



**Business Committee Meeting on Thursday 2 May 2024 at 5.15pm
Raeburn Room, Old College**

AGENDA

Tea, coffee and biscuits will be available at 5pm.

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Minutes of the Meeting of 29 February 2024 Paper 1
3. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 29 February 2024
4. Convener Election 2024 – Gordon Cairns was elected as Convener for 2024- 28
5. Presentation from Councillor Cammy Day, Leader of Edinburgh City Council
6.
 - a. Observations by General Council Assessors on Court Meeting on 22 April 2024
 - b. Agenda for Court Meeting on 22 April Paper 2
7. Response from Court to submission by General Council on People and Money Paper 3
8. Draft Resolutions of the University Court Papers 4 and 4a
9. Note of meetings with Chris Cox and James Smith on alumni engagement Paper 5
10. Reports from the Standing Committees Paper 6
 - Finance and Services Standing Committee – 11 April 2024
11. Report from the Secretary of the General Council Paper 7
12. Any other competent business
13. Date of next meeting – Thursday 27 June 2024

Notes on the Agenda

- Notice of any questions under item 11 and of any other matters which Members may wish to raise under item 12 should be given to the Secretary and Convener not less than 24 hours before the meeting.

**Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting held on Thursday 29 February 2024
at 5.15pm, in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

Present

Dr William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council	
Sir Philip Mawer, Convener of the Business Committee	
Mr Gordon Cairns, Vice-Convener of the Business Committee	
Ms Alison MacLeary, Assistant Secretary of the General Council	
Mr Arron Ashton	Ms Kirsty MacGregor (online)
Professor Alice Brown	Professor Francis McManus
Ms Manya Buchan (online)	Dr Bruce Nelson
Lady Joyce Caplan	Professor Graeme Reid
Mr John Clifford	Mr Devin Scobie
Ms Ann Cormack	Ms Krystyna Szumelukowa
Ms Candice Donnelly	The Hon. Sarah Wolffe KC
Dr Frances Dow	
Ms Elisabeth Feldstein (online)	
Dr Mary Gunn	
Professor Stephen Hillier	

In Attendance Mr Simon Fanshawe, Incoming Rector of the University

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the first meeting of Semester 2.

Apologies - Douglas Alexander, Almira Delibegovic-Broome, Alistair Dunlop, Jock Millican and Brian Smith.

2. a. Minutes of the Meeting of 7 December 2023

The minutes were approved.

b. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 7 December 2023

- Item 3 – The Secretary and Convener will meet with Chris Cox and Rebecca Jones (D & A), and VP International Prof. James Smith on 21 March;
- Item 4.4 – Christina Boswell will speak to the BC meeting on 10 October 2024;
- Item 7 – The Secretary has not been given a definitive figure re how many continuing students were affected by the Marking and Assessment Boycott but expected that the number would be higher than anticipated;
- Professor Colm Harmon, VP Students, will speak to ASC in more detail about this topic at its meeting on 28 May.

3. a. Minutes of the extra-ordinary Meeting of 22 January 2024

The minutes were approved.

b. Matters arising from the Minutes of 22 January 2024

Item 2 – A substantive response from Court to the Business Committee’s comments on PA Consulting’s External Review on People and Money is expected after the Court meeting on 22 April. The Principal had spoken to this issue at the recent GC HYM on 17 February, which indicates its ongoing importance.

4. Observations by General Council Assessors

- The Convener gave a report on the open items from the Court meeting on 26 February, a note of which had been provided by Jock Millican who had attended the meeting.
- A demonstration organised by members of EUSA had greeted Court members as they made their way into the meeting (see Paper 10). The morning seminar was about progress being made with the Curriculum Transformation project, building on best practice already established within parts of the University and which is being rolled out more widely and consistently;
- Principal's Report
 - Highlighted the current pressure on finances across the university sector and made mention of the recent UUK report. Edinburgh is better placed to cope than most other universities;
 - People and Money had been addressed in various University communications and Town Hall staff meetings and the Principal had updated on various priorities for action arising from the external review. The Convener added that the letter sent to Court from the General Council Business Committee re lessons learned from the PA Consulting report will be presented to the 22 April Court meeting, along with a response from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and a response will be received from Court thereafter.
 - A positive report from Development and Alumni including a £14.25m donation received for the Engineered Genetic Control Systems for Advanced Therapeutics Hub;
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI) remains a key area of substantial investment;
- Student Experience
 - There has been a concerted effort by SLT to deal with the issue of assessment and feedback. Heads of Schools have agreed a three-week turnaround to be implemented across all Schools and Colleges with data collection and spot checks to escalate this requirement when required;
 - An evaluation of the Student Support model has begun and, while reviews have been positive, there are areas for improvement. These are being developed by Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary, Students and will be rolled out across the University;
- EUSA letter to Court on Student Experience Concerns
 - The Convener drew particular attention to Paper 10, previously circulated, which was a letter from EUSA sent to the University Court, to highlight students' dissatisfaction with three key issues which are negatively impacting on student experience at Edinburgh; viz. the student housing crisis; the impact on students of the wider cost of living crisis; and gender-based violence on campus.
 - In relation to concerns about how gender-based violence incidents on campus were being handled, it was recalled that the Business Committee had previously recommended to Court there should be a comprehensive review of the Code of Student Conduct;
 - It was noted that the EUSA letter referred to a proposed 8% rent increase in 2024-25 for student accommodation and the appropriateness of this was queried;

ACTION – it was agreed to write to EUSA President explaining how the Business Committee and Standing Committee work programmes related to the issues of concern raised in the EUSA letter
- Ordinance 186
 - The Committee was pleased to hear that the proposed changes to Ordinance 186 about membership of the General Council had been approved by Court and these will now proceed to the next stage in seeking Privy Council approval;
 - The Secretary took the opportunity to thank The Hon. Sarah Wolffe KC for her support in co-authoring the paper sent to Court;
- Rector

At her final Court meeting, Debora Kayembe was warmly thanked for her contribution as Rector.

5. Reports from the Standing Committees

a. Academic Standing Committee

- SH reported on the meeting on 23 January with Professor Michael Rovatsos, School of Informatics, who spoke on the theme of AI;
- Highlighted that the University is internationally respected in this field and it is important to maintain this perception and to work with issues which are continually developing;
- There has been an exponential explosion of data/applications of AI and the ethical and social issues raised by it are not adequately explored at this time;
- The University is aware that it needs to provide greater guidance to staff and students around the governance/controls when using new applications of this technology;
- The Convener reminded the committee that this theme will be explored at the HYM on 15 June 2024.

b. Finance and Services Standing Committee

- In the absence of the FSSC Convener, PM referred to Paper 4, which was the minutes from the meeting on 30 January with the Director of Finance;
- The Principal had covered the University's Annual Report and Accounts to July 2023 during his presentation to the GC HYM on 17 February.

c. International Standing Committee

- KS reported on the meeting of 18 January (Paper 5) which was a closed meeting to review progress on the University's draft Global Strategy;
- Further consideration of the key issues from this meeting will be followed up with Chris Cox and James Smith on 21 March;
- Dr Rebecca Jones, Director of Alumni Relations, will also attend this meeting and was praised for her constructive, proactive and encouraging work to date;
- Highlighted Edinburgh Global initiatives such as the "Education Beyond Borders" scheme, supporting students and staff dealing with the consequences of displacement;
- Representatives from the Brussels Alumni Club, Gabriel Goldberg and Victor Loewenstein, had attended the recent February HYM and had persuaded the Principal to travel to Brussels to engage with their work across Europe;
- The final meeting of ISC in May will focus on developments in South East Asia.

d. Public Affairs Standing Committee

- CD spoke about the PASC meeting on 5 February with Chris Bruce, Managing Director of the Lane Agency, which had focused on General Council communications, in particular improvements to the format of Billet and ambitions for a new digital concept, which will need to be supported by the University.

