UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting held on 25 June 2013

Present: Colin Duncan (Convener), Alex Arthur (from 17:15), Christine Burgess, Eric Crockart (Vice-Convener), Nigel Lindsay, Maitland Mackie, Lynne Mennie, Alan Milne, Mike McConnell, Jennifer Shirreffs, Susan Stuart, Hamish Wilson, Brian Wood, Jennifer Sewel, Karen Scaife and Emma Forster (Clerk).

Apologies were received from: Jacquelynn Craw, Steve Duggan, Marjory Reid, Muriel Roberts, Paul Rorie, Michael Will and Hamish Wilson

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2013 were approved.

2 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

2.1 ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE AND ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (Minute 2.2 refers)

Mrs Shirreffs reported that a meeting had just been held between Alumnus Association and Business Committee representatives, and Alumni Relations. In general it was noted that it was confusing for graduates by having these distinct points of contact in relation to Alumni. The meeting had discussed opportunities for joint events and publications, and opportunities for engaging with existing students including meeting with the new sabbatical officers.

The possibility of inviting AUSA sabbatical officers to attend the Business Committee was discussed.

It was agreed that:

− The Convener should have input into email communications/ezines to alumni, in order to raise the profile of the Business Committee and the General Council.

− Proposals should be developed for the structure of future Statutory Meetings of the General Council, with the aim of engaging more alumni.

− The work of the Business Committee, vacancies and process for standing for election should be drawn to the attention of AUSA.

− Representatives of the Business Committee and Alumnus Association should continue to liaise to explore ideas for joint working.

3 STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The Committee received a paper giving an overview of the results of recent student satisfaction surveys (BC12-13:18):

− Student Barometer, a survey which was administered externally by a company called i-graduate

− National Student Survey, which was a UK-wide survey of final year undergraduates carried out by Ipsos-Mori on behalf of the UK HE funding bodies.

The results of these Surveys had been discussed by the University’s Student Affairs Committee, of which Mrs Shirreffs was a member.
In discussion the Committee commented on a number of points including:

- Responses to the question about the Students’ Union in the National Student Survey. Although this question was intended to refer to the work of the Students Association in its broadest sense, there was a risk that students would interpret this question as referring to a social space. The University’s capital plan included student facilities as a priority, and the form that these should take was being discussed with AUSA.

- The actual impact on student choice of these types of surveys and university league tables. This was difficult to measure.

- Opportunities for work experience to be incorporated into academic programmes. Employability was a component of the outcome of the University’s Curriculum Reform, with the implementation of the co-curriculum to provide students with opportunities to enhance transferable skills.

4 REVIEW OF THE CENTRE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The Committee received a paper on the review of CLL (BC12-13:20) and the recommendations arising from the review that had been approved by University management. Members raised concerns about the lack of consultation with the Business Committee on the review.

This led to a wider discussion on the University’s extra-mural provision. While acknowledging that the University had an extensive public engagement programme, there was particular interest from the Committee in more traditional continuing education activities such as structured programmes of evening classes. Members discussed whether the University should be more focussed on this type of provision, and whether there was demand for it.

There was also discussion about the University’s Summer School, which was a central element of the University’s widening participation strategy and which was being revised to ensure that it continued to be fit for purpose.

The Committee agreed that Professor Peter McGeorge, Vice Principal for Learning and Teaching, should be invited to present to a future meeting of the Committee on these issues.

The Committee also discussed the University’s festival programme, noting that this year MayFest had been held for the first time, in place of the Word Festival, and that in general feedback on MayFest had been positive.

5 COURT BUSINESS

5.1 ORAL REPORTS FROM GENERAL COUNCIL ASSESSORS

The Committee received an oral report from Mr Arthur and Mrs Shirreffs, General Council Assessors, on the meeting of Court held that morning.

At that meeting, the Principal had reported on the following matters:

- the successful ceremony that been held for the Installation of HRH The Duchess of Rothesay as the University’s new Chancellor.
- the University’s ranking at 91 in the Lieden rankings (http://www.leidenranking.com/) of the top 100 universities in the world for science, including 46th for Biomedical and health sciences.
- His involvement in discussions with regard to both the Universities UK submission to the UK Government’s forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review and Universities Scotland’s corresponding submission to the Scottish Government Spending Review.

