



UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTE OF THE 321st STATUTORY MEETING

The 321st meeting of the General Council was held in King's College Conference Centre and online on 7th December 2024. The Convener of the Business Committee, Dr Duncan Macniven, was in the Chair.

1. WELCOME

The Convener welcomed attendees, particularly Samantha Waters, Interim University Secretary, who was attending her first General Council meeting. He noted that the Principal, Professor George Boyne, was unwell and unable to attend. Deputy Secretary to the University, Louise Thomson, noted that there were 17 General Council members in the room and 17 members joining online, which met the quorum of 20 in General Council Standing Orders. She had however been unable to find the minutes of the General Council meeting in the early 1970s at which the quorum was discussed and approved. The Convener proposed to proceed on the assumption that the changes had been correctly approved. The meeting agreed.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The General Council received and approved minutes from the 319th statutory meeting held on 23rd March 2024, and the additional (320th) meeting held on 26th September 2024.

3. UNIVERSITY UPDATE

The Principal was unable to attend the meeting, but the Convener and Deputy Secretary spoke to his slides which provided an update of the University's performance over the last year. The University's Aberdeen 2040 strategy was highlighted as well as the five interdisciplinary challenges associated with the strategy.

The University's recent recognition in the UK and international league tables was highlighted alongside the University's priorities for 2024/25 of quality, new revenue and new ways of working.

The presentation also covered several significant research impacts which the University had achieved. These included researchers identifying a cancer gene with ancestral links to people living in Orkney, successful testing of AI to improve breast cancer screening, identifying a 'super basin' in the North Sea that could be used to store industrial carbon emissions, and informing Scottish Government policy on the price of school uniforms.

In discussion the following points were raised:

The opportunity for the University to seek UNESCO World Heritage status for Old Aberdeen. This would be raised with the Director of Estates.

The appetite and opportunities for collaborating with other educational institutions in Aberdeen to support income diversification efforts.

Arrangements with the US Government's Department for Education for the guarantee of student fees for students at Aberdeen from the US.

4. DISCUSSION OF MOTION: MARISCHAL COLLEGE

The following motion was tabled by General Council member Nigel Lindsay:

That the General Council notes that the Mitchell Hall and Picture Gallery are assets of irreplaceable cultural, architectural and practical value;

That it is of paramount importance that they be kept safe and well-maintained until they are in regular use again;

That there is as yet no adequate fire suppression system in the building;

And that the General Council therefore requests the University Court to give the installation of an adequate fire suppression system in this building high and immediate priority.

The motion was seconded by General Council member, Iain McDonald.

General Council discussed the motion, and the following points were made:

The installation of a fire suppression system would cost a seven-figure investment, from an already very tight budget.

The Reimagining our Campuses work over the last year had shown that the University had no current need to use Marichal College for teaching or research, though opportunities were being explored to ensure the building continued to play an important role in the vibrancy of the city centre.

The building was grade A listed, and the correct processes had been followed by the Estates team for mothballing the building.

The University should have a responsibility to do what it could for the building.

A survey should be done of the lead work of the stained-glass window in Mitchell Hall.

Voting followed in the room and online. The motion was carried with 20 votes for the motion and two abstentions. It would be passed to the University Court.

5. GENERAL COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE REPORT

General Council received and noted a report from the Convener on the work of the Business Committee over recent months.

6. UPDATE ON UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN RECTORIAL ELECTION

General Council received and noted an update on the recent Rectorial election which saw Iona Fyfe elected as Rector from 1st January 2025. General Council thanked the outgoing Rector, Martina Chukwuma-Ezike, for her support.

7. WORK OF THE ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Christina Schmid, Student President, gave a presentation on the work of the Students' Union.

She highlighted the organisation's core values and principles to improve students' lives in collaboration with class representatives, school conveners, the student council and section forums.

The presentation also covered student activities such as sports, societies, and groups. It was noted there were over 250 clubs and societies, with a steady increase in the percentage of students participating in the last three years.

The Student President spoke about international students and the local, national and academic challenges they faced which gave rise to an increasing number of advice cases.

Members of General Council then asked a number of questions including about the support provided to online students and whether the University could do more to build a connection with them. The Student President replied that the Students' Union did not have the resources to support students beyond the campuses.

The Convener thanked Christina for her presentation.

8. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE –
TIMELINE

General Council received and discussed a proposed timeline for the next election for membership to the Business Committee. The proposals were agreed in principle.

9. AOB

No additional business was raised.

10. NEXT MEETING

The next Statutory Meeting of General Council would be on Saturday 17th May 2025.

The Convener noted his thanks to the secretariat, the audio-visual team and the catering team for supporting the meeting.