

**Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting held on Thursday 27 June 2024
5.15pm in the Conference Room, Edinburgh Climate Change Institute (ECCI),
Infirmary Street, Edinburgh**

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	
	Mr Arron Ashton	Ms Kirsty MacGregor
	Professor Alice Brown	Professor Francis McManus
	Ms Many Buchan	Mr Jock Millican (online)
	Ms Ann Cormack	Dr Bruce Nelson (online)
	Mrs Almira Delibegovic-Broome	Professor Graeme Reid
	Ms Candice Donnelly	Mr Devin Scobie
	Dr Frances Dow	Rt. Rev. Brian Smith
	Professor Steve Hillier	Ms Krystyna Szumelukowa

In attendance	Dr Nikhil Agarwal - Newly Elected Member
	Professor Richard Andrews - Newly Elected Member
	Dr Lucy Blackburn - Newly Elected Member
	Professor John Gillies - Newly Elected Member
	Ms Tamara Raidt - Newly Elected Member (online)
	Ms Alison MacLeary, Assistant Secretary of the General Council

The meeting began with a short period of silent reflection in remembrance of John Clifford, a valued member of the Business Committee from 2013 – 2021; 2022-2024 who died unexpectedly on 22 June. He will be sadly missed.

The Convener expressed members' concern regarding the recent accident involving the Princess Royal, Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh and Chairman of its General Council.

Action: The Secretary will write to Princess Anne's Private Secretary, on behalf of the Business Committee, to wish the Princess a speedy recovery.

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the final meeting of the session and warmly welcomed the newly-elected members who had been invited to attend as observers.

Apologies had been received from Douglas Alexander, Alastair Dunlop, Mary Gunn, Kate Hawley and Sarah Wolffe.

2. Observations by General Council Assessors

- Jock Millican (JM) gave an oral report on the open items from the Court meeting of 22 June, held in the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) (Paper 1);
- Demonstrations about the University's investment policy had taken place outside the building at the same time and this had been the main topic during the meeting, when a full and frank discussion resulted in a statement from Court, published on the University website, emphasizing the need for "openness and transparency" in relation to the policy and its implementation;

- JM added that, as there was no universally agreed definition of a lethal weapon system, Court had requested that further information be brought to the next Court meeting in October;

Item 3: Principal's Report

- The Senior Leadership Team are continuing to encourage open dialogue through engagement sessions with professional services staff to listen to their concerns;
- People and Money – in-person sessions organised across the University offer staff an opportunity to ask questions about the improvement plan for this system;

Item 4: Committee Business

- The Nominations Committee had appointed new members, including General Council Court Assessor, The Rt. Hon. Sarah Wolffe KC to various Court Committees;

Item 5: Finance

- An increase had been reported in the overall income received from the Scottish Funding Council (+£2.9m);

Item 6: Annual People Report

- Recent improvements - initiated by James Saville, Director of HR, in 2023 - have allowed data to be recorded, stored and analysed consistently across the University. This had formed the basis of his report which covers the People Strategy; pay and reward; staff wellbeing; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI); Curriculum Transformation and the Digital Strategy;

Item 7: Court Effectiveness Review

- Conducted by Dr Veena O'Halloran, an External Facilitator, and will be published when the report has been approved. Positive but includes a number of recommendations such as briefer meeting papers;

Item 9: Students' Association and Sports Union Report

- New EUSA President, Dora Herndon, had presented the report which covered the main areas of student concern including housing and cost of living;
- While the report from the Sports Union was positive, it highlighted shortages of facilities due to the record number of people participating in sports at the University.

Discussion

- The Convener thanked JM for presenting the Court report and reminded members that the privileged insight provided into Court matters should be treated in confidence;
- Some members of the Committee raised concern about the high number of closed items on the Court agenda as this precludes them being reported on by the Assessors;
- JM indicated that the student protesters who had occupied Old College Quad had refused to engage with members of the University's Senior Leadership Team;
- JM reported that issues with People and Money remain, despite a general feeling from HR and staff members on Court that things are starting to improve.

3. Minutes of the Meeting of 2 May 2024

- a. The minutes were approved.
- b. There were no matters arising.

4. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

The Academic Standing Committee (ASC), was content to recommend the following Resolutions at its meeting on 28 May:

- No. 8-98/2024: Creation of Personal Chairs (various)

The above Resolutions were approved electronically by the Business Committee and a letter was sent

to Court Services to that effect on 11 June.

No new Resolutions had been received.

5. Co-option of new members of the Business Committee to fill vacancies

- The Convener referred to Paper 3;
- There are now 4 vacancies, including one on the International Standing Committee (ISC) due to the recent death of John Clifford;
- The Business Committee agreed with the following proposed co-options to fill two vacancies on the ASC: Professor Judy Hardy and Dorothy Welch;
- The following names have been suggested to fill one vacancy on FSSC:
 - Dame Anne Richards CVO FRSE, whom failing Alan Johnston;
- Ann Cormack and Krystyna Szumelukowa were invited to suggest possible names to fill the one vacant place on ISC; when these suggestions have been considered by the Secretary and Convener- elect, a recommendation will be made to the Business Committee for approval by correspondence;
- Co-optees will serve for the length of term remaining of the member whose departure from the Committee has created a vacancy;
- In response to a query about whether co-opted members could stand for election to the Business Committee before the term of the co-option finished, it was confirmed that they could. If successful in the election, this would mark the start of a new 4-year term; if not elected, the member would still be eligible to serve for the remainder of the period of co-option.

