

321<sup>ST</sup> STATUTORY MEETING OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN GENERAL COUNCIL

Date: **Saturday, 7 December 2024**  
Venue: **King's College Conference Centre and via Microsoft Teams**  
Timing: **11.00am – 13.00pm** (Teas & Coffees from 10.30am in James McKay Hall)

## AGENDA

### 1. Welcome

Convener to welcome attendees to the meeting, online and in person.

### 2. Minutes of Previous Meetings

General Council are invited to review and approve the draft minutes from:

- The 319<sup>th</sup> statutory meeting held on 23 March 2024; and
- The additional statutory meeting (320<sup>th</sup>) held on 26 September 2024, noting the outcome of the elections to the Business Committee of the General Council.

### 3. University Update

To receive a presentation from the Principal on the performance of the University, followed by an opportunity for General Council to ask questions.

### 4. Discussion of Motion

I wish to give Notice of the following Motion, to be moved in my name at the General Council meeting on Saturday, 7th December 2024:-

That the General Council notes that the Mitchell Hall and Picture Gallery are assets of irreplaceable cultural, architectural and practical value;

That it is of paramount importance that they be kept safe and well-maintained until they are in regular use again;

That there is as yet no adequate fire suppression system in the building;

And that the General Council therefore requests the University Court to give the installation of an adequate fire suppression system in this building high and immediate priority.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Lindsay (MA 1970, M.Litt, 1973)

- 5. General Council Business Committee Report** **Enclosed GC24:03**  
To receive an update from the Business Committee Convener on activities undertaken in 2024 and plans for 2025.
- 6. Update on University of Aberdeen Rectorial Election**  
To receive an update and outcome of the recent Rectorial election.
- 7. The Work of the Aberdeen University Students' Association**  
To receive a presentation from Christina Schmid, President, AUSA, followed by an opportunity for General Council to ask questions.
- 8. Membership of the General Council Business Committee – Election Timeline and Process** **Enclosed GC24:04**  
To approve the timeline and process for elections to the Business Committee in 2025.
- 9. AoB**
- 10. Date of 322<sup>nd</sup> Statutory Meeting of General Council**  
Saturday, 17 May 2025

THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
GENERAL COUNCIL  
MINUTE OF THE 319<sup>th</sup> STATUTORY MEETING

The 319<sup>th</sup> meeting of the General Council was held on campus and online on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2024. The Convener of the Business Committee, Dr Duncan Macniven, was in the Chair.

**1. Welcome**

- 1.1 The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting. He thanked Katrina Allan and the alumni team for their work in supporting the General Council and its Business Committee over the years and introduced Ross Anderson and Louise Thomson from the Governance and Executive Support Team, who would be taking over responsibility.

**2. Minutes of the 318<sup>th</sup> statutory meeting of the General Council (paper GC24:01)**

- 2.1 The minutes of the 318<sup>th</sup> statutory meeting of General Council were **approved** as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**3. University update**

- 3.1 The Convener invited Tracey Slaven (in her role as University Secretary and Chief Operating Officer) to provide an update on the University's activities.

3.2 Tracey Slaven's presentation highlighted:

- The University's purpose since 1495 - to be open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others - was still relevant and supported by the University's charitable aims of research and education.
- The new branding 'Go Beyond Boundaries' had been launched last summer and reinforced the need to evolve in the face of established and new challenges and opportunities.
- Recently, the University had continued to perform well in university league tables - notably being in the UK top 20 in The Times, The Sunday Times and The Guardian for three years running. The University had achieved good results in National Student Satisfaction surveys and the Medical School had been ranked the best in the UK.
- The University faced a volatile financial environment. Postgraduate student intake in September had reduced across the university sector, notably because of changes in visa fees and permissions. Recent research undertaken by PWC into the state of the sector's finances and operating environment concluded that universities faced significant financial challenges.
- The marking and assessment boycott referred to by the Principal at the last meeting had ended in September 2023.

