1 APOLOGIES

Received from Corinne Blackstock, Mel Roberts, Joe Wallace, Jenny Mordue, Mary Stephen.

2 PRESENTATION FROM PRINCIPAL

The Principal thanked Eric Crockart for his continued commitment to the university and his convenership of the Business Committee. He then went on to talk about the issues facing the University raised by Brexit.

He informed the committee that, when the news broke about Brexit, the University took immediate action to reassure staff, current and future students that it would be business as usual and the University's position would not change in the immediate future.

The Principal went on to outline some of the financial implications – in general Brexit is not good for Scottish Higher Education and we are likely looking at a few years of the same financial position. He stressed that much is still unknown but he thought that the move to a multi-year spending review may be delayed.

UCAS will open in September for 2017 intake. The University intends to maintain fees at the current level (awaiting reassurance from the Scottish Government).

He went on to say that there is a broad spectrum of options for a fees structure for International students which needs to be looked at. In addition the University may need to look at lowering entrance requirements for Scottish students to increase numbers to fill the potential gap from fewer International students. Increasing numbers from widening access is also a consideration but it should be noted that these options may not work across all disciplines as it will be a smaller pool of students.

The Principal advised that the Scottish government has indicated that fees for Scottish students are not an option.

Going forward he advised that the demand for university will be based on the current student experience therefore this is a priority for the university. In the recent leavers' survey 88% of students were satisfied (Aberdeen was top in Scotland in 10 subjects). The university is working hard to ensure we have a strong offering, improve satisfaction, improve performance and reduce drop out (he paid credit to AUSA for their continued hard work).
He advised the committee that the UK government had provided a commitment to underwrite ongoing EU grants, and grants obtained, for a certain time. He talked about how the EU need British Research therefore there will be ongoing negotiations in the future about working together. A key factor going forward is to be able to write competitive grant applications - the university has recently started a grant writing academy to support staff in this.

Many of the EU staff are nervous. The University is continuing to lobby the government on the issue of granting citizenship for current EU staff.

3 MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting in June were approved subject to Tom Lynch and Willie MacColl’s apologies being noted.

4 MATTERS ARISING

Lobbying subgroup – Tom Lynch to join the group

History of the General Council sub group – KS to look into getting the present history document digitised

Communications – KS to upload current Standing Orders. Subgroup needs to review content, check links and look at overall visibility on the University website.

5 REPORT FROM THE CONVENER

(The committee agreed to the convener’s proposal to deliver his report after item 7 to give the Clerk time to count the votes cast at the meeting for item 6.)

The convener said the abiding theme during his tenure as convener had been university governance. He read out the letter the committee agreed at the last meeting he should write to Court regarding the committee's opposition to the internal proposals to reduce the size of Court. The letter made clear that any attempt to cut the four General Council Assessor posts on Court would send out a very poor message to alumni. He said this letter had been noted by Court. The convener thanked every committee member for their contributions to the work of the committee, and for all the help and advice they had given him in the past two years.

6 CO-OPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

Voting papers were circulated. The appointed individuals will only serve the remainder of the term they are being co-opted for. Patricia Pugh and Euan Mackenzie were duly elected by the committee. The committee agreed to the convener's proposal that the unsuccessful candidates for co-option be encouraged to stand for election to the committee by the normal nomination process begun annually at the General Council in December.

7 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE STANDING ORDERS

Duncan MacNiven provided a possible solution to the wording to allow future conveners and vice-conveners of the committee to serve full terms. Tom Lynch pointed out that the present four-year terms allowed for both posts in the Standing Orders meant the committee could end up with more than the maximum of 21 elected members, as other members only serve three-year terms. The committee agreed that a sub group comprising Duncan MacNiven and Nuala Booth take this aboard and bring a final draft form of words to the next committee meeting for approval.
Colin Duncan picked up the theme of governance highlighted in the Convener's Report. He pointed out that reducing the size of Court to as few as 17 members would cause problems, including the difficulty of populating Court committees. He said he had submitted an alternative Court composition, maintaining the four General Council Assessors, in a Court of 25 members.

Jenny Shirreffs then revealed that Court's Governance committee had looked again at the proposals to reduce the size of Court, and would be recommending to the next Court meeting that Court should consist of 25 members. The convener said this was most welcome news, as it removed the threat to reduce the number of four General Council Assessors.

Caroline Inglis noted some updates – Court has now approved a process for election of a Senior Governor. She advised the committee that there was a review under way of the Scottish Code of Good HE governance. But in answer to a query from the Convener, she said she felt there was nothing the committee could usefully do at present in connection with lobbying the Scottish Government on this issue.

Nigel Lindsay, on behalf of the committee, congratulated Eric on his term of office and thanked him for his convenership.

The committee expressed thanks to the team at the Rowett for the highly informative tour of the institution's new building at Foresterhill, immediately prior to the meeting.

The Committee received and noted the Skills Register.

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Thursday 17 November 2016 at 4pm in Powis Gate