

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 3 JUNE 2021

Present: Duncan Macniven (Convener), Mel Roberts (Vice-Convener), Nuala Booth, Eric Crockart, Lisa Henderson, Tom Lynch, Lynne Mennie, Alan Milne, Dan Montgomery, Jenny Mordue, Graeme Nicol, Judith Taylor, with Rob Donelson (Director of Advancement), Tracey Slaven (University Secretary and Chief Operating Officer), and Nicole Cochrane (Clerk).

Apologies: Katrina Allan, Jennie Gibson, Euan Mackenzie, Willie McColl, Jan McRobbie, Jenny Shirreffs, Mary Stephen, Mark Strange, Iain Percival, Patricia Pugh, Brian Wood.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting. The apologies were noted by the committee.

2. MINUTES

The minutes were noted and approved. Mr Lynch explained that his absence from the last meeting was due to a technical issue and Ms Cochrane agreed to add his name to the noted apologies.

Action: Ms Cochrane

3. MATTERS ARISING

The Convener asked about arrangements for the election of a new Rector. Ms Slaven explained there were no nominations received in March of this year. The election process could not then be reopened as the election must take place during term time. A revised schedule envisaged nominations opening at the start of the new academic year, the election taking place in November, with the new Rector taking up the role on 01 January 2022.

On the University's pandemic response, Ms Slaven reported:

- The University continued to work with Scottish Government on the timeline for moving back to greater levels of study on campus
- While in Level 1 and 0 the University was still in restricted teaching, operating the blended model, but with more flexibility than previous levels
- Discussions at the moment are focused on September and the hope for a return to a more 'normal' student experience, with more on-campus teaching
- Work was underway on exam boards and there would be virtual graduations in summer, with the plan to have an in-person celebration next year
- Centre for Energy Transition had been formally launched, with the other interdisciplinary challenge centres over the coming months.

Ms Strachan asked when evening classes would resume. Ms Slaven said they hoped to reinstate these classes as soon as is safe but there was no firm decision on this yet.

MARISCHAL COLLEGE REVITALISATION

Mr Donelson highlighted, in his paper, that the Task and Finish Group had established criteria for repurposing Marischal College and had sought input from those in the community

who had worked on similar projects (e.g. St Machar's Cathedral, Music Hall). A panoramic video of the space was being created as part of the planning process and viable proposals would be presented to the Senior Management Team.

In discussion:

- Mr Crockart asked why the call for creative input was limited to staff and students currently and not alumni. Mr Donelson said that, rather than raise expectations in the wider community, the plan was for internal input initially and then to put a selected call for ideas to the external audience. The group felt that, since Marischal was a University building, the first to be consulted should be the University community.
- Ms Roberts asked if the external call would include a condition assessment. Mr Donelson confirmed that all condition considerations would be taken into account as part of the consultation.
- Professor Mordue asked when heritage architects would be asked to advise. Mr Donelson agreed that they would need to be consulted before any potential plans for the space could be finalised.
- The Convener asked, on behalf of Ms McRobbie, if the committee could be involved in commenting on the scoring criteria. Mr Donelson said that input could be given through Mr Crockart, who was already part of the Task and Finish Group. Mr Crockart agreed to keep Ms McRobbie updated on this.

Action: Mr Crockart

- Ms Roberts asked whether there were links with the Queen Street redevelopment and the City Action Plan. Mr Donelson explained that the redevelopment group was represented on the Task and Finish Group, which was considering how options for Marischal would fit in to the city plans.
- Professor Mordue queried how best the committee can feed ideas to the Task and Finish Group. Mr Donelson suggested it would be best to wait until the call for ideas was issued.

The Convener thanked Mr Donelson for his presentation.

4. 525 ALUMNI OF ACHIEVEMENT

Mr Donelson explained the outcome of research on the backgrounds of the nominees. The standards of centuries ago were often at odds with our values today. There was a strong desire neither to whitewash the history nor to celebrate the controversial parts of this history. So the title had been changed to '525 Alumni Portraits', as a neutral term.

It was agreed that the change in title and focus of the project closed the committee's involvement with the project.

5. REPORT FROM THE CONVENER

The Convener highlighted good attendance at the virtual General Council meeting in April.

On the University Motto concern raised by a General Council member he noted that, even if the point had little support from the committee, it remained their responsibility to represent the General Council. The committee was in general agreement that topics such as this

should be considered seriously; that the level of support afforded to the member's concern had been appropriate; and the opportunity to garner support from the wider General Council had been afforded. Ms Slaven explained that work was in hand on commitment 15 of the Aberdeen 2040 strategic plan, looking at cultural sensitivities and tensions on campus. She suggested that this might be a better way of carrying forward the member's concern, rather than having a further discussion at the next General Council meeting. The committee agreed. The Convener would respond accordingly to the member.

