UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present: Nigel Lindsay (Convener), Maggie Chapman (Rector), Eric Crockart, Colin Duncan, Steve Duggan, Tom Lynch, Duncan Macniven, Alan Milne, Dan Montgomery, Jenny Mordue, Graeme Nicol, Iain Percival, Mark Strange, Judith Taylor and Brian Wood, with Fiona Urquhart (Lead Alumni Engagement Officer), Nicole Cochrane (Clerk), and Principal Professor George Boyne (Items 3 & 5).

Apologies: Victoria Aston, Nuala Booth, Jennie Gibson, Caroline Inglis, Willie MacColl, Euan Mackenzie, Jan McRobbie, Lynne Mennie, Iain Percival, Patricia Pugh, Jennifer Shirreffs and Mel Roberts (Vice-Convener)

1. MINUTES
The minutes from the meeting held on 6 June 2019 were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING
- The committee agreed to invite Esther Robertson to attend the next Business Committee meeting in November.
  
  Action: Dr Macniven / Ms Cochrane

- The committee were asked if they had any feedback on using the Video-Conferencing (VC) Suite as a meeting location, rather than the Court Room. There was agreement that the VC room was substantially smaller than the Court Room, which could be an issue if the entire committee were to attend.

3. PRESENTATION: PROFESSOR GEORGE BOYNE, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR
The Convener welcomed Professor George Boyne to the meeting.

Professor Boyne presented to the committee (slides attached). Highlights included:

- Widening access has been hugely improved.
- Rise in International Student Recruitment has changed the University’s deficit to a surplus.
- Detailed no-deal Brexit plan is in place and the University is prepared in the event of this happening.
- The University has been ranked 31st in the world for the impact it has on society and 5th in the world for responsible consumption and production, which is a huge achievement.
- Professor Boyne noted the magnificently positive values of students and the need for us to support them.

Professor Boyne then took questions from the committee.

Mr Crockart congratulated the University’s positive ranking for overall student satisfaction, however raised the lack of Student Union and shops on campus as areas which bring this down. Professor Boyne explained that they are not seeing many of those comments this year. He is unsure if a ‘union’ is what current students feel best represents them and confirmed that it is an area to discuss further with students.
Mr Duncan queried if there has been a change in where international students are coming from, with the possibility of Brexit happening soon. Professor Boyne confirmed that this is changing already and that there will be a further shift from European students towards ‘rest of world’ students. He also noted that the intake from ‘rest of UK’ students is up from previous years.

Mr Crockart commented that there appears to be a clear vision of where the University needs to go next and enquired as to how Professor Boyne feels about the pace of change so far. Professor Boyne confirmed that there is a strong appetite for change and that he is happy with the pace so far. It is important to ensure that everyone remains on board and not to move too quickly or challenge too heavily. He noted that we need to keep moving in the right direction whilst ensuring people are content.

Mr Wood congratulated Professor Boyne on the positive picture and progress presented to the committee. He queried student retention and widening access students. Mr Wood felt that the University was well placed to look after those from less privileged backgrounds but was unclear on how successful these students are academically. He asked if there are any figures or statistics on this topic. Professor Boyne stated that there are some figures on this and that a summary can be shared. He advised that within margins widening access students perform just as well as those from other backgrounds, reiterating that these students have the potential to succeed and deserve to be here.

Dr Macniven said that he was struck by the congruence between the Business Committee’s recent discussions and Professor Boyne’s priorities, noting how positive this is.

The Convener thanked Professor Boyne for his time and presentation.

4. REPORT FROM THE CONVENER

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

The Convener explained the intention to address community planning later in the agenda.

The Convener also brought Dr Calder’s ongoing project on the history of the General Council to the committee’s attention. He encouraged contributions from members where appropriate and confirmed that Dr Calder has been interviewing previous Conveners for the project.

5. GRADUATION CEREMONIES AND THE USE OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS: PROFESSOR JENNY MORDUE

Professor Mordue submitted a paper to the committee on the topic of graduation ceremonies and the use of historic buildings (GC19:02).

Professor Mordue noted that time is short for the committee to share their input towards the location of graduations going forward. She raised for discussion the pros and cons of using Mitchell Hall for graduation ceremonies.

Mr Duggan raised the major access issue with regards to the hall and the large number of stairs. He shared an anecdote of his having to help carry disabled people up these stairs in previous years and how undignified this was, noting that this would rightly not be permitted now.
Mr Milne volunteered to be on any sub-committee with regards to this topic.

Mr Lynch commented that Marischal houses a museum which nobody ever sees. He believes that the creation of a Cultural Hub, as discussed at the June 2019 Business Committee meeting, would be a positive way to use this space. This project could include contributions for across different areas of the University and be shared with the public.

Mr Duncan noted that funding for rejuvenation projects must be considered. He commented that Marischal is full of fond memories for many of those on the committee, however this does not exist for current students. He suggested that consideration towards spaces for students to use on a regular basis would be very positive, given how far Hillhead is from campus and the lack of a Student Union. Mr Duncan also said that there needs to be consultation on what students want from these projects.

Bishop Strange shared that his daughter had graduated from the University in summer and he felt that the marquee was potentially problematic, i.e. during wet weather. He commented that there is something about the University being in the heart of the city, making the community part of it.

Mr Crockart noted that there are major access and wiring issues which would need to be overcome if there was a strong will to use Mitchell Hall. He commented that the University doesn’t have any other facility on the scale of Marischal, however there is a disconnect with the current student body who have no experience of it.

