

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 1999

Present: Principal, Professors Sloane, Houlihan, Dr JG Roberts, AR Forrester, Catto, Sewel, Cameron, Johnstone, Miller, Urwin, Penman, Baker, Britton, Jolliffe, Cusine, Racey, Buckland, Macinnes, Jordan, Bryden, Graham, Lomax, Alexander, Simpson, Pope, Watson, Ingold, Leboutte, Archbold, Adams, Mather, Duff, Salmon and Torrance, Dr GJA Burgess, Dr L Foley, Mr G Pryor, Dr AR Akisanya, Mr WTC Brotherstone, Dr JB Craig, Dr A Cumbers, Dr D Heddle, Dr G Hesketh, Dr MA Hutchison, Dr AM Kiger, Dr PR Kinnear, Dr S Lawrie, Dr WF Long, Dr PFA MacConnell, Dr MR Masson, Dr JA Petty, Dr J Sheehan, Dr JDF Skatun, Dr SP Townsend, Dr A Venneri, Dr HM Wallace, Mr A Cole-Hamilton, Mr R McGregor, Mr G Couper, Ms S Arrowsmith and Ms K Finan.

Apologies for absence were received from Professors IR Macdonald, Logan, Walker, Templeton, Thomson, Sleeman, Bruce, Helms, Ritchie, Sharp, Hukins, Gilbert, Booth, Flin, Greaves, Ingram, Watson, McCaig and Blaikie, Dr LH Chappell, Dr J Dunkley, Dr CT Imrie, Dr JM Liversidge, Mr WS McKerrow, Dr TA Mahmood, Dr DA Nunez, Mrs ML Ross, Mr R Okasha and Ms C Murray.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

190. The minutes of the meeting of 13 October 1999 were approved.

**INDUCTION OF PROFESSOR R LEBOUTTE TO THE
SECOND CHAIR OF HISTORY**

- 191.1 The Senate noted that the Court had appointed Professor Rene FMP Leboutte, MA, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Civilisation, European University Institute, Florence, to the Second Chair of History with effect from 1 October 1999.
- 191.2 Professor Leboutte was welcomed by the Principal on behalf of the Senate, and signed the Membership Roll.

STATEMENT BY PRINCIPAL

Small Grants Fund

192. The Principal announced that £100,000 of fund-raising income had been earmarked to support initiatives or activities for which funding might otherwise be unavailable. All staff and students would be eligible to apply for grants of up to £2,000. Details of the application procedure would be advertised shortly.

MacGillivray Academic Centre

193. The Principal reported that he had recently officially opened the MacGillivray Academic Centre, a new teaching and learning facility based within Aberdeen Maternity Hospital. The Centre was named in honour of Emeritus Professor Ian MacGillivray, former Professor and Head of the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology.

Elphinstone Institute

194. The Principal reported that the new offices of the University's Elphinstone Institute had been inaugurated at a special ceremony earlier in the day. The Institute was dedicated to the study of the cultural tradition of the North and North-East of Scotland.

Remedios

195. Senate noted that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Henry McLeish, had recently formally launched Remedios, a biotechnology company based in Aberdeen which was involved in the field of environmental diagnostics and solutions. The company's technology was based on luminescent biosensors which had been developed at the University.

Charitable Gifts

196. The Principal commented on several measures announced recently in the Chancellor's pre-budget statement which he hoped would give greater incentive to those wishing to make charitable donations to the University. In particular, the current levy of capital gains tax on appreciated securities would cease, which would allow the full value to be donated to the University; the Government would contribute 28 pence for every one pound of charitable funds received by HEIs; and the current ceiling on contributions being made through the payroll would be removed.

Graduation Ceremonies

- 197.1 The Principal urged members to attend graduation ceremonies, to demonstrate to graduands and their families the importance which the University attached to these events as graduates entered the next phase of their association with the University. He reminded members that graduation ceremonies would be held on 26 and 27 November 1999 at 3.00 p.m. and 11.00 a.m., respectively.
- 197.2 In response to a comment that junior staff may be reluctant to attend graduation ceremonies because of the cost of hiring a gown, the Principal indicated that the University would increase its stock of academic dress for staff to use on these occasions.

