

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2025

Present: Duncan Macniven (Convener), Jenny Mordue (Vice-Convener), Fiona Dormandy, Colin Duncan, Derek Duthie, Iona Fyfe, Hugh Galbraith, Norman Hutchison, Mark Lindley-Highfield, Jan McRobbie, Dan Montgomery, Graeme Nicol, Ogutu Okudo, Arnab Paul, Mel Roberts, Christina Schmid, He-Liang Shi, and Judith Taylor.

Apologies: George Boyne, John Campbell, Dorsa Naderimehr, John White, and Haiyan Zhang.

In Attendance: Ross Anderson, Executive Support Officer (Clerk), Brian Hussey, Head of Marketing & Campaigns (Market & Portfolio) (for items 1-4), Professor Georgios Leontidis, Interdisciplinary Institute Director (AI & Big Data) (for items 4 & 5), Clare Livingston, Interim Director of Advancement (for items 1 & 2), Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir, Interim Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary, Joseph Whimster, Associate Director, Global Partnerships & Recruitment, (for items 1-4), and Mark White, Chief Financial Officer (for item 3).

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed attendees and noted the apologies received from members.

2. Alumni Relations and Fundraising Update (Paper BC25:2509.1)

Clare Livingston, Interim Director of Advancement, provided an Alumni Relations and Fundraising update to the committee. Work continued to build up fundraising partnerships and develop tailored and personalised communications with alumni from specific areas. The next edition of the alumni magazine was currently being finalised and would be published shortly.

Alumni engagement events had now been held in 33 different countries, driven by the expansion of alumni chapters. There were now 28 chapters around the world with the latest four launched this year.

Class reunions held this year had been successful and the team were exploring where the opportunities for fundraising with them would be for next year.

Fundraising remains steady and strong with £2.5m in cash donations received and £3m in legacy commitments pledged this year. The largest donations came from donors who left a legacy in their will. In total, around £15m had been disbursed from the Development Trust to the University over the last few years, including £3.4m committed to the Interdisciplinary Research Institute.

The Interim Director of Advancement noted that her team had been working on a refreshed alumni relations strategy to cover the next three years. It would give a clear roadmap for where the University could focus activity. She thanked everyone who fed into that process.

The long-term ambition was to launch a fundraising campaign. The campaign's fundraising priorities were approved by Court last year. But it was currently paused for further reflection. The personal involvement of the Principal is critical to success of campaign, and Professor Boyne's impending retirement mean that it was an unpropitious moment to launch the campaign. Moreover, the team currently did not have the capacity to launch and sustain a large fundraising campaign. However, energetic fundraising continued and the Interim Director of Advancement noted that a public campaign was normally launched when around 70% of the fundraising total had been secured. The team performed above their weight compared to other much larger alumni relations and typically have successful Spring and Christmas appeals.

3. Financial Update

Mark White, the University's Chief Financial Officer, provided the Committee with an update on the University's 2025/26 financial position based on the Three-Year Financial Plan approved by Court on 25 June 2025. The update included detail of the 2024/25 final out-turn as well as progress on Transnational Education opportunities.

The final out-turn for **2024/25** was a deficit of £4.3m, lower than the Court approved target of £6.5m, and a significant improvement on the £8.4m deficit in 2023/24. This was underpinned by savings/additional income of £5.7m against a target of £6.5m (88%). Professional Services had exceeded their target (£2.8m against £1.2m), which had largely offset the shortfall achieved in the Schools (£3m against £4.8m). Staff costs exceeded budget by £1.1m. The pressures were pay awards (£2.7m) and the National Insurance increase (£0.7m). Action to mitigate these increases involved the continued limited recruitment to vacancies

For **2025/26**, income and savings plan targets had been given to the University's 12 Schools with work ongoing throughout this year to help improve the institution's financial position.

The Chief Financial Officer was asked about the University's income from spin-out companies. He reported that the University hoped to make a return on any investment in these, but there had been nothing in the last few years.

4. Student Recruitment Update

International

Joseph Whimster, Associate Director, Global Partnerships & Recruitment provided the Committee with an update on the September 2025 international student intake.

He reported that the University was seeing the benefits of reducing its fees and improving scholarships over the last year. It was likely that the UK Government would reduce the post-study visa to 18 months which would have a negative impact

on recruitment, although the levy on international fees was not expected to apply in Scotland.

Changes in the international market had been observed this year with students from Asia who might previously have gone to the United States now studying in Asia.

The University looked likely to recruit around 650 international students during the September intake. China had previously been the main source by some margin, but numbers had significantly reduced over the last two years. However, increases in overall population showed that the University was developing other markets, in a competitive environment.

The Committee noted the Joint Institute with South China Normal University as well as links with other universities in China. The University was also in process of applying to establish new partnerships to grow our presence in China. The University Court had recently approved proposals to open a branch campus in Mumbai with a target launch of September 2026 - the first of the UK's ancient universities and the first Scottish university to be granted permission for a branch campus in India.

