

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
**BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 24 APRIL 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, Christina Schmid, Judith Taylor, and John White.

**Apologies:** George Boyne, Iona Fyfe, Dan Montgomery, Dorsa Naderimehr, Graeme Nicol, Okudo Ogutu, Arnab Paul, Stefan Pelev, Mel Roberts, He-Liang Shi, Samantha Waters, and Haiyan Zhang.

**In Attendance:** Ross Anderson, Executive Support Officer (Clerk), Morag Beers, Director of Estates and Facilities (for Item 9), and Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Strategic Planning, Project & Corporate Governance (Items 2 to 8).

**1. Welcome and apologies**

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

**2. Update on Aberdeen 2040**

The Committee welcomed Dr Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Strategic Planning, Project & Corporate Governance, who provided an update on the progress made on commitments made within the University's award-winning Aberdeen 2040 strategy.

The presentation covered a range of topics, including the development of Aberdeen 2040, the Key Performance Indicators, various successes against performance targets (including consistently high-scoring student satisfaction), targets which were not being met, and future strategic priorities. The presentation also highlighted the QS Reputational Survey which several Business Committee members agreed to complete.

Dr Sveinsdottir answered questions from members, in response to which she reported that Scottish Funding Council income would increase by less than inflation this year.

The University had performed well at PGT recruitment during the pandemic, but numbers had since declined and the university was assuming that international students would neither increase nor decrease in the short term, though government policy and international events could affect the out-turn.

The Committee discussed the annual planning process under the Aberdeen 2040 strategy. Dr Sveinsdottir noted that access to monitoring data was sometimes challenging although it had improved significantly in recent years, specifically around student recruitment following the arrival of Ashar Eshan, Director of Student Recruitment.

The Committee discussed, in the light of the Aberdeen 2040 priorities, what should be its special subjects of focus over the next period. Good progress had been made on the two recent special subjects - commercialisation of research and graduate employability – both of which featured as priorities in Aberdeen 2040. Widening access, also an Aberdeen 2040 priority, had been a previous special subject. It did not seem fruitful to revisit these topics. Several new subjects were proposed by members: the University's contribution to the economy and wellbeing of the north-east of Scotland; international student recruitment and its consequences for the university sector which appeared to have spare capacity; artificial intelligence; and the commercialisation of the University's assets.

The Committee agreed that in addition a watching brief would be kept on the financial position of the University and on Marischal East, and that the Convener would draft a report to the next meeting to allow the Committee to take a final decision on future special subjects.

### **3. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising**

The Business Committee received and approved minutes of the last meeting on 13 February 2025 as an accurate record.

It was noted that the four seats for Court members on the Business Committee remained vacant.

The Business Committee also approved the use of Single Transferable Vote for the General Council ballot for new Business Committee members on Saturday 17 May. The results would be announced early the following week, to give time to count online and in-person votes.

### **4. Alumni Relations Update (Paper BC25:2404.1)**

The Business Committee received and noted the latest Alumni Relations update. The Convener noted that Committee member Okudo Ogutu had been shortlisted in the alumni category for the Principal's Excellence Awards.

### **5. Convener's Report (Paper BC25:2404.2)**

The Business Committee received and noted the Convener's Report.

### **6. Review of the Business Committee Remit (Paper BC25:2404.3)**

The Business Committee discussed and approved the amended remit, including the additional text describing how the points in the remit might be pursued. The updated remit would go to General Council for final approval on Saturday 17 May.

### **7. Court Digest February 2025 (Paper BC25:2404.4)**

The Business Committee received and noted February's Court Digest. The Convener would ask the Clerk to Court if more detail could be made available in future updates, short of returning to the practice of copying the full Court minutes.

## **8. University Update**

Dr Sveinsdottir provided a brief oral update on the University. It was noted that Fraser Bell started in post as Chief Operating Officer on 1 April 2025; that Samantha Waters had recently been confirmed as Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary; and that the Principal had recently announced his retirement from the University at the end of the year. Dr Sveinsdottir said that the process to appoint a new Principal was underway and that a recruitment agency had been appointed. The Convener would seek involvement by the Committee in the recruitment process.

Dr Sveinsdottir reported on the University's financial position. Efforts to make savings were continuing and a 2025-26 budget paper was going to the Court meeting on Wednesday 30 April. Work on student recruitment was also highlighted, with January's intake being positive and work in hand to maximise the intake for September 2025.

## **9. Marischal East**

Morag Beers, Director of Estates & Facilities, delivered a presentation to the Business Committee regarding the university estate and Marischal East in particular.

Morag Beers summarised progress on the recent Reimagining Our Campuses programme which helped to inform how the campus could be used in the future. It was noted that every university was facing the same challenges with their estates.

On Marischal East, the decant of the museum collections should be complete in around 18 months' time. Inspection of the Mitchell Tower was in progress. The necessary scaffolding would cost more than £100,000. Morag emphasised that her focus was on the stewardship of Marischal East, not a disposal. Aberdeen City Council's 175-year lease of their section of Marischal College would end in 2182 and her aim was to lease the remainder of the building so that it ends on the same date – desirably to a single tenant who could find a use for the important property.

Morag Beers was working with the Vice-Principal (Education) and the Vice-Principal (Research) to identify what parts of the estate would be needed in future and to identify commercial opportunities with current office spaces. For example, buildings owned on the High Street could be released from office use to investment use to help create a dynamic and vibrant area. Some staff housing, identified as surplus, would be sold off. Morag would be continuing to work to address accessibility challenges in Old Aberdeen.

The Convener thanked Morag Beers for her update. The Committee would continue to keep an interest in estates matters, particularly Marischal East.

## **10. Date of next meeting**

The 322<sup>nd</sup> Statutory Meeting of General Council would be held at Kings College Conference Centre on Saturday 17 May from 11am to 1pm. The next meeting of the Business Committee would be held on Thursday 19 June from 4pm to 6pm.