- Aberdeen and Glasgow had been awarded Investment Zone status, and the University had a seat on the steering group for the development in Aberdeen. This linked to other activities including the Scottish Government's Blueprint for Entrepreneurial Campuses and the Just Transition Fund for the north-east.
- The next UK wide Research Excellence Framework assessment had been delayed from 2028 to 2029, with increased emphasis on support for researchers and research culture.
- The Business School had recently been awarded EQUIS accreditation – one of only 200 globally to have this recognition.

3.3 Tracey Slaven emphasised the priority which the University was giving to the financial sustainability necessary to deliver its the academic mission - by re-organising services and processes to reduce costs and workloads; restructuring finances; and seeking to reduce staff and associated costs by an enhanced retirement scheme. The financial recovery plan approved by Court in February 2024 aimed to continue to meet the needs of students and deliver quality research and educational activities.

3.4 Questions arising from the presentation included:

- The impact of the changes to modern language programmes. Tracey Slaven explained that, following the December meeting of Court, the University had committed to continue to offer modern languages as part of joint honours programmes. The Senior Management Team was working with colleagues in modern languages to ensure sustainable provision of modern language courses and to monitor the result of the changes. A 'lessons learned' exercise would inform future action to achieve financial savings.
- The impact of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). Tracey Slaven replied that the University had been alert to the problem of RAAC early on and had been able to take pro-active steps in a timely manner that limited the impact. Five areas of the University had been identified with RAAC. The Foresterhill auditorium was the priority area with the aim of reopening before the new academic year.
- An update on the University's fundraising campaigns. Tracey Slaven highlighted the preparatory work underway to support a major campaign, which Court would be asked to approve at its June meeting.
- A request for more funds from the University to support the Gaudie student newspaper. Tracey Slaven suggested that, to ensure that editorial freedom was seen to be preserved, it was more appropriate for the Gaudie to be supported via the Development Trust.
- The potential for the University to generate more diverse income streams. Tracey Slaven confirmed that the Senior Management Team were keen to maximise the return on services and assets in order to diversify income streams and support the University's financial sustainability.

3.5 The Convener thanked the University Secretary and Chief Operating Officer for the update.

#### **4. Enhancing graduate employability**

4.1 The Convener introduced John Barrow, Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship, who delivered a presentation on the work of the Careers and Employability Service. He highlighted the following:

- There was a growing desire by both students and employers for universities to equip graduates with the skills they needed for the working environment. The University supported graduate outcomes and career readiness activity with: a dedicated committee (Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee) working in particular with each School, AUSA, the Careers Service and the Centre of Academic Development; work-based learning programmes; and a new skills and attributes framework aligned to Aberdeen 2040.
- The changing nature of recruitment and work placed more emphasis on work experience and psychometric testing, aptitude assessments and other skills-based exercises.
- There was more demand for ‘work-ready’ individuals, with transferrable skills essential to modern work – resilience, self-awareness, and time management.
- The Higher Education Statistics Authority collected information on employment of graduates 15 months after graduating. To support this, the University had launched a survey to monitor graduate employability and received over 12,000 responses.
- Ultimately, the University aimed to prepare students to thrive in the modern working environment and ‘MySkills’ was a key component of delivering that ambition.

4.2 A member emphasised the willingness of the Business Committee to support the work of the Dean and the University by using its networks and contacts to support activities and opportunities. This was welcomed by the Dean.

4.3 The Convener thanked the Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship for his presentation and remarked on the positive work being undertaken to support students and the wider economy.

#### **5. Work of the University museums and special collections team**

5.1 The Convener welcomed Neil Curtis, Head of Museums and Special Collections.

5.2 Neil Curtis explained that the presentation would cover the work of the team and how it supported the wider academic aims of the University, rather than describing the internationally important collection. He identified as of particular interest:

- Engagement with the public, including exhibitions in the Sir Duncan Rice Library Gallery and the Zoology Museum, small displays in the Science

Teaching Hub and Confucius Institute, and a varied range of events and activities. The 'Legacy of Slavery' exhibition had been a particular success, supported by an events programme, and was a model which would be repeated.

