

MINUTE OF BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON SATURDAY, 4 APRIL 2020 10AM – 11.50AM VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

Present via video link: Alison Baverstock (AB), Stuart Bryan (SB), Alan Chalmers (AC), Nigel Christie (NC), Adrian Greer (AG), Jonathan Hewitt (JH), Grace Lyon (GL), Gregory Newman (GN), Alastair Merrill (Registrar & Clerk & VP Gov, AM), Stephanie O'Rourke (SOR), and Wendy Russell, Convener (WR)

Apologies: Eliane Sum (ES), Brittany Collins (BC), Annabel Hamid (AH)

Abbreviations: BC = Business Committee of the General Council; GC = General Council

1. Introduction and appointment of minute secretary

The Convener welcomed everyone and general introductions were made. The agenda was agreed as circulated and no other competent business was intimated. SOR was appointed secretary for the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

As noted above.

3. Minute of Business Committee Meeting 19 January 2019

The draft minute was approved.

4. Election of Vice-Convener

It was previously decided to conduct the election via email, however no one nominated themselves in the initial round. WR has subsequently discussed this role with a member who is not currently present. It was agreed that this matter would be followed up with via email.

5. University Response to Covid-19

AM described the University's ongoing response to the rapidly changing situation, including impact on students, responsibility to the larger community, medium- and longer-term strategic planning, and a wide range of other issues. Immediate priorities are the wellbeing and safety of staff and students as well as the delivery of teaching and assessment through the end of the academic year. Plans are in place for the remote delivery of exams, and the University website provides a range of resources and support for students and staff.

Both short-term and long-term impacts will require robust responses. AM enumerated the support, resilience, and leadership exemplified at every level of the University thus far. In light of this period of change, it was reported that three senior members of Court who were due to step down will have their terms extended until the end of the calendar year to maintain continuity. The significance of the financial consequences was underscored. These are being addressed by Court but high-level conversations are also underway regarding local and sector-wide needs, including the prospect of financial assistance from the UK and Scottish governments. AM highlighted three ways the GC can support the University in this regard: (1) keeping in touch with alumni; (2) advocating for the financial wellbeing of the University and the broader HE sector; (3) continuing to promote the reputation of the University.

NC described some of the key challenges to medium- and long-term financial modelling, although he noted the productive and supportive relationship that exists between the University

and its lenders. AG noted the likelihood of enduring fundamental changes within the HE sector and praised collaborative efforts being taken by Scottish universities. AG, SOR, WR commended the University's leadership for their response thus far.

6. General Council Meeting, 27 June 2020

In light of the cancellation of graduation and the annual alumni weekend, WR raised the question of the June General Council Meeting (GCM). AC queried whether there was a statutory duty to hold a GCM. AM confirmed that the GC is required to assemble twice per year according to the 1858 Act, and that not holding a GCM in June puts us in breach of that statute although it was unlikely to be enforced.

Challenges to holding the GCM include: (1) logistical barriers to rescheduling the meeting for the fall; (2) insufficiently accessible and secure video conference alternatives; (3) current demands on the time and energy of University leadership. JH underscored the critical work done by Court and senior leadership to respond to Covid-19 and the necessity of not distracting them from these efforts.

WR raised the possibility of an email communication to the GC from the Principal, which WR noted could be a valuable opportunity to let members of the GC know how they can support the University. NC and AB remarked on potential additional benefits from this kind of message, including encouraging financial support from the alumni community. JH, AB, and NC discussed the proper balance such a message might want to strike in presenting the University's situation.

The BC decided that an in-person GCM in June should not take place, and recommended that a communication from the Chancellor and/or Principal in its place could be a valuable opportunity to engage with the GC.

Action point: WR, AG, and AM to be in touch via email in the coming weeks about the content of such an emailed communication, as well as the need to inform the community about the lack of an in-person GCM.

AG left the meeting.

7. Business Committee: Delivering Value

AC and AB presented the draft entrepreneurship paper. AC asked for clarification about the University's broader entrepreneurship strategy. AM affirmed that it should be an integral part of the University. Key aspects include:

- Incubating, accelerating, and licensing entrepreneurship
- Encouraging entrepreneurship through business support, advice, and connectivity
- Engagement through industry, including bringing together funders and advisors
- Integrating entrepreneurship into University pedagogy through the delivery of short credit-bearing courses aimed at business
- Leveraging existing capacity and searching out more opportunities for staff and students
- Using the Eden Campus as an entrepreneurial hub where academia and industry can come together

AB pointed to the value of acknowledging existing activity among students and suggested looking to collaborations with individuals who work across the institution such as the Student Union and the Library.

SOR noted her role designing an entrepreneurship joint-degree with the University of Melbourne, and will feedback relevant developments to the GCBC.

GL underscored the importance of 'initiative' within the strategy.

WR flagged the benefits of informing and mobilising the alumni community to support the strategy.

Action Point: WR to initiate conversation with Derek Watson and Tom Brown to identify further progress to be made.

8. GCBC Skills Matrix

It was agreed that the GCBC does not require the same skills as Court. NC suggested that the committee's needs might change over time. GL pointed to the disadvantages that might follow from specifying desired skills in prospective committee members, although JH underscored that this would enable the GCBC to operate most effectively.

Action Point: All members of the GCBC to consider which skills from the existing matrix best serve the purpose of the committee, for future discussion.

9. General Council Assessor's Report – JH

JH referred the committee to his earlier comments about Court in the context of the discussion of Covid-19. He reiterated that firm plans are in place to see the University through the current academic year and his praise for the efforts of staff and senior leadership. NC echoed this sentiment, remarking on the fulsome efforts of Court to respond to the current crisis. He also noted that mental health is a key issue, and flagged the University's efforts to provide relevant support for students both on campus and off campus.

10. VP Governance Report – AM

AM referred the committee to his earlier report about Covid-19.

11. Programme of GC and BC meetings

WR noted the provisional nature of these dates.

12. AOCB

WR conveyed thanks on behalf of the GCBC for the University's efforts to respond to the present difficulties and closed the meeting at 11.50am.