



THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTE OF THE 311th STATUTORY MEETING

The 311th meeting of the General Council was held in King's College Conference Centre on 25 May 2019. The Convener of the Business Committee, Mr Nigel Lindsay, was in the Chair.

1 MINUTES OF THE 310th MEETING

The draft Minutes of the 310th Statutory Meeting were approved.

2 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

3 REPORT FROM THE CONVENER OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

The Convener of the Business Committee, Mr Nigel Lindsay, reported on the activities of the Business Committee.

The Convenor noted that the review of the University's strategic planning process by the sub-group, led by Mr Duncan Macniven, is making good progress. In January the Business Committee was heartened to learn from the Principal's address that his thinking coincided with that of the Business Committee. On the 26th of April Mr Macniven and the Convener met with Senior Vice-Principal Karl Leydecker to discuss the future strategy. Following this meeting, Mr Macniven and the Convenor have been invited to meet the consultants working on the strategy on the 3rd of June. They have also been invited to represent the General Council at the Court 'away-day' on the 3rd of July. The Convenor would like to thank Mr Macniven and the other members for their contribution to this project.

Vice-Principal Peter McGeorge presented at the March meeting of the Business Committee. In his presentation Mr McGeorge discussed student retention; several members of the Business Committee have relevant experience and knowledge of this subject. The presentation was followed by an animated discussion during which the Business Committee explored how the University could increase student recruitment from schools where entrance to University has traditionally not been an option. The Committee decided to establish a sub-group on student recruitment and retention, this will be led by Mr Brian Wood.

During the March meeting, the combined meeting between the General Council and the University AGM was also discussed. It was generally agreed that this experience had been a success however, it was also agreed that there were opportunities for improvement. It was felt that the AGM had been intended as an opportunity for accountability and this had not been fully realised this year. It was suggested that AUSA, the unions and other groups in the University should be actively encouraged to attend. It was also felt that accountability would increase if a period longer than fifteen minutes was allowed for the Q&A session.

Members considered that the meeting had not provided the expected opportunity for informal contact between General Council and Court members. Despite a Court meeting taking place on the same day, it was disappointing that so few Court members attended the AGM. There was some concern that holding the Summer Statutory Meeting in May, to coincide with May Festival, and the Winter Statutory Meeting in January led to an asymmetrical meeting pattern. It was questioned whether this gap of four months and eight months was in full accordance with the rules and timings of General Council meetings. Moving the Winter Meeting to December or the Summer Meeting to later in the year were proposed as potential options. If the new format is repeated in future years, it would be valuable to have agreed Standing Orders for the meeting. These points have been shared with the University's SMT and it is hoped they will be taken on board next year.

The Director of Estates has been invited to present at the June meeting. He will provide an overview of the proposals for the new building and the refurbishment of New King's. This will also be an opportunity to discuss Marischal College. It has also been agreed that it would be useful to have future presentations on the University's industrial strategy, international recruitment and the University's financial situation as it develops.

During the last meeting, at the suggestion of Mr Euan MacKenzie, members considered providing facilities for remote meeting participation. This has become more desirable as more Business Committee members now live outside the University's traditional catchment areas. This suggestion is now being pursued and such facilities should be available for forthcoming meetings.

The Convenor of the Business Committee will demit office on the 30th of September. This is the last General Council meeting that will be chaired by the Convenor. The Convenor would like to thank all members of both the Business Committee and the General Council for their support.

The Convenor discussed that since its establishment the General Council has worked to influence the University primarily through its elected Assessors on the University Court. Over the last one hundred years, many of the most distinguished figures in University governance have been General Council Assessors. This option is not currently available, but it is hoped in the future that it will be again. However, under the Universities (Scotland) Act the General Council remain responsible for making representation to the University Court and for these to be considered. This route enables the General Council to influence the strategic planning process and previous representations have been well-received.

4 MEMBERSHIP OF BUSINESS COMMITTEE – ELECTION UPDATE

Mrs Urquhart, Acting Head of Alumni Engagement, advised that under the terms of Standing Order No 19, the following are due to retire from the Business Committee on 30 September 2019, but are eligible for re-election:

Tom Lynch
Victoria Aston
Jenny Mordue
Graeme Nicol

Nigel Lindsay and Steve Duggan are also due to retire from the Business Committee on 30 September 2019 but are not eligible for re-election.

At the closing date for nominations of candidates, which was Friday 29 March 2019, three nominations for six vacancies had been received and so the following were duly elected to the Business Committee:

Tom Lynch
Jenny Mordue
Graeme Nicol

5 HISTORY OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL- DR CHARLES CALDER

The Convenor welcomed Dr Alexander Charles Calder to provide an update on his work regarding the history of the General Council. Dr Calder is researching the General Council from 1960 – 2020. Dr Calder has previously presented on the first and second decades of this time period.

The topic of his third report is the “Official and Unofficial Academic History”. The Oral History Archive was conceived as an aid to researchers engaged in writing monographs on aspects of University history in memory of the Quincentenary.

Prominent members of the Business Committee were interviewed as part of this research including Mary Esslemont, Dorothy Younie, Harold Watt, Ronald Scott Brown, Mary B ‘Molly’ Gauld and Alison Skene. The interview with N R D Begg, successively Deputy Secretary and Secretary, provides an invaluable compliment. Interview transcripts with former Principals, Sir Edward Wright and Sir Fraser Noble and distinguished professors such as R V Jones and William Witte were also consulted.

Dr Calder is also grateful to Joan Catto, Colin Duncan, Eric Crockart and Nigel Lindsay for sharing their experience as Conveners of the Business Committee.

These sources enrich and ‘humanise’ the official records. The shelves of the Wolfson Reading Room hold a complete series of General Council Minutes from October 1860 to December 1982 plus Minutes for May 1983, May 1984 and May 1985. There are also Minutes of the Business Committee from 1860 to February 1969; the series is resumed in 1978. An attempt is being made to determine the reason for this gap.

In addition, four volumes of the Roll of Graduates are an indispensable aid and are a testament to the remarkable voluntary service rendered by Lt-Col William Johnston, Theodore Watt, John Mackintosh and Louise Donald. The Roll of Service (1921) was edited by Mabel Allardyce, with the substantial assistance of Theodore Watt and P J Anderson.

6 STATUTORY MEETING DATES

It was discussed that the University AGM cannot take place before the end of January as accounts are not ready until then. It was determined that the Business Committee can recommend dates, but it is not possible for the Business Committee to set them. Previously, the date for the Winter Meeting has been connected to the Carol Concert. However, it was felt that by connecting the Winter Meeting to the AGM more people attended, and the meeting schedule was more balanced with the academic year,

7 NOTICE OF THE 312th STATUTORY MEETING

The date for the 312th Statutory meeting will be released later in the year once the date has been discussed by both the Business Committee and the Court.