- International loans continued to be important, with a current exhibition of Ancient Egyptian material in Shanghai, which was shortly to move to Hangzhou, then Chengdu and Beijing. As well as promoting awareness of the University's collections, it was generating income.
- The collections sat at the heart of activity, so the Collection Development Policy was being reviewed to ensure that it continued to be relevant and able to support the University's work, including acquisitions that would diversify the range of people's lives represented, collection reviews, disposals and repatriation. Work was also addressing historic legacies, including the legacies of slavery and colonial collecting.
- The team was increasingly contributing to the University's teaching and research activity, and this was properly recognised with transfer of income to his unit, in the same way as between Schools. The number of academic staff working with the collection was also increasing, including the appointment of Honorary Curatorial Fellows.

5.3 A member asked about the University's philosophy on the repatriation of artefacts to and by the University. In response, Neil Curtis emphasised that each artefact should be considered on its own specific situation. A standardised approach was not appropriate. A rigorous procedure was outlined in the Collection Development Policy. Another question related to the murals in the old student union building. The meeting was informed that, as the University no longer owned the building, it was not in a position to be able to provide any further information. Other questions related to the use of 3D scanning and printing to copy artefacts before repatriation and the viability of the Old Town House to host exhibitions. Neil Curtis replied that there were arguments for and against copies, but that they were costly to make, and that the Old Town House was not a good venue for exhibitions due to its space and accessibility.

5.4 The Convener thanked the Head of Museums and Special Collections for his stimulating presentation.

## **6. General Council Business Committee report (paper GC24:02)**

6.1 The Convener introduced his report. He thanked members of the Business Committee, especially Vice-Convener Professor Jenny Mordue, for their contribution to its work. He invited comments and questions from attendees.

6.2 There were no questions and the meeting **noted** the paper.

## **7. Membership of the General Council Business Committee – election timeline and process**

7.1 Tracey Slaven, Clerk and Registrar to the General Council, advised the

meeting that, under standing order 19, two members of the Business Committee were due to retire and were not eligible for re-election. These were Patricia Pugh and Mary Stephen. A further member of the Business Committee had indicated their intention to stand down from the Committee: Yafan Zhang. Tracey Slaven thanked the three individuals for their service - a sentiment supported by the Convener.

- 7.2 Expressions of interest in these three vacancies could be lodged with the Governance and Executive Support Team ([gest@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:gest@abdn.ac.uk)) and nomination forms would be available from the end of March. Nominations would close at 12.00 noon on Friday 31 May. Should there be more nominations than vacancies, there would be an election at the December meeting of the General Council.

**8. Any other business**

- 8.1 There was no other business raised.

**9. Notice of the 320th statutory meeting of the General Council**

- 9.1 The Convener thanked everyone for their attendance and input and advised that the 320<sup>th</sup> statutory meeting would be held in hybrid form on 7 December 2024.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
GENERAL COUNCIL  
MINUTE OF THE 320th (ADDITIONAL) MEETING

The 320th meeting of the General Council was held online on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2024. The Convener of the Business Committee, Dr Duncan Macniven, was in the Chair. The purpose of the meeting was to elect members to the General Council Business Committee, as required under standing order number 20.

1 WELCOME

The Convener thanked everyone for attending and also the nominees who had put themselves forward for election to the Business Committee.

2. BUSINESS COMMITTEE ELECTION

The Clerk and Registrar to the General Council, Tracey Slaven, noted that there were 18 nominees for three vacancies on the Business Committee. In accordance with standing orders, a ballot was required to be held in a meeting of the General Council. As with other University elections, the ballot used a transferable vote process exercised using MS Forms. The 60 attendees of the meeting could vote for up to five nominees – so long as they had registered to attend the meeting and had their eligibility to participate confirmed.

Tracey Slaven explained that a provisional result would be announced at the end of the meeting and the three successful appointments confirmed after a final verification of the election result had been completed.

3. VOTING AND VERIFICATION OF RESULTS

Voting was opened via an MS Forms link. Attendees were given five minutes to complete and submit their voting forms. In this time, the Clerk responded to some technical questions and provided an alternative mechanism for those unable to access the link.

While the votes were being counted, the Convener provided an overview of the work of the Business Committee, its composition and its strategic focus.

