

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Duncan Macniven (Convener), Jenny Mordue (Vice-Convener), Colin Duncan, Mark Lindley-Highfield of Ballumbie Castle, Dan Montgomery, Iain Percival, Pat Pugh, Heliang Shi, Judith Taylor, Robert Traynham, with Bruce Purdon (Governance), Ruth Taylor (Vice-Principal Education), Vanessa Nzolo (Student President), Nicole Cochrane (Alumni Relations) and Alease Coleman (Assistant Clerk & Registrar).

Apologies: John Campbell, Mark Strange, Euan Mackenzie, Susan Strachan, Eric Crockart, Graeme Nicol, Lisa Henderson, Tracey Slaven, Mary Stephan, Katrina Allan, Otto Thoresen, Jan McRobbie, Martina Chukwuma-Ezike, Yafan Zhang.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Jenny Mordue, Vice Convener, and chair of this hybrid meeting greeted members.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes were noted and approved.

3. EDUCATION & RACE EQUALITY STRATEGY GROUP – RUTH TAYLOR

EDUCATION

Ruth Taylor spoke about the Aberdeen 2040 commitments and how they impacted the delivery of Education. She noted that the interdisciplinary commitment was the most challenging as it is new and there is yet to be full consideration on how this commitment can be integrated into the curriculum.

Ruth Taylor highlighted the following statistics:

- National Student Survey (undergraduate satisfaction): ranked 4th in the UK
- Graduate employability 2019/20 leavers: employment and / or further study: 93.8%
- Non-continuation (undergraduates): 3.2% (overall);
- Award gaps (first and upper second-class honours vs others): 7.6% (ethnicity); 10.3% (age); SIMD20 (11.4%).

Work was in hand to improve information on the skill level of employment and an action plan was in place to reduce award gaps.

The relevant workstreams to implement the Aberdeen 2040 commitments were:

- Graduate Attributes and Skills: Dean John Barrow would be working with industry stakeholders.
- Work Placements (including consultancy project): the University's placement activity had not returned to pre-Covid levels
- Decolonising the Curriculum: not removing anything from the curriculum but ensuring that every student could identify with the curriculum and considering the global environment
- Pastoral Support Review: personal tutors and having a better post graduate support.

- Monitoring and Absence Review: developing a more student-focused approach.
- International Learning and Student Mobility: how to give an international education to all students, whether they studied abroad or not.

There was a special focus on Employability:

- Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee
- Placement opportunities and consultancy for scaling up
- Internal mobility opportunities
- The Aberdeen 2040 Curriculum
- Beyond the curriculum
- Careers support and advice
- Industry and stakeholder engagement

In discussion:

- Pat Pugh asked the following 3 questions: was there data to show if the students who continue to study were doing so because of lack of ability to find a job; how could students be prepared for jobs that did not yet exist; and with the cost-of-living crisis would there be support for students wanting to study internationally? Ruth Taylor responded that the data collection for students and post education employability had changed, with the data being taken 15 months after graduation instead of 6 months. The University had had a great response from the graduating classes in 2019/2022, especially compared to other universities. There was room for improvement on the new question 'are you on track on where you want to be in your career?'. The Aberdeen 2040 challenges and their addition to the curriculum were designed to be future-focused and to prepare students for jobs not yet created, and Ruth Taylor praised-Vice Principal Pete Edwards for his proactiveness in engaging with stakeholders and local industries. On the cost of living, a small task group would look at how the University could support students.
- Iain Percival commented it takes a significant amount of resource from the host organisation to host students in placements, which is often underestimated by universities. Ruth Taylor explained that consultants were helping the University to understand the resource implications and to improve student employability.
- The Convener asked to what extent did the non-continuation of students correlate with the widening of access to university. Ruth Taylor said that there was a strong support system for 'widening access' students and they did not fare worse than other students in terms of continuation.
- Robert Traynham asked about the faculty's appetite for decolonising the curriculum. Ruth Taylor responded that many schools in the university had already done work on their curriculum. There were other schools where difficult conversations were taking place and the curriculum steering group was offering encouragement and seeking clarity on the timeframe of the work.
- Judith Taylor asked if there was a trend towards vocational degrees. Ruth Taylor noted the increase in medical students, whose numbers were capped, at the behest of the Scottish Government. Students studying anthropology, psychology, and sociology needed help in understanding their career options.
- Colin Duncan asked what area of student satisfaction did the university score particularly highly in. Ruth Taylor responded we scored highly in all aspects except 'assessments and feedback'.

ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY

Ruth Taylor explained that the University was looking at how it was handling racism because of events in 2020, reports concerning racism coming from the higher education sector generally, and comments from Aberdeen students (especially the medical students). The University had signed the Advance HE Declaration on Race and its vision was to recognise, challenge and actively reject racism, to foster a sense of belonging for all staff and students. The Race Equality Strategy Group had developed an Anti-racism Strategy, created racism reporting structures, and was linking with external organisations to learn and share to shift the approach across the sector. The University has signed up to the Advance HE Race Equality Charter to start the journey to advance race equality. [You can access the Advance HE Equality Charter here](#). The next steps were further race literacy opportunities, the launch of the Anti-racism Strategy the related action plan, regional roundtable conversations, and the continued sharing of progress, initiatives and impact with staff and students.

In response to a question from Colin Duncan, Ruth Taylor confirmed that there was collaboration with other Scottish universities, particularly with Abertay University, on anti-racism practices – although other universities were at different stages in their efforts to tackle racism.

4. UNIVERSITY UPDATE

Ruth Taylor presented the following University updates:

- Graduation ceremonies had been held at The Event Complex Aberdeen (TECA) for students who had finished their studies in 2022, 2020 and 2021. More than 2,300 people attended over 13 ceremonies, together with 2,600 students who completed their studies this year.
- There had been a small increase in Scottish undergraduate applicants this year. Currently, the University was still in the process of confirming places.
- The biggest international market was for postgraduates. There had been 42% more applications and 17% rise in acceptances, despite some uncertainties affecting Chinese applicants.
- Vanessa Nzolo, the AUSA President, had been instrumental in starting conversations with students about the cost-of-living crisis. The University had made an exceptional payment to staff at lower grades to help with living costs.
- The University had a small surplus in the financial year ending in July 2022, but the financial outlook was challenging because the Scottish Funding Council had been allocated a flat cash budget in the Scottish budget.
- The University's focus was on revenue growth, expanding international student recruitment and research and commercial income.

Colin Duncan asked about the venue for future graduation ceremonies and whether recruitment of EU students had been affected by Brexit. Ruth Taylor said that the TECA would continue to be used for graduations, for various reasons including construction going on across campus and how well TECA had worked for graduations. The University understood the importance of the historic campus and experiences were offered on campus linked to graduation., Ruth Taylor confirmed that European students were now classed as international students, with a consequential substantial increase in fees. Nonetheless, international student recruitment was going very well.

5. REPORT FROM THE CONVENER

The Convener reported that Eric Crockart had raised at the General Council meeting in June

concerns about the lack of a fire suppression system at Marischal College. It would be possible for the Committee to make a formal representation to Court on the subject, but he believed that it would be more proportionate to raise the matter in a less formal way. The Committee agreed.

Action: The Convener

The Convener reported that the summer General Council meeting had been a successful first hybrid event. Attendance was less good than had appeared in prospect: 31 people signed up to attend in person and 128 online, but only 22 attended in person and 26 online. Nicole Cochrane reported that a further 82 people had subsequently watched the meeting online. That total attendance was much higher than in the past, although it would be desirable to have more in-person attendees Nicole Cochrane mentioned that the conversion rates of online Alumni Relations events were similar to the first hybrid General Council meeting, as many people were interested in attending but, perhaps due to screen fatigue from the pandemic, the number actually attending was lower.

