

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Minutes of Meeting held on 16 May 2000

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

Apologies for absence were received from Professor G Catto, Councillor D Clyne, Dr H Fullerton, Professor G Graham, Mr J Grant, Professor S Logan and Mr A Salvesen.

MINUTES

166 The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2000 were approved.

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT

167 The Principal informed the Court that Professor Penman's resignation as a member of the Court had been occasioned by his appointment later in the summer to a post of Vice-Principal at the Robert Gordon University. On behalf of the Court the Principal expressed gratitude for Professor Penman's service as a member of Court and congratulations on a well-deserved appointment. The Court asked the Principal to convey its best wishes to Professor Penman.

168 The Principal informed the Court that work was proceeding on budget planning to respond to the reduced allocation to the University in Funding Council grant, in which the declared 1.8% increase actually equated with a £700K reduction in real terms. A reduction of this order had not been unexpected, but it would not be easy to adapt in budgetary terms both to the reduction in SHEFC grant and to the additional expenditure which had been permitted in the current year to assist Faculties in the run-up to the Research Assessment Exercise. The aim was to achieve a very modest historical cost surplus in 2000-2001 returning to a target surplus more in line with normal expectations in the following year.

169 The Principal referred to reports in the local press of the University's success in obtaining some £5M in European funding in support of some 28 projects. Professor Forrester added that it was especially gratifying that the applications which had been successful under Framework 5 were spread across the whole University. Those concerned with the success in obtaining the funding deserved congratulation.

170 A further success, while not so striking in financial terms, fully as distinguished in its own field, was the success of Professor Hewitt in securing a grant of £129K from the Arts and Humanities Research Board to support the continuing of his Walter Scott Project, which had been described as the most successful English language editing project in the world.

- 171 Referring to recent press reports, the Principal drew attention, among other things, to the very favourable comments made on the University's website, to the University's improved performance in a recently published league table, to reports of highly distinguished visitors to the University and to significant new appointments.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

- 172 Professor Sewel reminded the Court that the merger proposal on behalf of the University, the University of Dundee and the Northern College had been submitted to SHEFC in July 1999. SHEFC had informed the University only four weeks ago that it was unable to endorse the proposal. At a meeting of the three participants in the proposal with SHEFC on 12 May, however, it had become apparent that there were no major policy obstacles to the merger which could not be addressed by working arrangements between the two universities. There were problems of cost, although these concerned the Dundee element of the merger. Following constructive discussion the partners had agreed to work together to seek to achieve the aims of the original merger proposal, and speedy progress was expected over the next few weeks. While the originally proposed vesting date of 1 August 2000 was clearly not feasible, it was still hoped that the merger could be accomplished in time for the start of session 2001-2002.

VICE CHAIRMAN OF COURT

- 173 On the nomination of Dr Scott Brown, seconded by Mrs Skene, the Court elected Mr Alistair Mair as Vice-Chairman of Court with effect from 1 August 2000.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Joint Policy and Resource Committee

- 174 The Court received a report from the Joint Policy and Resource Committee (26.4.00).

Funding Academic Projects

- 175 It was reported that, although the JIF bid for Phase 2 of the Institute of Medical Sciences had distinguished itself by proceeding to the final stages of selection, it had ultimately not been funded. Management was now reviewing possible funding options for Phase 2, and would report to the Finance & Estates Committee and to the Court in June.
- 176 A further bid had been submitted to JIF for an Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability (ACES), which envisaged the construction of an extension to the existing Zoology building at a total cost of £15.5M including a University contribution of around £6.5M. If this bid was unsuccessful it would be necessary to review possible options in the light of available resources.

Department of Agriculture and Forestry

- 177 The Court considered and approved the recommendation of the Joint Policy and Resource Committee that the Departments of Agriculture and Forestry be merged as the Department of Agriculture and Forestry with effect from 1 August 2000.

- 178 Dr Mackie observed that there was an excellent opportunity for Aberdeen to achieve prominence in the area of land use and the study of rural environmental and economic issues, which the merged department could be well placed to exploit.

Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees

- 179 After discussion of the level of the extension fee and of the re-examination fee, the Court approved the recommendations of the Joint Policy and Resource Committee for Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees for the academic year 2000-2001 subject to the decision of the Senior Lay member and the Convener of the Finance and Estates Committee on the charging of a re-examination fee in the light of more detailed information on the collection of the fee,

Finance and Estates Committee

- 180 The Court received a report from the Finance & Estates Committee (2.5.00) including information on changes to the current year's Capital Programme, the close down of the 1998-99 Equipment Procurement Scheme and the continuation of the scheme in 1999-2000 through Skyglade, another special purpose leasing company, a report of the Funding Council's Main Grants in Support of Teaching and Research for 2000-2001 and a successful appeal to the VAT Tribunal resulting in a saving to the University of approximately £475K.

