UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting held on 19 February 2015

Present: Eric Crockart (Convener), Alex Arthur, Nuala Booth, Christine Burgess, Alan Campbell, Stephen Duggan, Colin Duncan, Nigel Lindsay, Tom Lynch, Duncan Macniven, Willie MacColl, Mike McConnell, Lynne Mennie, Alan Milne, Emily Mitchell, Jennifer Shirreffs, Susan Stuart, with Caroline Inglis, Genna Clarke (part meeting only), Karen Scaife (part meeting only), Rev Marylee Anderson (part meeting only), Rev David Hutchison (part meeting only), Professor Seth Kunin (part meeting only) and Bruce Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies for absence were received from Emily Beever, Corinne Blackstock, Michael Cooper, Marjory Reid, Muriel Roberts, Paul Rorie, Jennifer Sewel, Joseph Wallace and Brian Wood.

13 MINUTES

The Minutes of meeting held on 10 November 2014 were approved.

14 MATTERS ARISING

No matters arising were noted.

15 PRESENTATION FROM VICE-PRINCIPAL FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

The Committee received a presentation from Professor Seth Kunin, Vice-Principal, on the University's Internationalisation Strategy.

The Committee noted that the Strategy included six core elements: Institutional Profile; Student Recruitment and Experience; Transnational Education; Research Networks; Staff Recruitment and Mobility; and Alumni and Donors. The presentation outlined the main activities and priorities within each of these six elements.

The Committee noted that while not highlighted in the presentation, Europe would continue to be an important market for the University and this was reflected in the appointment of Professor Anne Glover as Vice-Principal with responsibility for Europe. The issue of financial support for international students was raised and it was noted that the University was considering how it could help to enhance financial assistance for students facing increasing UK visa/immigration costs. The Committee was assured that the University wished to make greater use of alumni, including recent graduates, to help promote the institution internationally. The University also intended to provide more opportunities for academic and non-academic staff to benefit from sabbatical periods at international universities.

16 CONVENER’S REPORT

The Convener welcomed Genna Clarke, President for Welfare and Equal Opportunities, Students’ Association, to the meeting. The Committee received a brief update from Ms Clarke on the current activities of the Students’ Association.

The Convener reported on the December General Council meeting, the structure and style of which had been thought to have worked well. It was hoped that as awareness of the new format of the event and the connection with the Carol Service grew, more members of the General Council would attend in future.

The Convener reported that, as previously agreed, he had attended the AGM of the Alumnus Association on 17 November 2014.
The Convener reported that he had, as previously agreed, written on behalf of the Committee to Professor Steve Logan to congratulate him on his retirement as Senior Vice-Principal. It was noted that Professor Jeremy Kilburn, currently Vice-Principal of Queen Mary University, had been appointed as the new Senior Vice-Principal with effect from March 2015.

The Convener noted that the University Chaplain was on a period of sabbatical leave and he welcomed the Assistant Chaplains, Rev Anderson and Rev Hutchison to the meeting.

17 PRESENTATION ON CHAPLAINCY AND MULTIFAITH CENTRE

The Committee received a presentation from Reverend Anderson and Reverend Hutchison on the work of the Chaplaincy and its ambition to create a Multi-Faith Centre on the site of the current Chaplaincy building. Rev Hutchison drew attention to the poor disabled access to the present Chaplaincy, saying it was an appalling building for him personally.

The Committee noted the importance of the work of the Chaplaincy to the enhancement of the student experience and in supporting the University's increasingly diverse and international community of students and staff. In support of this, initial outline plans for the creation of a Multi-Faith Centre had been developed and included in the University's Capital Plan.

Following discussion, the Committee noted that the University had a number of important forthcoming capital projects and that it was not in a position to comment on the prioritisation of these. On that basis, the Committee agreed to welcome 'in principle' the Multi-Faith project, and send a letter to Court in support of the concept. The Committee also agreed that a letter should be sent to the University Chaplain Easter Smart thanking her for her support for the multi-faith chaplaincy project and offering her the Committee's best wishes for her sabbatical.

18 COMMUNICATION FROM COURT: DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING 9 DECEMBER 2014

The Committee received and noted the draft Minutes of the meeting of Court held on 9 December 2014.

It was confirmed that the University's External Auditors were being reappointed for a second term having previously been appointed for five years (three years with an extension of a further two years).

