

BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

DRAFT MINUTE OF MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE

Saturday 22nd January 2022 10.00 am - 12.00 pm

Present via video link: John Edward (JE), Adrian Greer (Chancellor's Assessor)(AG), Annabel Hamid (AH), Jonathan Hewitt (General Council Assessor)(JH), Callum Macleod (CM), Alastair Merrill (Registrar & Clerk & VP Governance)(AM), Gregory Newman (GN), Ralitza Nikolaeva (RN), Stephanie O'Rourke (SO'R) and Wendy Russell (Convener)(WR)

Apologies: Iain Anderson (General Council Assessor), Matthew Lawson, Sally Mapstone (Principal), Lauren Stewart

Guest speaker: Robert Fleming (RF)

Abbreviations: BC = Business Committee of the General Council, GC = General Council
St A = the university

1. Introduction

The agenda was agreed and GL was appointed minute secretary.

2. Apologies for Absence

As above.

3. Minute of BC Meeting on 18th September 2020

The draft minutes of this meeting were approved.

Members agreed to dissolve the Ordinances and Resolutions sub-committee due to a lack of business for it to review currently.

4. University Update

AM gave a comprehensive summary of the news of the last few months.

On Covid related issues, still cautious, but

- Noted with pleasure that the last GC meeting had been in person in Parliament Hall
- Also, that graduation ceremonies had been conducted in person
- Return of in-person teaching for smaller classes as well as a programme of Covid-safe events
- St A now well-practised in Covid support facilities – testing sites, safe travel provision, vaccination clinics, rapid reaction team, etc all working well to support students and staff to mitigate the effect of Covid and curb its spread.

- Cancelled large pre-Christmas events, which was hard, but helped to prevent spread, though numbers increasing now that students are back.
- StA is constantly reviewing the position both as to the spread of Omicron and how this can be slowed and, conversely almost, how they can help the students to lead a more normal active student life and get some satisfaction from being here – the “Can-do” approach. StA also provide input to the Scottish government in the development of Covid policies
- It has become clear that tolerance, kindness and inclusivity have been and are now particularly important in dealing with the impact of 2 years of restrictions on the mental health of staff and students alike. Learning to live with Covid means learning to live with one another again, and it is important to re-establish community norms and the expectations we have of one another.
- This philosophy overlaps with StA's drive to celebrate the diversity of our community, promote inclusivity, signpost clear support for anyone with concerns, fears or complaints, and work with our local community and its businesses and organisations to tackle the misunderstandings and lack of knowledge which can fuel prejudice. All of this will be at the heart of our One St Andrews initiative later this year.
- In-person activities are expected to return in spring e.g. Court meetings, installation of the new Rector, the Alumni weekend.

Non-Covid issues

- The StA University profile continues to be high here and abroad and applications are buoyant.
- Outstanding Contribution to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Outstanding Estates Team
- Most Innovative Teacher of the Year for Dr Alexia Petsalis Diomidis
- StA sent a delegation to blue zone at COP 26 and ran a suite of activities at St Andrews in the run up to COP. Demonstration of hydrogen powered train at Bo'nes and Kinneil railway.
- Madras College plans are being developed – General Council heard an interesting resumé on the current position.
- The Younger Hall refurbishment is on course for its return to in person graduations this summer.
- A major refurbishment of the main library is in prospect.
- Two significant losses to StA are Prof Katie Stevenson (VP Collections etc) who is going to Australia, and Catherine Stihler (Senior Lay Member at Court) who has moved to California. Both of these leave a gap in StA's leadership and will be hard to replace.
- Two years of Covid has not stopped StA moving forward. Things could have been very different, with the university looking into a financial black hole in 2020. Team work and innovation have worked well, but good to see things returning to normal.
- AG noted that Covid might have ruined StA, but in fact StA's prompt and continuing support measures and initiatives have led to an increase in its student approval rating, in a period when other universities saw a drop in approval.

6. General Council Meetings

The first in-person GC meeting in nearly two years was held in November and had a good turnout. The topic lecture was on the current progress and thinking about Madras college.

7. Director of Development Update and Discussion

Robert Fleming (RF), Director of Development, joined us, to give an update.

The pandemic had caused a major re-think in how StA communicated with its alumni, and resulted in a number of very successful initiatives

- academic talks
- Saints walks
- Meet the Author
- Alumni weekend was online
- Festive video 2021
- Burns Night 2021, and 2022 is about to happen
- Chancellor's Circle talks with Sir Bob Reid and Fiona Hill

There is a problem with time zones for live events, but nevertheless these have all contributed to boost alumni contacts and Development is now working with the Careers Office to develop more connection opportunities and to develop more contact between alumni, for mentoring, “coffee connect”, work shadowing etc.

