

Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting of the University of Edinburgh General Council held on Thursday 3 October 2013 at 5.15pm in the Reception Room, McEwan Hall

Present

Professor Charles Swainson, Convener of the Business Committee	
Dr Mike Mitchell, Secretary of the General Council	
Ms Morven Brown	Dr Robert Burt
Mr John Clifford	Ms Luise Locke
Dr Elizabeth Morris	Mr Michael Lugton
Professor Stuart Macpherson	Mr Hamish McKenzie
Mr Matthew McPherson	Mr Scott Peter
Professor Ann Smyth	Mr Ian Stevens
Mr Ritchie Walker	

In attendance Mrs Mary Scott, Assistant to the Secretary of the General Council

Welcome

The Convener welcomed the following new members:

Ms Doreen Davidson, new Assessor to Court, in her absence
Mr John Clifford
Mr Scott Peter
Ms Anne Paterson, in her absence
Mr Matt McPherson
Mr Ian Stevens

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Sheriff Principal Edward Bowen, Mr Gordon Cairns, Mr Waverley Cameron, Dr Ian Conn, Ms Doreen Davidson, Dr Frances Dow, Mr Simon Fairclough, Mr Alan Johnston, Ms Kirsty MacGregor, Mr David Munro, Ms Anne Paterson, Dr Bruce Ritson and Mrs Ann Sutherland

2. Minutes of the Meeting of 11 July 2013

The Minutes of the above meeting were approved.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 11 July 2013

There were no matters arising, but the proposal, to refer the issues around allowing members to attend Standing Committees other than their own and the Academic Standing Committee for future consideration by CSC, was welcomed.

4 Report by Dr Ian Conn, Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs

Reluctantly Dr Conn had sent his apologies for this meeting and due to staff shortages he had been unable to send a representative. He had, however, provided a short paper outlining CAM's recent activity, which had been previously circulated and was tabled. He mentioned the following activity:

- **MOOCS** – Following the success of its partnership with US-based Coursera, the University announced the launch of a new UK platform FutureLearn in the summer in partnership with a number of other UK universities. This would allow it to offer more MOOCS (Massive Open

Online Courses). The latest developments around MOOCs had resulted in further positive media coverage.

- **QS World University Rankings** – In September the University appeared in the world’s top 20 in the QS Rankings. C&M had worked with the Principal’s Office and the Office of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Mike Russell MSP, to issue a news release, and facilitated a number of media interviews regarding the news which resulted in a highly successful debate on Wednesday 25 September in the Scottish Parliament.

While there was some concern that Edinburgh had dropped in certain areas in other rankings members recognised that a lot of work was being undertaken in this area, and looked forward to receiving an update from the Principal at the February 2014 Hals-Yearly Meeting.

- **Student Communications Campaign** – C&M had been working closely across the summer with the Vice Principal Learning & Teaching, Sue Rigby, on an integrated communications campaign to assist with the student experience project. The “On The Same Page” campaign aimed to develop dialogue between UoE and its students and ensure that students had the best possible experience at Edinburgh.
- **Film for Development & Alumni** – During the summer the C&M video unit had been working closely with D & A on a series of short films featuring twelve alumni of differing generations and backgrounds. They reflected on their time at Edinburgh and how the University shaped them and continued to shape them. They also talked about how financial support had assisted them and the importance of giving back to support future students.

The Committee welcomed the report.

5. Priorities for Session 2013-2013

The Convener presented Paper 1, the proposed set of priorities for the Business Committee and its Standing Committees, as previously circulated. These proposals had been prepared following meetings of all the BC Conveners, Vice Convener and Secretary, with written input from the Court Assessors and comments arising from meetings with the EUSA Sabbaticals. It was also informed by the University’s Strategic Plan. Priorities proposed were:

Student Experience including Learning & Teaching

1. The Student Experience, looking at
 - progress with the implementation of the many proposed enhancements
 - the actual impact of these changes on both staff and students
2. Learning & Teaching, including
 - the extent to which the University uses innovative learning methods
 - reward systems for staff

Engaging with Communities to support

3. the creation of smaller Communities within the University and linking with the civic community
4. the creation of the Alumni Engagement strategy and supporting enhanced alumni relations; it was essential to begin this engagement while students were still at University.
5. working in Partnership with EUSA

Other Strategic Items were

6. monitoring the progress with the University’s Strategic Plan

7. the implications for the University of changes in Scotland's constitutional arrangements.