Student Recruitment and Admissions

- 198.1 The Principal reported that last year's decline in applications to the University was part of a continuing trend observed since 1994. Indications suggested that the trend would continue. The University's ability to maintain its current level of funded student numbers would be in jeopardy unless the University took positive action to address the decline. The Principal acknowledged the huge efforts to increase applications already being made by several Departments. He invited the University Secretary to outline the actions being taken centrally.

- 198.2 Mr Cannon reported that the University would adopt a much more professional and targeted approach to student recruitment. The Undergraduate Admissions Office was now part of Student Recruitment and Admissions Services, and proposals were being prepared for additional resources to support promotional and recruitment activities targeted at home/EU students. Also, the Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions Services would review international activities and bring forward recommendations before April 2000.
- 198.3 Research would be undertaken to compare the University's provision with its competitors and to ascertain the needs of employers, to establish whether or not the University's product was that being demanded by the current market. The Principal had established a task force consisting of Lord Sewel, Professors AR Forrester, Catto and IR Macdonald, and the University Secretary to address the issues and bring forward proposals. The group would consult widely with Deans, Heads of Department, students and the academic community at large.

QSP Financial Systems

- 199.1 The Principal acknowledged the serious problems with the QSP financial systems which were being experienced throughout the University. The administration viewed these problems as a priority area requiring urgent attention and the Principal invited the University Secretary to update members on the current position.
- 199.2 Mr Cannon indicated that he was meeting regularly with the QSP Project Board, which had adopted a two-fold strategy to address the problems. Firstly, the significant technical difficulties with the hardware and software were being considered, and Heads of Department had received regular updates on progress. Secondly, there was a need to assess the QSP systems against the business practices operating within Departments, and of the business needs of Departments and the University. Departments would soon be invited to comment on the appropriateness of the system for their business needs. A report would be submitted to the Principal and the Senior Management Group in mid-December. Members were reminded that they should continue to write to Mr Cannon with their comments, suggestions or observations.

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

- 200.1 The Senate received a draft response to a consultation paper from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) on Higher Education Qualifications Frameworks. The Principal drew attention to the potential implications for the University of the QAA's proposals: in particular, the University's right to award the degrees of MA, MEng and MChem would be under threat if the proposals were endorsed.

200.2 The Principal invited general comment. A wide-ranging debate ensued, whose principal points of record were as follows:-

- (i) Members expressed general concern at the tone of the draft responses, which suggested that the University intended to comply with, or agreed with, some of the proposals.
- (ii) Strong opinion was expressed that the University should reject any proposal by the QAA to abolish the undergraduate MA degree. The authority of the QAA in this matter was questioned. The Universities (Scotland) Act 1966 gave authority to the University to determine the title and nature of awards which the University should offer.
- (iii) Members felt strongly that, following the first consultation on this issue, the QAA had had sufficient time to develop proposals for a Scottish Qualifications Framework which would allow the Scottish undergraduate MA degree to remain distinct from postgraduate taught Master's degrees. However, the QAA had failed to address this issue.
- (iv) The standards of the MA degree were considered to be more in line with European standards than those of equivalent BA degrees.
- (v) Members considered that the standard of the Scottish MA degree was widely understood and could not be confused with the standard of a postgraduate Master's degree. The University therefore had a duty to its current and prospective students and staff, and to its graduates and alumni, to continue to offer the MA degree.
- (vi) Concern was expressed at the potential implications for joint degrees in regard to the number of credits at Levels 3 and 4 that were being proposed as a pre-requisite for the award of an Honours degree.

200.3 In drawing the debate to a close, the Principal invited members to submit written comments on any of the consultation paper's proposals to the Academic Registrar by 26 November 1999. The following was agreed:-

- (a) That the draft response should be revised in light of discussion at the Senate and of written comments from members. It should emphasise the Senate's strong objections to the suggestion that the undergraduate MA degree should no longer be awarded, and to the potential implications of the proposals for other areas of the University's provision.
- (b) That the revised response should be considered by a small group of Senators before being finalised by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, on behalf of the University.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT
(2 November 1999)

Draft Resolution No of 1999
[Chair of Pharmacology - Amendment of Title]

201.1 The Senate noted that the Court had decided to forward the above Resolution to the Senate and the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.

- 201.2 The Senate, for its part, approved Draft Resolution No of 1999 [Chair of Pharmacology - Amendment of Title].

