAY AND CONDITIONS:
THE BETT REPORT

- 85 The Court received a draft position paper on the management approach to the Bett Report intended, following its approval by the Court, for discussion with the campus unions.
- 86 Mrs Inglis, in attendance for this item, presented the eight broad areas within which the Bett Report's sixty-one recommendations fell. In particular, she referred to the reduction of bargaining units from ten to two (academic and non-academic); the proposals for reform of pay structures; the disadvantageous disparity which had arisen between University levels of pay and market rates; the intention to introduce a national common core of minimum conditions of service; the importance of the establishment of a Scottish committee to advise the proposed National Council on Scottish matters; the need to retain the link between salary scales of clinical academics and those of NHS clinicians; the importance of management and staff development; the financial implications of implementing the Bett recommendations. She noted also that, following a period of consultation, a further announcement of UCEA's position was expected before the end of the year.
- 87 In discussion, reference was made to the importance of acknowledging international competitiveness and international salaries in remuneration of staff, the contribution which low pay and increasing bureaucracy made to the demotivation of staff, the need to ensure the relevance of staff development to secure staff support, the potential value of Investors in People as a vehicle for the delivery of institutional strategy, the government's insistence on accountability (with its associated bureaucracy) in its role as paymaster of higher education, and the desirability of attracting private funding to avoid dependency on the state.
- 88 The Court agreed that it would wish to consider further the issues raised in the position paper as they developed, but, in the meantime, approved the document as representing the management approach to the Bett Report in discussion with the campus unions.

RESOLUTION NO 217 OF 1999
[CHAIR OF PHARMACOLOGY – AMENDMENT OF TITLE]

- 89 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 218 OF 1999
[CHAIR OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY]

- 90 The Court, having noted that the draft Resolution had been approved by the Senate and 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 2000
[CREATION OF A FACULTY OF EDUCATION]

- 91 The Court decided to forward the draft Resolution to Senate and to the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

ACCREDITATION OF THE SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

- 92 The Court approved an Accreditation Agreement with the Scottish Agricultural College, noting that the Senate, for its part, had approved the Agreement at its meeting on 17 November 1999.

GIFTS, BENEFACTIONS AND CHARITABLE AWARDS

- 93 The Court received a report on gifts, benefactions and charitable research awards received by the University in the quarter to 31 October 1999.