

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of meeting held on 21 March 2000

Present: Rector (in the Chair), Principal, Dr R Scott Brown, Councillor D Clyne, Mr D Cockburn, Mr A Cole-Hamilton, Dr H Fullerton, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Miss A Harper, Professor D Houlihan, Councillor P Johnston, Professor S Logan, Professor I Macdonald, Dr M Mackie, Miss M Main, Mr A Mair, Mr J Michie, Dr N Milne, Professor D Ogston, Dr G Roberts, Professor P Sloane, Mr G Stevenson, Professor I Torrance, with Professor A Forrester and Professor J Sewel, Mr S Cannon and Mr D Yule (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Professor G Catto, Dr Paul Kinnear, Mr A Salvesen and Mrs A Skene

WELCOME

132 On behalf of the Court the Rector welcomed Miss Ann Harper to her first meeting of the Court.

MINUTES

133 The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2000 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

134 Referring to press reports which had been made available to Court members, the Principal drew attention to the improved level of placed material in quality newspapers. The Principal referred also to press reports of improving conditions for charitable giving and expressed his view that further improvements might be expected to be announced in the Budget. Recently press reports had also been indicative of thriving research within the University, of increased activity in student recruitment and of a high achieving student body, with the Debater having recorded impressive successes in national debating competitions.

135 Reviewing the recent level of achievement within the University, the Principal reported on a greater degree of success in competing for peer reviewed research grants, especially in Medicine and Medical Sciences, but also, for example, in the University's competitiveness within the JIF scheme and the recent achievement of Professor Sleeman in sharing in a Research Council Grant of £7M with colleagues in Edinburgh and Southampton Universities. The standard of academic staff appointments was now comparable with the highest national standards and reflected the higher level of aspiration now evident throughout the University.

- 136 Much had been achieved also in administration, to a large extent through the restructuring initiated by the Secretary. The student recruitment and admissions functions had been merged, and it was gratifying that the University was not following the national trend of a down turn in undergraduate applications. Functional mergers had also taken place to create the new Facilities Management Section and to consolidate student affairs under the Regent. Important developments were being promoted within Human Resources with the removal of the unfair dismissal clause, and substantial progress in equal opportunities policy, the development of a new redundancy policy and the imminent reintroduction of an improved appraisal scheme. In all those areas work had been proceeding in consultation with the unions, and the contribution which all parties had made to the handling of industrial action over the summer was something of which all could be proud. In Public Relations there had been noteworthy improvements in internal communication and a new internal bulletin would shortly be launched. Externally press coverage had improved, initially locally, then within Scotland, and was now beginning to be more successful also in the major UK national newspapers. The University's relations with local authorities and business were as good as they had ever been, though, as with all areas of external relations, more had to be achieved.
- 137 With just less than £20M raised in the last three years, there could be sufficient confidence in a year's time to transfer, say, £200K from the Development Trust to the University's revenue budget. Fund raising had now been established as a routine activity of the University. Court members had made a distinguished contribution to charitable giving to the University, and the Principal mentioned in particular Mr Stevenson's gift of a font to the Chapel, the endowment of the Macartney Student Fellowship and the Elphinstone Bell Scholarship established by Dr and Mrs Scott Brown.
- 138 In the area of student affairs, the formation of the new Student Association from the three existing student organisations would be a major step forward.
- 139 Mr Stevenson endorsed the Principal's favourable report of the development of Facilities Management, an area in which he had noticed a distinct improvement and in which he expected further improvement to follow.
- 140 On the reintroduction of appraisal, Mr Cannon explained that the revised scheme would shortly be piloted in one or two areas of the University, and that the scheme itself was firmly embedded in the culture of the University's commitment to Investors in People.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Audit Committee

- 141 The Court received a report from the Audit Committee (13.3.00) intimating that the Committee had reviewed University practice to assess institutional compliance with the revised SHEFC Code of Audit Practice, which came into effect in September 1999, and noted with satisfaction that the University largely complied with the mandatory requirements of the Code. Four areas, however, required further development and recommendations on those matters would be brought to the Audit Committee's next meeting in the context of a draft internal code.

Finance and Estates Committee

- 142 The Court received a report from the Finance and Estates Committee (7.3.00) which included a progress report on the Pathfinder Project and on the future of catering provision within the University.

Residential and Catering Services Budgets and Hall Fees 2000-2001

- 143 Mr Mair introduced the Committee's recommendations on budgets and hall fees for 2000-2001 which were based on an overall uplift of 2.5% in hall fees in line with inflation and 3.5% and 2.5% increases in catering prices for staff and students respectively. Mr Mair noted that the annual deficits on the residential and catering services budgets had been reduced steadily in recent years, with the expectation that in 1999/2000 the accounts would record something close to the estimated deficit of £393K. The recommendations of the Finance & Estates Committee were intended to reduce the annual deficit further to £184K, but represented simply a holding position while an overall review of Residences and Catering provision proceeded.
- 144 The Rector intimated that the SRC and Divinity students had asked her to inform the Court that, while they recognised the inevitability of the change of catering service provision in the King's College Sports Pavilion, they would wish a similar facility to be reintroduced within the new Student Association building.
- 145 It was observed that budgeting for a voids rate of 5% was simply a recognition of the reality of the outflow of student residents in the course of the year, and Mr Cannon confirmed that, while the University did not actually benchmark voids, there was regular benchmarking of rents and stock, which indicated that the University's prices were around the average for the sector, but the stock held was much higher than average. The Finance Director undertook to provide more detailed information to Councillor Johnston on the budgeted figures for bar income and expenditure.
- 146 The Court approved the recommendations of the Finance & Estates Committee on budgets and hall fees for session 2000-2001.

