

Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting held on Thursday 7 December 2023 5.15pm in the ECCI, Infirmary Street, Edinburgh

Present

Sir Philip Mawer, Convener of the Business Committee
Mr Gordon Cairns, Vice-Convener of the Business Committee
Dr William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council
Mr Arron Ashton
Professor Alice Brown
Lady Joyce Caplan
Mr John Clifford
Ms Ann Cormack
Mrs Almira Delibegovic-Broome
Ms Candice Donnelly
Dr Frances Dow
Ms Kate Hawley (online)
Professor Stephen Hillier
Ms Alison MacLeary, Assistant Secretary of the General Council
Mr Jock Millican (online)
Dr Bruce Nelson
Professor Graeme Reid
Mr Devin Scobie
Rt. Rev Brian Smith
Ms Krystyna Szumelukowa

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the final meeting of semester one.

Apologies - Douglas Alexander, Manya Buchan, Alistair Dunlop, Elisabeth Feldstein, Kirsty MacGregor, Francis McManus and Sarah Wolffe.

2. Minutes of the Meeting of 12 October 2023

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes of 12 October 2023

The Convener reported that he and the Secretary had met with Chris Cox on 23 November and promptly followed this up with a letter suggesting how to create greater synergy between GC and D&A in their communications with alumni, given the increasing number of overseas members. It was noted that communications from the GC should primarily relate to its governance role. They had also suggested a follow up joint meeting with both Chris Cox and VP International, Professor James Smith, to discuss engagement with overseas alumni clubs.

4. Topics for consideration arising from the Standing Committee meetings

The minutes of the various Standing Committees previously circulated were noted.

These covered the meetings of:

- a. Academic Standing Committee on 1 November and 23 November.
- b. Constitutional Standing Committee on 9 November.
- c. Finance & Services Standing Committee on 21 November.
- d. International Standing Committee on 26 October and 16 November.
- e. Public Affairs Standing Committee on 19 October and 29 November.

In addition, the SC Conveners had produced short summary notes, previously circulated, of key issues arising from each of their committee meetings in Semester one. PM invited discussion and the following four issues were raised.

1. **Student Satisfaction and Well-being.** Different aspects of this had arisen at several meetings.

a. The ASC meeting on 1 November heard from Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary (Students), about various initiatives to try to improve the student experience and the University's low National Student Survey (NSS) ranking.

- SH applauded the more pro-active hands-on approach the University is now giving under Lucy Evans' initiative to this longstanding issue by embedding the student experience within University activity, e.g. through providing peer assisted learning and by improving student support systems and better recreational areas and sports facilities;
- In response to a query about the questions asked in NSS surveys and how these might influence the answers, it was explained that the questions tend to be the same each year in order that trend analyses can be carried out. However, a final question asking for an overall satisfaction rating had been removed from the surveys at English universities, although retained in Scotland and concern was expressed that this could disadvantage Scottish institutions;
- It was noted that there was a lower satisfaction rate for home students and it was suggested this could be related to the increasing accommodation and financial challenges they face, which may not necessarily apply to international students from more affluent backgrounds;
- The lack of an upward trend at Edinburgh in relation to assessment and feedback was considered particularly problematic given the low rankings for this aspect; a situation made worse by the large number of students at Edinburgh affected by the Marking and Assessment Boycott (see agenda item 7 below)
- The low level of staff satisfaction at Edinburgh was also thought to be a contributing factor;
- It was agreed that attempts to improve student satisfaction would also need to address the lack of sense of community which can often be felt within a highly devolved, disparate institution.

b. At the ASC meeting on 23 November with the EUSA President, Sharan Atwal, another issue affecting student well-being had been raised, concerning student safety on campus and freedom of expression.

- At one of several student protests held in Bristo Square about the Israel/ Gaza conflict there had been police intervention and arrests, whereas many students felt strongly that the University's own security team should have been more visible to deal with the situation internally rather than rely on police involvement; in discussion it was noted that the police intervention came after superficial damage to property and that Bristo Square is a public area, not part of the campus;
- This incident had exacerbated safety concerns given the increased risk of violent Antisemitic or Islamophobic behaviour generated by the Israel/ Gaza conflict;
- It was agreed that universities should be places that allow the safe expression of different views and that *proportionate* levels of security should be on hand to support these types of events.

c. The FSSC meeting on 21 November with Gary Jebb, Director of Place, had discussed the availability of suitable student accommodation and its impact on the student experience.