The Court had received presentations on one of the University’s four research themes, Pathways to a healthy life, from Dr Bauke de Roos, leader of the research theme, and from Mrs Banks, University Librarian (who was leaving the University to take up a post at Imperial College).
The Court had received and discussed the Draft Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance, and discussed issues arising from this including student representation on Court, the diversity of Court, and the reporting of Remuneration Committee decisions.

Among other matters, the Court had also received updates on:

- Strategic Planning and Risk
- Equal Pay Audit
- The introduction of a Starbucks on campus (see minute 5.2 below)

5.2 STARBUCKS ON CAMPUS

The Committee received the report made by the Operating Board to Court earlier that day (BC12-13:19, tabled) in relation to introducing a Starbucks on campus.

It was clarified that the Operating Board was a governance committee with delegated powers from Court to act in relation to academic, financial, estate and human resource planning and policy making.

The proposal to introduce Starbucks on campus had been developed by the Catering & Student Accommodation Project Board. The Committee noted that the matter had been brought to the attention of the Operating Board by campus trades unions and AUSA, who had written to the Convener of the Operating Board, and representatives from these groups had been invited to attend the Operating Board meeting on 11 June. The concerns expressed to the Board related primarily to the lack of consultation with staff and students and more generally, to the range of facilities on campus and whether these met the needs of staff and student groups. However, on balance, the Operating Board felt that the Starbucks proposal presented significant opportunities, and therefore agreed, in principle, that University Management should take forward the proposal, subject to follow-up discussions on the detail of the proposal taking place immediately with the Trades Unions and Students’ Association.

The Operating Board had noted that Starbucks was a Fairtrade provider that would enable the University to continue to meet its Fairtrade commitment, and this was a key criterion in its identifying Starbucks.

The Convener reported that at the meeting of Court held that morning, he had indicated there was evidence that potentially challenged the Fairtrade status of Starbucks, and the Court had agreed that this evidence should be received and considered by University Management. He would be providing further information to the University's Senior Vice-Principal, and this course of action was endorsed by the Committee.

The Business Committee also discussed the following points:

- The reputational impact of any publicity around Starbucks
- The opportunities for independent, local providers on campus. It was noted that attracting businesses on to the campus, which saw reduced number of potential customers outwith term-time and in the evenings, was challenging.

6 MEMBERSHIP

6.1 PROPOSALS FOR CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Committee received and approved proposals for co-opted members subject to: 1) the correction of an error in relation to the terms of office as presented in the paper; and 2) the proposed members agreeing to their respective terms of office.

An induction meeting for new members would be held immediately before the next meeting of the Committee, on 14 November 2013.
6.2 TIMING OF ELECTIONS: CHANGES TO STANDING ORDERS

The Committee received and approved amendments to its Standing Orders, the purpose of which was to change the timing of the announcement of elections in order to generate more interest from the General Council.

It was noted that in order to formalise a change to the Standing Orders, the Business Committee was required to:

− Inform the next meeting of the General Council (December 2013) that a change would be proposed at the following meeting (May/June 2014); and
− Present the change formally to the May/June 2014 meeting.

7 AGENDA ITEMS 2013/14

Members were invited to suggest items for 2013/14 meetings of the Business Committee. Initial suggestions included:

− Scottish HE Governance Review
− Lifelong learning and public engagement
− Research themes
− Presentation from AUSA
− Annual report from Finance
− Following on from the presentation at the last meeting of the Committee, further update on capital projects towards the end of 2013/14
− Annual presentation from the Principal

8 AOCB: STEVE CANNON

The Convener reported that Steve Cannon, formerly Secretary to the University of Aberdeen, had taken up the post of Chief Executive Officer at the University of Hong Kong. Mr Cannon would receive an honorary degree from the University of Aberdeen at a ceremony being held on 3 July 2013.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 14 November 2013 at 4pm. There was some discussion as to whether it would be possible to synchronise meeting timings with Court meetings to improve information flow.