Present: Eric Crockart (Convener), Alex Arthur, Christine Burgess, Alan Campbell, Michael Cooper, Stephen Duggan, Colin Duncan, Nigel Lindsay, Duncan Macniven, Mike McConnell, Lynne Mennie, Alan Milne, Emily Mitchell, Marjorie Reid, Muriel Roberts, Jennifer Shirreffs, Susan Stuart, Joseph Wallace, Brian Wood, with Caroline Inglis, Jennifer Sewel, Karen Scaife (part meeting only), Theresa Merrick (part meeting only), Professor Phil Hannaford (part meeting only) and Bruce Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies were received from Emily Beever, Corinne Blackstock, Nuala Booth, Tom Lynch, Willie MacColl and Paul Rorie.

30 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2015 were approved.

31 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted that, as agreed at the previous meeting, the Convener had written to the Court to express the Committee's in principle support for a Multi-Faith Centre and to the University Chaplain, Rev Easter Smart.

32 REPORT ON REF RESULTS

The Committee received a paper and presentation from Professor Phil Hannaford, Vice-Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange, on the University's REF Results.

The Committee noted an analysis of the University's results by unit of assessment and compared with national averages. In discussion, it was noted that the University had in overall terms improved in terms of the number and quality profile of staff submitted. However, it was also noted that some competitor universities had improved further and that this had impacted on the University's overall ranking. The University had, however, already commenced the process of planning for the next REF a key part of this being how to respond to this competitive challenge.

The Committee also discussed how the REF results would translate into research funding. It was noted that due to changes in the Scottish Funding Council’s funding methodology, the University would receive significantly less in research excellence grant funding over the next few years.

33 CONSULTATION ON NEW UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN


The Committee discussed a number of aspects of the ‘White Paper’, including comments on the proposed Vision and Mission and more emphasis of the University’s cultural role. It was noted that the White Paper did not include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or an analysis of performance against the current Plan. The Committee was assured that KPIs were being developed and that reporting of performance against strategic targets was regularly received by Court. It was noted that there would be consultation with other stakeholders in the wider community of Aberdeen.
The Committee agreed that it would contribute a composite response to the White Paper consultation and that the Convener would coordinate this.

34 REPORT FROM THE CONVENER

The Convener highlighted the outcome of a recent student experience survey in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* and the University’s performance in this.

**Voluntary Severance Scheme**

The Convener noted that the University had launched a voluntary severance scheme and that it was seeking to identify savings equivalent to 150 staff posts.

The Committee discussed a number of issues related to the scheme and the financial issues it was seeking to address, including the extent to whether staffing costs at the University were out of step with sector benchmarks. The Committee also noted, however, that the University Court had approved the scheme in order to address significant external pressures on funding and to put in place a financial structure that was both sustainable and that enabled the future investment that would be necessary to deliver the University’s strategic ambition.

In discussion, it was confirmed that the University had not stopped all capital projects but had paused design stage projects. This was part of a wider review of expenditure to identify potential areas for savings.

The Committee expressed some concerns at the media coverage of the voluntary severance scheme. It was assured that the communications were being professionally handled but that it was inevitable that some selective reporting would take place.

The Committee agreed to receive an update at its next meeting on the voluntary severance scheme. It was also agreed that in this context it would be helpful to receive the presentation on Finance which had been deferred from the meeting.

**Future Events**

The Convener reminded the Committee regarding the forthcoming Statutory Meeting of the General Council and the Graduations and encouraged members to participate in these.

35 REPORT FROM GENERAL COUNCIL ASSESSORS AND COMMUNICATION FROM COURT: DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING 24 MARCH 2015

The Committee received and noted the draft Minutes of the meeting of Court held on 24 March 2015. With the exception of the discussion of the voluntary severance scheme, no further matters arising from the meeting of Court were reported by the General Council Assessors.

36 SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION ON HE GOVERNANCE BILL

The Committee received a paper enclosing the Scottish Government’s summary report of the responses to the consultation on the potential content of a Scottish HE Governance Bill. The Committee also received a copy of the response of Universities Scotland to the publication of the summary of responses.

37 FUTURE BUSINESS

The Committee confirmed that it would receive a presentation on Finance at the next meeting. It was also agreed that it was preferable to limit the number of presentations at meetings to one.
38 ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE
The Committee received an update regarding forthcoming alumni relations activities and events.

40 REPORT FROM SUB-COMMITTEE ON DEGREE REGULATIONS AND ROLE OF BUSINESS COMMITTEE IN RESOLUTIONS
The Committee received a report from the sub-committee on degree regulations which had been convened following the last meeting.

The Committee noted that the sub-committee had received a paper on the proposed changes to degree regulations which more clearly outlined the changes and the rationale for these. The sub-committee had noted that as a general point it would be helpful in future for the Business Committee to receive papers on degree regulations in this way which more clearly showed the changes being made and to have present a University Officer who was able to clarify any points raised at the meeting. It had also noted that papers would more clearly state the Business Committee’s statutory role was to consider and comment on Draft Resolutions rather than to approve them.

In discussion, it was confirmed that the sub-committee had discussed the changes to progression into honours with the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning. A report of the sub-committee’s consideration of the draft resolutions had been included in the papers considered by Court prior to its approval of the resolutions.

41 ROLE OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE
The Committee received and noted the paper routinely included on the agenda regarding the role of the General Council and the Business Committee.

42 NOMINATIONS AND ELECTION OF MEMBERS TO THE COMMITTEE
The Committee noted that following the close of nominations for membership of the Committee, nine nominations had been received for the nine positions available. As a result the following nine individuals were automatically appointed without the need for an election.

Continuing Members
Lynne Mennie
Alan Milne
Muriel Roberts
Brian Wood
Mike Cooper
Emily Mitchell
Willie McColl

New Members
Graham Hunter (former Rector’s Assessor on Court)
Mary Stephen (PGDE Depute Programme Director in the School of Education).

The Committee noted that the two new members’ terms of office commenced from 1 October 2015 for a period of three years.
DATE OF STATUTORY MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The Committee noted that the next Statutory Meeting of the General Council and exclusive alumni May Festival event – Aberdeen Humanities – The Future of our Past would be held on Saturday 30 May at 2pm in King's College Conference Centre, University of Aberdeen. Following the meeting, members were invited to join the panel and fellow graduates for afternoon tea in the James MacKay Hall from 3pm.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday 11 June 2015 at 4.00pm at Institute of Medical Sciences, Foresterhill.

DATE OF MEETINGS FOR 2015-16

The Committee received a proposed set of dates for meetings for session 2015-16. It was suggested, however, that the schedule of meetings should be reviewed to consider a structure whereby meetings were spaced more evenly across the year. The Committee agreed that this should be undertaken and reported to the next meeting.