- The University guarantees accommodation for all 1st year undergraduate or postgraduate students and the planned addition of 3000 extra beds should help maintain this guarantee, but concern was highlighted about the cost and availability of suitable accommodation for returning students; all four of the Edinburgh universities are working together to address this;

- There is a need to improve the ‘town and gown’ relationship as there is an increasing perception within the City that the Universities are contributing to the recently declared ‘Edinburgh housing emergency’ by attracting more fee-paying students who can afford higher rents, thereby exacerbating the homelessness situation; instead, these students should be viewed as making a valuable contribution to the local economy;
- Given its interest in promoting good community relations, it was suggested in discussion that PASC should seek a meeting with the City Council Leader, Cllr Day.

2. Global Strategy

ISC had met VP International, Professor James Smith on 16 November who had outlined plans for producing a new Global Strategy which is expected to be launched in 2024.

- The new Global Strategy will need to align with other University strategies, such as Curriculum Transformation, and Research and Innovation, and KS noted that the latter is expected to be published shortly;
- KS drew attention to the increasing number of international students studying at the University and the need for the University to maintain its standards so that it can retain its place within international rankings and continue to attract international students;
- General concern was expressed about the impact that major changes just announced by the UK Government introducing stricter rules about visas and income thresholds, all designed to reduce inward migration, would have on attracting and retaining overseas staff and students.

3. Communications with General Council members

- CD spoke about PASC’s focus on increasing engagement with GC members through digital methods e.g. the website and improvements to the Billet template, but pointed out that the move to G4 has resulted in the University being currently unable to provide analytic data on usage of the site;
- AC raised the need to engage alumni via social media;
- CD also reported that PASC had received a presentation from Dave Gorman, Director, Social Responsibility and Sustainability, at its meeting on 29 November, about the positive impact and excellent performance of the University’s social investment fund.

4. Committee meetings in 2024

- PM invited feedback from members about how the structure of BC meetings could be improved;
- AA welcomed the covering notes from SC Conveners circulated prior to the meeting that had highlighted key issues from their recent SC meetings, as this had generated useful discussion;
- WD reported that there will be one further meeting of ASC, CSC, ISC and PASC in January/February 2024 and they will then have their fourth (final) meetings later in the year;
- FSSC will have two meetings in Semester 2: one with Catherine Martin, VP Corporate Services, and the other meeting with Director of Finance, Lee Hamill. As the topics to be discussed with Catherine Martin will cover security, staff satisfaction, catering and accommodation – all topics of particular interest to ASC - its members will be invited to join online rather than expect her to have a separate meeting with ASC; the meeting with Lee Hamill will, as usual, be for members of FSSC only.
- As the Research and Innovation Strategy had recently been approved by Court, it was agreed that Professor Christina Boswell, VP Research and Enterprise, should be invited to give a presentation about it to the Business Committee.

5. Observations by General Council Assessors

The agenda for the Court meeting on 4 December – see Appendix 1 - had been circulated previously and this showed which items were closed and which were open. Jock Millican explained he had been unable to attend Court but he had been fully briefed by Sarah Wolffe and Douglas Alexander who had attended and he gave the following report:

