

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2025

Present: Duncan Macniven (Convener), Jenny Mordue (Vice-Convener), John Campbell, Fiona Dormandy, Colin Duncan, Derek Duthie, Hugh Galbraith, Norman Hutchison, Mark Lindley-Highfield, Jan McRobbie, Dan Montgomery, Okudo Ogutu, He-Liang Shi, Christina Schmid, Judith Taylor, John White, and Haiyan Zhang.

Apologies: Katrina Allan, George Boyne, Dorsa Naderimehr, Graeme Nicol, Arnab Paul, Stefan Pelev, Mel Roberts, Otto Thoresen, Fiona Urquhart, John White and Samantha Waters.

In Attendance: Ross Anderson, Executive Support Officer, Heather May Morgan, Dean for Enterprise and Innovation, and John Underhill, Interdisciplinary Institute Director - Energy Transition.

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies received.

2. Energy Transition (Paper BC25:1302.6)

Professor John Underhill, Interdisciplinary Institute Director - Energy Transition, spoke about Energy Transition and the University's activities in this area.

Professor Underhill emphasised in the need for a managed, orderly and hence, just transition for local communities. But given population growth (3x increase from 2.5B to 8B in past 70 years and projected increase to 11B by the end of the Century), change was required since global carbon emissions mapped on to the population growth and had increased seven-fold since the 1960s and oil, gas and coal made up more than 80% of global energy consumption today.

The United Kingdom contributed less than 2% of global carbon emissions and had fallen by over 50% since 1990, with oil and natural gas comprising 75% of the country's energy consumption currently (something that had remained at that level of the past 30 years). Touching on energy security, Professor Underhill noted that oil and gas supported 196,000 jobs in the UK and that the UK was a net importer of gas from around the world. A transition to clean, secure, reliable and affordable energy, without serious effects on employment in and around Aberdeen, needs interdisciplinary thinking.

Professor Underhill reflected on the University's Aberdeen 2040 strategy, within which Energy Transition was one of five interdisciplinary challenges. He highlighted the research work and achievements of the Centre for Energy Transition, the National Decommissioning Centre in Newburgh and the University's Just Transition Lab. The University was at the heart of work on energy transition not only in north-east Scotland but more widely in Scotland and the UK.

The Convener thanked Professor Underhill for his informative presentation. Speaking to her paper (BC25:1302.6), Okudo Ogutu welcomed the University's activities. Other members of the Committee asked Professor Underhill a range of questions including education opportunities in other countries; the work needed to reach net zero (described by Professor Underhill requiring action on an unprecedented scale), and the assessment of competing interests for marine real estate around the UK.

The Committee warmly thanked Professor Underhill for his presentation. The Convener and Vice-Convener agreed to contact Professor Underhill to see where the Committee's influence would be best placed to support the University's work.

3. Commercialisation of Research (Paper BC25:1302.1)

The Vice-Convener and Dr Heather May Morgan, Dean for Enterprise and Innovation, introduced proposals to engage with enhanced enterprise and innovation activity at the University. The Committee discussed the options presented in the paper and noted the recent appointment of a fifth entrepreneur in residence at the University.

Dr Morgan noted that the University was in a building phase for this activity and was looking at how it could partner with other organisations. It was also noted that the work was aligned with the Scottish Government's entrepreneurial campus report published in 2023.

The Committee agreed that the small group convened by Jenny Mordue should continue to work with Dr Morgan and her colleagues.

4. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising

The Committee received and approved the minutes of the previous meeting on 7 November 2024 as an accurate record.

The Committee discussed the University's financial position, and it was noted that the Chief Financial Officer would be invited to submit a paper to the Committee to provide the details requested at the November meeting.

The Convener would circulate the University's Reimagining our Campuses report which had recently been published.

5. Alumni Relations update (Paper BC25:1302.2)

The Committee received and noted the alumni relations update, and the information presented including the activities overseas.

6. Convener's Report (Paper BC25:1302.3)

The Committee received and noted the Convener's report. The Convener would circulate the induction pack for members to provide feedback.

The Committee agreed that Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Strategic Planning, Project & Corporate Governance, should be invited to the next meeting to provide an update on progress on the Aberdeen 2040 commitments, as a means of identifying future strategic topics for the Committee to pursue, in lieu of the proposed strategy day.

The Committee noted the resolution passed at December's General Council meeting regarding a fire suppression system for Marischal College.

7. Review of the Business Committee Remit (Paper BC25:1302.4)

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Business Committee. Committee members were meantime invited to submit comments to the Convener.

8. Court Digest November 2024 and University update (Paper BC25:1302.5)

The Committee noted the Court Digest and the need to fill the four seats for Court members on the Business Committee. The Interim University Secretary was not in attendance, so it was not possible to provide a University update to the Committee.

9. AOCB

The Committee briefly discussed succession planning ahead of the Convener and Vice-Convener stepping down at the end of September. The timeline for the election for new members of the Committee was also discussed. Nominations would open in week commencing 10 March. Current members eligible for a further term would be required to submit their nominations before 31 March. If nominations exceeded the 9 vacancies, an election would be held at the General Council meeting on 17 May.

10. Date of next meetings:

Future meetings of the Business Committee would be held on 24 April 2025 and 19 June 2025.