**The General Council of the University of Edinburgh**

**Business Committee 2020-21**

**Information for New Business Committee Members**

There are formal Constitutional Arrangements for the working of the University of Edinburgh General Council and its Business Committee. Induction is provided to all newly elected Business Committee members with a printed Induction Pack containing this information.

It may nonetheless be helpful to remind those elected to the Business Committee to know what membership is likely to involve.

The General Council has a statutory right to comment on matters affecting the well-being and prosperity of the University. The Business Committee has a key role in enabling the General Council to be appropriately informed on key contemporary issues to fulfil its governance role.

***Business Committee Meetings***

The Business Committee typically meets 5 times per year, on Thursdays, at 5.15pm. Meetings are held in the central area of the University.

Papers are circulated at least a week in advance. Members are expected to have read the papers to equip them to comment on issues arising at these meetings.

The agenda will cover current issues for the University and oversight of the work of the standing committees as well as functions undertaken on behalf of the General Council. The meetings are formally minuted.

The Business Committee is chaired by an elected Convener and there is a Vice-Convener. Both positions are elected from current or recent Business Committee members according to formal regulations (included in the Induction Pack).

The Business Committee reports its work to the wider General Council through its website, through its publication, *Billet*, and at its statutory half yearly meetings.

***Standing Committees***

The Business Committee has a number of standing committees the remits of which are given in the Induction Pack. Business Committee members are invited to express their preference with regard to the standing committee to which they would like to be assigned. It is not always possible to respect first preferences but every effort is made to match elected members’ experience and expertise to the appropriate committee.

Standing committees typically meet 4 times per year in the late afternoon, usually in the central area of the University.

Elected members will receive papers for the committees of which they are formally a member, electronically, in advance – normally one week ahead of the meeting.

Standing committees typically have an invited speaker from the staff and/or student body at each meeting. It is a matter for the convener to determine whether it is appropriate for these presentations to be open to other Business Committee members. The committee aims to offer speakers engagement as with ‘critical friends‘ of the University. Questions to guest speakers are posed in a constructive manner and where appropriate, members explore whether there is a role in which General Council members could be helpful in the area under discussion.

Standing committee meetings are formally minuted with due regard to the privileged status of the information being shared by invited speakers.

Those attending open events who are not members of the committee in question will not receive meeting papers or minutes and will be expected to leave the event when the invited speaker leaves to allow the committee to continue with its agenda of business. They will be expected to respect confidentiality as required.

Members attending out of interest may ask questions of the speaker in the usual way but should be sensitive to the use of time. The committee may have specific issues on their workplan which they wish to explore with the speaker.

The work of standing committees is reported through the Business Committee and to the wider General Council.

***General Council Half Yearly Meetings***

It is expected that where possible, Business Committee members will attend the statutory General Council Half-Yearly meetings. These take place on Saturdays, one in February and the other in June, in various locations around the University.

By statute the Principal of the University gives his Annual Report and takes questions at the meeting in February. Traditionally this is followed by a reception and lunch to which partners are invited.

In recent years the February meeting has been livestreamed to enable General Council members outwith Edinburgh to engage with the Principal’s report. With members living around the world i.e. in different time zones, the Business Committee is considering whether greater flexibility is required in the timing of this meeting from year to year, to allow greater equity of opportunity globally for real-time online participation.

The format for the June event is more flexible and typically informal. The business element of the meeting is generally combined with an opportunity to engage with some wider aspect of the University’s activities.

Both meetings are an opportunity to engage with General Council members.

***Other events.***

Traditionally the Convener of the Business Committee holds a Christmas party which is an opportunity to engage with members of the University’s wider community.

Members of the General Council Business Committee are invited to attend a range of University events ranging from Freshers’ welcoming, through Church and other ceremonial events, to graduations. Attendance at these events is voluntary.

There are opportunities for those who wish to engage further in supporting various aspects of the University’s work in a voluntary capacity e.g. mentoring students

***Ambassadorial role of Business Committee members***

By being accurately informed on key issues members of the Business Committee can fulfil an important ambassadorial role for the University in their own spheres of influence at a time when the University’s position may not be known or may have been misrepresented or misunderstood.