

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTE OF MEETING HELD IN THE NISBET ROOM, DAVID RUSSELL APARTMENTS, ST ANDREWS

Saturday 21st September 2019, 10am – 12.45pm

Present: Stuart Bryan (SB), Alan Chalmers (AC), Grace Lyon (GL), Annabel Hamid (AH), Gregory Newman (GN), Alastair Merrill (Registrar & Clerk & VP Gov, AM), Stephanie O'Rourke (SOR) and Wendy Russell, Acting Convener (WR)

By Skype Video-link: Eliane Sum (Internet connection failed)

Apologies: Alison Baverstock (AB), Nigel Christie (NC), Brittany Collins (BC), Adrian Greer (AG)

Abbreviations BC = Business Committee of the General Council
 GC = General Council

1. Introduction and appointment of minute secretary.

The Acting Convener welcomed everyone and general introductions were made. The agenda was agreed as circulated and no other competent business was intimated. GL was appointed secretary for the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

As noted above.

3. Election of Convener

Wendy Russell was elected as Convener of the General Council Business Committee.

As there were so many new members to the committee, it was decided to postpone the election of Vice-Convener until the next meeting.

4. Minute of Business Committee Meeting 19 January 2019

The draft minute was approved.

Matters Arising

1. Alumni Engagement – A paper containing proposals is being drafted by WR and AH and will come back to the next meeting. See further discussion below under point 6.

5. Business Committee Election

The election process was completed with 6 members elected for 4 years and one elected for 2 years. 868 votes were placed, compared to 857 in 2017, accounting for approximately 1.7% of contactable General Council members.

There are currently 10 members of the Business Committee, which would be 12 at full strength. There is an option available for co-opting 2 further members. It was decided to leave this open pending any requirement to bring additional skills onto the committee.

6. Business Committee – Delivering Value

GL queried the feedback process on the quality of student teaching and SOR was able to give some information about the system currently in place. AM also confirmed that all academics are given training in teaching and that a system of promotion on the grounds of teaching competence is in place.

The discussion focussed mainly on alumni engagement with both the General Council and the University. Out of approximately 75K alumni, less than half are contactable and of those, less than 2% vote in BC elections. To improve engagement, BC is considering ways of creating and maintaining contact with new graduates and of re-establishing contact with graduates who have lost contact; recognising also that these latter have either “unsubscribed”, changed email address, or graduated before emails existed and have never contacted the University to provide their email address, or their house address. Any viable options must adhere to GDPR and need to be clearly linked to the University Strategy 2018-2023.

Action required

AH, SOR and WR to Produce a paper on engagement summarising these options for consideration at the January meeting. The paper is intended for consideration by the Principal.

AM to speak to IT (Niall Scott) about the relative positioning of and navigation to Alumni areas on the University website.

7. Ordinance 132

WR expressed concern that the final wording of this ordinance effectively disenfranchised members of the GC. The previously constituted BC hoped the remedy might lie in the nomination process. This process has now been determined by Court following the rejection of proposals put forward by a joint Court/BC working group. Under the new arrangements, the university has asked for nominations from the General Council and has received many applications including some very strong candidates. The Court will presently proceed with interviews. After further careful discussion, it was unanimously decided to make no further representations to Court on this matter.

Four revised Ordinances were approved by the Queen in July. Possible future Resolution changes might include details of new degree titles etc.

8. General Council meeting 30 November 2019

Members input to proposals for speakers at the next General Council meeting. Subsequently, following the meeting AM confirmed that Professor Garry Taylor, former Deputy Principal and Master of the University has agreed to speak at the November General Council meeting on a topic encompassing the new music centre and the Budongo Research Unit at Edinburgh Zoo.

9. Changes to Membership of the Business Committee

Following the discussion in point 5 above, WR explained that a discussion had taken place at a previous BC meeting regarding the ex-officio members of Business Committee and that this had not been formalised in a change to Standing Orders. Information about the BC on the University website regarding this is inconsistent. In discussion, it was noted that ex-officio members had rarely attended BC meetings. Members agreed that the invitation be restricted to the two longest serving non-executive members of Court. AM advised that any amendment to the BC constitution should be tabled at a future General Council meeting.

10. Oral Report from VP Governance

This report covered the following areas:-

- Times & Sunday Times University of the year; noted particularly that teaching was a strong point (re discussion above, Point 6)
- University Strategy document complete and planning is now ongoing to transform the vision into reality
- Governance – various new appointments. Recruitment is under way for the new position of Lay Member to Court, with an election in November, and the new GC Assessor, under the new system
- As mentioned above, four new ordinances have been approved by the Queen

- New semester – good intake. StA now a ‘sanctuary’ university
- Out of hours health care is being arranged by the University, having been effectively withdrawn by the NHS. Co-located with the University Security Team it is hoped that with the small size of the St Andrews community and the wardennial system in halls, this will be sufficient support for students who need healthcare support out of hours
- Research awards are holding up well
- Temporary lab facilities are now in place and functioning to replace the fire-damaged BMS building. As a consequence of the fire, a review of the North Haugh in general is underway
- Eden Campus has been delayed by Brexit procurement issues and environmental requirements
- Madras College now belongs to the University, and is being leased back to Fife Council for a couple of years while detailed plans are developed
- Plans for St A West have been approved by the Council; this will herald an ambitious capital planning programme
- Laidlaw Music Centre is nearing completion
- Younger Hall is being refurbished
- the Scottish Oceans Institute will be formally opened at the end of September
- Brexit – a Helpdesk for students and staff has been established
- Concern remains about possible staff strikes over pay and pensions

11. Dates of GC and Business Committee meetings

A list of relevant dates was circulated by email.

The next GC meeting is on 30th November 10.30, Parliament Hall

The next BC meeting is on 18th January 2020 in the Nisbet Room, DRA

12. AOCB

The Business Committee warmly congratulated the University on its success in the Times and Sunday Times rankings as the UK University of the Year.

There being no other competent business, WR thanked all those in attendance and in particular noted the dedication of those who had travelled considerable distances – and to Eliane who wanted to be present.