Draft Resolution No of 1999
[Chair of Social Anthropology]

- 202.1 The Senate noted that the Court had decided to forward the above Resolution to the Senate and the General Council and to make it generally available in terms of Section 6 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966.
- 202.2 The Senate, for its part, approved Draft Resolution No of 1999 [Chair of Social Anthropology].

Resolution No 215 of 1999
[Chairs of Computing Science - Amendment of Title]

203. The Senate noted that the Court had approved the above Resolution.

Library Committee:
Resolution No 216 of 1999
[Repeal of Ordinance No 307 (Aberdeen No 82)]

204. The Senate noted that the Court had approved the above Resolution.

Northern European Historical Research Network

205. The Senate noted that the Court had approved the recommendation that the University become a partner institution of the Northern European Historical Research Network.

Vice-Principal

206. The Senate noted that the Court had approved the recommendation that Professor John Sewel be appointed Vice-Principal for the period 1 August 1999 - 31 July 2002.

REPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON
TEACHING AND LEARNING
(21 October 1999)

Honours Classification in All Degree Programmes (*Grade Spectrum*)

- 207.1 The Senate approved a recommendation from the University Committee on Teaching and Learning that, following three recent academic appeals and following a specific request from five External Examiners for clearer guidance on the use of discretion in determining degree classification, the following be incorporated as Notes to the University's "Honours Classification in All Degree Programmes (*Grade Spectrum*)" with immediate effect:-

Notes

- 1 General Regulation 20 for First Degrees shall apply where candidates have been unable to complete an element of Honours degree assessment at the prescribed time on account of illness (which must be certified by a medical practitioner) or other good cause. [Good cause is defined as any reason outwith a candidate's control e.g. compassionate or unavoidable circumstances and does not include, for example, misreading of the examination timetable in regard to the date, time or venue of an examination].
 - 2 Where candidates fail to complete an element of Honours degree assessment at the prescribed time without good cause (see Note 1), they shall be awarded a No Paper (NP) for each such element: for the purposes of the grade spectrum, this shall be interpreted as candidates having been awarded a mark of 0 for these elements. Candidates in this position cannot expect to be awarded a class higher than a 2ii unless the Examiners choose to use their discretion to depart from the class indicated by the grade spectrum.
 - 3 There can be no undertaking that the Examiners will choose to use discretion to depart from the class indicated by the grade spectrum. And in no circumstances other than those that are outlined in General Regulation 20 for First Degrees can the fact that a student has not completed any element of assessment, or the mark obtained in any element, be discounted for the purposes of Honours classification.
 - 4 Where the Examiners choose to use their discretion to depart, in an upward direction, from the class indicated by the grade spectrum, it shall normally be as a consequence of (a) a candidate's overall performance and (b) the particular circumstances which have resulted in a candidate not satisfying the normal grade spectrum requirement for the higher class.
- 207.2 The Senate noted that a document would be prepared in regard to the guidance which Heads of Department and Advisers of Studies should give to students who either missed an element of Honours degree assessment without good cause or who failed an element of Honours degree assessment, as to the potential effect this would have on their degree classification and what steps they could take, if any, to remedy their position (Note 2 above refers).
- 207.3 The Senate agreed that the guidance to students also should indicate that, where a student had either failed, or had been unable to complete, for any reason, an element of Honours assessment at the time prescribed by General Regulation 9.3 for First Degrees, they still had the right to be assessed in the element(s) concerned at a later date, provided that they held a valid Class Certificate(s) for the course(s) in question and paid the re-examination fee, where appropriate. While the result of such an assessment would not contribute to Honours classification, it would, if completed successfully, be recorded on a student's transcript and could be used, for example, to indicate to a professional or statutory body that a student had completed successfully a particular course in order to satisfy accreditation requirements.

