UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 MARCH 2020

Present: Duncan Macniven (Convener), Mel Roberts (Vice-Convener), Nuala Booth, Maggie Chapman (Rector), Eric Crockart, Colin Duncan, Jennie Gibson, Euan Mackenzie, Alan Milne, Dan Montgomery, Mark Strange, Mary Stephen, Judith Taylor and Brian Wood with Steve Cannon (Interim University Secretary), Fiona Urquhart (Acting Head of Alumni Engagement), Nicole Cochrane (Clerk), Ruth Taylor (Vice-Principal, Education), Pete Stollery (Chair in Music) and Rob Donelson (Executive Director of Advancement).

Apologies: Tom Lynch, Willie MacColl, Jan McRobbie, Lynne Mennie, Jenny Mordue, Graeme Nicol, Iain Percival, Patricia Pugh, Jennifer Shirrefff

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convener welcomed those present, particularly Ruth Taylor (Vice-Principal, Education), Pete Stollery (Chair in Music) and Rob Donelson (Executive Director of Advancement).

Ms Cochrane shared the apologies received.

2. PRESENTATION: RUTH TAYLOR, VICE-PRINCIPAL, EDUCATION

Professor Taylor provided a comprehensive update for the committee.

Highlights included:

- The desire to create challenge led education, where students tackle real world problems and are equipped with life skills. They aim to increase the number of students undertaking work experience, with work placements being a key strand to helping students develop skill sets.
- There are an increasing number of graduates going successfully into employment or further study.
- The Aberdeen 2040 curriculum group has a number of strands which relate to the objectives of Education, particularly employability, sustainability and international.
- It was noted there is ongoing work happening with bodies such as the Careers Employer Board and Skills Development Scotland.
- There is work being carried out to understand what is being done across the different schools at the University, with the desire to have a coherent approach to achieving the goals of Aberdeen 2040.

The Convener invited comments and questions.

Mr Wood shared that, during his time as a secondary school Head Teacher, they were often criticised by employers for sending out individuals with underdeveloped skills. He asked Professor Taylor how good she thinks employers are at predicting the skills which will be needed. Professor Taylor confirmed that they are plugging into Skills Development Scotland to work with employers across the country, to obtain a national approach. Her opinion is that employers are better at knowing what they are looking for now but need to think about what they will want in the future as well.
The Convener raised the topic of Modern Apprenticeships and the opinion some have that this is a better route than University; giving qualifications as well as work experience. Professor Taylor commented that there will always be different route for different people. She explained that the University is dipping a toe into apprenticeships, particularly in engineering. Part of the exploration is to develop more work-based learning. She noted that the University is not short of applicants but there is a decision to be made on how engaged the University becomes with apprenticeships.

Mr Mackenzie queried whether the University could do more to offer post graduate qualifications to those already in work. Professor Taylor explained that the Scottish Funding Council provided upskill funding for exactly this purpose. They are currently working with Schools to enable employers to support this type of learning.

Mr Donelson asked for thoughts on entrepreneurship and developing these skills for the future. Professor Taylor confirmed there is the desire to embed entrepreneurial skills into all learning, as those skills are not just useful for those who want to open their open own businesses.

Ms Roberts noted that employers are struggling to create work environments which can meet unknown future challenges and asked how can those going out the workplace be prepared? Professor Taylor commented that this was a big question and there is not a straight answer. Students are being prepared for the workplace, however the context of this changes all the time and there are widely differing organisational cultures. She said there are conversations yet to be had about the behaviours and skills needed in the future.

The Convener thanked Professor Taylor for her presentation.

3. PRESENTATION: DUNCAN STUART, HEAD OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Mr Stuart was unable to attend due to his work on the taskforce relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. He will be invited back at a later date.

4. MARISCHAL COLLEGE – A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The Convener welcomed Pete Stollery (Chair in Music), who was in attendance due to his involvement with the Marischal College project.

Mr Crockart spoke to paper GC 19:10. In discussion of the present graduation arrangements:

- The graduand survey was highlighted, especially how the marquee setting scored 'exceeding expectations'.
- Dr Milne commented that those graduating in the marquee have not experienced any other setting to compare it to.
- Ms Stephen commented that evening ceremony times are difficult for a number of reasons.
- The Convener noted that the marquee can accommodate more relatives.
- Ms Roberts stated that she was impressed by the atmosphere in the marquee and underlined the importance of families seeing where the student has studied.
- Mr Cannon agreed with Ms Roberts and feels there is an underestimation on how remarkable graduations are when held on campus, in the heart of the historic University.
• Mr Montgomery asked if St Machar Cathedral could host graduations and Mr Stollery confirmed that the venue is too small.

Prof Stollery presented the cultural vision for Marischal College. He said that the next stage for the group led by Aberdeen City Council is an informal feasibility study looking at reopening the building. There needs to be research carried out on income generating activities for the space and a balance struck between culture and income.

