

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 9 JUNE 2022

Present: Duncan Macniven (Convener), Jenny Mordue (Vice-Convener), John Campbell, Eric Crockart, Colin Duncan, Mark Lindley-Highfield of Ballumbie Castle, Euan Mackenzie, Graeme Nicol, Dan Montgomery, Iain Percival, Pat Pugh, Heliang Shi, Mary Stephen, Judith Taylor, Yafan Zhang, with Tracey Slaven (Clerk & Registrar), Martina Chukwuma-Ezike (Rector), Marion Campbell (Vice-Principal Research), Katrina Allan (Alumni Relations), Nicole Cochrane (Alumni Relations) and Alease Coleman (Assistant Clerk & Registrar).

Apologies: Lisa Henderson, Jan McRobbie, Susan Strachan, Mark Strange and Otto Thoresen.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convener welcomed members, particularly Robert Traynham who was attending his first meeting.

2. MINUTES

The minutes were noted, with an amendment to include Mary Stephen in the attendance.

3. RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Professor Marion Campbell spoke about recent research highlights:

- At COP26 the University was awarded the Herald Research Project of the Year for work to reduce greenhouse gas emission and was a finalist for the Herald Award for influence on the COP agenda.
- The REF results ranked Theology 1st in the UK and Public Health 8th in UK (and 1st in Scotland).
- The quality rating was higher in the last REF (2014) – but other universities had increased by a larger amount
- The REF research impact stories included Reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions (Environmental Science), Minimum pricing for alcohol in Scotland (Public Health), Friction grip technology (Engineering), Environmental protection regulation (Law), Museums and history – digital sharing (Anthropology), and Influence of theology in dementia (Divinity).
- The University was making good progress with interdisciplinary research which was at the core of the Aberdeen2040 strategy and which was addressing five contemporary challenges: Energy Transition led by John Underhill, Environment and Biodiversity by David Burslem, Health Nutrition and Wellbeing by Jennie Macdiarmid, Data and Artificial Intelligence by Georgios Leontidis, and Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity by Eleanora Belfiore.

The forward plan included:

- An action plan to prepare for the next REF.
- The “triple helix network”, working with the NHS and industry to link academic research to the needs of the NHS.
- Reporting of the research campaign on social media.

- The relaunch of Aberdeen University Press as an open access press later this year.
- The opening in late 2022 of BioHub at Foresterhill campus as part of the City Deal, with incubation facilities for spinouts and early-stage business and bespoke laboratories for established businesses - a place where academics, researchers and clinicians can connect to the commercial world.

In discussion:

- Iain Percival commented on the powerful impact of the research, which were reported on the University website.
- Pat Pugh questioned how BREXIT was impacting international collaboration. Marion Campbell responded that the University would remain an international research hub but that BREXIT threatened access to Horizon Europe which was Europe's largest research funder. Current projects would remain supported by Horizon Europe but the longer-term position was uncertain.
- Colin Duncan asked about the biggest challenges facing research at the university and whether other Scottish universities were taking an interdisciplinary approach. Marion Campbell stated the challenges were funding and Aberdeen's relatively remote location. The University was however ahead of other institutions in its approach to interdisciplinary work, with clear targets and responsible research directors. Collaboration with other institutions would continue.
- Judith Taylor asked about the impact of the REF on funding. Marion Campbell explained that there would be a reduction in Scottish Government funding of £4.7 million (from £15 million to £10.3 million): a greater reduction than any other Scottish university.
- John Campbell questioned if the Triple Helix aimed to attract small biotech firms to collaborate at Foresterhill or to drive existing research into the health services. Marion Campbell confirmed that both were intended, as well as identifying what problems the NHS foresaw.
- In response to a question by the Convener on the REF action plan, Marion Campbell explained that the task force who were creating the action plan were looking at Aberdeen's performance compared to the top universities, at postgraduate research studentships and the research culture.
- In response to questions from Euan Mackenzie and Dan Montgomery, Marion Campbell explained that the research budget included roughly £16 million from government and £50 million from other sources (for example the Medical Research Council, the National Institute for Health Research and from research charities). Approximately 60-70% was spent on Medical and Science research and 30-40% on Humanities – the former being more costly. In most cases, funds were tied to an application for specific research projects that it is targeted. Tracey Slaven added that funding tied to individual projects would not be affected by the funding reductions stemming from the REF.

The Convener thanked Marion Campbell for an informative presentation.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Jenny Mordue reported that the task and finish group for Marischal East Project, of which Eric Crockart was a member, had selected items from the Business Committee's submission for potential uses of the space. An overall submission had been approved by the Senior Management Team and Pete Edwards, Vice Principal for Regional Engagement & Regional Recovery, would be responsible for the next phase, to determine feasible options.

Eric Crockart spoke about the two major themes of the project: *Education and Skills* which would be the main generator of income and learning, and *Creative Cluster* which would focus on public engagement (such as museums, performing spaces, and start up spaces). Tracey Slaven reminded the Committee of the significant cost to complete the Marischal East Project, and how it must fund its revenue costs and contribute to the capital cost.

The Committee welcomed progress and concluded that Pete Edwards should be invited to a future meeting to report on the next phase of work.