Action Points:

- *Follow up progress on the Student Experience and the impact on staff and students - ASC*
- *Monitor improvements to teaching and learning - ASC*
- *At its meeting at 5pm on 21 November 2013 ASC would be meeting with Mr Alan Mackay, Deputy Vice Principal International and International Director, giving members an opportunity to find out what support was provided for students arriving at university for the first time, particularly from overseas. All members would receive an invitation to this meeting.*
- *D&A to continue to involve the BC in its Engagement Strategy - PASC*
- *Work in partnership with the students on engagement with the community – PASC*
- *Monitor implementation of the Strategic Plan – FSSC*
- *Consideration of the impending changes to Scotland's constitutional arrangements and the implications of either outcomes - CSC*
- *The text of Professor Tom Devine's lecture in Berlin in June 2013 had been made available to the Graduates' Association and Mr Ritchie Walker would share this with the committee as an impartial view of these implications*
- *Additional suggestions:*
 - *The impact of increased cultural variations within the student population - ASC*
 - *Variations in fee levels and potential effect on admissions, and changes to funding - FSSC*
 - *Efforts made by the University to get students into employment – D&A and the Careers Services already provided an e-mentoring scheme and it formed an important part of the Engagement Review, so it was decided await the outcome of that research - FSSC*

6. Proposed changes to the publication of *Edit/Billet*

The Secretary explained that due to increasing numbers of graduates and associated postage, the escalating costs of two printed editions of *Edit*, and *Billet* within *Edit*, a year had become unsustainable; the University was therefore looking at options to maintain costs at current levels. The proposal was to continue to publish a printed version of *Edit* in the winter, which would facilitate the circulation of essential election data and to introduce an electronic version in the summer. This was also seen as an opportunity to embrace digital publishing and involve a different readership.

If this proposal was accepted there would be a final printed version of *Billet*, in a stand-alone format, in June 2014 after which members would have to request a printed version of the electronic summer issue. The consequences of this proposal had been considered by PASC electronically, and CSC was currently working on a Motion to put to the February 2014 Half-Yearly Meeting, as this would have to be published in the *Billet* within *Edit*, the deadline for which was fast approaching. Other GCs had already taken this step and on the positive side it would result in an improved annual magazine and enhanced electronic publication.

Members approved this proposal.

Action Point:

- *CSC to finalise drafting the Motion for publication in the winter issue of *Billet**

7. Standing Committees

a) Academic Standing Committee.

The first (Planning) meeting of ASC would take place on Monday 4 November 2013, followed by its first presentation at 4.30pm on Thursday 21 November when there would be a presentation by Mr Alan Mackay of the International Office. This meeting was open to all BC members and it was hoped that as many as possible would attend.

b) Constitutional Standing Committee

There were no meetings of the CSC planned at present, although members were working on the Motion regarding changes to the publication of the *Billet* which was needed to meet the short deadline for copy for *Edit*. A meeting would be set up to begin consideration of the possible implications of the Scottish referendum for the University.

c) Finance & Services Standing Committee.

The Planning meeting would take place on 5 December 2013 and a subsequent meeting had been arranged for January 2014 when the committee would receive a presentation on the Annual Report and Financial Statements to July 2013 from Mr Phil McNaul, Director of Finance.

d) Public Affairs Standing Committee

The first meeting of PASC would take place on 7 November 2013.

8. Final Version of Scottish Code of Higher Education Governance

This document had been circulated to members on 12 August 2013. It was felt to be a good document, not proscriptive, with recommendations being made on a 'comply or explain' basis. The two issues which were most pertinent to the GC were the independence of members of governing bodies; the GC clearly stated that its Assessors were independent members of Court, and the limitation of terms of office, which had recently been dealt with in the revision of terms of office of Assessors.

9. 'What is the University for?' – Joint General Council/EUSA Event

The previous year the University Chaplaincy had organised a series of events on the theme of "What's the University For?" and over the coming year, they were going to be running some more events like this in conjunction with EUSA - broadening out its reach and the conversation it was facilitating. Hugh Murdoch, EUSA President, had asked whether there might be interest in a joint EUSA-General Council event around such a theme, asking graduates in Edinburgh to reflect on the big questions facing the University and Higher Education at the moment. The committee were keen to support this initiative by EUSA. The panel would include a representative from the BC and members would be given further information as and when it became available.