Student Residences and University Catering

- 181 The Court noted that presentations had been made to the Finance & Estates Committee on the potential redevelopment of the University's student residential accommodation and on options for the future of University catering, and that the Committee had agreed that detailed proposals be developed and brought forward for consideration by the Committee and subsequently the Court at their meetings in June 2000.

Foresterhill Site Transportation Policy

- 182 The Court noted that Aberdeen City Council Planning Committee had approved the University's IMS 2 planning application, which reflected the proposed implementation of the Foresterhill Site Transportation Policy being developed between the University, Aberdeen City Council and the Grampian University Hospitals NHS Trust.

University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme

- 183 The Court noted that, in the light of the Actuary's report the Trustees had approved three relatively minor improvements in benefits to take effect from 1 August 2000, and had further agreed that the contribution rate be set at 15% of pensionable salary with effect from 1 August 1999. The 2.6% reduction in employer's contribution would result in a saving to the University of £250K in 1999-2000.
- 184 The Court appointed Miss Margaret Main as a Trustee of the University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme elected by the members for a further three year period from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2003.

Student Organisations Committee

- 185 The Court received a report from the Student Organisations Committee (25.4.00), which included a report on the allocation of grants to the student organisations for 2000-2001.

Students' Association: Draft Constitution and Schedules

- 186 The Court approved the draft Constitution and related Schedules for the Students' Association, which had been recommended by the Student Organisations Committee. In doing so, the Court agreed that, in the interests of limiting the possibility of risk to the University, the Students' Association should not have the power to own property.
- 187 Noting, however, that consultation with staff on the transfer of staff contracts under the standard TUPE arrangements were still ongoing, and that the necessary transfer of the licence for the sale of alcohol from the existing University Union to the new Students' Association could not be completed before the scheduled date for the establishment of the Students' Association on 1 August 2000, the Court agreed that, as a transitional arrangement from 1 August 2000 to 1 November 2000, while the constitution of the Students' Association should apply to the generality of student organisation business, the University Union, and its existing constitution should be retained and the Union should be run, in accordance with the existing constitution, by the Union Management Council. Thereafter the new Students' Association constitution should be fully adopted following satisfaction of all TUPE requirements and the transfer of the licence from the Union to the Students' Association.
- 188 The Court also approved the observation of the Student Organisations Committee that it remained appropriate that, of the three constituent Councils of the new Students' Association only the Union Management Council required to have Court representation, and that it would be appropriate to review the arrangement after a year's experience of the new Students' Association.
- 189 It was noted that a constitutional working party of the Students' Association would keep the constitution under review, and that it was possible that amendments would be required in the light of working experience.
- 190 The Court also approved the revised Code of Practice to ensure compliance with the 1994 Education Act, which had been updated to reflect the Court's relationship with the new Students' Association.

REVIEW OF COMMITTEES

- 191 The Court received recommendations for the reform of the structure of Court and Joint Court-Senate Committees, specifically, the proposed mergers of the Joint Policy and Resource Committee with Finance & Estates, the Student Organisations Committee with Welfare and Academic Services Consultative Committee, and the Personnel Policy and Staff Development and Appraisal Committee with the Staff Grading and Promotions Committee, the amendment of remit and composition of the Chapel Committee and the Safety Committee, and the abolition of the Continuing Education Policy Committee.

- 192 Noting that, in view of the recommended change to the remit of the Safety Committee, the Committee might more appropriately be entitled the Health and Safety Committee, the Court agreed to refer the proposals for appropriate consultation with a view to a final decision at the Court's meeting on 27 June 2000.

REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS OF COURT

- 193 The Court received a draft questionnaire intended for use in a survey of Court members as the first stage of the Court's review of its effectiveness and approved it with minor amendment.
- 194 The Court approved the composition of the following review group to analyse responses to the questionnaire in the first instance: Dr R Scott Brown, Mr A Mair and Professor I Torrance.

GIFTS, BENEFACTIONS AND CHARITABLE AWARDS

- 195 The Court received a report of gifts, benefactions and charitable awards received in the quarter to 30 April.