Discussion

- AC raised the security implications surrounding the Exascale supercomputer which is to be hosted in Edinburgh;

- The Convener reminded the committee that the Principal is the lead member on the Russell Group Board for national and international security issues in higher education and, given the University follows elaborate risk assessment procedures within its own Audit and Risk Committee, is reasonably confident that appropriate arrangements to safeguard security concerns will be made;
- Acknowledged the significance of the point made by AC and will keep a watching brief on this issue;
- BN reported that issues of cybersecurity are currently being addressed by the SLT.

6. Process and timetable for election of Convener and Vice-Convener: Role and responsibilities of Convener

- Paper 7, circulated for information, outlined the process and timetable for the elections which had been approved at the BC meeting on 12 October;
- Paper 7a, contained some reflections from PM, WD and Ann Smyth, former Secretary of the GC, on the role and responsibilities of the Convener and is intended to be indicative and not prescriptive.

7. Comments and Reflections on February 2024 Half-Yearly Meeting

- The annual February HYM is an important and helpful opportunity for the Principal to convey to the GC membership any key messaging from the SLT;
- The committee agreed with an observation by the Secretary that basement rooms in McEwan Hall were not ideal for the HYM meeting and if the facilities in Edinburgh Futures Institute were more suitable these could be used for future meetings;
- It was not possible to provide livestream data because of the move to G4 analytics, which is not currently supported by the University;
- Gabriel Goldberg from the Brussels alumni group circulated a blog of his experience of the HYM to his networks via social media;
- It was agreed that allocating BC hosts to tables during lunch in the Playfair had worked well;
- The Convener thanked the after-lunch Speaker, Douglas Alexander, and Gordon Cairns who gave the Vote of Thanks, for their stimulating contributions which ended the meeting on a high note;
- The GC office was congratulated the excellent arrangements for an enjoyable event
- Members of the committee were encouraged to provide any other feedback to the Secretary.

8. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

Steve Hillier, Convener of ASC, had spoken to the following resolutions at the meeting of ASC on 23 January and which are being reported here for information. No further resolutions had been received.

Draft Resolutions: No. 1-2/2024

These had been received after the BC meeting on 7 December and were considered by the BC electronically. A letter had been sent to Court on 19 February approving these resolutions.

9. Report from the Secretary of the General Council

- Paper 8, previously circulated, was for information;
- WD drew attention to Paper 8a and asked members to note the dates of forthcoming Business Committee meetings in 2024/25 and 2025/26; these were agreed

ACTION – Secretary to notify newly elected members of the dates of future meetings

- The Committee recorded its thanks to Dr Lewis Allan, Senior Governance Adviser to the Vice-Principal and University Secretary, and The Hon. Sarah Wolffe KC, for their input into the report to Court with proposed changes to Ordinance 186.

10. Meeting Simon Fanshawe – next Rector

- Paper 9, previously circulated, was a copy of Simon Fanshawe’s election manifesto;
- The Convener extended a warm welcome to the new Rector and led the introductions;
- The Rector iterated that, in his role as Chair of Court proceedings, he will spend time listening and gaining an understanding of the large and multi-faceted institution that is Edinburgh University;
- A central priority will be helping the University to open up the space for academics to express their views, using respectful dialogue to exchange ideas, and he will work with Court and the SLT to re-emphasise the importance of universities as a forum for international debate;
- The Rector has the power to convene discussions across the University, to allow staff and students to be able to speak their mind and express their views while listening respectfully to others;
- The General Council Business Committee can help to reinforce this key purpose and feedback to its own networks;
- The Rector’s freelance background will allow him to assume various Court commitments and to pace his workload effectively.

The Convener thanked the new Rector and, on behalf of the Committee, wished him well in his role.

11. Any other competent business

There was no other competent business.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would take place at 5.15pm on Thursday, 2 May 2024 in the Raeburn Room. Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member of the University Court, is expected to attend.



University Court
Institute for Regeneration and Repair, Edinburgh BioQuarter,
4-5 Little France Drive, Edinburgh
Monday, 22 April 2024

AGENDA

[Version for General Council Business Committee,
indicating whether papers are open or closed]

OPENING ITEMS

- 1 Minutes [Open version of minutes to be published in due course]**
To approve
 - the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2024 **A1**
 - the note of the Court seminar held on 26 February 2024 **A2**
- 2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log [CLOSED]** **A3**
To raise any matters arising and review the Action Log
- 3 Principal's Report [OPEN]** **B**
To note a report from Peter Mathieson, Principal
- 4 Committee Business**
 - Senior Lay Member's Overview **Verbal**
 - Policy & Resources Committee [CLOSED] **C1**
 - Audit & Risk Committee [CLOSED] **C2**
 - Knowledge Strategy Committee [CLOSED] **C3**
 - Senate (Senatus Academicus) **Verbal**

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

- 5 Student Experience [OPEN]** **D**
To consider a paper presented by Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students
- 6 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports**
To consider the reports presented by Sharan Atwal, Students' Association President
 - **Students' Association Report [OPEN]** **E1**
 - **Sports Union Report [OPEN]** **E2**
- 7 Finance**
 - **Director of Finance's Report [CLOSED]** **F1**
To consider a paper presented by Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
 - **Planning Round [CLOSED]** **F2**
To consider a paper presented by Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary, Governance and Strategic Planning
- 8 People & Money Systems and Roadmap Update [CLOSED]** **G**
To consider a paper presented by Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services and approve the proposed response to the General Council

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| 9 | Annual People Report [Deferred to the next meeting]
To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by James Saville, Director of HR | H |
| 10 | Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Data Report 2024 [CLOSED; final version to be published shortly]
To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion | I |
| 11 | Performance Measures to Support Strategy 2030: 2023-24 Mid-Year Report [CLOSED]
To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary, Governance and Strategic Planning | J |
| 12 | Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity [CLOSED]
To <u>note</u> a paper presented by Chris Cox, Vice-Principal Philanthropy and Advancement | K |
| 13 | Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) [CLOSED]
To <u>approve</u> the requested funding and delegation of authority | L |
| 14 | Managing Security Related Risks in Internationalisation: Annual Update [CLOSED]
To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Alan Mackay, Vice-Principal International | M |

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

- | | | |
|-----------|--|----------|
| 15 | Strategic Risk Report [CLOSED]
To <u>approve</u> | N |
| 16 | Professional Services Members of Senate Election Regulations [OPEN]
To <u>approve</u> | O |
| 17 | Edinburgh BioQuarter [CLOSED]
To <u>note</u> | P |
| 18 | Draft Resolutions: Degree Programme Regulations [OPEN]
To <u>review</u> and <u>refer</u> to Senate and the General Council | Q |
| 19 | Any Other Business
To <u>consider</u> any other matters | |
| 20 | Date of Next Meeting
Monday 17 June 2024, 14.00-17.00 | |

Response to Business Committee of the General Council Letter 'Suggested Issues for consideration by the University Court and Senior Leadership Team'

The University Senior Leadership Team is grateful for the letter received from the Business Committee of the General Council on learning the lessons from People and Money. The letter contained six clusters of suggested issues for consideration by the University Court and the Senior Leadership Team.

This document sets out the management response under the six headings in the letter (with the questions from the letter quoted in blue text) and any response from Court, where relevant, in italics.

