



THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTE OF THE 315th STATUTORY MEETING

The 315th meeting of the General Council was held virtually (due to Covid-19) on 13 January 2022. The Convener of the Business Committee, Dr Duncan Macniven, was in the Chair.

1 WELCOME

Duncan Macniven gave a special welcome to the new Rector, Martina Chukwuma-Ezike.

2 MINUTES OF THE 314th MEETING

The draft Minutes of the 314th Statutory Meeting were approved.

3 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

4 BUSINESS COMMITTEE REPORT

Duncan Macniven introduced his written report, highlighting the widening of the Business Committee's membership to include two China-domiciled members. The report was noted.

5 UNIVERSITY UPDATE

Tracey Slaven, University Secretary, reported on the implementation of Covid-19 restrictions for staff and students, which had avoided transmission of the virus in teaching and research environments. With the easing of restrictions, the first graduations since the pandemic started was able to be held in Aberdeen in November 2021 and in Qatar.

The past year had seen changes in the governance of the University, with the appointment of a new Senior Governor (Julie Ashworth, Court Member Nuala Booth having served as interim Senior Governor) and of four new independent members, and two new student members, of the University Court. New arrangements had been set up to make a bridge between Court and the General Council Business Committee. Following the election in November, Martina Chukwuma-Ezike had been elected as the Rector of the University, taking up her role on 1 January 2022.

The University continued to perform well. It had been awarded the Queen's Award for higher education for the work of the teams on Soil Science and Climate Change –

particularly notable because of the close succession to the last such award. The University was for the first time in the top 20 of the two key league tables in UK (the Guardian and the Sunday Times), as well as reaching the highest-ever spot at 158th in Times Global league tables. The University had also improved its ranking (5th place) for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey.

Student recruitment had remained buoyant throughout the pandemic. There was a clear desire from both domestic and international students to be on campus as much as possible. Over the past year, the University had had a 6.8% growth in student population and staff investment was being made to meet the growth.

A full account of the University's last year, the annual report for 2020-2021 was on the University website. The University had addressed the impacts of Covid-19 to return a financial surplus for the third year in a row.

6 ALUMNI RELATIONS & REGULAR GIVING UPDATE

Duncan Macniven commended the work of the Alumni Relations & Regular Giving team during the pandemic. Katrina Allan, Head of Alumni Relations & Regular Giving, provided a summary of how they reacted to Covid-19, including the launch of a Bursary Appeal which had raised over £325,000 to date. The core work of the team had not changed during the pandemic but online delivery had been introduced successfully and would be a permanent feature, reflecting the possibility that future alumni would interact differently with the University.

Katrina Allan summarised the 2021 highlights including:

- 1,500 'Class of 2021' mugs handed out at graduations
- 1,490 graduating students agreeing to stay in touch by email
- £52,740 raised by community fundraisers
- £516,000 raised through regular giving alumni donors
- 400 alumni volunteers to support students in halls of residence
- 100 alumni volunteers to be featured in the award-winning 'From Aberdeen to' campaign
- 1,000 bottles of 525 anniversary gin sold in support of students.

7 STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

Duncan Macniven introduced Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Planning, and Iain Grant, Head of Strategic Planning, to present the Aberdeen 2040 strategic plan.

Hulda Sveinsdottir reported that planning for a new strategy began in January 2019, shortly after Principal George Boyne's start at the University. The development of the strategy took a full year and it was launched February 2020. The approach was very collaborative approach, with staff and students invited to co-chair workstreams. Additionally, workshops, open sessions, away-days, and stakeholder interviews were conducted. The resulting strategy had four themes, five interdisciplinary societal challenges and 20 commitments.

The collaborative approach had been successful: only 47% of staff had identified with the previous development plan, while a 2020 staff survey showed that 91% identified with the commitments set out in Aberdeen 2040. In June 2021, University of Aberdeen had won the Higher Education Strategic Planners award.

Iain Grant reported on the approach to implementation: an Implementation Plan to 2025, with four-year high-level actions and one-year priority activities set against each action, plus three-year School Plans and Directorate Plans, monitored through an annual institutional planning round. A senior manager was responsible for leading to follow-through of each of the 20 commitments, with KPI's created for each commitment. Iain Grant described the annual planning cycle, starting with a planning day that would encourage collaboration between Schools and annual budget and planning reviews in February/ March, with finalised budgets in April and an end of year update for each commitment in September/October.

Duncan Macniven welcomed the presentation, noting that the 20-year time horizon for the strategy was more suitable than a 5-year strategy for an organisation of the University's size and importance. In response to a question about the success in meeting the performance indicators, Iain Grant confirmed that, although it was early in the implementation period, only one or two commitments thus far needed improvement. In response to a question, Hulda Sveinsdottir confirmed that the consultative approach would be retained for future strategic reviews, subject to the views of senior management.

8 QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Members asked about the future of the Marischal College building. Duncan Macniven reported that it was divided into two: the front managed by the city council and the and the eastern part under University management – well-maintained well but under-used and not visitable. A guided tour would be problematic due to the accessibility of the building. The Business Committee had for some time considered that it should be developed as an asset for the city and the University. The University had recently set up a working group, on which the Business Committee was represented, to consider the future use of the eastern part of the building and had held a consultation exercise. The next step was to consider the suggestions and opinions from the consultation. Rob Donelson, Director of Development, who chaired the working group, added that many great ideas had been presented and that a report would shortly be submitted to the senior management group. The member sought reassurance that care was being taken of the paintings in the building and Duncan Macniven confirmed that University's head of Museums and Special Collections had a strong interest in the subject. The Business Committee would continue to advocate appropriate development of the building and its contents.

A member asked if printed copies of Dr Charles Calder's forthcoming publication on the history of the General Council would be made available to buy, since it deserved to be published in a lasting format. Duncan Macniven said that the matter was under consideration and welcomed the member's view.

Members asked about future fundraising priorities, including whether the University's longer-term planning horizon would encourage sponsors and donors to make longer-term finance commitments. Tracey Slaven and Rob Donelson hoped that that would be the case. The Business School and King's Quarter developments were examples of donor opportunities of that kind. The University was preparing a major fundraising campaign which would emphasise the long-term nature of the University's work. Future fundraising priorities were likely to be postgraduate research initiatives, undergraduate scholarship support and expanding support for potential students who were disadvantaged in any way, not only socio-economically. Duncan Macniven added that the Business Council was in full support of the widening access schemes.

A member asked if Crombie Hall was still in use. Tracey Slaven explained that meeting spaces and post-graduate research spaces were located there.

9 ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Noting that the Spring meeting of the General Council had in recent years been linked with the University's annual meeting, Tracey Slaven commented that the format did not comply fully with the Higher Education Code and the Spring General Council meeting was likely to revert to the traditional stand-alone format.

10 NOTICE OF THE 316th STATUTORY MEETING

The date of the 316th Statutory Meeting was to be confirmed.