On social media, all numbers have gone up.

In Nov/Dec 2021 graduations were held in person for the first time since 2019 and an alumnus start up “Stageclip” was chosen to video the ceremony, following which individual clips for each graduate was posted, as a surprise “freebie”. This was very popular and generated a lot of goodwill, but few donations. However, now it has been trialled, we hope to take this forward and possibly go back and process earlier years for special anniversaries such as 25th.

There is a problem for fundraising, as the current GDPR Rules which mean that once a recipient has opted out of fundraising messages, that's it for life. Not sure how to re-connect with these people.

Bejant receptions are also now planned in person.

Staffing has been increased to include a new BAME officer. We need more diversity not just in students and staff, but in our thinking – for instance we currently recognise only the Western traditional celebrations.

Chronicle magazine is expensive and carbon heavy, but many people enjoy receiving it as a print copy, so it will probably be kept. An online version may be developed offering links to extra information, videos etc.

All in all, despite Covid, or possibly because of the initiatives Covid provoked, the year to July 2021 was a record year for fundraising.

Discussion -

RN asked about fundraising for Madras College. The initial target is £10M for the project to launch and a key donor has already pledged £5M. An architectural competition is now live and fundraising will begin in earnest when those plans are available. But so far it's looking good.

AG mentioned that Covid might have ruined the university, on many factors; but in fact student satisfaction scores went up, and this must be attributed to the huge effort the university put into thinking how to help the students to cope and to get the most out of their time here.

WR asked if “cancel culture” [ostracising or villifying people on social media for having the wrong opinions] had affected StA. AM said, not much, but the values espoused by the University seek to ensure that issues, however uncomfortable, are discussed in an open, kind and respectful way. The upcoming One St Andrews initiative is expected to help StA avoid some of the toxic issues which have emerged in other universities. But we need to recognise what needs to be aired. StA has commissioned an independent review to explore the management of race and ethnicity at StA, reviewing progress made under Diverse St Andrews, and addressing the practical and cultural challenges. Due to report in Spring. New appointment has been made to lead University's application for the Race Equality Charter.

Where problems of bullying, harassment, assault, discrimination etc occur, students are encouraged to report this and there are several routes. Anonymous reporting is available and support is given for anyone who needs it, including assisting them in reporting matters to the police.

8. Business Committee Initiatives

Legacy of the Gown

JH, while continuing to be involved, has passed on leadership of the initiative to WR. An online survey is ready to go out to alumni to assess the level of support. Possibly sent out to tranches of alumni rather than all at once.

Arrangements to be considered – storage, insurance, work-parties, shop and student association involvement.

Sustainability

WR wondered if we could promote the StA forest to the GC. Perhaps the BC could set up a tree planting for April, to coincide with its next meeting.

RN mentioned that you can donate to the forest if you don't have anywhere to plant a tree. You can sign up for email updates, or help to get planting – maybe this could go on FaceBook Alumni sites?

GL wondered if the GC could adopt a project to help landscape Madras grounds? (This would be a long way off as development has only recently started).

Diversity

RN suggested that as a practical de-colonisation initiative, StA should offer scholarships for students from countries in the low-development index. Scholarships could take various forms, and would need to have many facets – money, support, mentoring etc.

Although the idea was met with general approval, AH wondered if this needed to be a new initiative, or if we could just support what StA already does?

RN will look at the current StA scholarships to identify any gaps.

9. Business Committee Governance

As previous business had run on quite long, there was general agreement that there was no time for this item and it would be brought back in April.

10. General Council Assessor's Report

JH reported, by saying that AM had covered most matters. StA seems to be in good shape after a terrible two years. It was good to see the university management and student bodies working together to get the best possible outcome for students. "Can Do" has been crucial.

11. Programme of Future Meetings

The future dates of GC and BC meeting was approved as set out in an accompanying paper. The next meeting of the BC is on Saturday, 16th April, and is planned as an in-person meeting in St A. The next GC meeting is scheduled for Saturday, 18th June.

Suggestions for future GC meeting speakers Prof Sir Ian Boyd, or Derek Watson or Lesley Caldwell, the Communities Liaison Officer.

12. AOCB

None.

WR thanked members for their engagement and input. The meeting closed at 12 noon.