- 1) **Governance by Court** - the PA Consulting report stresses several times that Court and its sub-committees were “involved in all key budgetary and programme approvals/decisions throughout the People and Money Programme, albeit at a level removed from the detail behind these decisions.” Whilst it is clear from the report that there were deficiencies below the level of Court in project governance and decision making, it would be helpful in trying to rebuild staff and external stakeholder trust and confidence to know:
 - a. whether Court will be issuing its own response to the PA Report?
 - b. How will the lessons learned from experience to date be implemented in relation to Court’s oversight of the “substantial outstanding and ongoing work” the PA Consulting report says still needs to be done to make People and Money deliver the benefits that were expected of it?
 - c. how will the lessons learned from People and Money affect the way Court exercises oversight of other major change management programmes, either already underway or in prospect?
 - a. *Court response: In December 2022 Court commissioned an External Review of the People and Money programme to help inform future decision-making and oversight of major change projects. The PA External Review of People and Money was then presented and discussed in detail in a special session for Court members on 4 December 2023 as well as being formally considered at the scheduled Court meeting held on the same day. Court agreed that the report produced by the independent consultants should be published in full. Court also noted that the Senior Leadership Team has given a commitment to implement all of the report’s recommendations and agreed that this commitment should be communicated publicly, with details of implementation to be released in due course.*

Court welcomed the PA report and is responding in 3 ways:

 - *publication of the full report;*
 - *taking oversight of the commitment received from Senior Leadership to implement the recommendations; and*
 - *ongoing review of progress with addressing the recommendations, via relevant committees.*
 - b. University management have set out the roadmap of work that requires to be undertaken to deliver the next phase of work relating to our Finance and HR

processes underpinned by the People and Money system. The lessons learned from the PA External Review in relation to People and Money have been considered as part of the development and planning of the work. A refreshed governance model has been implemented as part of the roadmap which includes the establishment of 'The Finance & HR Process and System Implementation Board' (the Implementation Board) which, amongst other things, will have responsibility for the delivery of the Roadmap and monitoring the implementation of the lessons learned for the PA External Review which were directly related to People and Money, as well as taking into account the broader recommendations.

The Implementation Board reports into the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB), which, in turn, reports into University Executive. University management has established this new governance structure to provide oversight of major change initiatives, their interactions and dependencies and the institutional capacity for their successful delivery. As well as the wider responsibilities set out in its Terms of Reference and described later in this letter, the UIPB also has oversight of the implementation of all the recommendations accepted by management from the PA External Review.

Recognising that People and Money will continue to be a topic of interest to Policy and Resources Committee and Court, escalations would come through the UIPB to University Executive with material items reported to Court via the more appropriate of Policy & Resources Committee or Audit and Risk Committee, depending on the item.

- c. As set out above, University management have established the new governance structure to provide oversight of major change initiatives and escalations would come through the UIPB to University Executive and then material items reporting to Court via the more appropriate of Policy & Resources Committee or Audit and Risk Committee depending on the item.

- 2) **Rebuilding Confidence and Trust** - the extent of distrust and the adverse human impact of the flawed implementation of People and Money confirmed by the PA Consulting report is a major challenge to the collective leadership of the University - Court, Senate, the Senior Leadership Team (led by the Principal), and General Council. Sustained efforts by all parties will be needed if this challenge is to be overcome successfully. We welcome the steps already announced by the Principal and Senior Leadership Team to foster greater visibility and transparency and look forward to seeing positive impact from those actions.

We hope that Court will also espouse and contribute to promoting this effort. The Business Committee is fortunate to have three fully engaged Assessors on the Court and we are most grateful for their oral reports to each Business Committee, although their reports are restricted to open items only, whereas reports to Court on People and Money and other major change projects have been closed agenda items.

While we understand that some matters must remain confidential, we do not believe the high level of confidentiality surrounding many reports presented to Court and the long delays which have been experienced before the minutes or papers appear on the University website are conducive to rebuilding trust and confidence.

This leads us to ask if Court will require and monitor the impact of a full programme of regular engagement at all levels and publish regular feedback on progress in rebuilding confidence and trust throughout the University?

Court response: Court benefits greatly from the independent perspective provided by the three General Council Assessors and, as with all positions on the Court with a stakeholder link, they receive full access to commercially sensitive papers on the basis that they respect the confidentiality of the material and of the discussions at Court and bear this in mind when providing any updates outside of the Court membership. The Court secretariat believes that we publish more information on Court business than any peer institution in the UK, including publishing the full report of the external review. As with any similar organisation, this does not extend to commercially sensitive matters. There has been a small backlog in publishing Court minutes, agendas and open papers and this is being prioritised by the Court secretariat. Court and its relevant committees will continue to be updated on the People and Money System as appropriate via the escalation process set out above and its discussions minuted and published in due course.

On the programme of engagement, members of the Senior Leadership Team have embarked on a series of in-person and virtual open meetings around the University campuses, which have been well received. These will continue.

- 3) **Further work required to make People and Money fit for purpose** – We note that the PA report does not address the key issue of whether the Oracle system used for People and Money was suitable for a highly devolved institution like Edinburgh University. The Report says there have been other reviews and feedback exercises during the project which have been provided to Court. Did these address this issue of suitability?

Given the present situation and the insights that the PA Consulting Report has provided, does Court itself intend to seek further external independent advice to assist its ongoing governance of the remaining stages of the People and Money project?

Regarding the next phase of work on People and Money, we look forward to seeing the roadmap referred to in the PA report and which the Senior Leadership Team in its response said would be available in February. Relevant to the development of this, we hope this will clarify:

- a. What the scope and the strategy for the next phase of work will be. (For example, will the primary focus continue to be on system implementation or will the focus revert to the original aim of organisational transformation?)
- b. Based on the outcome of a) above, what further modifications or systems changes still need to be made?
- c. How long will these take? Clear timescales and outputs by which to chart the progress being made will greatly help to restore confidence.

- d. How much additional expenditure is likely to be involved before the system will fully deliver what is required of it?
- e. The PA Report recommends undertaking the next phase with a suitably qualified external partner. We note the reference to an 'external adviser' in the Senior Leadership Team's response to the report and would welcome clarification of who this is and the extent of their role.

The PA report does make reference to reviews and feedback exercises that were undertaken during the lifecycle of the People and Money Programme – including two external advisor reviews, audit and gateway review activity. These have not addressed the issues of suitability as set out in this letter – i.e., whether the Oracle system is suitable for a highly devolved institution like Edinburgh University. However, these reviews have not suggested that it is a critical issue for management to consider and we are aware that the Oracle system(s) operate in universities and in thousands of different organisations across the world. To summarise the two reviews referred to:

- In September/October 2021 the Principal asked Professor Anthony Finkelstein (current Vice-Chancellor at City University, an academic specialist in system change of this order and author of an instructive and hard-hitting review of systems implementation at the University of Cambridge) to provide insights which were incorporated into planning at that stage, and in addition reviewed relevant documentation and provided an initial review providing further focussed advice to the Senior Responsible Officer and the rest of the Senior Leadership Team. This advice was also shared with the Enactment Group at the time.
- In February/March 2023 the Principal asked Robert Fraser (former Director of Finance at two Russell Group Universities as well as industry experience relevant to systems implementation) to provide insights which were relevant to the post implementation work. 12 recommendations were received in April 2023 and presented at University Court that month. 7 of the recommendations related directly to People and Money and work we needed to undertake, with others set out as broader recommendations the University Senior Leadership should consider.

It is intended that an external member will be appointed to the University Initiatives Portfolio Board, which will give external input into all change initiatives under the Board, including People and Money.

In answer to the questions in this section:

- a. The Finance and HR process document - which was presented to University Executive in February 2024, Policy & Resources Committee in March 2024 and Court in April 2024 - sets out the roadmap for our key Finance, Procurement, Payroll and HR processes and a prioritised set of activities that need to be undertaken to deliver these: the approach to engagement, training and support; reporting; outcomes from impact assessments; governance; risks; issues and assumptions; and forecast/estimated resourcing requirements.

The Senior Leadership Team welcomed and accepted the recommendations arising from the People and Money external review conducted by PA Consulting and shared this with colleagues through an all-staff communication on 7 December 2023.

As well as the broader recommendations on future change programmes, the report set out specific recommendations for People and Money, which are reflected in the roadmap. The headings in the report covered: addressing the division felt within the University and building trust; placing greater focus and emphasis on change management; validating organisational and process design and embedding new ways of working; outlining a clear strategy and approach; presenting a single integrated roadmap and plan to co-ordinate and prioritise; scoping well and securing sufficient funding establishing clear and effective governance; system integration, data and reporting.

