

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2024

Present:

Duncan Macniven (Convener), Colin Duncan, Hugh Galbraith, Mark Lindley-Highfield (for items 1 & 2), Dan Montgomery, Jenny Mordue (Vice-Convener), Vanessa Mabonso Nzolo (Student President), Pat Pugh, and Judith Taylor.

Apologies:

George Boyne (Principal), John Campbell, Martina Chukwuma-Ezike (Rector), Jan MacRobbie, Anne Minto, Dorsa Naderimehr, Graeme Nicol, Ogutu Okudo, Arnab Paul, Stefan Pelev, Heliang Shi, Tracey Slaven (University Secretary and Chief Operating Officer), Mary Stephen, Otto Thoresen, Robert Traynham, John White, and Haiyan Zhang.

In attendance:

Ross Anderson, Governance and Executive Support Officer (Clerk), Ashar Ehsan, Director of Student Recruitment (for item 1), Clare Livingston, Campaign Director (for item 2), Louise Thomson, Head of Governance and Executive Support, Fiona Urquhart, Alumni Relations Manager (until item 6).

1. Welcome and apologies

- 1.1 The Convener welcomed colleagues and noted the apologies received.

2. Student Recruitment

- 2.1 Ashar Eshan, Director of Student Recruitment, delivered a presentation on current student recruitment at the University. The presentation covered trend data looking at the last few years of student recruitment which highlighted a contracting international market. Domestic Undergraduate student numbers were little changed. International Undergraduate numbers had been static but were now beginning to decline. Postgraduate Taught (PGT) numbers were forecast to halve by 2025. By contrast, Postgraduate Research (PGR) recruitment was increasing slightly.
- 2.2 The Director of Student Recruitment also outlined scholarship arrangements with governments including Oman, Panama, and Mexico which would provide funding for students to attend the University of Aberdeen. Work was also being done to diversify the University's student recruitment to make it more resilient to global changes.
- 2.3 The Director of Student Recruitment reported that processing times for applications were between 24 and 48 hours from the point of processing to making an offer, engaging with applicants far quicker than in previous years in order to reduce wastage. A new financial support package aimed to help international students with visa costs and increases in the cost of living.

- 2.4 The Director of Student Recruitment reported that the University had broadened its entry requirements for 2025/26, Further investment had been made in Widening Access and there would be a new recruitment focus on secondary schools in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. A single recruitment and marketing plan will be launched in Autumn 2024, aiming to consolidate and grow International Undergraduate student numbers, diversify Postgraduate Taught numbers and relaunch Scottish/rest of UK recruitment.
- 2.5 The Director of Student Recruitment highlighted current Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships and the University's partnership with AFG College in Qatar. Further TNE opportunities were being investigated in north and central America, Europe and north Africa and south-east Asia.
- 2.6 The Director of Student Recruitment noted that the sector, and the University, had experienced challenging times recently, but with support and commitment from Court and the Business Committee he expected good progress with its student recruitment. He had a longer-term ambition to introduce a "University of Aberdeen Global", covering the institution's TNE and online courses.
- 2.7 Members of the Committee asked a range of questions covering applications for Modern Language courses; potential collaboration with other Scottish universities, the use of agents for student recruitment; and the broadening of entry requirements for international and domestic students. On the last question, the Committee noted that, for 2025 entry, the A-Level entry requirements for students from the rest of the UK would be lowered from BBB to BBC, with a similar reduction for Scottish applicants.
- 2.8 The Committee noted the QS rankings published on 5 June, which saw a decline in the University's global ranking, and asked how that would impact partnership and recruitment activities. The Director of Student Recruitment's preference was to be back in top 200 and everyone at the University was working hard to that end – but he did not expect a major effect and noted that, despite the ranking changes, the University's international partners were still working with us.
- 2.9 The Convener thanked the Director of Student Recruitment for his presentation, which the Committee had long looked forward to.

