The 307th Statutory Meeting of the General Council was held in the King’s College Centre on 27 May 2017. The Convener of the Business Committee, Mr Nigel Lindsay, was in the Chair.

1 DRAFT MINUTES

The draft minutes of the 306th Statutory Meeting were approved.

2 REPORT FROM THE CONVENER OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

2.1 The Convener of the Business Committee, Mr Nigel Lindsay, reported on the activities of the Business Committee during the past year.

2.2 The Convener talked about the Business Committee meeting in March. Unfortunately, due to work commitments, Professor John Paterson was unable to give his presentation on Internationalisation and Student Recruitment. His presentation was postponed to June’s meeting.

Professor Tim Ingold gave a talk on the ‘Reclaiming Our University’ movement with which he is associated. Professor Ingold’s talk stimulated an interesting question and answer session, in which the Committee were able to step back from immediate concerns and explore some longer-term issues about what the University is for and how it is run.

2.3 The Convener noted that the General Council encompasses tens of thousands of graduates who are a massive potential resource for the University. The work around financial support is already done effectively by others and, while they would be delighted to help if asked, it is not their area of expertise. It was highlighted that graduates have a huge wealth of disparate experience. The Business Committee wants to encourage the University to recognise the value of this vast network of experience and influence.

2.4 At the March meeting the Business Committee gave further consideration to how members' biographies and experience are presented on the University’s website. The Convener thanked Tom Lynch and others who have worked on this, so that the details can be given in a standard template presenting the relevant skills and experience that members have, rather than following the form of a personal biography. Work is continuing on this and, when the Committee has a satisfactory template, they hope it can be extended to a wider group of the General Council members.

2.5 The Convener also thanked the Business Committee’s Vice-Convener Mel Roberts for leading a sub-group and arranging a meeting with colleagues in the University’s External Relations department. As a result, the next Committee meeting will include a discussion with three members of External Relations so that they can better understand the work they do, and explore ways in which the members might be able to offer continued co-operation and support.

2.6 Another project is a proposal to update the history of the General Council. A history of the first hundred years’ work of the General Council from its inception in 1860 was published in 1963, and members have agreed that there would be value in a re-publication of that work, augmented by a history of the fifty years since then. The Convener noted that he would be delighted to hear from anyone who would be prepared to contribute to the work of going
through different source material and interviewing some of those who were involved during these years.

2.7 The Convener will be meeting his counterparts from St Andrews, Glasgow and Edinburgh universities on 15 June. One of the matters which will be discussed is changes in the governance of Scottish universities. All four ancient universities have had Assessors elected by all members of the General Council to the Court. It was noted that Aberdeen has four assessors and it has been gender-balanced for over ten years now, something that is only starting to happen with the rest of the Court membership.

The issue of the composition of court which ended the right of the General Council to elect Assessors was discussed. The Convener recommended a book by Professor Stefan Collini, called “Speaking of Universities”. He read a quote from page 15.

A sub-group of the Business Committee has been formed to work on this issue on its behalf. The Convener noted that it is engaged in a constructive dialogue with the University, and that he hopes to have more to say at the next Statutory Meeting in December.

3 QUESTIONS

3.1 Dr David Galloway asked if the ‘Reclaiming our university’ manifesto is available online and if the Business Committee members are aware of various changes happening across the University.

The Convener noted that the manifesto was available online and asked Caroline Inglis, Secretary to the University, to address the second half of the question.

Caroline Inglis noted that the University is facing a number of challenges, including a reduction in government funding. However, the University is very resilient and every School has strategic plans in place to address areas such as staffing, research funding, student recruitment outreach activities and public engagement. Changes to funding related to the University’s Music department have been implemented but it will continue to function as normal.

3.2 It was noted that the University’s Music department brings many rewards. The Convener endorsed the statement and added that the Business Committee members and fellow graduates are proud of the Music department’s success.

3.3 Eric Crockart asked if changes to the way assessors to Court are elected have been fully confirmed.

Caroline Inglis provided a brief history of developments over the last couple of years. Changes are required to comply with the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016. Currently, Court consists of 28 members but the number is to be reduced to 25. In addition, there is a proposal to remove the requirement for General Council members to elect their own Assessors and allow Court members to appoint Assessors through a recruitment process. Any available vacancy will be advertised to ensure gender balance and a range of skills.

A draft resolution has been produced upon which the Scottish Government provided several comments. The resolution will be taken forward for further discussion.

4 RESULTS OF BUSINESS COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

4.1 Under the terms of Standing Order No 19, the following are due retire from the Business Committee on 30 September 2017 but were eligible for re-election: Susan Stuart, Corrine Blackstock, Duncan Macniven, Joseph Wallace and Euan Mackenzie.
Marjory Reid is also due to retire from the Business Committee on 30 September 2017 but is not eligible for re-election.

At the closing date for nominations of candidates, four nominations for six vacancies had been received and so the following were duly elected to the Business Committee: Eric Crockart, Euan Mackenzie, Duncan Macniven and Jan McRobbie. They will all serve on the Business Committee from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2020.

4.2 Under the terms of Standing Order No 21, Nigel Lindsay will continue his role as the Convener until 2019.

5 NOTICE OF THE 308th STATUTORY MEETING

The 308th Statutory Meeting will be held on Wednesday 7 December at 6pm in the Linklater Rooms. Members of the General Council will be then invited to attend the University Carol Service at St Machar’s Cathedral.

6 TAGGING EVENT PRESENTATION

6.1 Mrs Liz Bowie, Director of Development and Alumni Relations, gave a presentation on the ‘TAG’ (Thank A Giver) event which took place during the 2017 May Festival.

6.2 The Development Trust organised a programme of activity during the May Festival to raise awareness of fundraising and philanthropic support and to thank many generous donors. The event was inspired by similar initiatives undertaken in other universities, in the USA in particular.

6.3 Over 50 temporary “tags” were installed, showcasing items, areas, building and items around the University which have been supported by philanthropy. In addition, an informative map featuring the location of all tags across Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill campuses was produced. An online photo competition encouraged people to take part in this year’s event through uploading “selfie” photographs online, using hashtag #AberDonors. Various prizes were available for best photos, courtesy of Aberdeen Sports Village and FreshMex.