The focus of the roadmap, and the governance model, starts with the end-to-end business process, engagement and support, rather than the system itself, with the intention of fully embedding the processes and organisational design. This is important, given the focus of your letter on the Oracle system. We have taken this approach because our key processes are in different states of maturity and the actions set out in the roadmap will reflect that not all actions require systems work. This focus aligns with one of our Strategic Performance Indicators and our intention as set out in Strategy 2030 'to have more user-friendly processes and efficient systems to support our work'.

The roadmap is broken down into several key areas:

- A shared view of standard practice understood within and across our business units;
 - Continued improvement of finance processes underpinning our research grants/projects;
 - Improve processes and use of system across key financial planning and operational areas;
 - Ongoing enhancements to our processes for making payments to stakeholders (through purchase to pay and/or non-trade processes);
 - Continuous improvement that improves our overall financial controls and smaller scale enhancements and integrations and capacity;
 - Additional capacity to support continuous improvement in our HR processes; and,
 - Financial approvals.
- b. As set out above the focus of the roadmap starts with the end-to-end process, rather than the system itself. There are several areas where we are planning for system modification and changes to be undertake. A few of these have been highlighted below:
- One of our priorities to enhance the support for our research finance processes is to start and deliver a project which will enhance the Research

Salary Management processes. This project will involve system changes to help integrate the payroll and the project areas of the system.

- We will make changes to the way that we distribute General Ledger reports to colleagues outside Finance. This change may require some system modifications and changes.
 - We will implement system workflows and approvals for four processes in accounts payable and two in accounts receivable.
 - There will be a series of smaller technical changes to support improvements to our business processes as identified through our work.
 - There is one final area which relates to work the University may decide to undertake which would effect changes to the financial approval structure within the system. This would be a complex change and, consequently, a three-step approach has been recommended: step 1 being an organisational design proof of concept to test whether the proposed changes can be applied in a consistent way across the organisation before any decision to move onto step 2: a system/technical proof of concept before any decision to move onto step 3: a full rollout.
- c. The scope of the work, the inter-dependencies, the system underpinning the processes, and the structure of the University mean that this remains a complex and challenging set of deliverables to resource, plan and incorporate into a roadmap.

The PA review has made several recommendations relating to improved planning, prioritisation and co-ordination; that sufficient resourcing should not be underestimated and needs to be planned in plenty of time, from both internal and external perspectives; and scope and security or resource. The lessons learned are being implemented and that will mean ongoing improvement in the estimation and forecasting of the individual elements in addition to the appropriate project/programme controls being implemented through the new Implementation Board and the Universities Initiatives Portfolio Board.

We have set a planning horizon of two years and the financial estimates align with this, recognising that some of our work will be effective in a shorter time – this will emerge as we break this down into specific area of focus and the specific deliverable project/work that needs to be undertaken.

- d. The anticipated costs have been reflected in planning round submissions.
- e. We understand the recommendation in the PA report sets out that ‘greater external support from a transformation partner should be considered for the most significant change programmes (where appropriate)’ rather than setting out that we should specifically engage with external support for the next phase of work of the roadmap. We will continue to need technical support from an implementation partner for specific targeted work which involves system enhancement, and we will look externally in some areas where we are unable to deliver the required capacity to undertake work.

The 'external advisor' referred to in the Senior Leadership Team's response was Robert Fraser (covered above).

- 4) **Strategy and Planning** – Looking ahead, how does Court now plan to regulate the number of major change projects which are undertaken at any one time and the interaction between them? This is particularly important in a complex and highly diversified organisation like Edinburgh University.

In relation to approved priority projects, the PA Report indicated that the following are crucial to their successful delivery:

- sufficient, realistic resourcing from inception to final delivery.
- careful planning with realistic timetabling of key milestones.
- user-focused communication to ensure understanding and buy-in to projects through emphasis on end-user benefits, not just greater central management control.
- clear mechanisms for staff feedback and constructive comment to be taken into account as the project specification is developed.
- respectful, timely and sufficient training and support for staff prior to, during and post implementation.
- realistic and timely reporting to Court of programme progress, issues and risk management.

What actions is Court taking to ensure that these requirements are met in future?

The Senior Leadership Team welcomed and accepted the recommendations arising from the PA External Review of People and Money. The recommendations and subsequent management actions will be aligned to and the delivery monitored through the University Initiatives Portfolio Board.

- 5) **University Initiatives Programme Board.** Like many others, we are keen to know more about how this new Board (referred to in the Senior Leadership Team's response to the PA report) will operate. For example:

- What are its terms of reference?
- Who will determine the membership - will this be purely internal or include independent members? Will the relevant skill sets for managing change and programme implementation be part of the process for determining its membership?
- What will be its reporting arrangements?
- How will Court exercise governance and ensure the Board's transparency?

The University Initiatives Portfolio Board has now been established and the Terms of Reference and membership are published [here](#). The UIPB reports into the University Executive. Financial approval and governance oversight remains with the Policy and Resources Committee, Knowledge Strategy Committee, Estates Committee and University Court as per the Delegated Authority Schedule and Terms of References of these committees as appropriate.

The Terms of Reference set out that the UIPB is responsible for making recommendations to the University Executive which will support Executive in making decisions which progress the delivery of initiatives to enable the realisation of strategic objectives. The UIPB will provide collective oversight of approved programmes/projects and the pipeline of new initiatives, with a focus on prioritisation, monitoring, and evaluation of the portfolio. It will:

- Make recommendations regarding the prioritisation and sequencing of University Initiatives programmes/project milestones and deliverables;
- Consider organisational capacity – in terms of expertise and level of resource – to engage with and embed an initiative as a critical factor of success;
- Provide a critical forum for two-way dialogue between the individual programme/project sponsor and those responsible for considering wider university position, provide improved visibility of priorities leading to a better understanding of what we are doing and why.

The criteria applying to programmes and projects to be included in the UIPB portfolio are contained within the Terms of Reference. The programme currently included in the Portfolio are: Curriculum Transformation, Growing Research Together, People and Money Roadmap 2024-26; and Student Support.

The UIPB has met three times now: in January 2024 a welcome and induction meeting was held, during which the Chair expressed sincere appreciation and gratitude to the members for their enthusiasm and commitment to joining UIPB and the positive response from members to promoting future change. In addition, the UIPB: endorsed the Terms of Reference and agreed it would be useful to review these after a six month period to provide an opportunity to reflect on the first period for business; spent time discussing some of the key background material including the work undertaken during an internal review of strategic change and continuous improvement and the PA External review of People and Money and the relevant recommendations; and provided space for programme sponsors to introduce the programmes/projects in scope and to set out what they are seeking to achieve, why, whom this is going to impact, how they expect the work to be achieved, and by when.

Through the review of strategic change and continuous improvement there was agreement that we should adopt the globally recognised PROSCI approach for change management. The UIPB Board held a facilitated session on PROSCI on 22 February 2024 and this will be rolled out across the other programme and project board and the programme and project teams.

The March 2024 meeting represented the first standard meeting of business for the UIPB. To support this, a standard data reporting pack was developed to drive consistency across all programmes/projects. The data pack will mature over time to support a holistic approach – including the technical elements of change (policy, process, systems, structures etc), as well as the critical people and leadership elements.

The membership has been established following discussion at the University Executive and subsequent engagement with the Senior Leadership Team and we have a wide range

of skills and experience on the UIPB which includes relevant skills for managing change and programme implementation. We do have room on the UIPB for an external change specialist to be appointed and that action remains outstanding as we consider the most effective way to establish this.

- 6) **Communications and Engagement** - we welcome the Senior Leadership Team's recognition in its response to the PA report that the development of an integrated communication and engagement plan as part of a clear road map for the remaining phases of the implementation of People and Money is essential. We are concerned that both internal and external communications should be covered by this engagement plan.

The negative internal and external impact of the implementation of People and Money has generated adverse publicity outside as well as inside the University. The University's external communications can unfortunately often appear defensive and reactive. A proactive stance will be necessary if the damage done to the University's reputation is to be repaired.