10. Observations by the General Council Assessors

Professor Ann Smyth gave the report from Court. Professor Smyth pointed out that the Court Minutes were freely available on the web and that this item was an opportunity for one of the three GC Assessor to give the committee a little more detail about issues which they might find particularly relevant.

Apart from formal meetings Court business was conducted through working groups and biannual workshops. The following areas were mentioned:

- Court had learned from D&A about its future plans. With the culmination of the successful Campaign in 2012 there was a change of focus towards alumni engagement, links between schools and alumni, encompassing the diversity of relationships and less emphasis on a few large donors.
- Work on governance issues had taken place over the summer to make the University 'compliant' with the new Code, including changes in the post of Chair of Court, membership of committees and transparency.
- Court meetings were held at various venues around the University and benefited from presentations by members of staff.
- The University had become very involved in the various festivals, especially the summer ones, which had provided internships and summer holiday jobs with the Fringe. Court also monitored the use of financial benefits gained from festival activities.
- It was also watching student numbers and inclusion policies, and the uptake of bursaries and retention of students from deprived backgrounds.
- There was concern within the Russell Group about the decline in students from developing countries. Edinburgh was still attracting large numbers, but there was no room for complacency and Court were monitoring the situation.

11. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

These Draft Resolutions had been considered in advance by Dr Bruce Ritson and most were considered to be straightforward. However Draft Resolution 73/2013, which dealt with the New Code of Student Conduct, required more in depth consideration by the committee. Further explanation had been requested from Court Services and this included the following points:

- a. The new Code focused on good conduct and expectations of student behaviour and was not just focus on student discipline. The University viewed the code and discipline procedures as part of a welfare approach: misconduct may be the first indicator of underlying problems and intervention could provide students with an opportunity for reflection and learning.
- b. The misconduct offences were largely unchanged but now took account of protected characteristics under the equalities legislation. New offences of misconduct in research and statutory obligation breaches were included.
- c. The section on Misconduct and the Law had been changed significantly. The police were under no obligation to communicate with the University but the current regulations assumed that the University would know outcomes to external processes, which may not be the case. The new Code gave the University the discretion to take action when appropriate. Lawyers had advised that, as a general guide, the more serious the alleged criminal offence, the less inclined the University should be to seek to prosecute its own disciplinary process whilst the criminal proceedings were pending.
- d. The roles for staff involved in alleged misconduct cases had been clarified. Investigation and discipline roles had been separated. Significant judgements, for example on immediate suspension, were no longer made by a single individual.
- e. The University continued to have the right to immediately suspend students in urgent situations. The process for this had been clarified.

- f. The standard of proof had changed from the criminal to the civil standard, i.e. the balance of probabilities. This was based on advice from lawyers and aligned with the practice in other Universities.
- g. The appeals process had been simplified.
- h. Reporting and recording was mentioned explicitly.

Members approved the New Student Code of Practice, along with the other Draft Resolutions, but requested clarification on the following points:

- How did this Code relate to online bullying, which was notoriously difficult to deal with?
- Would penalties be means-tested?
- Confirmation that EUSA had been involved in the development of the proposed Code and were content with the proposal.

Action Points:

- *The Secretary to write to Dr Katherine Novosel to inform her that the Draft Resolutions had been approved and to raise the three issues above.*

12. General Information and Events

The Convener emphasized the following points from Paper 3 Convener's Information Sheet:

- **Election February 2014** – members were reminded that there would be an election for five members of the Business Committee in February 2014 and to encourage friends and acquaintances to put themselves forward. The majority of candidates come from personal efforts by Committee members. The closing date for nominations was 20 November 2013.
- **June 2014 General Council Meeting and Alumni Events** – A further delay had now been encountered in the confirmation of the actual weekend of these events planned for Montreal next June. The F1 committee would not make a final decision about the date of the Grand Prix until December this year. This was obviously far too late to be included in the Winter issue of *Edit*. Staff in D&A was also under pressure to confirm provisionally booked venues, which would not have been possible. Under the circumstances University staff involved, including the Principal, had been approached by D&A to suggest that the meeting be relocated to Toronto. This had been met very positively and as a result the Principal had written to the President of Toronto University to ask him to host our meeting and lunch next June. The date for the meeting had still to be finalised, but would be confirmed in the next couple of weeks.

13. Any other competent business

There was no other competent business.

14. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 28 November in Room 1.07 in the Main Library, George Square.