UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19 FEBRUARY 2026

Present: Norman Hutchison (Convener), Natalia Calanzani, Andrew Duffell, Derek Duthie, David Evans, Hugh Galbraith, Christian Haerpfer, Dan Montgomery, Ogutu Okudo, Judith Taylor, John White, and Xiaoou Zhao.

Apologies: Doris Edem Agbevivi, Fiona Dormandy, Peter Edwards, Jason Forbus, Elizabeth McClure, Jan McRobbie, Dorsa Naderimehr, Arnab Paul, Mel Roberts, and Haiyan Zhang.

In Attendance: Jonathan Dorrat, Student Vice President for Communities, Fraser Bell, Chief Operating Officer, Hannah Brian, Interim Chief Governance Officer & University Secretary, Iona Fyfe, University Rector, and Ross Anderson, Executive Support Officer (Clerk).

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed committee members to the meeting and the apologies were noted.

2. Adapting for Continued Success

The Committee received a presentation from the University's Chief Operating Officer, Fraser Bell, on the Adapting for Continued Success (ACS) programme. He explained that the programme is chaired by the Principal & Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Edwards, and is intended to support the University in becoming more resilient, efficient, and financially sustainable in line with Aberdeen 2040, with a target to achieve financial break-even by 2028. Fraser Bell outlined the governance structure, noting the Programme Board and its four supporting workstreams covering academic organisational design, professional services redesign, leadership and governance, and people and culture. He also highlighted the extensive engagement activities currently underway with staff, intended to feed directly into each workstream as proposals develop.

In describing the Academic Re-Design, Fraser Bell set out the emerging preference for a structure comprising four faculties. These faculties would be led by Executive Deans who would sit on the University's Senior Management Team, strengthening academic leadership, accountability, and representation. The shift to a faculty-based model is intended to reduce duplication, improve interdisciplinarity, and enhance institutional resilience.

Turning to Professional Services, Fraser Bell noted that around 188 FTE staff had voluntarily left the University through the Voluntary Severance scheme during 2024/25, which had highlighted the need to strengthen service resilience and clarify roles and responsibilities. The University currently operates eight Professional Services directorates, with an ambition to reduce these to five as part of moving towards a more integrated and efficient model. He also drew attention to ongoing work to develop a joint single procurement function with RGU, intended to improve coordination and deliver better value.

He explained that the proposed Integrated Delivery Model is designed to enhance connectivity across teams, streamline processes, improve decision-making agility, and increase focus on commercial opportunities. Complementary activities are progressing in parallel, including reviews of business processes, exploration of alternative delivery approaches, and work led by the ACS Infrastructure workstream focused on digital and estates matters.

Fraser Bell concluded by outlining the forthcoming steps. Court will consider proposals on academic structures in February, and will receive further reporting in April, including updates on how ACS consultations with staff are progressing. Work across the People & Culture, Governance & Leadership, and Infrastructure workstreams will continue in tandem with ongoing engagement and refinement of proposals.

3. University Update

Hannah Brian, Interim Chief Governance Officer & University Secretary, introduced herself to the Business Committee and delivered a University Update.

Appointment announcements for two SMT posts, the Provost, and the Vice-Principal (Regional Engagement & Innovation), will be made shortly. External recruitment for Vice-Principal (Global) will begin shortly.

Christine Millburn will start as University Secretary on 1 April 2026, after Hannah's time as interim is completed at the end of March.

It was noted that admissions have opened for September 2026 starts at the University's recently launched Mumbai campus.

Work is ongoing across the University for REF2029 so that the institution has strongest possible submission.

The University's newly launched Geothermal exploration project across the city was noted which has seen sensors buried underground across the city to assess the potential to generate geothermal energy.

4. Students' Union Presentation

The Committee received a presentation from Jonathan Dorrat, Vice President for Communities, on behalf of Aberdeen Students' Union. He provided an overview of AUSA's purpose and activities, highlighting its role in representing, empowering and supporting the student body through services including representation, academic and wellbeing support, sports clubs, societies, volunteering, sustainability initiatives and wider community-building work.

The presentation introduced the elected sabbatical officer team and outlined their respective areas of responsibility. The Vice President for Communities reported that students' primary concerns continue to relate to cost-of-living pressures, academic studies and teaching quality, mental health and wellbeing, and personal safety.

The Committee also noted reports of hostility directed towards students in the Don Street area last semester, occurring in the context of a wider wave of hostility across the UK towards refugees and migrants. Other incidents were observed in parts of Aberdeen. The University's Senior Management Team is continuing to monitor this issue closely.

The presentation outlined organisational priorities for the Students' Union. These include strengthening governance through implementation of Board sub-committees and the Democracy Review, improving engagement with representative structures, widening access to information, and lobbying for a sustainable funding model while pursuing opportunities for grant-funded initiatives.