General Council alumni in particular are a key part of the University's external stakeholders – almost 10% of the population of Edinburgh, for example, are General Council members. What measures will be taken to inform – including helping the General Council office to inform - General Council members and others of developments, so that they do not rely solely for information on negative stories in the media and social media?

Internally, as the Senior Leadership Team has acknowledged, there needs to be increased emphasis on greater openness, more explanation and more evident listening and responding to feedback. Visibility of, and accessibility to, the University's Senior Leadership will be vital in this process. How does Court intend to monitor the progress of (and, no doubt, the further challenges that) this process of greater engagement will reveal?

A comprehensive approach and plan are being developed for the HR and Finance plan, in line with the new approach to change and communications which has been established as part of the review of strategic change and continuous improvement.

The initial focus will be on communication of the work that has already been approved as well as the focus on the areas set out in the rest of the roadmap. Where we have timelines, and as other timelines are confirmed, we will communicate these. Ongoing communications will be part of the engagement, support and training delivered through the roadmap activity and the new governance groups have a particular responsibility in this area. The tactical communications we set out will include plans for direct engagement sessions and we will be clear in our messaging how we will keep people updated as decisions on the roadmap are made and the subsequent work delivered.

The communications plan will combine largely targeted messages to impacted staff with broader messages aimed at providing reassurance and building trust. It will demonstrate how we are embedding the recommendations from the People and Money External Review and the work from our internal review of strategic change and continuous

improvement. Managing expectations will be a key part of the messaging, as we seek to avoid promising something we later cannot deliver.

The communications plan will set out audience groups, key messages, recommended tactics and evaluation. An ongoing timeline on communications will be developed to ensure the correct messaging is being delivered at the right time, which will support a coordinated plan of engagement to ensure that we provide opportunities to listen to staff, give updated on progress, and make changes based on feedback.

Court response: Court will continue to review updates from management on the People and Money System and other strategic change projects as escalated through the process described above, including the communication of these, with close reference to findings of the external review.

Note of meetings with VP (Philanthropy and Advancement) **Chris Cox**; VP (International) **James Smith** and **Rebecca Jones** (Director of Alumni Relations, D&A)

- 1) In **Chris Cox's (CC) presentation to the Business Committee on 12 October 2023**, he described the General Council as one of the strengths of Edinburgh University, providing as it does evidence that alumni are integral to the University's local and global community and have a voice in present and future decisions. The increasingly international character of the alumni community poses challenges for both the General Council (GC) and D&A in relating effectively to alumni abroad as well as at home. Following this presentation and after discussion with the Convener (PM), William Duncan (WD) wrote to CC seeking to open a dialogue about how D&A and the GC could work better together to their mutual advantage in addressing this challenge, while avoiding trespassing on each other's responsibilities.
- 2) **An initial meeting between WD, PM and CC took place on 23 November 2023**, at which the question of GC links with alumni clubs abroad was also identified as requiring further consideration. This followed discussion at **the International Standing Committee on 16 November with VP James Smith** about the role of alumni and the current review of the University's Global Strategy. It was agreed to discuss these matters more fully when James Smith and Rebecca Jones (RJ, whose responsibilities in D&A include relations with alumni) could also be present.
- 3) This **wider meeting took place on 21 March 2024**. In preparation for it, WD wrote to CC summarising the specific issues to be discussed as including:
 - a) the nature and frequency of the GC's communications with its members.
 - b) how the GC might, in partnership with D&A (and to the extent appropriate, Edinburgh Global), engage more effectively with alumni clubs at home and abroad.
 - c) how best the GC might continue to contribute to the current review of Global Strategy and, assuming that the outcome of this referred to the potential role of alumni in helping to forward the implementation of the review, how the GC might assist in this.
- 4) The meeting on 21 March underlined the extent to which the changing shape of the alumni body presents both a challenge and an opportunity. In addressing this, all those present agreed that there was scope for greater working together, provided each party took care to stick to their respective roles and avoided trespassing on each other's responsibilities. From the perspective of the GC, PM and WD said that the aim would be to maximise effective communication and engagement with alumni at home and abroad, in order to help deliver the GC's non-executive role in the University's governance as effectively as possible in a rapidly changing world. A better informed, more involved GC membership could also strengthen the University by providing it with influential ambassadors able to help deliver its global goals and thereby ensure its continued wellbeing.
- 5) They suggested that, at a practical level, achieving this would require the GC to:
 - a) have more frequent opportunities than at present to make digital contact with its members, for example by sending them reminders shortly before Half Yearly Meetings (HYMs) to

encourage viewing on line, or flagging up when important information about GC business is put on the website; the need to keep these messages brief and avoiding over-communicating with members was fully recognised.

- b) continue the current updating of its statutory twice-yearly publication of *Billet*.
 - c) secure the help of D&A in promoting, through its normal channels of communication with alumni, greater participation in occasional GC events - such as the upcoming Summer Meeting on AI, interest in which was high – and in developing links with alumni clubs both in the UK and abroad, through for example attendance at Club meetings by Convener(s) or GC Secretary when they were in the locality for other reasons. WD said that the GC's aim was to encourage far greater online participation, especially by overseas alumni, in the live-streamed HYMs, through a combination of communication with alumni clubs done through RJ's team and by slightly more frequent GC scheduled bulk emails to individual alumni.
 - d) carefully monitor the resource implications for D&A and the GC office of a more active engagement programme and discuss their implications with D&A as these began to clarify.
- 6) In the course of discussion, the following points were made:
- a) The culture of individual alumni clubs varied considerably. It would be wrong to see them as being of a uniform pattern. That said, D&A could see advantage in encouraging members of clubs to meet to view GC Half Yearly Meetings (HYMs) online together and, to the extent possible, to participate actively in them.
 - b) D&A were seeking to increase the number of events and opportunities for alumni in and around Edinburgh to engage with the University and were working on the publication of a regular emailed communication to alumni listing such Events and Opportunities. The first edition of this was expected to appear around Easter. Information about the Summer 2024 HYM could be included in this.
ACTION – RJ and WD to follow up. [This has been done and emails sent out on 29 March referred to the Summer HYM.]
 - c) Given the GC's wish for a modest increase in the number of its emails to members, WD would produce an indicative annual email/communications calendar to be shared with D&A as a basis for planning.
ACTION – WD to provide D&A with a calendar of indicative dates of proposed emails.
- 7) In relation to the review of the University's Global Strategy, JS reported that there had been a lot of changes since the January draft of the review report which had been seen by the ISC. He was grateful for the comments on that draft which WD had made on behalf of ISC at a meeting of the Global Executive. The latest draft of the report was now being considered by the Provost: it was already clear that she wished a closer link to be made between the vision and aims set out in the draft and the proposed strategies for achieving them, as well as greater clarity about how the proposed Global strategy related to the outcome of recent and current reviews of other aspects of the University's activities. Nonetheless he was confident that the contribution that alumni could make to delivery of the Global Strategy would be mentioned in the final version of the report and hopeful that there would be another opportunity for the GC to comment on the revised text before it was finalised. The revised text was expected to go to Senate and then on to the Senior Leadership Team in May, before being shared with Court.

ACTION – JS and WD to keep in contact over the progress in finalising the Global Strategy and after it has been approved, to consider how GC can contribute, within its non- executive role, to the delivery of the related Operational Plan.

- 8) At this point, CC and JS left the meeting, which concluded with a short discussion between WD, PM and RJ about the Summer HYM. During this, WD and PM were able to congratulate RJ on her new appointment at the National Museums of Scotland, which she indicated she would take up in the second half of June, immediately after the Summer HYM. In response to a request by WD about the need for additional staff support to deal with the much-increased numbers already registered to attend, RJ undertook to enquire of her Events team whether any members of it would be available to offer the GC team help immediately before and during that event.

ACTION - RJ to seek volunteer from Events and Protocol Team. [Done and briefing meeting arranged on 17 April with volunteer].

WD to liaise further with RJ about support for and communications about the HYM.