4. ELECTION RESULTS

The Clerk confirmed that, subject to a final verification after the meeting, the results of the ballot was that, in alphabetical order, the three nominees elected to the



Business Committee of the General Council were Fiona Dormandy, Derek Duthie and Professor Norman Hutchinson. Their terms of office would Start on 1 October 2024 and conclude on 30 September 2027.

#### 5. CONVENER'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Convener congratulated those elected. He expressed his thanks to everyone who stood as nominees, as well as those who attended to vote and the team who organised the election and counted the votes. He noted that the next statutory meeting of General Council was scheduled for 7 December 2024

#### CLERK'S NOTE

After the meeting, the final verification of votes was completed which confirmed the initial results announced in the meeting.

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
GENERAL COUNCIL, 7 DECEMBER 2024  
REPORT BY CONVENER OF BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

1. The Business Committee acts on behalf of the General Council between meetings.

**Business Committee meetings**

2. The Business Committee met on 6 June, 19 September and 7 November. Each meeting received reports on current matters of importance to the University, including the financial position, progress with student recruitment, the continuing work of Alumni Relations and topics discussed at recent meetings of Court. The meeting on **6 June** focussed on student recruitment (with a presentation by the Director of Student Recruitment) and on the University's forthcoming fundraising campaign (with a presentation by the Campaign Director). The important topic of research, including research income and the preparations for the next Research Excellence Framework (REF), was the main business on **19 September**, with a presentation by the Vice-Principal (Research). On **7 November**, the principal business was a report by the Chief Financial Officer on the financial position of the University.

3. The Business Committee also enquired into the "Reimagining the Campus" project, which is designed to ensure that the University's accommodation is fit for the future, because of concerns by General Council members about the effect on Old Aberdeen of some of the possible changes. The Committee urged the Court to consult with the local community before taking irrevocable decisions and made clear the Committee's opposition to radical change without such consultation.

4. Between meetings, Committee members attended key events in the life of the University, including the summer and winter graduation ceremonies, the University's annual stakeholder meeting and the Remembrance Sunday service.

**Business Committee strategic topics**

5. The Committee has continued to pursue, mainly through small working groups of members, the following topics identified at its strategy day in October 2022 which are important to the University and on which the members of the Committee can collectively add value:

- **Commercialisation of research outcomes.** The working group is ready to run a programme of speaker events, drawing on the experience of its members and designed to encourage researchers to commercialise their findings. The group has looked at entrepreneurship funding and has offered to support future grant applications, as well as offering to set up links between budding entrepreneurs and experienced alumni.
- **Graduate employability.** Work on the topic concluded with the presentation to the March General Council meeting by the Dean of Employment and Entrepreneurship, but the group has since kept in touch with the Careers and Employability Service.
- **The University's leadership role in the North-East.** Discussions have taken place with the Vice-Principal (Regional Engagement) but it is unclear whether the Committee can add value to the work already underway in the University.
- **Raising the profile of the General Council and the Business Committee** in the University and with alumni. Work continues, including publicising General Council meetings more widely, ensuring that every graduation ceremony is attended by at least one member of the Committee and keeping up-to-date the relevant parts of the University's website.

6. In the light of that progress, the Committee's strategic agenda needs to be refreshed. A strategy day is planned for March 2025, to identify new topics. Suggestions from General Council members would be welcome.

### **Other topics**

7. Originally stimulated by concern by General Council members about a University proposal, since abandoned, to site a food cart near Bishop Elphinstone's tomb at King's College, a small group of Committee members wrote a short paper on the attractiveness of King's College (and Old Aberdeen more generally) as a tourist destination. The paper was sent to the University's Director of Estates and will be the subject of continuing dialogue.

8. The General Council, and the Business Committee, has had a longstanding interest in the future of the part of Marischal College which is still in the hands of the University – including the Mitchell Hall, the Debater and the Museum. A Business Committee working group continues to pursue that interest, as well as monitoring the "Re-imagining the Campus" project. That project has confirmed that the University no longer needs any part of the College building for teaching or research purposes. But the University recognises that Marischal remains an outstanding building in Aberdeen city centre and is exploring future uses with a range of external stakeholders. The Business

Committee has made clear its willingness to facilitate that, and will keep the subject actively on its agenda.