Mr Crockart added that he visited Marischal College on 10 December 2019 with Angus Donaldson (Director of Estates and Facilities). He confirmed that currently the space is wind and watertight, however there are access issues and problems with wiring and fire doors. There is no fire suppression system. There is an estimate of £4m - £6m required to restore the space and bring it up to safety and access requirements. There is great enthusiasm for the project but the plan created needs to be viable and have a revenue generating component.

In discussion:

• Ms Roberts asked if the plans being discussed help with reclaiming the University identity in the city. She hopes that the project would be strongly imaged as a University enterprise and would mark the history of this. Prof Stollery agreed with the importance of this aspect and explained the idea to have a mezzanine room as a museum, rotating displays of the University collections. He is confident there would be a strong University presence at the centre of the plans

• Ms Taylor asked about operating costs and what sources of funding were sought. Prof Stollery confirmed that they were exploring options such as Lottery Heritage Fund, Development Trust and Aberdeen City Council

• Mr Wood was impressed by the plan being discussed. He queried whether Aberdeen can support another arts space and if this would have an adverse effect on other venues such as the Arts Centre and Music Hall. Prof Stollery explained that the notion would be a partnership for cultural life, with all venues working together on arts and culture in the city.

The Committee agreed to support the plans in principle and to seek the endorsement of the General Council at its meeting in May. The Convener thanked Prof Stollery.

Action: Mr Crockart

5. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 5 September 2019 were approved.

The Convener noted that Jenny Fernandez, Acting Director of External Relations & Marketing, would welcome any input from the committee regarding community planning. The Convener asked members to email him any comments they may have.

The lack of draft Court minutes recently was raised. It was agreed that draft Court minutes are found very useful by the committee and are to be chased up in future.
6. MATTERS ARISING

- CONTINUING WORKSTREAMS

Ms Roberts spoke to the Member Engagement workstream. She highlighted the welcome Move of the General Council webpages under Strategy and Governance. She also highlighted the improved look of the pages which now conform with the other committees of the University. The next steps for the group will include accessing analytics on online traffic for these pages and how social media can be usefully employed to raise the profile of the General Council.

- CO-OPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

Mr Mackenzie proposed Lisa Henderson for co-option, providing background information. The co-option was approved by the committee.

Ms Taylor commented that she had recent contact with a potential individual for co-option. Ms Taylor confirmed she would raise this again at the June meeting if the candidate wishes to proceed.

7. REPORT FROM THE CONVENER

The Convener prepared a written report, which was reviewed by the committee.

Dr Milne noted an error in the title of the Duchess of Cornwall, cited as the Duchess of Cambridge in the report. Furthermore, it was agreed that this should be corrected to the Duchess of Rothesay, as the correct title in Scotland.

Action: Ms Cochrane

Mr Cannon noted that the University accepted the main findings of the recently published SFC report on the remuneration of the former Principal and that £119,000 was repaid to the SFC. Work is being done to implement the further recommendations of the report.

8. PRESENTATION: ROB DONELSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

The Convener welcomed Mr Donelson to the meeting.

Mr Donelson provided some information on his background prior to joining the University in November 2019. He thanked the committee members as alumni volunteers and noted the value of the input they provide. Since taking his new position, Mr Donelson has engaged in 80 one to one meetings across the University and gained a real sense of the passion and commitment that staff and alumni have.

Mr Donelson highlighted his key areas of focus:

- The quality of the alumni database is currently being looked at, as a top priority. A taskforce has been developed to review and identify and implement improvements
- The need to expand revenue generation and develop greater specialisation with the fundraisers in the office. There will also be additional roles added to the team
- Expanding communications with alumni, with dedicated newsletters for each School.
- Expanding alumni involvement in student recruitment globally
• Engaging more fully with students while on campus, with the mentoring programme already underway
• Working with the 2040 strategy to identify projects that need funding
• The pool of donors requires expansion: currently this is small and Aberdeen-centric
• The upcoming 525 Alumni of Achievement project and 525 student bursaries campaign

Mr Donelson noted a call to action for the committee, asking them to first encourage alumni they know to update their details and stay in touch with the University. He also asked them to think about individuals or organisations who may be able to support a campaign.

The Convener thanked Mr Donelson for the comprehensive update. In discussion:

• Mr Duncan commented that he liked the idea of engaging with students early in the University experience.
• Bishop Strange queried the sustainability of expanded communications, such as magazines. Mr Donelson confirmed that the desire would be to have as much communication as possible be electronic going forward.

The Convener endorsed the good work that Mr Donelson and his team are carrying out. He encouraged committee members to get in touch with Mr Donelson should they have anything they would like to discuss further.

9. ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE

Due to time constraints at the meeting, Ms Urquhart (Acting Head of Alumni Relations) provided a comprehensive written report to the Committee for information only. Members had received the paper in advance of the meeting and welcomed the report.

10. AOCB

No other items of business were noted.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 4 June 2020, 4pm, Court Room, University Office, Old Aberdeen