



BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

**MINUTE OF MEETING HELD IN THE NISBET ROOM, DAVID RUSSELL
APARTMENTS, ST ANDREWS**

Saturday 16 April 2022, 10.00am – 12.30pm

Present in the room: John Edward (JE), Jonathan Hewitt (GC Assessor) (JH), Grace Lyon (GL), Callum MacLeod (CM), Gregory Newman (GN), Ralitzia Nikolaeva (RN), Wendy Russell (Convener) (WR)

Present via Zoom: Annabel Hamid (AH)

In attendance: Alastair Merrill (Registrar & Clerk and Vice-Principal (Governance) (AM), Lottie Doherty (President of the Students Association) (LD) - part-time

Apologies : Abbreviations

BC = Business Committee of the General Council

GC = General Council

StA = St Andrews University

1. Introduction, including appointment of minute secretary.

WR welcomed everyone to the Meeting, whether in person or online. The agenda was agreed as circulated and no further items of competent business were added. It was agreed that CM would act as Minute Secretary for the Meeting. WR informed the Committee that Lottie Doherty, President of the Students' Association, would join the meeting from Agenda Item 5.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Iain Anderson (GC Assessor), Adrian Greer (Chancellor's Assessor), Matthew Lawson, Sally Mapstone (Principal), and Stephanie O'Rourke.

3. Minute

The Minute of the previous meeting of Saturday 22 January 2022, previously circulated, was approved.

Matters arising

Tree planting – WR reported that a somewhat cool response to the proposal had been received from the University. It was agreed to pursue the idea by participating in the tree planting sessions organised by the Transition Group.

4. Report from the Principal's Office

AM provided a comprehensive report on key university issues and developments as follows:

Ukraine

Staff and students from the areas affected have been supported to enable them to return to the University and all are accounted for. The Principal has restated the commitment of the University to the pursuit of peaceful co-existence and advancement through learning, underpinned by the values of tolerance, respect and inclusivity. Hundreds of staff and students attended a vigil in St Salvator's Quad on 28 February 2022 and, along with townspeople, a rally on 30 March 2022. An appeal for funds to support affected students currently stood at £145k; appreciation of contributions made by alumni was expressed. A number of St Andrews academics have been prominent commentators on the crisis, particularly Professor Phillips O'Brien.

Covid

The University's handling of the return for Semester 2 has been commended by the Scottish Government Recovery Group. Remaining Covid restrictions have been gradually lifted. The Government had published a set of principles to assist Higher Education Institutions in moving forward, the key presumption being that in-person teaching should be the appropriate and desirable position for most courses. In relation to the Government's Coronavirus Reform and Recovery Bill, the University is concerned that emergency powers might exist which Ministers were not competent to exercise, such as setting examination dates, term times, dictating which courses could be taught, and which individuals would be admitted. The University is articulating an alternative approach which it is hoped will be acceptable to Scottish Government.

Industrial Action

The UCU had called for 15 days of strike action in relation to on-going disputes over pensions, pay and conditions, the mandate running until early May. A re-balloting of 146 institutions has delivered a fresh mandate in 37, including St Andrews which reached the 50% threshold for further action. A package of pension reforms has now been implemented to finalise the 2020 valuation. It is hoped that focus can return to future reforms of the scheme, elements of which St Andrews has been instrumental in securing, to provide longer term stability.

Strategy

A review and refresh of the University Strategy is underway. The World-leading and Global pillars have been merged. Diverse St Andrews remains, with in-creased focus on race and ethnicity, as does Entrepreneurial St Andrews. New pillars of Sustainable and Digital St Andrews have been added after consultation with staff and students.

University Life

Works of art, artefacts, manuscripts and books have been brought together for the first time in 500 years at an Exhibition at the Wardlaw Museum. John Hardyng's 15th century map of Scotland, on loan from the British Library, has also been on display. The Laidlaw Music Centre was officially opened in March 2022 with a performance of *Così fan Tutte*, a reception, concert and dinner. Two hundred and fifty people attended the first Inclusion Weekend in February 2022, with an emphasis on anti-colonial practice in higher education and understanding disability, with the establishment of an annual lecture. Sanctuary Week was held in early March. The University hosted Scottish Power Energy Networks at the Eden Campus at the end of March. The installation of the University's 54th Rector, Dr Leyla Hussein, OBE was held on Friday 15 April 2022; Dr Hussein is the first woman of colour to hold this position.