9. Work to finalise the history of the General Council since 1960 is nearing a conclusion, and arrangements are in hand to have it published by Aberdeen University Press – certainly on its website, and most likely also in hard copy.

### **Recommendation**

10. The General Council is invited to note this report.

**Duncan Macniven**  
**Convener, Business Committee**  
**November 2024**

## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**General Council Business Committee Election timeline****1. Purpose of the paper**

- 1.1 The following provides an overview of the process and timeline for the nomination and election process for members of the General Council Business Committee.
- 1.2 As detailed in standing order number 20, the nominations process for elections to the Business Committee requires a deadline of no more than 69 days or no less than 48 days before the May statutory meeting of General Council.
- 1.3 Should there be more nominations than vacancies, there will be an election by ballot at a meeting of the General Council to decide the outcome.
- 1.4 Successful individuals will commence their term of office on the Business Committee on 1 October 2025.
- 1.5 There are several vacancies available for appointment in 2025, the exact number will be confirmed at the time nominations are called.

**2. Previous consideration by /further approval required**

|   | <b>Board/Committee</b> | <b>Date</b>     |
|---|------------------------|-----------------|
| Previously considered/approved by           | N/A                    |                 |
| Further consideration/ approval required by | General Council        | 7 December 2024 |

**3. Recommended action**

- 3.1 The General Council is invited to **note** the process for the appointment of members to the Business Committee and **approve** the proposed timeline for the nominations and elections to the Committee.

**4. Context**

- 4.1 Under section 9 (3) of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1932, General Council has the power to 'appoint committees of its own number or others, and to define powers, and to determine, the membership and the quorum, of such committees'. This paper provides an overview of the process and timeline for the nomination and election process for members of the General Council Business Committee, as detailed in the standing orders.
- 4.2 Standing order number 20, provides for the nominations process for elections to the Business Committee and requires a deadline of no more than 69 days or no less than 48 days before the May statutory meeting of General Council.
- 4.3 Should there be more nominations than vacancies, there is a requirement for an election by ballot at a meeting of the General Council to decide the outcome.
- 4.4 Successful individuals will commence their term of office on the Business Committee on 1 October 2025.

- 4.5 The following individual members of the Business Committee are required to step down or re-submit themselves for re-election at the May 2025 statutory meeting of General Council:
- 4.6 There are several vacancies available for appointment in 2025. The exact number will be confirmed at the time the call for nominations is made.
- 4.7 The University would like to thank those members of the Committee due to retire in 2025 for their work and consideration in performing their role supporting General Council.

## **5. Nomination and election timeline**

- 5.1 The following provides the key dates and actions to support the appropriate and timely call for nominations and elections to the Business Committee, as detailed in the standing orders:

Indicative timeline

### **w/c 10 March 2025**

Call for nominations to election of membership to Business Committee.  
Nominations open.

### **w/c 17 March 2025**

Public notice of statutory meeting of the General Council date and business to be transacted (specifically the election of members to the Business Committee)

### **31 March 2025**

Deadline for receipt of nominations (12.00 BST)

### **w/c 31 March 2025**

Due diligence on nominations received, proposers and seconders

### **w/c 7 April 2025**

Valid nominations to be advised of a) the need for a ballot to decide Committee positions and to submit a short supporting statement or b) that no election is required.

### **w/c 21 April 2025**

Deadline for statements from nominees (12.00 BST)

### **17 May 2025**

Statutory meeting of General Council

If there are the same or fewer nominations received than vacancies, the announcement of new members will be reported to the meeting.

Should there be more nominations than vacancies received, the statutory meeting will hold a ballot to determine Committee appointments. The ballot will be run online using MS Forms and the single transferrable vote system, as used in 2024.

**1 October 2025** New committee members formally begin their term of office on the Business Committee.

**6. Next steps**

6.1 The General Council is invited to **note** the process for the appointment of members to the Business Committee and **approve** the proposed timeline for the nominations and elections to the Committee.

**7. Further information**

7.1 Further information is available from Louise Thomson, Head of Governance and Executive Support ([louise.thomson@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:louise.thomson@abdn.ac.uk))

7 December 2024

**Confidentiality Status:** Open