

# UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2023

Present: Duncan Macniven (Convener), Jenny Mordue (Vice-Convener), Dan Montgomery, Euan Mackenzie, Colin Duncan, Iain Percival, John Campbell, Lisa Henderson, Judith Taylor, Mark Lindley-Highfield of Ballumbie Castle, Pat Pugh, Robert Traynam, Yafan Zhang, Mel Roberts, Heliang Shi, Susan Strachan, Nick Edwards (Deputy Director of People), Martina Chukwuma-Ezike (Rector), Nicole Cochrane (Alumni Relations), Liza Boffen-Yordanov (Director of Development and Alumni Relations), Vanessa Nzolo (Student President), Louise Thomson (Head of Governance) and Alease Coleman (Assistant Clerk & Registrar).

Apologies: Eric Crockart, Otto Thoreson, Jan McRobbie, Mark Strange, Tracey Slaven (Clerk & Registrar).

#### 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convener gave a warm welcome to Liza Boffen-Yordanov and Nick Edwards. Professor Alan Speight (Vice-Principal Global Student Recruitment) had fallen ill shortly before the meeting and was not in attendance; he would be invited to address a future meeting.

#### 2. NICK EDWARDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE – CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE (Papers BC23:01 & BC23:02)

Nick Edwards briefed the Committee on the purpose of the updated Code of Practice. The last update had been in 2012. The current draft had involved internal collaboration with the Students Association and external consultation with third sector bodies such as Rape Crisis. The draft had been discussed with Senate and was available online for general comments. He invited the views of the Committee.

Comments from the Committee were:

- The Code was excellent, and partnership with the Students Association commendable – but much was open to interpretation.
- Harassment and bullying were difficult to define with legal precision and paragraph 3.3 bullet point 4 might be best reduced to the first sentence, with the remaining points in guidance for students – although it was necessary also to recognise that students had asked for the Code itself to attempt a definition.
- A summary of key points for students was desirable.
- It would be desirable for tutors to be briefed on the Code; case managers would have to be carefully trained; and whistleblowing students would need protection.
- The inclusion of alumni in the scope of the Code, and of (potentially broad) “activity which may bring the University into disrepute” could be a constraint on the work of the Business Committee.
- It was unclear how the Code of Conduct would work alongside safeguarding policy.

In response, Nick Edwards said that:

- an important element of the Code was how it would be communicated to students. A student-focused document would be issued, to guide students on what good conduct looked like and what victims of harassment, racism, etc should do.
- the University's separate whistle blowing policy would sit alongside the Code.
- personal tutors would be resourced, and a risk assessment tool called LISTEN would be made available to a wide range of staff.
- the Code only pertained to alumni if they sought to become students again.
- safeguarding processes would work alongside the Code.

### **3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

No comments and minutes approved.

### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

There were none.

### **5. CONVENER'S REPORT (Paper BC23:03)**

Amplifying his written report, Duncan Macniven:

- reminded members that 14 April was the last date for people to apply for the eight vacancies on the Business Committee.
- reported that Anne Minto, Court member, had asked about joining the Business Committee. Standing orders allowed up to 4 independent members of Court, who were also General Council members, to be members of the Committee. Since there were 3 such members at present, it was open to the Committee to approve her immediate membership. The Committee agreed.

### **6. STRATEGY FOLLOW UP (Papers BC23:04 & BC23:05)**

The Committee discussed progress on the strategic themes identified at the strategy session in October.

Commercialisation of Research

- Jenny Mordue reported that there had been two meetings of the group and multiple meetings outside the group.
- So far, the group had sought to understand the background and where the University sat among its peers.
- Fruitful work continued, helped by Otto Thoresen being both a member of the group and convener of a Court group on the topic.

Graduate Employability

- Judith Taylor reported that the group had concentrated on forging connections and fact finding. Establishing concrete steps and taking those forwards was the next step.

- Pat Pugh suggested that Tracey Innes, and perhaps Ruth Taylor, might be invited to speak in more detail to the Committee about what the University was doing to improve employability.
- Jenny Mordue mentioned SCI, a charity where science met business, which currently had two scholarships that helped PhD students make contacts in industry.

#### Marischal College East

- Jenny Mordue reported that there had been no progress since the last meeting. She suggested contacting honorary graduate Fiona Kennedy, who had expressed an interest, to consider how to keep the topic in the mind of Court.
- Duncan Macniven suggested inviting Vice-Principal Pete Edwards to address the Committee again, to discuss local engagement but also Marischal College.
- Iain Percival reminded everyone that, like all universities, Aberdeen faced financial challenges which made immediate action impracticable. The Committee should however continue to bring Marischal's wellbeing to the attention of University and Court.
- Mel Roberts stressed the importance of taking account of Aberdonians' views on Marischal College and the University.