Each sabbatical officer's priority areas were set out. The Student President is leading work on the Democracy Review, the University's Target Operating Model, transnational education, tackling gender-based violence and ensuring sustainable funding. The Vice President for Activities is focusing on accessible sports provision, improved branding for sports clubs, a stronger relationship between clubs and societies, female empowerment and officer accessibility. The Vice President for Communities is progressing the Library of Things, volunteering and employability initiatives, engagement with Aberdeen City Council, community organising and sustainability-related activity linked to COP30. The Vice President for Education is leading on the Class Rep Review, teaching-quality enhancement, the Student Partnership Agreement, greater transparency around academic feedback, and improvements to study spaces. The Vice President for Welfare is prioritising a student mental health agreement, student housing campaigns, development of the Liberation Lounge, equalities and liberation work, and support for international students.

The Vice President for Communities also summarised key thematic issues emerging from Council and student engagement. Cost of living remains a pressing concern, with planned actions including free breakfast provision, hardship-fund support, enhanced information on resources, stronger partnerships with local organisations and improvements to Hillhead accommodation. Student spaces, study, social and sporting, have been identified as a major priority and are now embedded within the Student Partnership Agreement. Accessibility issues were highlighted, including campus navigation, safety, building access, signage and communication challenges. Improving engagement and representation remains central to AUSA's work, with efforts to enhance visibility of officer achievements, streamline communication channels, strengthen the Class Rep system and reduce practical and perceptual barriers to student participation.

The Committee noted the breadth of activity underway and the clear alignment with the expressed priorities and concerns of the student body. The Clerk will circulate slides to Committee members.

Action: RA

5. Minutes

The Committee received minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2025 and approved them as an accurate record.

6. Action Log

The Committee received and noted the Action Log. The Convener reported that he has spoken to the Acting Senior Governor who is keen for independent Court members to take up the spaces on the Business Committee which are set aside for them.

7. Convener's Update

The Convener reported that the Business Committee was represented at several Founders' Day events at the University in mid-February.

It was noted that the University's Pro-Chancellor, Sir Iain Torrance, has offered to chair the next General Council meeting on Saturday, 16 May.

The Convener noted the importance of increasing the number of attendees at General Council meetings. He noted that both Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities have moved to fully online General Council meetings, and the Convener felt that it would be unfortunate if Aberdeen followed suit.

8. **Alumni Relations Update**

The Committee received and noted an update on recent alumni engagement and fundraising activity at the University. A programme of global events and online sessions has continued to strengthen alumni connections, alongside communication through the Aberdeen magazine and engagement at winter graduations. In philanthropy, income and new commitments remain strong, supported by significant legacy pledges and notable donations to research and student support.

9. Sub-Committee Updates

The Committee received updates from each of the three sub-committees which were established at the previous meeting:

Raising Engagement with Alumni

The Committee received an update from Daniel Montgomery, Chair of the Sub-Committee. It was reported that it has met twice and continues to work closely with colleagues from Development & Alumni Relations. Members discussed current alumni engagement practice, noting strong loyalty among graduates and opportunities to increase contact, including through Chapters, events, and improved communication methods. Challenges in engaging online-only students were highlighted, and a future briefing from the Alumni Relations team is planned.

The Sub-Committee considered potential initiatives to enhance engagement, including the establishment of an Aberdeen and North East Chapter, exploration of event formats, use of alumni surveys, development of a digital engagement platform, improved networking opportunities, and the creation of an alumni mentorship programme. Members also discussed BC contributions to alumni communications and nominations for the Principal's Excellence Awards.

Commercialisation

The Committee received an update from Professor Hugh Galbraith, Chair of the Commercialisation Sub-Committee. It was noted that Dr Heather May Morgan, Dean for Enterprise and Innovation, has been co-opted onto the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee has met twice and is reviewing the University's commercialisation activity, including opportunities to strengthen coordination, identify commercial assets, and enhance stakeholder engagement. Discussions highlighted the need for a dedicated innovation hub to support enterprise activity, and members received presentations from the newly appointed Business Development Executives on partnership development across priority sectors.

The group also considered mechanisms supporting consultancy, contract research, CPD, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and innovation voucher schemes, alongside improving communication systems and incentives to encourage staff participation. Further work is ongoing, and the next meeting will be scheduled in due course.

Student Employability

The Committee received an update from Xiaoou Zhao, Chair of the Employability Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee reported on its meeting of 20 January 2026, noting ongoing work within the Careers & Employability Service to enhance skills development, redevelop graduate attributes into the new MySkills framework, and expand paid internship opportunities across a range of sectors.

The Sub-Committee discussed the increasing impact of AI on student learning, assessment, and employer expectations, highlighting the importance of supporting students in developing confident and responsible use of AI tools. School-specific issues were also considered, including placement needs in Education and challenges in Public Health linked to AI-generated work.

Members identified opportunities for the Business Committee to assist with employer engagement and internship sourcing. Actions agreed included sharing AI toolkit resources, enhancing communication with Schools, and circulating employer-facing materials to widen participation.

The Chair emphasised the need to strengthen the visibility of employability services for all students and reaffirmed the aim of embedding employability across the curriculum.

10. Court Digest

The Committee received and noted the Court Digest for the December 2025 meeting. The Convener noted that while the update was useful, it was very brief, and it increased the importance of having Court members as part of the Business Committee.

11. AOCB

The Committee agreed to move to a 2pm start time for its next meeting on Thursday, 18 June 2026.