Dr Macniven said that there has been a loss of University presence in the city centre, with the average Aberdonian seeing nothing of the University at all.

Professor Boyne confirmed that there are continued discussions happening regarding Marischal and that the University absolutely wants it back in use, in some capacity. He agreed with the importance of having presence in the city centre. Professor Boyne raised the ongoing discussion around the redevelopment of Queen’s Square. He is currently sitting on a steering group with the council on this topic but has yet to see a business plan that would be credible and feels momentum will pick up when the intentions are firmer. The University will be moving into a major fundraising campaign in a couple of years and Marischal College will be a big part of this.

Dr Macniven queried the possibility of commissioning someone to create a solid business plan. Professor Boyne confirmed that he is working with the Development Trust on this currently.

Professor Mordue suggested requesting the views of alumni with regards to rejuvenating Marischal College. Professor Boyne confirmed that there is the intention to include the alumni community after there is something more concrete to share.

Dr Macniven suggested that there be representation made to court on the committee’s views with regards to Marischal College and Mitchell Hall. He also queried if there had been any consideration to other short-term solutions for housing graduations, other than the marquee.

Ms Urquhart suggested it would be a good idea to invite Mr Duncan Stewart, Head of Student Engagement, to a future meeting to discuss this further. She shared that there was a survey carried out with 2019 summer graduates regarding the use of the marquee for graduations, the outcome of which was overwhelmingly positive.

Mr Duncan and Mr Crockart raised the idea of adding more ceremonies in order to accommodate numbers in Elphinstone Hall.

Professor Mordue agreed to set up a small sub-committee dedicated to this topic, which will consist of Mr Milne, Bishop Strange and will co-op Mr Milne’s wife Ms Nanette Milne. Professor Mordue will also link up with Mr Stewart about student feedback.

**Action: Professor Mordue**
6. **COMMUNITY PLANNING ABERDEEN (LOCAL OUTCOME IMPROVEMENT PLAN) - INVITATION FROM SENIOR VICE-PRINCIPAL**

The Convener referenced the paper shared with the committee on this topic (GC19:03) and opened discussion for general observations.

Mr Crockart queried what the University can do in terms of practical measures and requested to know more about what has been done so far regarding local community engagement.

Ms Taylor questioned what constitutes a community and asked who speaks on behalf of different communities. She noted there is a lot to consider in relation to this.

Mr Duncan suggested the need to clarify what the University focus is regarding this as well as where they can provide support.

Bishop Strange commented that, having lived in Seaton previously, there is nothing worse than an institution telling you what is wrong in your community. He said that the local communities know that the University is here so work should be focused on making them feel part of the University.

Dr Macniven confirmed that Professor Leydecker has recently become a member of the Community Planning Aberdeen group. He suggested that the University should feel encouraged to take part and that the committee can assist with making recommendations to Professor Leydecker on this topic.

The Convener will respond and accept the invitation to participate from Professor Leydecker.

*Action: Mr Lindsay*

Mr Crockart agreed to lead a small sub-committee on this subject, consisting of Mr Nicol, Mr Macniven and Ms Taylor.

7. **CONTINUING WORKSTREAMS**

   **Member Engagement**

   The members of this group were absent from the meeting. This will be followed up in November.

   **Strategic Planning Process**

   Dr Macniven confirmed that their update was covered under the Convener report with impact continuing.

   **Student Retention**

   The work of this group has concluded and therefore will now be closed. The committee agreed to review this topic and reopen if required.

8. **NOMINATIONS FOR HONORARY DEGREES**

   The Convener noted his intention to contact the University and discuss Business Committee input into Honorary Degree nominations. He does not anticipate there being any issue with this and feels it is appropriate that their input be considered on this topic.

   *Action: Mr Lindsay*
9. CO-OPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

The Convener thanked Mr Duggan for his service to the committee now that his term is coming to an end.

There are three vacancies open for co-option currently. Dr Macniven confirmed that he had spoken with Kathleen Preston and proposed her for co-option to the committee. All committee members approved this proposal. Ms Preston will join the committee from November 2019.

Action: Ms Cochrane

The Convener called for further nominations to fill the two outstanding vacancies.

10. ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE

Ms Urquhart, Lead Alumni Engagement Officer, provided a comprehensive written report to the Committee on alumni relations activity. Highlights included:

- The annual ‘Welcome to Aberdeen’ event for new members of the Parent & Family Programme took place during the weekend prior to the meeting and was a huge success.
- There is ongoing work regarding events for 525 celebrations in 2020 with the intention of holding several big celebrations.
- On social media there was a lot of engagement surrounding the ‘Ducks’ video, created from an exchange between the alumni team and comedian James Veitch, a graduate of the University. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with one social media user commenting, “I’ve never been prouder of our Uni”.

11. DRAFT COURT MINUTES FROM 26 MARCH 2019 MEETING (IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE)

The Committee noted the minutes and were reminded of the strict confidentiality of the document.

12. AOCB

The clarification of terms of office continues to be an issue. Ms Cochrane agreed to look further into this.

Action: Ms Cochrane

Dr Macniven said he was looking forward to taking over as Convener of the Business Committee from 1 October 2019. On behalf of the committee he thanked Mr Lindsay for all of his hard work during his time as Convener.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Business Committee will be held on Thursday 7 November 2019 at 4pm in the Court Room, University Office.