#### Leadership role of the University in North-east Scotland

- The group to pursue this topic had not yet met. Duncan Macniven wondered whether the subject might be illuminated by the "Fireside chat" suggested by Robert Traynham at the strategy session. Robert Traynham said that he had taken that approach at a recent Royal Society of Edinburgh event on leadership qualities, which Vanessa Nzolo praised as it had brought multiple stakeholders together to discuss matters casually and quickly.
- Louise Thomson reminded the Committee of the link to Pete Edwards' work on regional engagement, and it was agreed that the group should meet him to explore the scope for action by the Committee.

#### Raising the Profile of the General Council and Business Committee

- Duncan Macniven reported that he and Alease Coleman were pursuing the agreed action as time and resources allowed.

### **7. LIZA BOFFEN-YORDANOV, DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT**

Liza Boffen-Yordanov introduced herself to the Committee and outlined her immediate priorities. She had worked for almost 25 years in university advancement, most recently at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, a top 20 university.

In discussion:

- Judith Taylor asked if the Business Committee could use Development and Alumni Relations to send out communications. Nicole Cochrane confirmed that this had been offered before and was still an option.
- Heliang Shi said that he was looking forward to welcoming Liza Boffen-Yordanov during her forthcoming trip to Asia.

- Colin Duncan asked about the objectives of the trip to Asia. Liza Boffen-Yordanov said she would be meeting with alumni newer and older, and also meeting with major prospects in Hong Kong and Singapore.
- Martina Chukwuma-Ezike asked about the timing of the next Alumni Relations event in Nigeria. Nicole Cochrane explained that Alumni Relations was currently hiring someone for liaison with Africa. Liza Boffen-Yordanov said Africa was high on her priorities, but Asia was an easier first trip because of her experience in the region.

#### **8. ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE (Paper BC23:06)**

Nicole Cochrane, speaking to the paper, briefly updated the Committee on events since its last meeting.

#### **9. DATE OF NEXT GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING (Paper BC23:07)**

Alease Coleman provided the numbers missing from paragraph 3 of the paper: the February 2023 General Council meeting had been attended by 15 members online and 38 in person, and the recording had subsequently been watched 188 times.

The Committee agreed that the summer Statutory Meeting should be held in the early evening of Thursday 24 August, which aligned with Principal George Boyne's calendar. The location needed further thought: the King's Conference Centre would not be available because of the King's Quarter Project; the Institute of Medical Services conference room might be off limits due to a lift not working; the Rowett seminar room (with a capacity of 90 and hybrid capabilities) might be the best option, at a time which avoided the rush hour. Alease Coleman and Louise Thomson would do further work on location and timing.

#### **10. COURT DIGEST (Paper BC23:08)**

The paper gave a digest of the November meeting of Court. Louise Thomson briefed the Committee on the subsequent meeting, held the previous day:

- Court had received reports on the visit in February from Her Majesty the Queen Consort to see the Science Teaching Hub, marking her 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Chancellor.
- The Principal had reported funding problems not only for the University (where the in-year position was worse than the worst-case scenario reported to the Committee at its last meeting) but for the HE sector as a whole. About one-third of UK universities were in deficit. But the University was not planning to repeat the 2015 cuts which had adversely affected the REF ranking.
- Court had heard that strikes by teaching staff continued to cause disruption, and that more strike dates had been announced.
- Court had welcomed a report on service effectiveness for professional service staff.
- Court had also received reports on student inclusion, the results of the staff survey, and the Public Sector Quality Duty (a statutory requirement that looked at gender balance).
- Court had considered how the University could support academics in conflict areas.
- Court had looked at the work of AUSA and the University to support students and staff with the rising cost of living.

- 7 out of 12 independent Court members were drawn from the General Council community and 4 of them are due to be re-appointed or re-elected in the next 2 years. The Governance team was to recruit to those positions.

## 11. **AOCB**

The Convener reported that an alumna had raised concerns about the effect of the King's Quarter Project on the O'Dell Garden. In particular, the ashes of many alumni and staff members had been scattered in the garden. The alumna wished the Business Committee to express concerns about the sensitive space being used for the King's Quarter Project.

In discussion, the Business Committee was clear that building on the site of the O'Dell Garden was crucial to the King's Quarter Project, which was of great importance to future generations of students and that the loss of the Garden must not be allowed to stand in the way of the Project. On the question of the scattered ashes, the Committee could well appreciate people's emotional attachment to the Garden, whether the scattering had been sanctioned by the University or not. It was agreed that the Convener would explore with the Project Manager whether the plans for the Project might allow a commemoration of those whose ashes were scattered in the present garden.