PM/WD

8 April 2024

Minutes of the Finance and Services Standing Committee
4.30pm on Thursday 11 April 2024
Cheviot Room, Charles Stewart House

Present: Almira Delibegovic-Broome, Convener, FSSC
Manya Buchan
Frances Dow
Kirsty MacGregor
Bruce Nelson
William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council
Philip Mawer, Convener of the Business Committee
Gordon Cairns, Vice Convener of the Business Committee
Alison MacLeary, Assistant Secretary of the General Council

In attendance: Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
Graeme Reid (ASC – online)

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener of FSSC, Almira Delibegovic-Broome KC, welcomed members of the committee to hear a presentation from Dr Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services, who had been sent a list of topics of interest to the committee in advance of the meeting to aid discussion.

Members of the Academic Standing Committee had been invited to attend online to listen to the presentation from Dr Catherine Martin.

No apologies had been received.

2. Presentation by Dr Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services

CM covered the following headings and took questions from the committee during the presentation.

People and Money

- The University Executive had recently approved the 2024-25 'roadmap' in February 2024 - a group of activities which are being prioritized to improve user experience of the system, accelerating two main areas:
 - intensifying colleagues' understanding of the procurement journey and advice and guidance around the Purchase to Pay process;
 - Research Finance - challenges to be addressed include more resource support, particularly in the College of Science and Engineering, changes to the approval system and increasing visibility of reporting beyond the finance community;
- While there was no appetite for a significant re-implementation of the system, it was acknowledged there were aspects of change programmes within the University that had not been executed particularly effectively and improvements include more 2-way communication across the organisation;

- A Portfolio Board has been established involving a professional team who are trained in change management methodology and which reports to the University Executive;
- WD pointed out that the letter recently sent to Court from the GC about the People and Money implementation is about being constructive in asking for clarity about how Court will monitor and supervise progress as part of their governance responsibility;
- CM concurred and said that the priority is to avoid similar challenges in future;
- There is no intention to publish the entire roadmap but elements will be available for specific groups to view where relevant and more in-person meetings and drop-ins are scheduled going forward to address areas which are of most interest to colleagues;
- The committee agreed that it is vital to rebuild trust between senior management and the wider University community.

HR and Industrial Relations

- The Staff Experience Committee is responsible for execution of the University's People Strategy and evaluating risks associated with staff e.g. staff morale and recruitment. This is undergoing change and bringing in more colleagues from across the University;
- The Staff Engagement Survey takes place every 2 years and the next one is scheduled for January 2025 with efforts to improve the low response rate and see if there has been any improvement;
- Results of previous surveys have been poor (38% response rate vis a vis 60%+ which is typical of the sector) but key takeaway is that the University does not manage change well;
- More Pulse Survey work is being undertaken as people are seen to respond better to local surveys;
- The University's Digital Strategy includes submission for a central intranet site to improve communications.

Student Accommodation

- A housing emergency in Edinburgh was declared in 2023 with reports of students experiencing homelessness (Student organisation 'Slurp' executed its own student homelessness survey) yet data showed that there were 350 empty beds available within the University's lowest price banding in the last year;
- CM pointed out that the situation with student accommodation is now different due to complex changes within the private rental sector; an expectation that the University will provide accommodation for the majority of its students; more students than before are content to live in a managed environment;
- University is working collaboratively with all three other HE institutions in Edinburgh, the City of Edinburgh Council and Cushman and Wakefield (a global real estate and services firm) to address this issue and understand the landscape better in order to deploy resources and make progress with this complex issue;
- CM said that the 8% increase in rent was approved by the University Executive for accommodation where utilities were included and agreed a 5% increase where this was not applicable;
- Reasons include greater expenses incurred in running the University estate i.e. an

increase in food costs, the wraparound service provided and the need to maintain the portfolio of properties for the benefit of future students.

Safety and Security on Campus

- Reported that the film 'Adult Human Female' had now been successfully screened, despite previous challenges involving security for this event;
- A sense of safety and security on campus is enhanced by the presence of police for some members of the University community but others are opposed to police involvement;
- Mentioned student occupations in relation to issues surrounding Palestine and the University's investment portfolio;
- CM is responsible for the University's security but pointed out that Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students, works closely with the Student's Association around gender-based violence and highlighted that the University provides considerable support for its large and complex community.

Catering at King's Buildings (KB) campus

- CM reported that the University had completed its Residential Strategy in 2023 and its Transport Strategy is scheduled for completion in May 2024, but said that the Catering Strategy is still in development;
- The main issues around catering at the King's Buildings complex are as follows:
 - Nutritious menu choices that can be offered at a competitive rate;
 - The Nucleus building is the primary catering outlet at the KB campus and there are challenges around efficient management of available resources to support peak demand during lunch periods;
- CM pointed out that the University offers a soup plus sandwich option for under £2 at all its catering outlets;
- Aware of the need to offer students a robust and accessible catering service which offers variety and value for money which will help to improve future NSS scores.

The Convener thanked CM for her presentation. The committee appreciated the range of responsibilities within the remit of VP Corporate Services and the energy and commitment expressed towards tackling the challenges involved. CM left the meeting.

3. Minutes from the meeting held on 30 January 2024

Minutes from the meeting were approved.

4. Matters arising from the minutes of 30 January 2024

Item 4: General Council Budget 2023-24

- WD updated that an end of year surplus will be closer to £15k rather than the estimated £5k reported at the last meeting and that this was due to:
 - Billet costs being less than anticipated;
 - Costs associated with the June HYM are also less than expected given that the GC will not be charged for use of the Edinburgh Futures Institute, but suggested putting aside budget allocation to pay for additional expenses such as event assistance and a proposed publication on the theme of Artificial Intelligence which could be produced after the event.

5. General Council Prince Philip Fund

- The Secretary was recently advised of two new recipients to the Fund in 2023-24:
 - Elliot Brack – Psychology BSc (Hons)
 - Sophia Blincow – Biomedical Sciences BSc (Hons)
- WD reported that the GC office were currently unable to receive a report on fund income and highlighted that he had pursued this information with Neil Burns (Senior Philanthropy Officer, D & A) which was required before the next meeting of the Business Committee on 2 May in order to take an informed decision about affordability for next academic session;
- AD-B remarked that greater transparency and communication regarding the fund was needed;
- PM will attend a Scholarships Reception on 17 April and will meet privately with Neil Burns beforehand and will make clear that more information is needed to report to members in order to encourage donations and increase the fund.

Action:-

Approach D & A to obtain donation materials that can be taken to the Half-Yearly Meeting on 15 June.

6. Preparation for the next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 21 May with Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer, and Librarian to the University.

7. Any other business

None.

Secretary's Report

1. Vice-Convener election

The process for choosing the next Vice-Convener is identical to that adopted for the recent election of Convener, except the dates for the key stages are:

3 May All those eligible (viz current Business Committee and those who served during previous 2 years) are notified by Secretary that nomination forms are available

17 May Closing date for Secretary to receive nomination forms

20 May eballot forms issued to Business Committee (if more than one valid nomination)

7 June Closing date for return of ballot forms to Secretary

10 June Business Committee notified of result

15 June Names of next Convener and Vice-Convener announced at HYM

2. Summer Billet

This has now been produced by Lane design agency in a similar format to Winter Billet. Paper copies are posted direct from the printer and should arrive shortly. Electronic copies will be sent next week by D & A communications team.

3. Summer Half-Yearly Meeting

A preliminary notice was sent electronically in March resulting in all the then available in person places being taken within 24 hours. The attendance limit was raised to 300 and there is now a waiting list of 100.

When Billet is received, this is likely to result in further applications. The new conference hall at EFI holds 375, but there is only capacity in adjoining areas to offer lunch to 300.

In view of the level of interest and to allow those unable to attend the opportunity to view the proceedings, these will be livestreamed and also recorded for later viewing on the General Council Website.

