**BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE**

**Saturday** **19th September 2020, 10 - 11.45am**

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

**Apologies :** Sally Mapstone (Principal), Stuart Bryan (SB), Brittany Collins (BC), Annabel Hamid (AH), Eliane Sum (ES)

**Abbreviations**

BC = Business Committee of the General Council

GC = General Council

StA = St Andrews

1. **Introduction and appointment of minute secretary.**

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

As above.

1. **Minute of Business Committee Meeting 4th April 2020 and Matters Arising**
* The draft minute was approved.
* The GC meeting of June 2020 was cancelled. The content of a proposed email communication to GC members was discussed by WR, AG and AM following the meeting and later sent out to all GC members by AM in mid May.
* Discussion of the skills matrix is to be put on hold for the time being
* Other matters arising are discussed under the various headings below.
1. **Election of Vice-Convener**

GL had volunteered to be vice-convener and this was agreed by consensus.

1. **Response to Covid-19**

AM gave a thorough summary of the university’s actions and the current position. There have been four stages to the university’s response to the Covid emergency.

*Preparation before lockdown in March*

* Putting systems in place for the online rush e.g. purchase of VPNs
* Converting lectures to online

*Reacting to lockdown*

* Closing buildings
* Looking after students who had to stay in StA
* Switching to online teaching, online assessments, online graduation

*Preparing for recovery*

* Risk assessments across the whole estate and teaching environments, developed in close consultation with Trade Unions
* Planning for a safe start, good practice guidelines, union discussions
* Communications and managing expectations
* Dealing with the school exam problems and consequent enlarged u/g student intake, including taking extra student accommodation in Dundee
* Web pages of advice for students and staff
* Discussions with the Scottish Government
* Assessing the financial implications

*Managing the return and the new environment*

* Re-starting research and re-opening labs.
* Re-opening buildings
* Student transport from airports, quarantine facilities in halls
* Re-structuring teaching – dual delivery, or full online for those who can’t get back to StA. Planning for lab work, which cannot be online
* Planning gradually to increase “in person” teaching; but all such classes will be kept small.
* Student and staff well-being, pastoral support
* Epidemiology, testing capacity (drop in testing centre), PPE
* Exercises to test their response to a local outbreak
* Covid rapid response team, contact tracing and support to recent positive test cases
* External relationships, partnerships, travel
* Community engagement, town-gown relationship
* Communications, in particular with the University’s “Covid Code”
* Student monitors (”Covid Saints”) to encourage students to observe behavioural protocols Mental health is obviously of crucial importance,activities include students asked to look out for each other, societies and sports to be encouraged as much as possible, “Can Do” groups established to facilitate events and develop guidance as to how to hold events safely.
* The Freshers Fair was held online very successfully
* The Sports Fair was held outside successfully – strictly following Gov’t guidelines
* Students may stay in StA over Christmas, so they will need to be catered for and supported in various ways

*Comments and Questions*

AB said that StA communications had been great. Some students have been calling for a refund but teaching has continued online or by dual delivery. This has required considerable work and is not an easy option.

GN asked if the university had a good relationship with the privately operated student halls with regard to good Covid behaviour by students. AM confirmed that the non-academic misconduct policy applied in these halls as well, and after a few misguided parties, and spot fines, there was now good compliance.

GL asked if the Covid tests were being analysed locally or in a Scottish or NHS UK lab – it is NHS UK. Also if the students were being encouraged to install the Protect Scotland app – yes.

ACasked about the impact on the university finances of the increased undergraduate numbers. AM replied that recruitment had been successful, but students could withdraw from their university place until the beginning of December, with no financial cost to themselves. The number of students who would decide to do so was unknown.

Overseas numbers have held up, but as many of them are currently unable to get to StA, or unwilling to travel, we don’t know what they will decide to do. The university also lost substantial amounts of money last year from forgone accommodation fees and commercial income. The financial picture would not clarify until December at the earliest. . See also below under para 9.

**Culture Shift**

WR asked how the University was responding to “St Andrews Survivors” which is an Instagram group for student victims of sexual harassment. AM replied that the University was looking to engage with the “Survivors”. The student group that had been the focus of many of the allegations on this Instagram site was not a society affiliated with the Students Association or recognised by the University. Whilst the stories of the Survivors made harrowing reading, a number of the accounts related to historic incidents or incidents outwith St Andrews. No formal complaints have been made. If they were, they would be investigated under the University policy on sexual harassment, which is updated every year in association with students’ representatives. The University was introducing this semester an anonymous reporting procedure to supplement existing reporting channels.

Also, see below under Paras 8 and 9

1. **Next General Council meeting – November 2020**

The November meeting will not take place in physical form and since the June meeting was cancelled, members expressed the view that some kind of online substitute was necessary, recognising that online may not be a solution for some of the older/less IT-literate regular attendees.

