

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2025

Present: Norman Hutchison (Convener), Doris Edem Agbevivi, Natalia Calanzani, Fiona Dormandy, Andrew Duffell, Derek Duthie, David Evans, Jason Forbus, Hugh Galbraith, Christian Haerper, Beth McClure, Dan Montgomery, Arnab Paul, Judith Taylor, and Xiaouo Zhao

Apologies: Hannah Brian, Peter Edwards, Iona Fyfe, Jan McRobbie, Dorsa Naderimehr, Ogutu Okudo, Mel Roberts Christina Schmid, John White, and Haiyan Zhang.

In Attendance: Ross Anderson, Executive Support Officer (Clerk), Jonathan Dorrat, Student Vice President for Communities and Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Strategic Planning, Project & Corporate Governance, & Deputy University Secretary.

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed members to the first meeting under his convenorship. Apologies from committee members were noted. New members introduced themselves and shared their skills and interests. The Convener acknowledged the broad range of skills and experience across the Committee.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting on 25 September were approved.

Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir provided an update on the SUMS Review of Governance and noted the appointment of Hannah Brian as Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary. A new group will be established under Hannah's leadership to review governance structures.

3. University Update

Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir provided a University update and noted the appointment of Professor Peter Edwards as Principal & Vice-Chancellor for at least the next two years. Professor Nick Forsyth has been appointed as Acting Senior Vice-Principal.

4. Committee Objectives

The Convener outlined key areas where the Committee could contribute meaningfully:

- Alumni Engagement
- Student Employability
- Finances and Fundraising
- Engagement with the north-east of Scotland

The Committee will discuss these later in the meeting with the plan that sub-committees will be formed for the agreed areas of interest. Each is expected to meet before the end of the year and again before the next Business Committee meeting on Thursday, 19 February 2026.

5. Education Update

Professor Jo-Anne Murray, Vice- Principal (Education) provided an update on student employability and educational performance.

The University continues to perform well in the National Student Survey (NSS), with a participation rate of 58%. Despite improved scores, the University's ranking dropped from 15th to 34th in the UK which indicates other Universities are making improvements.

Assessment and feedback remain ongoing challenges for the University which is reflected in the NSS scores.

The Committee discussed integrating Artificial Intelligence into assessments and curriculum with the Vice-Principal (Education). The Committee noted the importance of digital literacy and an understanding of AI's limitations. Students are eager to learn how to use AI effectively and it should be used to enhance, not replace, core skills.

The Vice-Principal will contact committee members Fiona Dormandy and Doris Edem Agbevivi regarding AI integration into the curriculum.

6. Student Experience

Jonathan Dorrat, Student Vice President for Communities reported that cost of living pressures continues to be an issue for students as well as the price of student fees for international students. Post-COVID teaching improvements were noted as well as increased use of library spaces which is becoming an issue for students alongside library opening hours.

7. Commercialisation Update

Dr Heather May Morgan, Dean for Enterprise and Innovation provided an update on commercialisation activity at the University. She reported the success of the annual Lightbulb competition, now expanded to include Scientists and Business fellowship. There was successful collaboration with Robert Gordon University to pitch for money from Aberdeen City Council to fund the project.

The University launched a student accelerator programme in Summer 2025 which has led to improved performance by students in national competitions.

The University hosts monthly "Start Here" breakfasts and work has been done to refresh the ABVentures webpages which offer support to those who have business ideas.

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/support/entrepreneurial-skills/abventures/>

Dr Morgan will contact Andrew Duffell regarding his experience in Commercialisation activities.

It was noted that work is ongoing on staff spin-out support and consultancy opportunities, and some recent successes were highlighted. It was noted that improved communication to staff was a focus.

The Convener noted that the Commercialisation sub-committee will continue with Dr Morgan included in the membership.

8. Member Updates

The Vice-Convenor requested that committee members review and update their bios and send them to the Clerk by next Friday.

The Clerk will circulate the online link to watch winter graduations from Tuesday 25 to Thursday 27 November 2025.

Upcoming events were also noted. The Aberdeen Christmas Carol Service at King's College Chapel on Wednesday, 10 December 2025, and the Founders Day events in February 2026.

9. Future Planning and Topics of Interest

Convenor emphasised the importance of the Committee linking with Court members. He suggested Business Committee involvement in recruiting independent members and inviting them to attend meetings. Dr Sveinsdottir will discuss this with the University Secretary and explore best practices in this area from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The Convenor will share minutes from the latest meeting of the Convenors of Business Committees of the Scottish Ancients.

The Committee agreed that the following sub-committees will run in 2025/26:

- Commercialisation
- Student Employability (In liaison with Tracey Innes, Head of Careers)
- Alumni engagement and north-east Scotland engagement.

10. Planning for General Council Meetings

The Convenor requested that the Clerk contact Acting Senior Vice-Principal Professor Nick Forsyth to ask if he could provide a research and REF update at General Council on Saturday, 6 December.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Business Committee will be held on Thursday, 19 February 2026.