The programme is in 3 parts:

10.30 – 11.00 Business meeting, chaired by Rector

11.15 – 12.30 Symposium on AI and its implications for the University, chaired by the Principal

12.30 – 13.45 Lunch

14.00 – 15.30 Symposium on AI and Data Science, chaired by Vice-Principal Andrew Morris (newly elected President of Academy of Medical Sciences).

4. Reception on 27 June at St. Cecilia's Hall at 7pm

All Business Committee members should have received invitations to this reception to thank the outgoing Office Bearers and Business Committee members, and to welcome their replacements. Would any who have not yet replied please do so.

5. Forthcoming Standing Committee Meetings

The following Standing Committee meetings have been arranged in May:

7 May – International Standing Committee
13 May – Public Affairs Standing Committee
21 May – Finance and Services Standing Committee
28 May – Academic Standing Committee

Minutes of these meetings will be presented to the 27 June Business Committee.

6. Business Committee/Standing Committee Membership 2024/25

There will be significant turnover with

- new Business Committee Convener (Gordon Cairns)
- new Vice-Convenor (to be decided)
- three new Standing Committee Conveners (ASC; ISC; PASC)
- five newly elected Business Committee members
- new co-opted member(s) (to replace those who resign)

The newly elected members will be allocated to the various Standing Committees and to help inform this process, they will be asked in May to indicate any preferences. Preferences are indicative and not definitive, given the need to create set of viable Committee with the requisite skills and experience to fulfil their remits, Likewise, continuing members will be asked if they are content to remain on their current Standing Committee or wish to move.

The intention is to inform the June Business Committee meeting of the various new Convener appointments and the allocations to Standing Committees, in order that decisions can be made then by the Business Committee on any co-options required.

7. Induction of new members of the Business Committee

The newly elected members are invited to attend, as observers, the 27 June Business Committee. They have been invited to the reception at St Cecilia's Hall afterwards.

The formal induction session of new members (including any co-options) will be on 26 September, when they will also meet the various Conveners.

8. Prince Philip Scholarship Fund

Two additional awards were made in autumn 2023 to:

- Elliot Brack (Psychology BSc Hons)
- Sophia Blincow (Biomedical Sciences BSc Hons)

They join the previous 3 scholars, to give a total of 5.

The General Council Prince Philip Fund meets 50% of the cost of the annual stipend (currently £3000 pa, but under review) meaning that the Fund will be charged £7500 this year.

Due to the situation with People and money reporting, no financial information was able to be provided to FSSC on either the income to the Fund or its capital value. It is hoped this will be available for the next FSSC meeting, to enable a recommendation on further awards to be made to the June Business Committee meeting.

Measures to seek further donations to the Fund from General Council members are being discussed with D & A staff.

9. Senior Executive team response to EUSA letter to Court

The February Business Committee saw and commented on the letter that EUSA presented to Court about three areas of specific concern to students. The Court decided to ask the University Executive to respond and this is attached in confidence (see separate enclosure). It has not been uploaded to the EUSA website.

A meeting between the Secretary and incoming EUSA Office Bearers has been arranged for 27 June.

10. Reminder of Business Committee dates for 2024/25

- 10 October 2024
- 5 December 2024
- 27 February 2025
- 1 May 2025
- 26 June 2025

Response to EUSA following letter to University Court (February 2024)

At the February meeting of the University Court, the President of Edinburgh University Students' Association, included, as an appendix to the regular EUSA report, a letter to Court members, designed to highlight students' ongoing dissatisfaction with key issues impacting the student experience at the University. The three key areas of focus were: **the student housing crisis, the impact of the wider cost-of-living crisis and gender-based violence on-campus.**

The University Court asked the University's management to respond directly to EUSA in relation to these matters.

1. The student housing crisis

Limited supply in the private rental market is driving up rents and resulting in intense competition, forcing many students into properties that are beyond their budget, miles from campus, or poorly maintained, and making them vulnerable to exploitation, from landlords, letting agencies, and scammers. This is particularly challenging as students arrive in the city at the start of each academic year and creates anxiety and uncertainty for our students at a time of transition.

University-owned accommodation should be a safety net for these students, but instead Edinburgh is now raising rents by 8% in 2024/25, at a time when inflation is expected to be just 4% and (English) student loans are increasing by 2.4%. We published this statement on the decision to our members.

The University brings thousands of students to the city each year, and has a responsibility to ensure that each of them has somewhere suitable to live. Not only should the University be providing affordable accommodation to students, but to proactively find a long-term solution should be using their influence in the city to lobby for policies that benefit students, from rent caps to student housing cooperatives.

We are very aware of the impact of both the cost-of-living crisis and shortage of housing in the city. As an individual organisation, we cannot alone absorb responsibility for remediating this situation and, in particular, we cannot take responsibility for ensuring every student whom we recruit to a programme of study has a suitable place to live as suggested. Having said that, in order to support the wellbeing of our students we have taken, and will continue to take the following actions into 2024/25:

- Although we offer an accommodation guarantee to particular cohorts of our students, we have also offered housing to many students, who do not meet the criteria applicable to the guarantee in 2023/24. This includes prioritising applications from part-year students, who have historically struggled to find short-term housing in the city.
- In anticipation of the challenge we knew some students would face, given the current state of the private rental market in Edinburgh with high rents and limited availability, an email and social media campaign was launched by the University in May 2023 to encourage returning students to begin their accommodation search early. The University also has a [website](#) signposting private rented accommodation that includes information such as links to letting agents, PBSA providers, flat share groups and how to avoid letting scams. For students who were not able to secure accommodation before the Autumn 2023 term began, email correspondence was sent in August 2023 to inform students of emergency accommodation that also provided resources to other types of housing support, including linking to the dedicated accommodation [website](#). We will continue to advertise our vacant rooms on-line and will share information with EUSA to support EUSA with assisting any students experiencing adverse conditions in the private sector.

- As part of our review of bands in 2023/24, a number of beds within our Value range of accommodation will be charged at a lesser rate in 2024/25 than they are currently.
- We continue to monitor the volume of students reporting difficulty in paying their rent or falling into arrears and offer tailored support such as deferred payment plans, transfers to less expensive housing and signposting within the University for financial advice and/or support.
- We continue to offer emergency housing support and advice ensuring that this continues throughout the year, whilst noting the particular demand in the weeks prior to and following the start of semester one.
- The majority of events run through the Residence Life Team will include the provision of food
- We continue to lobby for the creation of more affordable housing for students on both local and national political platforms.
- We continue to work with Local and Scottish Government on key housing consultations, most recently *City Plan 2030*, *New Deal for Tenants*, *Review of Purpose Build Student Accommodation*, *Fairer Council Tax*, all of which will have a direct impact on our students.
- We are in the process of creating a 'Living Strategy' which will focus on the accommodation demand and supply pressures being experienced by students from all institutions in the city. We work closely with the other higher and further education institutions in the city of Edinburgh on this issue. We have commissioned an independent report, on behalf of all institutions within the city, to create an accurate data set around scale, rent levels and future requirement for student housing which can then be shared with local authorities to assist with planning applications for future developments. It is particularly important for us to understand what the data are telling us, as we hear continued significant concern from our students in relation to homelessness but have had more than 200 beds available – many in our lowest price bands – during the course of 2023/24. As EUSA colleagues will recognise, creating more student accommodation of our own takes time, carries planning risk and consumes a considerable amount of the capital planning envelope, which also has to accommodate projects in the teaching and research space. We have made a significant investment recently in the refurbishment of the former Tynecastle High School, which will provide a further c.450 University of Edinburgh beds in 2026.
- We hosted key city partners and charities in a recent Housing Summit to create a response to the Housing Emergency declared by City of Edinburgh Council in November 2023, to ensure student housing was (and continues to be) considered as a key component of the broader challenge.

To assure you, we know that rent continues to represent a significant outlay for students and that there remain concerns about the University applying increases. As you are aware, this topic is always carefully discussed at the University Executive, including recently, when we set rents for 2024/25, taking account of utilities and food inflation as well as the cost of property management. We always have to balance affordability with our need to be able to provide safe, comfortable, well-maintained accommodation and our ability to invest in accommodation for future generations of students, in line with the demand for more university-managed property.