3. Fundraising Campaign

- 3.1 Clare Livingston, Campaign Director, delivered a high-level presentation on the work being done to develop the fundraising campaign. Full proposals would be going to Court for consideration on 19 June.
- 3.2 The Campaign Director's presentation covered the set-up of the campaign team and disbursements from the Development Trust to the University. Over the last two years, more than £10m had been raised - the most since the conclusion of the last fundraising campaign in 2012. The Thomas Reid Circle

had been relaunched for legacy pledgers, with an event in early June welcoming 35 people from around the UK.

- 3.3 Turning to the recipients of funding, the Campaign Director highlighted student scholarships and research including neurology (£4m) and women's health (£2m of a £6m goal).
- 3.4 The Campaign Director provided an update on planning and campaign objectives, which focussed on students, research, and innovation. The campaign would be launched later in the year and could last between 7 to 10 years. The flagship goal was the creation of the King's Innovation Hub. The Campaign Director also outlined how Business Committee members could help facilitate introductions to businesses and organisations who could support the campaign.
- 3.5 In response to questions, it was noted that fundraising for the University had returned to pre-pandemic levels this year. A communications plan would be key to the success of the campaign. Campaign updates would be included in the Alumni Relations update that comes to each meeting.
- 3.6 Thanking the Campaign Director, the Convener noted that the Committee was looking forward to responding to the campaign by continuing to act as advocates for the University; by communicating the impact of philanthropy in general and the campaign focus in particular; and by identifying business and personal contacts who might be willing to donate.

4. Minutes and Matters Arising (paper BC24.4.1 and 24.4.2)

- 4.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting on 7 March 2024 as an accurate record and received and noted the Action Log.

5. Alumni Relations Update (paper BC24.5)

- 5.1 The Committee noted the Alumni Relations update, which as usual reported a welcome diversity of topic and location.

6. Convener's Report (paper BC24.6)

- 6.1 The Committee discussed the format of meetings and the use of Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Teams. It was agreed that the Head of Governance and Executive Support would develop a questionnaire to ascertain members' preferences.

7. Governance Review Update (paper BC24.7) and General Council budget report (paper BC24.7.1)

- 7.1 The Committee discussed the paper which reviewed current practices of the General Council and its Business Committee and proposed revisions. An updated paper would be put to the next meeting.

- 7.2 On the budget update, the Convener pointed out that the Committee had not been involved in setting the budget and that it did not seem sufficient for the modest established activities of the Council and Committee. Nor did it seem commensurate with the Council's role as one of the three governing bodies of the University. It was agreed that he would work with the Head of Governance and Executive Support to agree a budget for 2024/25.

8. Business Committee Nominations Update (paper BC24.8)

- 8.1 The Head of Governance and Executive Support reported that, by the deadline of 31 May, 20 nominations had been received for the 3 vacant elected member seats on the Committee for the period from 1 October.
- 8.2 The Business Committee approved delegation to the Clerk to General Council, in consultation with the Convener, to call a special meeting of General Council in September to ballot for the vacancies.

9. Marischal East and Re-Imagining Our Campuses (paper BC24.9)

- 9.1 The Committee noted the update from the working group on Marischal East.

10. Commercialisation of Research (paper BC24.10)

- 10.1 The Committee discussed the update from the Commercialisation of Research working group in support of the University's strategy of commercialisation of scientific research.
- 10.2 The Committee approved the development of a 'Meet the Entrepreneurs' seminar series and to the development of further programmes with the Director of Research & Innovation and her team. It was noted that contribution on commercialisation by the working group had been very helpful to the University.

11. Omnibus Resolution (paper BC24.11)

- 11.1 The Business Committee discussed and endorsed several proposed changes to regulations for various degrees in 2024/25. The changes would be put to Court on 19 June for final approval.

12. Court Digests (paper BC24.12)

- 12.1 The Business Committee received and noted Court Digests for February 2024 and April 2024, as well as a University Update.

13. Any Other Business and Date of next meeting

- 13.1 There being no other business, the Committee agreed that the next meeting of the Business Committee would be held online at noon on Thursday 19 September.