BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTE OF MEETING HELD ONLINE ON ZOOM

**Saturday 29October 2022: 10.00am – 12.30pm**

**Present online via Zoom:** Iain Anderson (IA), John Edward (JE), Matthew Lawson (ML), Grace Lyon (GL), Ralitza Nikolaeva (RN), Wendy Russell (Convener) (WR)

**In attendance:** Alastair Merrill (Registrar & Clerk and Vice-Principal (Governance) (AM)

**Apologies:** The Principal, Adrian Greer (Chancellor’s Assessor), Annabel Hamid, Jonathan Hewitt (General Council Assessor), Callum MacLeod, Gregory Newman, Stephanie O’Rourke, Lauren Stewart

**Abbreviations:**
BC = Business Committee of the General Council
GC = General Council
StA = St Andrews University

### Introduction, including appointment of minute secretary

WR welcomed everyone to the meeting which was held online. The agenda was agreed as circulated and no further items of competent business were added. It was agreed that RN would act as minute secretary for the meeting.

### Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Adrian Greer (Chancellor’s Assessor), Jonathan Hewitt (GC Assessor), Callum MacLeod, Sally Mapstone (Principal), Gregory Newman, Stephanie O’Rourke and Lauren Stewart.

### Minute

The minute of the previous meeting of Saturday 23 April 2022, previously circulated, was approved.

#### Matters arising

Tree planting – WR reported that there had been a recent email inviting those interested to participate in tree planting organised by the University. The email arrived only days before the event. She asked if there was a way to sign up with more advance notice. AM explained that if the GCBC wanted to organise a special event, they would need to write a proposal and be prepared to carry the extra costs associated with such an event due to existing safety regulations around equipment and supervision. GL and RN suggested that it is more important to get the trees planted and to donate these extra expenses rather than spending them on organising a special planting event for GCBC members. There was general agreement that it would be better to pursue the option of raising money and having a special plaque dedication. AM agreed to follow up with Development on the available packages for such an initiative.

WR reported that she has sent two letters to the Principal: 1) congratulating her on becoming Dame (DBM) in the late Queen’s 2022 Birthday Honours; 2) expressing congratulations to the University on achieving top rankings once more in the UK tables.

### Report from the Principal’s Office

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

HM Queen’s death - The Semester started with the sad occasion of the Queen’s death on 8 September. University initiated formal mourning protocol as a mark of respect, which remained in place until the end of the state funeral on 19 September. Flags at half mast, maces hooded with black. Principal attended Proclamation at Cupar and VP Governance attended Motion of Condolence at the Scottish Parliament.

University Guides – UStA achieved first place in *Guardian University Guide 2023*. Mirrors achievement in *Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide* in 2022. Several academic schools rank best in UK in the subject tables – Art History, Neuroscience, Chemistry, Economics, English, History, International Relations. 16 of 22 subjects taught at UStA ranked in respective top five. *The Times* & *Sunday Times* rank UStA top in Scotland and second in UK.

Strategy – University Court has agreed the University Strategy 2022-2027 following extensive consultation with the University community, including all staff and students. The strategy will be published on the [University website](https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk) and printed copies will be available at the General Council’s winter meeting. The refreshed strategy develops further the themes of world-leading, diverse, digital, sustainable and entrepreneurial St Andrews. As in the previous strategy, there is an explicit commitment to social responsibility.

External developments affecting the University: budget cuts, war in Ukraine, cost-of-living crisis – Heading into difficult winter with strong political headwinds. Scottish Funding Council flat cash settlement looks like the best-case scenario, and

the economic outlook looks grim. Scottish Government departments are modelling cuts of up to 15%.

The University is acutely aware of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on staff and students. At the end of September all core salaried staff received a payroll supplement of £500. New Voluntary Living Wage levels already implemented and backdated to 1 September. Further to the announced increase in minimum stipend levels for UKRI postgraduate students, UStA postgraduate stipends, pegged to UKRI levels, also increased. A cost-of-living task force is investigating and implementing initiatives in the following areas: study-related costs; building food and drink offerings in order to limit the barriers to inclusion; access to employment; use of physical spaces; circular economy and sustainability. Discretionary funds accessible for students in need, and a range of measures have been put in place including advertising warm study spaces across campus and providing subsidised hot food (for students and staff) in University cafeterias.

New class of students - For first time in two years students returned for an academic year in which all teaching is intended to take place in person. The overall student population for 2022/23 is almost 10500 FTE, 81 per cent of whom are undergraduates. This represents a slight increase in the overall population compared with last year. One hundred and twenty-nine countries are represented with 26.5% form Scotland, 25.7% from the rest of the UK and 47.8% International.

Student accommodation - In run up to the academic year it was challenging for some students to find accommodation in StA. External pressures, including ScotGov legislation on private residential tenancies, created shortage of accommodation across UK. There were organised communications, waiting list management and other adjustments to support students to find accommodation through August. All undergraduate new entrant students who applied by the deadline were accommodated as per our guarantee. Arrangements are in place to create a community in Dundee, supported by St A staff, and access to accommodation in Leuchars has continued. Pressures are unlikely to ease for the next academic year, and the University is are already preparing how best to support students next summer.

Other news - Phase 1 of the Library refurbishment is complete and the building returned to its pre-pandemic capacity and opening hours. Shortlisted for Outstanding Library Team in THE Awards 2022. Looking ahead, engagement in the campaign for New College continues to be high, and the Principal is this week engaged in philanthropic activities in the US. Our recruitment of a new Senior Lay Member to replace Stuart Monro as chair of Court is moving forward with an election at end of November. The upcoming period will be challenging, with prospect of industrial action over pay and pensions, funding cuts and inflation all taking their toll. However, on the plus side, students and staff are back in person, the town is busy once more, and UStA beat Edinburgh at the varsity rugby match in September.

### Legacy of the Gown

WR invited JE to comment on the survey. JE reported that despite the active promotion of the survey on various social media platforms only 13 responses were received. Out of these, the general mood is positive toward the initiative but questions arose as to whether such numbers are a reliable gauge of interest. WR and GL asked how the response rate can be increased. IA suggested to send invitations via the office of Development. AM explained that the office has a carefully planned schedule of emailing alumni that are usually tied to campaigns and sending extra emails is not among the best practices. He suggested that it could be put as a news item in the Chronicle or St Andrews in The News. WR suggested seeking support from the After Many Days Club.

### Governance Issues

A discussion was held on the roles and responsibilities of the GCBC. Members agreed that processes be reviewed and revised where appropriate. A Working Group was agreed and a draft paper will be brought to the next GCBC meeting for wider discussion.

WR raised a concern about members of the GCBC who routinely do not attend meetings. Members agreed that the members update the roles and responsibilities to include an attendance policy. The frequency of meetings was discussed and members agreed that the current frequency of three meetings per year held in person or online be maintained.

### General Council Meetings

It was noted that the next Meeting of the General Council would be held at 10.30am on Saturday 26 November 2022.

### Oral Report from General Council Assessors

IA delivered a report of the Assessors:

* The University is dealing well with the external financial pressures
* Good results from fundraising activities
* Responding well to the rapidly changing political environment
* Principal convening Scottish universities
* Pressure to decrease the number of students on campus
* The new strategic plan
* Major capital projects
* Reputation on track
* Digital capabilities

### Schedule of GC and BC meeting dates in 2022

WR referred to the schedule of GC and BC Meetings which had previously been circulated. A Doodle will be sent out for the January 2023 meeting.

### AOCB

There being no other competent business, WR thanked those present for taking part and closed the meeting.

*The meeting closed at 12.05.*