Marischal College

- 147 The Court received a progress report on parallel proposals for potential hotel and office developments at Marischal College. On the hotel development proposal, Jarvis had agreed Heads of Terms with another hotel operator, whose Board had approved in principle a development of Marischal College. The University was seeking an independent analysis of the business projections received from Jarvis with a view to determining whether the Jarvis proposal could be acceptable to the University.
- 148 On the office accommodation proposal, negotiations were continuing with the potential developer, who had indicated a wish to have exclusive use of Marischal College. This proposal might only be taken forward further after the position in regard to the hotel development had been clarified.
- 149 While noting concern at the unused and potentially deteriorating asset represented by Marischal College, members of the Sub-Group on Marischal College confirmed that, on grounds of expense and risk respectively, it would be inappropriate for the University either to reoccupy the premises or to seek to develop them itself.

Bridge of Don Retail Scheme

- 150 The Court received a progress report on the University's planning application for a retail scheme on its Bridge of Don site. It was noted that there had been indications that planning approval might not necessarily be granted and, if so, the University would need to decide whether to take the matter to appeal.

Capital Programme 1999-2000

- 151 The Court noted two amendments to the 1999-2000 Capital Programme (for £160K on IT server replacement to be brought forward to the current year and for £100K for design fees for the JIF bid for an Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability).

Student Organisations Committee

- 152 The Court received a report from the Student Organisations Committee (13.3.00) that the Committee had reviewed the very great majority of the constitutional documents required for the establishment for the Aberdeen University Student Association, but had noted that, while the documents were very nearly complete, they required some final adjustment and consultation with the existing student organisations before they might properly be forwarded to the Court.
- 153 In the circumstances, the Court approved the recommendation of the Student Organisations Committee that the Court extend its provisional approval of the draft Constitution and the draft Elections Schedule to permit elections to proceed for the Student Association's constituent councils and to allow the Court to reach a final decision on the proposed Constitution of the Student Association at its meeting on 16 May 2000.

LIBRARY REGULATIONS

- 154 The Court received revised draft Library Regulations, which the Senate, for its part had approved.
- 155 While noting that the Regulations permitted access to the Library to members of the general public without distinction as to age, the Court observed that the Director of Information Systems and Services had discretion to exclude from the Library any person, regardless of age, whose improper conduct was inappropriate in a Library environment, and approved the Regulations without amendment.

**FUNDING FOR THE FUTURE: STAGE 2 CONSULTATION PAPER
ON THE FUNDING OF TEACHING**

- 156 The Court received SHEFC Consultation Paper 01/00, Funding for the Future: Stage 2 Consultation Paper on the Funding of Teaching and a commentary on the Consultation Paper.
- 157 While acknowledging the validity of the Government's priority of widening access, members of Court expressed a number of concerns about the content of the Consultation Paper and, in particular, about the expressed intention to divert funded numbers in an attempt to deliver Government policy. It was observed that widening access could be more appropriately addressed by special initiatives supported by top sliced funding, and that the proposals in the Consultation Paper were unlikely to achieve their objectives and could prove damaging in terms of wastage rates and academic standards.
- 158 It was noted that there would shortly be a COSHEP meeting to discuss the Consultation Paper, and the Court authorised the Secretary to finalise the

University's response which should be based on the Court's own discussion of the paper modified by the general view of Scottish Higher Education Institutions expressed at the COSHEP meeting.

CUC PROGRESS REPORT ON EFFECTIVENESS OF
UNIVERSITY GOVERNING BODIES

- 159 The Court received the progress report of the CUC Working Party on the effectiveness of University governing bodies with a commentary on the report.
- 160 The Court noted that it would be appropriate to complete a review of its effectiveness during the summer, so that the University could participate in the CUC survey of progress in this area scheduled for autumn 2000.
- 161 Following discussion the Court agreed to adopt the recommendations of Dr Scott Brown that it should conduct a review of its effectiveness in three stages – initially by questionnaire, by internal analysis of the responses, and by a full meeting of the Court, perhaps over two days which would include aspects also of a fuller induction programme. The questionnaire should be scheduled for completion before the end of the summer term with the final stage of the review taking place just before the opening of the session 2000/2001.

RESOLUTION NO 220 OF 2000
SUPPLEMENTARY REGULATIONS FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF EDUCATION
(B.Ed)

- 162 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 221 OF 2000
SUPPLEMENTARY REGULATIONS FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (BA)
IN THE FIELD OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

- 163 The Court having noted that the draft Resolution had been approved by the Senate and (with certain observations) 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 222 OF 2000
CHANGES IN REGULATIONS FOR VARIOUS DEGREES

- 164 The Court having noted that the draft Resolution had been approved by the Senate and (subject to minor amendment) 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.

DRAFT RESOLUTION NO OF 2000
FIFTH AMENDMENT TO SCHEDULE A TO UC ORDINANCE NO 111
(ELECTION OF READERS AND LECTURERS TO THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS)

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