Court

The University Court met on Friday 15 April 2022, with Dr Hussein presiding. Progress was reviewed on a range of policy topics as well as the University's forward infrastructure plans and financial situation.

Looking ahead

The admissions cycle is in full swing, with strong application numbers across most cohorts and good progress on widening access and participation. The final weeks of teaching have begun, with three weeks of graduation ceremonies to come for the Classes of 2020, 2021 and 2022 in the newly refurbished Younger Hall.

5. Legacy of the Gown

WR reported that progress had been limited. Director of Development Robert Fleming has asked to see an outline business case before giving his full support. The targeted survey is ready but technical limitations have delayed implementation. The student survey is complete, with a positive response. Members agreed that a survey would be done via existing alumni groups and other social media channels. Contact would be made with the After Many Days Club; CM intimated that, all being well, he would be joining the Club's Committee in June and would be happy to liaise with the Club.

6. Student's Association

Association President Lottie Doherty reported as follows:

The year had been characterised by events still being cancelled, ongoing anxiety about high Covid numbers, concern about changes by the University to the academic calendar, most aspects of accommodation, personal safety, and the spiking phenomenon. Following extensive consultation, a student Mental Health Agreement had been put in place by the Wellbeing Officer, the document being available online.

Employability

A strategy has been introduced, prompted by the lack of Careers Open Days in the past two years. Encouragement is given to students to get involved in activities which will develop useful transferable skills.

Accommodation

Many students are struggling to find accommodation, particular-ly affordable options. There is concern over rising costs for rent, energy, heating and the cost of living generally. All the financial support available, in the form of scholarships, for example, is welcome.

Cancel Culture

As elsewhere, issues relating to transphobia have arisen. This is an extremely sensitive subject, generating much discussion, often controversial, about legitimate debate, suppression of freedom of speech in an academic setting, and the dangers of hate speech. The importance of self-care for all was noted.

Spiking

Discussion took place about the scale of the problem and numbers. Difficulties in identifying incidents and establishing culpability were recognised by Members. Education for all and specific training for Union staff were seen as vital in combatting this dangerous practice.

Trustees

In answer to a question about governance of the Students Association, LD reported that the potential issue of non-student Trustees of the Board being held personally liable in legal situations had been satisfactorily addressed.

WR asked what the General Council and, in particular, the Business Committee could do for the Students Association. LD referred to the existence of an Alumni Sub-Committee which, in the post-Covid world, could be a conduit for developing links. Furthermore, the Business Committee, through its own channels, could encourage applications to the University from traditionally under-represented areas of society.

7. Ukrainian Scholars

RN described the case of a Ukrainian academic known to particular staff members in Modern Languages who had been able to leave Ukraine. The School of Modern Languages has approved her application to become an associate and accommodation has been identified. The question of a stipend of £5-10k has been a problem.

AM advised Members of his opinion that this was not a matter for the Business Committee and that the matter was being appropriately addressed through official channels. He encouraged members of the Business Committee instead to promote where possible the University's strategy for Ukrainian students and scholars.

8. General Council Meetings

It was noted that the next Meeting of the General Council would be held at 10.30am on Saturday 2 July 2022. Names of potential speakers were considered; AM will check availability. (Subsequently, Professor Stephen Gethins, Strategic Adviser to the Principal on External Relations and Professor of Practice in International Relations, was approached and agreed to address General Council on the topic of Community Engagement.)

The date of the November 2022 Meeting will be confirmed in due course.

9. Oral Report from General Council Assessors

JH updated Members on the most recent meeting of the University Court. Projects which had been delayed by Covid were being reactivated. The future of the concept of “the Lecture”, student assessment, and cybersecurity had also been discussed.

10. Schedule of GC and BC meeting dates in 2022

WR referred to the schedule of GC and BC Meetings which had previously been circulated. Members noted and accepted them.

11. AOCB

No other competent business was tabled.

Members adjourned for a group photograph.

Those members able to do so reconvened for a closed discussion on the topic of Business Committee governance.