2. The impact of the wider cost-of-living crisis on students

Housing is the single greatest cost for most of our members, so it is no surprise that increasing rents is putting financial pressure on students, who are having to cut back elsewhere in response.

In March last year, over 2200 students signed an open letter calling on the University to do more to address financial hardship, highlighting the results of a Russell Group survey on the cost-of-living which showed that 1 in 2 students weren't confident that they could cover their basic living costs, 1 in 4 were regularly skipping meals to save money, and 54% felt that the cost-of-living crisis was negatively impacting their academic performance. That letter included four key asks, none of which have been addressed to-date.

Our report to University Court includes some additional insights from our most recent annual Members' Survey here at Edinburgh – indicating over a third of respondents are concerned they cannot afford to stay at University.

The Principal provided a response to the EUSA Sabbatical team last year in response to the request to implement the following measures:

- Reverse the decision to increase rents by almost 6% in the next academic year and instead commit to not increasing University of Edinburgh Accommodation rent prices for 2023/24.*
- Fully subsidise transport for anyone not covered by the Under-22 travel scheme, and shuttle buses to both Easter Bush and the BioQuarter.*
- Free breakfast provision for students, available on all campuses.*
- Library and Accommodation Conduct Fines eradicated, and to waive all outstanding fines.*

We have commented on the matter of rent costs in the section above.

The Principal set out the approach that we continue to take is to firmly target those that are experiencing financial difficulties and doubling the University's investment in student support 'hardship' funding to £3m in order to do so, with the intention that all students should be encouraged to apply should they need support. We also made various changes to the application process to make this as easy for students as possible. Feedback continues to be invaluable to improve how we are getting the message out to students that help is available, and to consider further improvement where possible to the application process. We have maintained our student support funding to ensure that we can help all those that apply and we will continue to work on improving visibility. We are always open to discussing alternative approaches, however, we remain committed to prioritising those most in need.

As at the end of February we have provided direct financial support, totaling £1.1m, making 606 awards, to our students, similar provision to last year. We approach applications openly and aim to respond generously. We have also provided immediate support, such as food vouchers, bank transfers and emergency accommodation to those coming to us with urgent need. We continue to invest in this support and keep our support under regular review to ensure we have funds when students need them. This in the context of a sector wide reduction in funding from the Scottish Government in relation to student financial support and support with childcare of 25%, and 35% at Edinburgh (£1.28m to £825k).

As part of our continuous improvement work in relation to the student experience, with EUSA input, we are working hard proactively to reach out to our student community including a focus on moving to a front-facing service; with the aim of providing more accessible and targeted financial advice before students reach the need for financial support, as well as providing greater visibility and personal support for those applying for support. This will extend to collaboration between Residence Life to assist students in our accommodation with budgeting skills.

We continue to be disappointed with Lothian Buses' position regarding extending the transport offer. Our discussions with them continue, of course, and this is something that we will continue to highlight.

With regard to library fines, there has been a significant reduction over recent times. Our current fines policy is only in operation on those items where a return has been delayed and another student is waiting, which can be a very stressful situation for the waiting student. We remain committed to working with EUSA to ensure we get the right balance for all students in this area. The income from fines, c. £15,000 in 22/23, is reinvested in frontline student services. We also have a well-used and comprehensive offering in terms of supporting those experiencing digital poverty, including short and yearlong laptops for loan, MiFi units, cameras and other digital equipment as free loans to students to ensure that no student is left without the computing equipment or internet access they need for their studies.

In relation to waiving charges in accommodation, we are not supportive of a blanket waiver but consider each charge on its merits in order to encourage the right behaviours in our accommodation to the benefit of our entire accommodated student population.

3. Gender based violence on campus

On 9 February, and for the third consecutive year, students gathered to call on the University to address the experience of survivors of gender based violence. Many of those who spoke at that protest described feeling abandoned by the University in their time of need and retraumatised by the experience of trying to seek justice. A key concern for student survivors is that they enter a process wherein only the respondent receives a final report and they do not, and they only have the option to appeal the handling of their case, not the outcome. Without any knowledge of how the outcome was reached, due to the process being confidential between the respondent and the Student Code of Conduct, the survivor does not have information to explain why their case wasn't upheld and must submit a new complaint as an appeal. When there are so many barriers – both social and bureaucratic – to reporting, and reportedly less than half of gender based violence cases investigated by the University are upheld, it's clear that currently students feel this is not an issue that the University takes seriously. Individual students, student groups, and the Students' Association have consistently given the University feedback on ways in which these processes could be improved, however very little has changed for those who are impacted.

We continue to work alongside a range of groups to support survivors and educate our community on sexual violence prevention, including developing guidance and training for students and staff. We are pleased to be able to do this in collaboration with EUSA, for example our support, promotion and investment in #NoExcuse, a EUSA-led campaign.

We seek to actively promote dignity and respect in our student community and have a group dedicated to this, with EUSA and EUSU representatives, plus staff from the Advice Place.

We remain acutely aware of the wider issue of sexual violence on campus and respond promptly and sensitively to issues students raise with us, and where appropriate take disciplinary action. We do not tolerate sexual violence within our community and we investigate all reports made to us thoroughly.

We are aware that not every outcome of our investigations results in the outcome that the reporting party agrees with. However, we consider that we provide structure, process and support to our students that go beyond that provided by peer institutions and we are committed to continually improving our

approach We were pleased to recently work with EUSA and other student groups on the production of student-facing guidance for all parties involved.

We do recognise and understand the concerns raised about information sharing. However, as we have previously communicated, we manage this on case-by-case basis with consideration of data protection and confidentiality issues balanced alongside the welfare of both the reporting party and the respondent (and other witnesses involved in the investigation process if relevant). Reporting parties can make a formal complaint should they be dissatisfied with the way the Code of Student Conduct procedure has been followed. We do not have a mechanism for the reporting party to appeal a decision the University reaches about what it considers an appropriate sanction of a respondent under the Code of Student Conduct. It is common that appeals against sanctions – for example, in the criminal justice system against sentences imposed by judges, or in other internal disciplinary investigations such as employer disciplinary proceedings – can only be made by those individuals who are subject to the decision (in the case of the Code of Conduct, the respondent), and not those who brought the complaint (in the case of the Code of Conduct, the reporting party) because they disagree with the outcome of the conduct process.

We are proud that the University introduced a dedicated Equally Safe Team three years ago as a specialist team that offers support to anyone affected by sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence. Members of the Equally Safe Team discuss the most appropriate support, provide help to assess safety and wellbeing, and discuss options for ongoing and practical support with any student or staff member affected by gender-based violence. They also help to access additional specialist services within and beyond the University, including accessing the University student conduct process, considering making a report to the police, and/or the NHS led Sexual assault Referral & Co-ordination Service (SARCS). Whilst other universities do offer support as part of their overall services for students, we are sector-leading in our provision of a dedicated team with the remit outlined. We are eager to continue to work with EUSA in recognising the value that this team brings to impacted students.

Our Report + Support platform covers all forms of discrimination and bullying. By allowing students to raise concerns about experiences of abusive behaviours we are better able to respond and minimise such behaviours that have no place in our community.

We have a suite of courses for staff and students in this area. This year as part of our improvement work in student experience, with EUSA input, we designed and delivered two micro-courses (c 4-minute TikTok style video based) on Consent and Active Bystander training for new taught students in September 2023, with links to more detailed training also provided by the University. A total of 10,081 students completed the Consent course and 5,019 completed the Active Bystander course. This represents an overall completion rate for the Consent course of 58% and for the Active Bystander course of 30%. We are seeking to role this out to all students next year. Dedicated training is essential for a wide range of staff in student facing roles including Student Advisers, Residence Life, Complaints and Conduct teams, plus Student Discipline Committee members.

We are grateful to EUSA for continuing to represent the things that matter to our large and diverse student community and look forward to working in partnership to improve every student's experience with us.