Action:-

The Secretary will approach those suggested above to ascertain their willingness to serve on the GC BC; in respect to the one vacancy on FSSC, WD will approach Anne Richards in the first instance. The Secretary will seek approval by correspondence with the Business Committee of the name recommended to fill the vacancy on ISC

6. General Council Prince Philip Fund – further scholarship appointment

- The Convener referred to Paper 4;
- The proposal by the Finance and Services Standing Committee to appoint only one new General Council Scholar each year for the time being, to replace those whose scholarships were ending was approved by the Business Committee.

7. University Consultation on Responsible Investments Policy

- Paper 5, previously circulated, explained it had now been agreed that General Council members could also respond to the University's consultation with staff and students about its investment policies, which had been launched at the end of May;
- The Secretary would include information about how General Council members could input their views to the consultation in an email being sent to them on 2 July;
- As the specific link that General Council members would need to use to input their views would only be given in the email from the Secretary and not put on the GC website (as this can be accessed by non-members), this should mitigate the risk of spurious submissions but, if necessary, the email address used to submit a response can be checked against the information held in the General Council Register;
- Concern was expressed that due to the strict interpretation of GDPR used by the University, it was only possible to email about 50% of those listed in the Register; it was noted that a Bill on

Data Protection that could have allowed a less restrictive approach was not passed before the UK Parliament was dissolved for the July election;

- It was agreed to establish an expert group with a range of relevant expertise to draft a response to the consultation, which would be circulated to the Business Committee for approval before submission;
- The Committee approved the following as members of the expert group:
 - Almira Delibegovic-Broome; Gordon Cairns; Ann Cormack; Alan Johnston; Bruce Nelson and Dame Anne Richards; subject to ascertaining that none have any conflicts of interest that would preclude them being on the group;
- The Convener invited members to contact the Secretary with any further suggestions for membership;
- Lucy Blackburn remarked that the outcome of the consultation could affect the University's finances and has implications for the wider community in Edinburgh;
- John Gillies said that it would be challenging for the BC to produce a report by end August, and the Secretary indicated he would be seeking an extension to the deadline set for input to the review;
- The question of the possible restriction of the Business Committee's ability to communicate with GC members because of GDPR, which was raised in discussion, should be referred to PASC for further consideration.

Action:-

- ***A communication will go out to General Council members in early July, inviting them to respond via a link to the consultation survey by 30 August;***
- ***The Secretary will consider how best to ensure the validity of the responses to the survey received from General Council members.***

8. Feedback on the 15 June Half Yearly Meeting and Symposium at EFI

- Paper 6, previously circulated, asked members to give feedback on topics such as the suitability of the venue and speakers' presentations, the quality of the catering, and frequency of communications about the event;
- Members remarked on the disappointing number of 'no shows' and resulting food waste;
- The Convener recorded the Committee's thanks to the Secretary and Assistant Secretary for organizing the event in demanding circumstances.

Action:-The Secretary will consider with PASC at its next meeting whether the summer HYM should continue to include a "show casing" event or whether this could be held at a different time from the statutory meeting, which must be held on a Saturday as part of the General Council's constitutional arrangements.

9. Minutes of Standing Committee meetings

- Papers 7-10 contained reports from recent Standing Committee meetings and had been circulated in advance to the Business Committee;
- The following points were noted:
 - Incoming Convener, Graeme Reid, reported on the last meeting of ASC on 28 May (Paper 7);
 - Almira Delibegovic-Broome wished to draw attention to the two main issues from the meeting of FSSC on 21 May (Paper 8): a presentation from VP and Chief Information Officer, Gavin McLachlan, on the University's Digital Strategy, and the University's consultation on Responsible Investment;

- The meeting of ISC on 7 May had been Krystyna Szumelukowa’s final one as Convener of ISC. She spoke eloquently about John Clifford who was a member of ISC when he died; she also expressed considerable disappointment that there was still no final draft of the outcome from the consultation about the University’s Global Plan. This matter will be pursued by the incoming Convener of ISC, Ann Cormack, when the Committee reconvenes in the forthcoming academic session;
- Candice Donnelly spoke to the final meeting of PASC on 13 May (Paper 10) about updates to the University’s Community Plan and urged the committee to watch the related video: [What we did in year three | The University of Edinburgh](#).

Report from the Secretary of the General Council

- Paper 11, previously circulated, included the following diary dates for noting:
 - Business Committee meetings for 2024/5
 - ❖ Thursday 10th October 2024 – presentation on Research and Innovation Strategy
 - ❖ Thursday 5 December 2024
 - ❖ Thursday 27 February 2025
 - ❖ Thursday 1 May 2025
 - ❖ Thursday 26 June 2025

All meetings to be held at 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room unless otherwise advised

- Christmas Reception
 - ❖ 10 December 2024 at Talbot Rice Gallery
- Half Yearly Meeting
 - ❖ Saturday 15 February 2025 at 10.30 followed by lunch at the Playfair Library
 - ❖ Saturday 14 June 2025 – venue to be arranged

10. Any other competent business

- The Secretary and Convener had met earlier that afternoon with four of the new EUSA sabbatical officers, including the President;
- The Secretary and the incoming Convener (Gordon Cairns) and Vice Convener (Bruce Nelson) will meet with representatives from the General Councils of the other “Ancient” Scottish universities on 26 July;
- A drinks reception and buffet supper at St. Cecilia’s Hall would follow the Business Committee meeting, to thank Sir Philip Mawer and the other retiring members of the Committee - Steve Hillier, Joyce Caplan, Frances Dow, Francis McManus and Krystyna Szumelukowa - for their outstanding contributions, and to welcome new members to the Committee.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Business Committee would take place at 5.15pm on Thursday, 10 October, 2024 in the Raeburn Room, Old College.