It was noted that the Rector's Installation Ceremony was expected to be on Monday 23 March 2015. The Rector had not yet announced the appointment of her Assessor on Court.

19 REPORT FROM GENERAL COUNCIL ASSESSORS ON MEETING OF COURT ON 9 DECEMBER 2014

No further matters arising from the meeting of the Court on 9 December 2014 were reported by those Assessors present.

20 CONSULTATION ON LEGISLATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

The Committee received and noted a copy of a response to the Scottish Government's consultation on HE Governance Legislation, which as agreed by circulation, had been submitted by the Convener by the closing date of 31 January 2015. The response had noted the Committee's concern regarding proposals to limit the number of alumni representatives on governing bodies.

The Convener also highlighted that in the response he had commented briefly on certain questions due to the manner in which they had been framed rendering it difficult to provide no response. The Convener had also previously highlighted to members that they were entitled to respond to the consultation individually.
21 ROLES OF UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES

The Committee received a paper which provided information on the role and membership of the Student Experience Committee and in addition, information regarding the principal formal committee structure of the University and key advisory groups. The Committee also noted that the University was currently undertaking an extensive review of its committee structures and received a summary of the background and purpose of that review.

In discussion, it was noted that the Student Experience Committee included academic members of staff and that issues related to the academic delivery of the student experience were considered as part of its business.

The Committee noted that the University had received complaints regarding smoking in public outdoor areas of the campus and intended, subject to planning permission, to create designated smoking shelter areas in appropriate areas of the Old Aberdeen campus.

22 ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE

The Committee received an update from Ms Scaife regarding forthcoming alumni relations activities and events. It was noted that the next Statutory Meeting of the General Council would be held on Saturday 30th May 2015 as part of the May Festival.

It was noted that members of the Committee might be approached to help participate in alumni events. It was agreed that Ms Scaife would provide members with a periodic update on forthcoming events so that members were better able to volunteer their support, particularly for events in their area. Ms Scaife would also circulate a request for members to provide Alumni Profiles.

23 FUTURE BUSINESS

It was agreed that for the next meeting the Committee would receive a presentation on Finance, a report on the development of the University’s next Strategic Plan and a report on the Research Excellence Framework results.

24 DRAFT ORDINANCE ON OVERSEAS CAMPUSES

The Committee received and, for its part, approved a draft Ordinance seeking the extension of the University’s powers to allow the establishment of University of Aberdeen campuses overseas.

25 DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

The Committee received two draft Resolutions ([Supplementary Regulations for the Degrees of Master of Arts] [Changes to Regulations for Various Degrees]) regarding regulatory changes for 2015/2016 as recommended by the Senate and the Quality Assurance Committee.

Some members of the Committee expressed concern regarding those changes which related to the decision of the Senate that requirements for students to meet a specific Common Assessment/Grade Scale hurdle for entry to an Honours programme should be discontinued. It was agreed that further information regarding this was required before the Committee could, as requested in the paper, approve the draft Resolutions. It was agreed that if this could not be deferred to the next meeting of the full Committee, the Convener should convene a sub-committee to consider the matter on behalf of the full committee.

The Committee also agreed that in future it would wish to receive papers which more clearly set out the proposed changes and to have a member of Registry present who could respond to questions.
ROLE OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

The Committee received an updated summary of the paper routinely included on the agenda regarding the role of the General Council and of the Business Committee. It was agreed to make a minor change to the paper to reflect that the membership of the Business Committee included 21 elected members rather than “up to 21 elected members”.

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF MEMBERS TO THE COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that the current terms of office of eight members of the Committee would conclude on 30 September 2015. All members were eligible to serve a further term of office (3 years). There was also a vacancy on the Committee.

In accordance with the General Council’s Standing Orders, nominations for membership of the Business Committee of the General Council would close on Tuesday 24 March 2015 at 4pm.

The General Council had been formally notified of the timeframe and process for nominations at its statutory meeting in December 2014. All members whose current terms of office would conclude in 2015 had also been made aware of the nominations process.

AOCB

Marischal Square

It was noted that the University did not have an institutional position on the Marischal Square Development and had not made representations to the planning process.

DATE AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS FOR 2014-15

The Committee noted the dates and venue of future meetings for 2014-2015:

Thursday 23 April 2015  4.00pm  Venue: Sir Duncan Rice Library
Thursday 11 June 2015  4.00pm  Venue: Institute of Medical Sciences, Foresterhill