UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
Minutes of meeting held on 14 November 2013

Present: Mr Colin Duncan (Convener), Ms Corinne Blackstock, Ms Christine Burgess, Mr Alan Campbell, Mr M Cooper, Mr Eric Crockart, Mr Stephen Duggan, Mr Nigel Lindsay, Mr Tom Lynch, Dr Maitland Mackie, Mr Willie McColl, Mr Mike McConnell, Ms Lynne Mennie, Mr Alan Milne, Ms Emily Mitchell, Ms Muriel Roberts, Mrs Jenny Shirreffs, Ms Susan Stuart, Mr Brian Wood, with Ms Irene Bews, Ms Karen Scaife, Ms Jennifer Sewel and Ms Emma Forster (Clerk).

Apologies were received from Mr Alex Arthur, Ms Jacquelynn Craw, and Mr Paul Rorie.

1 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2013 were approved subject to the following amendments:
- Paragraph 3, Student Experience: Mrs Shirreffs was the Convener of the University's Student Affairs Committee
- Paragraph 8, Steve Cannon: Mr Cannon’s new job title at the University of Hong Kong was Executive Vice-President (Administration & Finance)
- Attendance list: Hamish Wilson had not been present at the last meeting.

2 MATTERS ARISING
2.1 Starbucks on Campus (Minute 5.2 refers)
Members of the Committee continued to express concern about the decision by the University to bring a Starbucks onto Campus. The Campus Trades Unions were again making a submission to the University Court with additional information about Starbucks' Fairtrade status.

3 CONVENER’S REPORT
The Convener welcomed the new members of the Committee to their first meeting: Corinne Blackstock, Alan Campbell, Tom Lynch, Willie McColl and Emily Mitchell.

He reminded Committee members that the Statutory Meeting of the General Council would be held on 7 December, and encouraged all to attend.

The Convener also sought ideas for social events for the Committee such as the Student Show which members had attended in the past.

In relation to the role of the Business Committee, the Convener suggested that over the coming months it would worthwhile to spend some time reflecting on this role and the way in which the Business Committee could be more proactively involved in being consulted on University matters.

The Convener commented on the format of meetings for the forthcoming academic year. It was the intention to have one presentation on a matter of interest at each meeting. In future years he hoped to invite the Principal to the November meeting to set the context and the challenges for the forthcoming year.
4 FINANCIAL OUTTURN

The Committee received a presentation from Ms Bews, the Director of Finance, on the Financial Outturn for financial year 2013/14.

It noted that in 2013/14 the University had received total income of £220m up from £215m the previous year, and had had total net costs of £216m. The £5.7m variance was important to allow reinvestment back into University infrastructure, particularly as capital funding from the Scottish Funding Council was now much more limited than in previous years.

The Committee noted the financial challenges facing the University which included tuition fee income from students from the Rest of the UK and from outwith the EU, and research income. In relation to research income, at this point in the year the University was seeing an increase in research grants awarded compared to the same time last year.

5 COMMUNICATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY COURT

The Committee received and considered a communication from the University Court (BC13-14:1). It also received a tabled paper from the Vice-Convener, summarising the position in respect to the Court’s discussions on its composition and size.

The Committee noted that the Court had discussed its compliance with the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance. The Code stated that a governing body of no more than 25 members represented a benchmark of good practice. The Court’s current size was 28 which was not compliant with this.

The Court had also agreed to include in its membership a second student member. This meant that in order to both comply with the Scottish Governance Code and accommodate a second student member, it had to reduce its size from 28 to 24 members and Court had agreed to achieve this as follows:

- Reducing the number of Vice-Principal members from three to one;
- Reducing the number of General Council Assessors from four to two;
- Removing the position of Rector’s Assessor as a member of Court, although the Court had agreed that the Rector’s Assessor should be routinely in attendance.

In discussion, the Business Committee felt that the disproportionate reduction in General Council Assessors was inconsistent with the fact that the number of co-opted members on Court had not been reduced. It noted that General Council Assessors were elected by a transparent election process.

The Committee also expressed concern that it had not been consulted on these proposals at an earlier stage.

The Committee unanimously agreed to submit a paper for consideration by the University Court which proposed that if a reduction in the size of the Court leaves no alternative but to reduce the number of General Council assessors, any such reduction should be by no more than one post, so that in future there would be at least 3 elected General Council assessors sitting on Court.

The Committee also unanimously agreed that to make this possible, and in the interests of equitability with any reduction in General Council assessor posts, it recommended that the Court consider reducing the number of co-opted lay member positions on Court accordingly.

It also agreed to report this issue to the Statutory Meeting of the General Council being held on 7 December.
6 GENERAL COUNCIL ASSESSORS’ REPORT ON THE MEETING OF COURT HELD ON 2 OCTOBER 2013

The Convener reported on the meeting of Court held on 2 October 2013. This meeting had comprised a strategy session at which issues relating to the future strategic direction of the University had been discussed. This had included a presentation from the Principal focussing on the priority given to the student experience and what needed to change in order to enhance this experience.

Presentations had also been received from the three Heads of College, and from the Vice-Principal for Research & Knowledge Exchange and the Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching.

Members of the Committee raised matters relating to the strategic direction of the University which they would wish to see considered by Court. These included widening participation strategy, and the provision of museum space.

It was agreed to ask the Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching to comment on the University’s widening participation strategy when he attended the next meeting of the Committee in February.

7 ARRANGEMENT FOR DECEMBER STATUTORY MEETING

The Committee received and considered a paper proposing arrangements for future statutory meetings (BC13-14:2). It agreed that the proposal set out in the paper should be taken forward as follows:

• The summer 2014 Statutory Meeting would again be held at the same time as MayFest, and plans for the meeting could include an event with an author/influential speaker, followed by the meeting and a drinks reception.

• The winter Statutory Meeting would be held prior to the University Carol Service with mulled wine and canapé reception being incorporated.

The Committee also discussed ways in which alumni could be encouraged to re-engage with the University, perhaps through links to University open days, or employer engagement in relation to activities including the existing career mentoring scheme.

8 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

The Committee received and noted an update on Public Engagement activities and initiatives which was included for its information.

9 AOCB: LIFELONG LEARNING

Ms Stuart circulated examples of brochures from other institutions setting out Lifelong Learning programmes, which she felt should be provided in a similar way by the University of Aberdeen. The Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching would be asked to comment on this when he presented to the Committee’s next meeting in February 2014.

10 ROLE OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

The Committee received and noted a paper setting out its role, which was included for its information (BC13-14:4).

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 13 February 2014 at 4.00pm.