UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting held on 10 November 2014

Present: Eric Crockart (Convener), Corinne Blackstock, Christine Burgess, Michael Cooper, Nigel Lindsay, Tom Lynch, Duncan Macniven, Willie McColl, Alan Milne, Marjory Reid, Muriel Roberts, Jennifer Shirreffs, Susan Stuart, Joseph Wallace, Brian Wood with Emily Beever, Caroline Inglis, Jennifer Sewel and Bruce Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies were received from Alex Arthur, Nuala Booth, Alan Campbell, Steven Duggan, Colin Duncan, Mike McConnell, Lynne Mennie, Emily Mitchell and Paul Rorie.

1. PRESENTATION FROM THE PRINCIPAL

The Committee received a presentation from the Principal which covered the potential impact of political change in the UK on higher education, the University's current position in key rankings and league tables, key challenges in enhancing the student experience and a number of related issues which would all inform the development of the University's next Strategic Plan for 2015-2020. The Principal also drew the Committee's attention to the recently published White Paper on higher education governance in Scotland, including a proposal that might limit to two the number of General Council assessors on Court.

There followed an extended discussion in which the Committee discussed with the Principal issues including student retention rates, an unexpected rise in demand resulting in a shortage of hall accommodation for some first year students, the future of the Mitchell Hall, the role of the University in enhancing the cultural life of Aberdeen, and the new Science Building.

It was noted that the Committee would have an opportunity to comment on the development of the Strategic Plan in early 2015, with this anticipated to be at the April meeting of the Committee.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2014 were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

FORMAL APPROVAL OF MS MURIEL ROBERTS AS VICE-CONVENER

The Committee formally approved the appointment of Ms Roberts as the Vice-Convener for the duration of her remaining term of office (30 September 2015).

4. CONVENER’S INTRODUCTION

The Convener reported on a number of matters regarding how he envisaged chairing the Committee in the year ahead.

The Committee welcomed Ms Emily Beever to the meeting and, on the recommendation of the Convener, agreed that Ms Beever and a student sabbatical colleague of her choosing, should be invited to attend meetings as observers.

Ms Beever briefed the Committee on the work of the Students’ Association and its current priorities. The Committee were invited to visit the Students’ Association premises and it was agreed to organise this for the afternoon of Wednesday 10 December so as to coincide with the General Council Winter Statutory Meeting.
5. COMMUNICATION FROM COURT: DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Committee received and noted the draft Minutes of the meeting of Court held on 30 September 2014. It was agreed that the Committee found it helpful to receive these and that this practice should continue.

6. REPORT FROM GENERAL COUNCIL ASSESSORS ON MEETING OF COURT ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Committee noted that none of the General Council Assessors who had attended the recent meeting of Court were present to report further to the Committee.

7. FUTURE ITEMS OF BUSINESS

The Committee discussed a list of potential future items of business for the academic year. It was noted that there were a number of issues, including potential future items related to the development of the University's new Strategic Plan, which were deserving of the Committee's attention. However, it was also noted that there was value in the Committee being flexible regarding when it should discuss particular issues. It was, therefore, agreed that the next meeting would focus on Internationalisation and would be held in the Chaplaincy Centre, with a further short presentation on the role of the Chaplaincy. The Committee would determine main issues for future meetings on a rolling basis but agreed that, as in past years, the Director of Finance would be invited to present to the Committee and this was expected to be at the April 2015 meeting.

The Committee noted that it would be helpful to receive information regarding the role of the University's Student Experience Committee from Mrs Shirreffs and Ms Sewel.

8. ALUMNII RELATIONS UPDATE AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR DECEMBER STATUTORY MEETING

The Committee received and noted an overview of some of the key alumni events and communication plans for 2015.

The Committee noted that the next Statutory Meeting of the General Council would be held on Wednesday 10 December 2014 in the Craig Suite of the Sir Duncan Rice Library at 5.00-7.00pm.

9. REPORT ON 2014 GENERAL COUNCIL ASSESSOR ELECTIONS

The Committee received and noted for information, a paper which provided a brief report on the outcome and process of the 2014 General Council elections, which was the first year that these had been conducted through online voting.

The Committee welcomed the savings that had been generated through the use of online voting, greater use of e-mail and reduction in postal costs. The Committee also noted that turnout in the election was lower than at the previous election in 2010 (an election not having been required in 2012). A number of the potential reasons for this were discussed, including whether the lower turnout reflected a more general lack of awareness of, or engagement with, the General Council. It was noted, however, that informal evidence suggested the low turnout was comparable to the recent experience of other Scottish universities.

10. ROLE OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

The Committee received and noted a paper setting out its role, which was routinely included in Committee papers for its information. The Committee noted that the document would be reviewed and updated by Mr Lindsay and the Clerk.
11. AOCB

11.1 Website

Members were reminded that the Committee’s webpage included biographies and photographs, some of which required to be added or updated. The Clerk would contact members directly to request biographies and photographs.

11.2 Number of Meetings

The Committee discussed the number of meetings and noted that the current level of four meetings per academic year was consistent with practice followed by other University committees which met either three or four times in keeping with the pattern of Court and Senate meetings. It was agreed, however, that consideration would be given as to whether the current scheduling of meetings in November, February, April and June should be changed for academic year 2015-16.

11.3 Alumnus Association

It was agreed the Convener would contribute to discussions on the future development of the Alumnus Association, by attending the Association's AGM on 17 Nov.

11.4 Retirement of the Senior Vice-Principal

The Committee agreed that the Convener should write on behalf of the Committee to offer its thanks and best wishes to Professor Logan on his retirement as Senior Vice-Principal.

12. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS FOR 2014-15

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings:

- Thursday 19 February 2015 4.00pm Main Hall, Chaplaincy Centre
- Thursday 23 April 2015 4.00pm Venue tbc
- Thursday 11 June 2015 4.00pm Venue tbc