

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTE OF MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM - VIDEOCONFERENCE

TUESDAY 30 MAY 2023 6 - 7.15 PM

Present via video link: John Edward (JE), Annabel Hamid (AH), Jonathan Hewitt (GC Assessor) (JH), Matthew Lawson (ML), Grace Lyon (GL), Callum MacLeod (CM), Gregory Newman (GN), Stephanie O'Rourke (SO), Wendy Russell (Convener) (WR)

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

Apologies: Sally Mapstone (Principal), Ralitza Nikolaeva, Lauren Stewart, Iain Anderson

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

1. Introduction, including appointment of minute secretary

WR welcomed everybody. The agenda was agreed as circulated and no further items of competent business were added. JE was appointed as minute secretary for the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

As noted above.

3. Minute

No amendments were proposed to the draft minute and it was approved by the committee.

4. Business Committee Governance

GL, GN, AH and SO are all due to step down on 30 June 2023 (ES already absent). The University outsourced, several years ago, the conduct of elections, and a budget would be required to support the election of new BC members in 2023.

A discussion took place relating to the role and purpose of the BC which will form part of the work to develop a business case for submission to the University in order to justify the approximately £3.5k required to run an election process through the organisation the University has contracted with.

The funding to run BC elections has to come from somewhere. The University is running a deficit so spending here could affect bursaries or other forms of student support. It was countered that it was not an issue for the BC how funding is found, as choice to outsource the election process was beyond the control of BC. A discussion is needed on purpose first, followed by a business case if necessary.

It may be difficult to identify roles and activities for the BC to undertake, but it is part of GC and GC is a fundamental part of the University – it gives graduates some say in the functioning of the University. Does GC need BC to get certain tasks done? Should the outsourcing of the election contract have included elections to the BC in the tender?

BC elections were previously run by a show of hands. The BC has sought to establish and maintain its independence from GC, a decision taken in 2009-10. BC has received benefits in kind from the University e.g. meeting rooms, and there is no allocated budget code for BC work.

The BC can co-opt members, and there is no limit to those appointed. It was suggested that the committee approach unsuccessful candidates from the last election, however members were informed that no-one else from the 2021 election met the minimum threshold.

The BC has had various roles over time and filled gaps when needed but has not always been effective. If cost is an issue, could BC elections be recalibrated so that the period of election was longer requiring fewer elections? Either way, establishing a business case is very important.

It may prove hard to demonstrate the value-add of BC; the Legacy of the Gown did not take off etc. Are there other ways to support GC work and make a difference?

The GC will have to be informed in June as to why scheduled elections are not taking place. Six current members will continue – departing members were asked to indicate if they would be willing to continue supporting the BC.

The committee discussed outstanding governance processes and will continue this work via a small working group. **Action:** JE, JH and WR

The University Update and General Council Assessor's Report were held over for the next meeting.

5. GC and BC Programme

The summer meeting of the General Council is to be held on 17 June at 1030 in Parliament Hall. Dr Rebekah Widdowfield, Vice-Principal (People and Diversity), will present on 'Diverse St Andrews, one of the key pillars of the University's Strategy'.

The next GC will be in November – date tbc.

The BC can discuss work strands over the summer with a view to another meeting, currently scheduled for Saturday 7 October.

6. AOB

The Convenors and Clerks of the General Council of Scottish universities (Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Dundee) are meeting shortly in Aberdeen — WR and AM to attend.

WR thanked those members who are standing down in June for their commitment and contribution to the work of the BC.

Meeting closed.