Action: Convener

The Convener noted the ongoing nominations for committee membership and Ms Cochrane reported that nominations were likely to fall short of the nine vacancies. The option to co-opt remained for positions unfilled. The Convener encouraged committee members to encourage nominations, especially of younger people. Ms Taylor asked how the election had been advertised. Ms Cochrane explained that it had been communicated via email and across social media channels.

On the topic of hosting an away day, the committee was in agreement to hold this when in-person meetings were permitted.

The Convener spoke of Charles Calder's work on the General Council history and encouraged any committee members with experience in publishing to help drive this forward. It was agreed that a digital publication would be most suitable, with a small number of hard copies.

Regarding Court representation, the Convener proposed that four independent members of Court, who were also on the General Council, be made members of the Business Committee. The committee agreed. In response to Mr Crockart, Ms Slaven confirmed that the Court's Governance & Nomination Committee would select the independent members of Court and proposed then, in consultation with the Convener, identifying the four members most suitable for membership of the Business Committee. Mr Crockart noted that a change to Standing Orders would be needed.

Action: Ms Slaven and Convener

6. DEVELOPING A NEW RELATIONSHIP MODEL

Ms Roberts represented her paper on this topic. She noted the committee's role of representing the General Council and queried how this can be done in line with the modern age. Ms Roberts highlighted the huge number of alumni around the world who were members of the General Council. Ms Roberts proposed that committee members should be more active regularly, out with the schedule of meetings. Finally, she highlighted the importance of the committee's 'reporting' line being to the University Secretary, as a full part of University governance.

Mr Crockart clarified that the previous Assessors to Court were never selected by the Business Committee, they were elected by the General Council. The committee then invited these individuals to become ex-officio members of the Business Committee. He considered that it would be an improvement to make the independent members of court official members of the committee.

Ms Slaven explained that the previous disbanding of a central governance team had slackened the governance connections. Her intention was to restore the central team, emphasising that this would not remove the committee's relationship with Development & Alumni. The committee welcomed the proposal. Ms Slaven explained that, in Edinburgh, the business committee linked up with chapters, in the way proposed in the paper - even taking the General Council meeting on tour to Singapore and Toronto.

In response to Mr Montgomery, Ms Cochrane confirmed that work was in hand to raise current students' consciousness of the Business Committee and General Council with current students.

The Convener suggested that Mr Montgomery might join Ms Roberts to work on this topic, with Ms Roberts continuing her involvement after her term of office on the committee expired. Mr Montgomery agreed, and the committee approved.

7. ALUMNI RELATIONS & REGULAR GIVING UPDATE

Ms Cochrane shared the following update written by Katrina Allan, Head of Alumni Relations & Regular Giving:

- Alumni Relations hosted 12 virtual events for alumni and friends in the third quarter of this year, including 'Brexit: Where Are We Now?' with Professor Michael Keating, which had over 20,000 views on YouTube, and 'In Conversation with Neil Fachie'.
- During the quarter, over 1,000 attendees joined including non-alumni donors, students, staff, and prospective students, thereby supporting donor stewardship, student engagement, student recruitment, and profile raising.
- In collaboration with alumni at Porter's Gin, the second batch of commemorative bottles released in April sold out in days. This batch of 1,495 bottles was in addition to the initial 525 bottles released before Christmas, due to overwhelming demand. Proceeds would go to the Covid-19 525 Bursary Fund and would exceed £15,000.
- The 525 Challenge, the team's first virtual community fundraising event, took place throughout February and raised just over £10,000 (inc. Gift Aid) for the Covid-19 525 Bursary Fund. Since the fund was launched in May last year it had raised over £300,000.
- The spring appeal in support of the Alumni Annual Fund, supporting scholarships and important initiatives related to the student experience, was now underway.
- Alumni volunteers continued to support student recruitment activities and virtual student and alumni employability programmes run by the Careers Service. The team was also actively seeking alumni with businesses or alumni who work at companies which could give student work placements.
- The team was constantly adding to the bank of 'From Aberdeen to...' alumni profiles, the latest volunteers being Jason Clarke and Charlie Craig of Genius Brewing, who were on BBC's Dragon's Den in April.
- The team had developed an ambitious plan for regular giving - a potentially-important revenue stream - including annual appeals as well as Giving Tuesday, class-based appeals, reunion fundraising, memorial/tribute and anniversary fundraising, staff giving, graduating class giving, and community fundraising, as well as ad-hoc appeals for individual Schools or departments based on urgent need.

8. COURT MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 2020 MEETING

The committee noted the minutes.

9. AOCB

There was nothing noted.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 2 September 2021, 4pm, location TBC