Subject Review

- 208.1 The Senate noted that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council had agreed recently, in principle, to contract with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) for a new process of external review of the quality and standards of educational provision. All subjects were to be reviewed between 2000-2003 and 2003-2006. The QAA had recently published details of the new framework for the assurance of quality and standards and how it would operate. The University had been required to submit to the QAA, by 1 November 1999, a timetable for subject review between 2000-2003, indicating the academic year in which the University would prefer each subject unit to be reviewed. After consultation with the relevant Deans and Heads of Department, the University had proposed that subjects should be reviewed between 2001-2003. However, there was no guarantee that this timetable would be acceptable to the QAA (or SHEFC), which had requested an even distribution of subjects to be reviewed over the three year period.
- 208.2 The Senate noted that the Principal had recently written to the Chief Executive of SHEFC to request formally that the first three-year cycle of subject review be deferred by one year i.e. that it should not commence until 2001/2002; and that, if this were not acceptable to SHEFC, the University should be allowed to compress all those subjects identified for review between 2000-2003 into the last two years of the cycle i.e. between 2001-2003. This would allow (a) Departments to concentrate on preparing for the Research Assessment Exercise during 2000-2001 and (b) the University to evaluate the QAA's proposals for Subject Review so that Departments could be better prepared for this new process of external scrutiny.

REPORTS FROM THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Accreditation of The Scottish Agricultural College

209. The Senate received and, for its part, approved a draft Accreditation Agreement following a recommendation from the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) that the University should accredit The Scottish Agricultural College (SAC).

Dates of Terms

210. The Senate approved recommendations from the relevant Undergraduate Programme Committees in regard to the dates of terms in Academic Year 2000-2001 for the Degree of MA in European Languages with Education, the Degrees of BSc in Animal Care and in Equine Science, and the Degrees of MBChB and BSc Med Sci.

New and Discontinued Courses and Programmes

211. The Senate noted that the Academic Standards Committees, on the recommendations of the relevant Faculties, had approved further changes to the list of courses and programmes available as under (the list excluded those courses which had been re-numbered solely because of a change in credit value, or teaching or assessment arrangements).

Geography

Introduction of new level 4 course: 'Environmental Monitoring and Modelling'.

Withdrawal of the courses 'Human Impact on the Atmosphere' (GG3514) and 'Climate and Weather Systems' (GG4513).

History of Art

Re-instatement of the level 3 course 'French Art 1880-1935' (HA 3505).

Zoology

Introduction of a Designated Degree of B Sc programme in Conservation Biology.

**APPROVAL OF ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR ENTRY
IN SEPTEMBER 2001**

212. The Senate agreed that the Principal be authorised to approve on its behalf any changes to 'going rates' for entry to First Degree programmes in September 2001 which the Joint Policy and Resource Committee, following consultation with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee, may decide to recommend at its postponed meeting to be held on 2 December 1999. This was to avoid formal approval of any such changes having to await the meeting of the Senate to be held on 26 January 2000. Any changes approved, together with the admissions targets approved by the Joint Policy and Resource Committee for entry in September 2000, would be reported to the Senate at its January meeting.

**REPORT FROM THE STUDENT RECRUITMENT
AND ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE
(11 November 1999)**

213. The Senate noted the *Report on Admissions to the University : Academic Year 1999-2000*, which had been considered by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee.

MERGER WITH NORTHERN COLLEGE

214. The Senate approved a recommendation that the validation of the degrees and diplomas currently awarded at the Aberdeen campus of Northern College for the purpose of their leading to an award of the University in the event of merger, and of any new or amended course and programme proposals, be remitted to the relevant Academic Standards Committee, as appropriate.

ELECTION OF SENATE ASSESSOR TO THE UNIVERSITY COURT

215. The Senate noted that Dr PR Kinnear had been elected to serve as a Senate Assessor to the University Court with immediate effect until 30 September 2003.

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP OF SENATE

216. The Senate noted that the following students had been elected to serve on the Senate for the academic year 1999-2000:-

President SRC	Mr A Cole-Hamilton
Education Convener	Mr R Okasha
Postgraduate Convener	Mr D Bow
Student Conveners for the Undergraduate Programme Committees in:	
Arts & Social Sciences	Mr R McGregor
Divinity	vacant
Engineering	Mr G Couper
Law	Ms S Arrowsmith
Medicine	Ms C Murray
Science	Ms K Finan

GRADUATIONS *IN ABSENTIA*

- 217.1 The Senate received a list of those qualified to receive degrees and diplomas who had applied to have them conferred *in absentia* (see Appendix to the Minutes of June 2000).
- 217.2 The Senate conferred the degrees on, and awarded the diplomas and other qualifications to, the persons.