Popular items are: the Principal’s address, the opportunity to ask questions and the guest speaker.

Possible formats for an online meeting were discussed including live vs a broadcast with pre-recorded elements. This would provide an opportunity to increase the attendance figures and trial some aspects of making the event available to the global GC membership. It was agreed that on this occasion Questions would be solicited ahead of the event and a mechanism for answering them in the broadcast or online researched.

The final consensus was for the GC meeting to be broadcast simply as a pre-recorded presentation from the Principal, in robes, at the same time as the physical event would have taken place. The event would then be available to view online at a time convenient to any GC member across the world.

**Action Point:** AM agreed to speak to the Principal about this.

Proposed changes to GC Standing Orders which requires the membership to vote (see the Minutes of the January 2020 BC meeting, Section 5) will, by agreement, be postponed.

**Action Point**: WR and AM to discuss options

1. **Delivering Value**
* **Entrepreneurship**

AC, AB, and WR had compiled a paper with ideas on how we could help the university’s entrepreneurship ambitions (see minutes of the April BC meeting). This went to the university, and has been circulated to BC members. There is a degree of duplication with the university’s own ideas, and the paper sparked a good discussion with Derek Watson and Tom Brown in September.

AB said that in order to be effective, the importance of entrepreneurship needs to pervade all university thinking and communications, should include students, non-academic professional and administrative staff as well as academics and work across disciplines and roles.

It was suggested that the university might consider funding a scholarship, or an annual award, based on entrepreneurialism and that this should be awarded alongside more conventional academic scholarships/awards. This to be funded from the same source, so making the point that entrepreneurialism is embedded in student attributes and outcomes sought. This needs further discussion.

* **Alumni Engagement**

Work is continuing on this theme. Members were keen to understand the breadth of alumni activities currently organised by Development Office (DO), and have further discussions with the DO to identify where we could contribute. A first step would be to invite a representative from the DO to attend a BC meeting and provide an update. It may also be that the enforced use of online resources for the GC meetings may improve alumni relations.

**Action Point:** WR to contact DO

1. **Black Lives Matter**

This is a live issue and “Diverse St Andrews” is already one of the four key strands of the University “Strategy”.

AM summarised university actions in this regard.

* Training on diversity and unconscious bias is already mandatory for all new members of staff and court.
* Written guidance for staff is available now and guidance for students will come soon.
* The university is reaching out to BAME students and staff and establishing “report and support” mechanisms so that the university can learn from their current experiences.
* There is a need for a continuing cultural shift, to include attitudes to cultural diversity, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and staff, and the LGBTIQ+ community.
1. **General Council Assessor’s Report**

JH reported on some of the Court’s main themes over the summer

* Admissions – because of the school exams situation, UStA now has 200-300 more students than usual. The University is keen not to lower standards.
* Diverse StA – Black Lives Matter and StA Survivors, were both major considerations and have needed a lot of work.
* Court visited Walter Bower House (for professional services staff and library archives). The university aims to establish an efficient and positive workplace which will also be conducive to collaborative working. The Innovation and Entrepreneurial workspace looks excellent.
* Court had two “strategy” days. In the Covid era, although “online” works to an extent, it is not so good as the “real StA” experience and that needs further focus. Also, online can cause problems with accessibility (mainly for students at home).
* Finance – the university has taken a huge hit as a result of the pandemic (see the discussion above, section 5) and needs to plan a balance between current necessary expenditure and future needs, which remain uncertain.
1. **VP Governance Report**
* AM noted that StA had come 2nd in the 2021 Guardian university rankings and was in the QS top 100 world rankings
* Research awards are well up
* £26.5M has now been secured for the Eden campus development
* Despite the inhibiting Covid problems, student numbers have held up well, in all sectors, undergraduate, post-graduate, overseas, UK and Scotland. This is a credit to the university’s great reputation at home and abroad.
1. **GC and BC dates**

These have been circulated separately and are, of necessity, provisional.

1. **AOCB**

JH mentioned that the student representatives on Court were concerned about the cost of the red gowns. He was thinking that there must be hundreds of gowns sitting in wardrobes all over the world, that could be brought back into use. He wondered if some kind of “legacy label” could be sewn into these gowns, listing the people who had worn them, and possibly dates or whatever.

**Action Point:** All. Please consider options as to how this might be organised.

AM added that this year Nigel Christie steps down from the Court as General Council Assessor. Alastair wished to thank him profoundly for all the help he has given over the years and for the huge contribution he has made to Court. The Committee endorsed this tribute and wished Nigel well for the future.

WR closed the meeting with thanks to all.