5. REPORT FROM THE CONVENER (PAPER GC22:03)

Speaking to the paper, the Convener reported that the History of the General Council was making progress with the assistance of Nigel Lindsay, perhaps with illustrations added to the text. Publication is in sight, at modest cost. Colin Duncan echoed the Convener's desire for it to be printed.

On future Committee agendas, members suggested Pete Edwards to update the committee on regional engagement as well as the Marischal East Project and Mark White, the new Director of Finance. The Committee welcomed the proposals for an away day, with Judith Taylor volunteering to assist with preparations.

The summer General Council meeting – the first to be held in hybrid in-person/online form, was being held on 11 June. The Committee agreed that the winter General Council meeting should be held in November or December, desirably linked to another event, or perhaps a tour of the Science Hub.

6. UNIVERSITY UPDATE

Tracey Slaven presented the following University updates:

- The Scottish Government's Spending Review had provided less detail than expected but it was clear that there would be a real-terms reduction in funding. Against that, there would be funding to increase the numbers of Scottish-domiciled students who had completed their A-Levels/Highers during COVID-19.
- Work was in hand with the Scottish Funding Council on "Path Finders", including working regionally with RGU and NESCOL, especially in reference to the energy transition in Aberdeen, and the response to the difficulty in recruitment to Scotland's Social Care Sector and the NHS, exacerbated by COVID-19.
- The School of Education had been awarded £2.9 million to work on mental wellbeing in Rwanda, funded by the National Institute for Health Research.
- The University had been developing support for existing Ukrainian staff and students, especially students who could not return home this summer. Twelve fellowships had been announced for Ukrainian academics who the University will support in their research and, alongside Aberdeen City Council, provide housing. The University's medical school had twinned with a medical school in Ukraine.
- Unlike other universities, no industrial action was taking place at the University.

In discussion:

- Iain Percival suggested setting a fixed target for the Ukraine appeal. Katrina Allan Explained that a target had not been set because of the unknown number of beneficiaries needed and the novelty of Regular Giving.
- Euan Mackenzie and Colin Duncan asked about funding and other major challenges facing the University. Tracey Slaven responded with a quick overview

including increased digital enhancement for education, understanding different markets, continually changing curriculum, and climate change especially in relation to heating buildings.

7. COURT MEMBERS ON BUSINESS COMMITTEE (PAPER GC22:04)

The Committee confirmed its agreement to the appointment of three independent Court members who were also members of the General Council – Iain Percival, Robert Traynham and Otto Thoresen. The Convener expressed the Committee's gratitude for the contribution of Iain Percival in maintaining Court and Business Committee relationships in the interim period. The Committee welcomed the new members.

8. COURT DIGEST (PAPER GC22:05)

The Convener thanked Bruce Purdon for an informative and concise paper. In discussion:

- Pat Pugh asked how the University was supporting students with similar plights to Ukrainian students. Tracey Slaven explained that 3 people were supported by the Student and Scholar Sanctuary Fund, which would be made more accessible.
- Tracey Slaven mentioned plans to hold a memorial service for Sir Duncan Rice, most likely in Spring 2023 on the anniversary of his death.

9. AOCB

Nicole Cochrane shared highlights from the Alumni Relations Team, including:

- The Spring Appeal for Students and Scholars affected by the invasion of Ukraine had raised over £17,000 with more donations coming in each day.
- Two class reunions were taking place on campus shortly - for the first time since COVID-19.
- In May, Chloe Bruce and the team had held alumni events across Europe - in Barcelona, Paris, Brussels, Luxembourg, Frankfurt, Berlin, and Warsaw. These were the first alumni events in Europe since COVID-19 and over 100 alumni had attended.
- In the background, the team was overhauling alumni benefits and services which had been underutilised.
- Graduations would be taking place at The Event Complex Aberdeen in early July, and the team would be attending every ceremony to encourage graduates to retain a connection with the University.
- Katrina Allan would be taking part in a profile-raising project with MSPs and staff at Holyrood at the end of June.
- The local Aberdeen Connect, suspended since 2020, would be starting up over Summer, including tours of the Botanic Garden and history walks.
- The History of Art department's 50th anniversary was being celebrated with a reception for students and staff past and present, including alumni travelling from Poland and London to attend the in-person event.
- In April, Katrina Allan had travelled to New York for the Tartan Day celebrations which had attracted the highest number of attendees at an overseas event so far.

In discussion:

- The Convener asked how the demand has changed for alumni events. Nicole Cochrane replied that the first virtual events had been during the start of COVID-19 and the demand was phenomenal, was reflective of people not being able to leave their houses. As expected, with the world opening up again, the numbers attending

online events had dropped but there remained a number of international alumni dedicated to the events. The team were considering what could be delivered online and in-person going forward.

- Colin Duncan asked how success was measured. Nicole Cochrane explained that there were various ways to measure success but predominately it was the evolution of relationships, alumni becoming actively engaged, and alumni becoming engaged with the Development Trust. Katrina Allan added that although metrics were in place, it was hard to measure the long-term benefits of alumni work.
- Euan Mackenzie asked about the scope for increasing the profit from university merchandise.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 01 September 2022, Location TBC.