To avoid overloading the secretariat during a busy period in November and December, the Committee agreed that the winter General Council meeting should be held in January, repeating the hybrid format, desirably including a tour of the Science Teaching Hub. Judith Taylor remarked how much she enjoyed the opening day of the Science Teaching Hub.

The Convener reported that the History of the General Council 1960-2020 had been revised by himself and his predecessor Nigel Lindsay and sent to Charles Calder, the author, for further comment.

6. BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP (Paper GC22:06)

The Vice-Convener reported that she, Graeme Nicol, and Dan Montgomery had come to the end of their terms on the Business Committee and were eligible for a further term. Mel Roberts was the sole other nomination, making the total of 19 members. An election was therefore unnecessary and there was scope for two co-options. Nicole Cochrane encouraged everyone to think of their own networks for the co-option spaces. Iain Percival noted that the strategy day would be a good time to discuss the type of people that could fill the two remaining seats on the Committee. Judith Taylor stressed the importance of gender and race diversity.

The Vice-Convener reported that the Convener had completed his 3-year term as Convener and was eligible for re-election. Forms to nominate to the convenership would be circulated in paper form and online by Alease Coleman and the final date for submission would be 16 September. Jenny Mordue confirmed that, if more than one person were nominated, a vote would take place.

Action: Alease Coleman

7. BUSINESS COMMITTEE STRATEGY DAY PREPARATIONS (Paper GC22:07)

The Convener reported that Lynne Mennie, who was facilitating the strategy day, had suggested two breakout groups with topics listed in the paper, and additional topics from Tracey Slaven recommended as important for the Business Committee to discuss. Members were invited to suggest topics to Alease Coleman. If Tracey Slaven was able to attend, she would be invited to give speak about how the Business Committee fitted into the University's governance. Questions would be circulated beforehand so that members could consider them in advance.

Jenny Mordue said that an important issue was raising the profile of the Business Committee and General Council with alumni. Colin Duncan emphasised that the relevance of the Business Committee depended on alignment with the new University governance.

9. ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE

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

- The New York Chapter had a small group of graduates going to the Highland Games.
- The Team was working with Porter's Gin again on a permanent University of Aberdeen gin, made with Mark Paterson's selected botanicals from the Cruickshank botanic gardens.
- The first volunteer working group meeting was taking place next week which will allow a more strategic approach to volunteer opportunities for alumni.
- The new virtual event schedule had been launched, running from September to December 2022.
- Recently, there had been reunions of the Engineering class of 1979 in June, the Maths class of 1977 in July, and the Medical class of 1970 in August. Upcoming in September, there would be Medical reunions for both 1972 and 1982, with the later reunion expecting 80 attendees.
- In July, the Team had attended all the graduation celebrations at TECA, handing out thousands of mugs. The week had had a great atmosphere.
- In-person events for alumni had increased, with a few in July and August, hosting 75 people in total – every event having sold out, with a conversion rate of 89%. In between September and Christmas, the Team had organised events in Portsoy, Edinburgh, Lerwick, London, and 3 more local events in Aberdeen.
- The Spring Appeal had raised over £60,000 for the students and scholars' sanctuary fund.

10. AOCB

Noting the unusually small attendance at the meeting, Judith Taylor wondered whether a different time would encourage people to come along in person. Colin Duncan asked how long an online option would be used as he thought it negatively affecting the attendance at both the Business Committee and General Council. Nicole Cochrane said that an online attendance option was greatly appreciated by the international audience, and was more eco-friendly. She suggested continuing to offer in-person additions like the tour of the Kings Quarter project and the Science Teaching Hub to encourage physical attendance. Alease Coleman added that raising the profile of the Committee with the past twenty years of graduates would bring awareness to people who were currently unaware and perhaps attract new Committee members. Pat Pugh pointed out that the online option was inclusive to all alumni.

Judith Taylor asked about the public stakeholder meeting in the Autumn. Bruce Purdon said the Business Committee will be invited to the meeting, provisionally arranged on 22 November.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 03 November, 4pm. Location TBC.