Domestic

Brian Hussey, Head of Marketing & Campaigns (Market & Portfolio) provided an update on UK domestic student recruitment.

The numbers were looking positive, reflecting the sustained activity over the last year, including a strong clearing campaign this year. The University was approaching an 8% student intake from SIMD20 (relatively deprived) areas this year. Next year the focus would be on undergraduates and the local north-east of Scotland market, where there was scope for improvement.

In discussion, the Committee noted the importance of the QS ranking for overseas student recruitment, although the cost of living and affordability was becoming more important for applicants relative to rankings.

5. Artificial Intelligence

Professor Georgios Leontidis, Interdisciplinary Institute Director (AI & Big Data) delivered a presentation to the Committee on the University's research work involving Artificial Intelligence. He provided an overview of the Interdisciplinary Research Institute and the work being done on the five Aberdeen 2040 themes: Energy Transition, Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity, Environment and Biodiversity, Data and Artificial Intelligence, and Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing. The presentation covered several examples of how AI is being used in the University's research.

The Committee discussed how it could help in the field of AI. Professor Leontidis noted that the team were operating in a challenging climate due to the University's finances, but that AI was being used in both academic and Professional Services areas. Work was ongoing to encourage staff to find new ways on how to use AI for research purposes, or to improve the performance of the University. Guidelines had

been developed for the use of Artificial Intelligence.

6. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising

The Committee received and approved the minutes of the previous meeting on 19th June, subject to minor typo correction.

7. University Update

Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir, Interim Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary, provided an update. The SUMS Governance Efficiency review, discussed at the last meeting, had been completed at the end of July. A finalised report would be going to Court next week then Senate on 15th October. The report would then be used to inform the Adapting for Continued Success programme which was looking at the University's Academic and Professional Services structures, as well as People and Culture, and Leadership and Governance. After Court the report would be circulated to the Business Committee.

The University ranked 18th in the UK in the recent Guardian University Guide 2026 and 23rd in the UK in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2026. The University was also 3rd in the devolved nations for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2025 (NSS). Other universities have had a stronger movement in NSS which impacted on this year's rankings. The Times Higher University Rankings were due in early October.

Recruitment for the next Principal was ongoing with the focus now on making an internal appointment for a fixed term of 12 months in the first instance. The deadline for applications was tomorrow. The University Secretary post was also being advertised, with the aim of making a permanent appointment by the New Year. Discussions were ongoing with the Development Trust regarding the fundraising campaign.

8. Convener's Report (Paper BC25:2509.2)

The Business Committee noted the report and the progress made on the history of the General Council which would be published shortly.

9. Commercialisation of Research (Paper BC25:2509.3)

The Business Committee noted the update paper. The Convener thanked Hugh Galbraith for taking on the leadership role in this area now that the Vice-Convener would be leaving the committee. The Vice-Convener stressed that the group would need new members from the Committee to continue its work.

10. Omnibus Resolution 2025-26 (Paper BC25:2509.4)

The Business Committee noted a response from the University relating to suggestions made on the Omnibus Resolution 2025-26. It was agreed to thank the Deans for responses to the suggestions of the Committee and for providing rationale for not accepting them as amendments to the *General Regulations for Research*

Degrees.

The suggestion made was to direct the additional observations (provided below) of the Committee to Liam Dyker in the first instance.

These observations relate to the earlier (unaccepted) suggestions (BC:25 1906.3) for increasing information on the role of the “non-lead” supervisor which was not defined in the *Regulation (Schedule A. programme Regulations, 6)* but has description in the “*UoA PGR Code of Practice Academic Year 2024/25, Supervisory Relationship*” (page 20).

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/media/site/staffnet/documents/academic-quality-handbook/Code-of-Practice-Postgraduate-Research-Students.pdf>

Relevant texts appear as (6.1) ... “A supervisory team will comprise more than one supervisor, working in **co-supervision**, always with one supervisor designated as lead.....”

And (6.2.5) “**Co-supervisors have an equal role and responsibility** to the lead supervisor with respect to supervision of the postgraduate researcher's work,... “ There would appear to be merit in reviewing the texts (and practises) concerning Regulations and *Code of Practice*, for suitable consistency.”

11.AOCB

The Convener noted his thanks to those who were completing their terms of office on the Committee - Duncan Macniven, Jenny Mordue, John Campbell, Colin Duncan, Mark Lindley-Highfield, Graeme Nicol, and Heliang Shi. He would be sending a note of thanks to them before he left post on 30th September 2025.

The Convener said how much he had enjoyed his membership of the Committee since 2014, and particularly his time as Convener since 2019. He welcomed the support from members, particularly the Vice-Convener, Jenny Mordue.

Norman Hutchison, the incoming Convener from 1st October 2025, thanked both the Convener and the Vice-Convener for their work over the years and presented them with gifts.

12.Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Business Committee would be on Thursday, 6th November 2025 from 4pm to 6pm in Committee Room 2, University Office and via Microsoft Teams.