- Visit to the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI). A visit to EFI took place before the formal meeting at the College of Art; it will be an impressive facility when the extensive refurbishments are complete in 2024.
- Item 3 - The Principal's Report
 - Keen to improve the University's communications and reputation, which is perceived to be much higher outwith Scotland than within;
 - Congratulated Jane Hillston, Head of the School of Informatics, on being awarded the British Computer Society's Lovelace medal and the first person awarded BCS top three awards;
 - The College of Medicine and Vet Medicine (CMVM) had won research grants totalling £268m;
 - Presentations had taken place in Edinburgh and at the Westminster Parliament on an independent review of the economic impact of the University: this showed a £7.5bn contribution to the UK economy in 2021/22;
 - Adult Human Female film has now been screened but two complaints were received from Court members relating to the security measures at the screening;
 - The Principal had made a successful short visit to the USA accompanied by Chris Cox (D & A) and Professor Shannon Vallor, Baillie Gifford Chair in the Ethics of Data and Artificial Intelligence;
- Item 4 – Committee business
 - a. Court USS Sub Group – reported on positive changes to the USS pension scheme;
 - b. Senate – this had been a difficult meeting but all were resolved to move forward constructively;
- Item 5 – People and Money. Discussion of the Report that Court had commissioned from PA Consulting was a closed item, but Court had decided that the full Report would be published soon. [Secretary's note: the PA Report was circulated to the Business Committee on 11 December along with the covering message sent to staff from the Senior Leadership Team];
- Item 6 - Performance Measures to Support Strategy 2030 – this item was closed but some aspects will be covered in the Annual Report and Accounts;
- Item 9 - Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23 – will be published in January following final completion of the audit;
- Item 10 - Progress relating to the University's Grade Scale Review will be announced shortly;
- Item 11 – Student Experience. The discussion was closed but significant improvement had been achieved in some areas, while acknowledging that much more work was needed;
- Item 14 - Research and Innovations Strategy had been approved and will be published shortly;
- Item 16 - General Council Membership & Registration Ordinance. It was agreed that a period of formal consultation should take place with General Council and Senate over the proposed changes.

Query

It was noted that 18 of the 29 Reports presented to Court were closed. In response to a query about how it was decided which items were open or closed and why so many were closed, JM explained that closed items relate to subjects which are financially, reputationally or commercially sensitive, but added that the outcomes of closed items are often made public in due course.

6. Ordinance 186 – consultation with GC about proposed changes to GC membership

- Business Committee was pleased to hear that Court was content that the Draft New Ordinance (see Appendix 2) relating to GC Membership and Registration should now proceed

to a statutory consultation to receive feedback from the GC membership and others. This would inform consideration of this matter at the next Court meeting on 26 February.

- The BC approved the following process of consultation with GC members:
 - Notice sent in mid- December to members (either by email or letter) from the Secretary inviting comments by end January on the proposed changes;
 - Details of the proposed changes to be available on the General Council website;
 - Reminder email to GC members from the Secretary in mid-January;
 - Report to Business Committee in early February summarising the responses received;
 - Convener's report to the 17 February Half Yearly meeting to present responses and allow discussion then if necessary;
 - Secretary to notify Court Services on 19 February of outcome of consultation with General Council, so this can be reported to Court meeting on 26 February;
 - Court to decide in February whether to proceed and if any further modifications should be made to the revised Ordinance, before it is sent to the Scottish Universities Committee of the Privy Council and then to the Privy Council itself for approval.

It was agreed that the notice to members should adopt a neutral position, simply inviting comments for or against the proposed changes, noting that the case for the changes was set out in the report to Court and that this would be available on the General Council website.

7. Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) – update

- The Secretary drew attention to a note received that day from Lucy Evans (Deputy Secretary, Students) and circulated prior to the meeting;
- Members were pleased to read that all final year students had received their results by mid-November, noting that UCU had lifted the Boycott in early September and that UCU had subsequently failed to achieve a mandate for continuing the Boycott;
- Members were concerned to read, however, that a legacy issue from prioritising final year students' assessments was that some continuing students had not received their assessments and were not expected to receive them until the next calendar year;
- It was agreed that further information on the number of students who have yet to receive their marks should be obtained because, if significant, this could affect student satisfaction ratings and have longer term consequences for the University's reputation.

ACTION: The Secretary was asked to find out how many continuing students were affected by the Boycott.

8. Report from the Secretary of the General Council

- A report previously circulated - see Appendix 3 - provided an update on the production of a substantially redesigned edition of Winter Billet following the decision by Communications and Marketing to outsource its production to Lane Agency, and a list of the 13 Candidates for election in February to the 7 vacancies arising on the Business Committee. BC welcomed the large number and diversity of candidates standing for election;
- WD drew attention to **Draft Resolutions Nos. 112/2023 – 114/2023 being approved** in correspondence by the Business Committee.

9. Any other competent business

The Convener reminded members that the GC Christmas Reception will take place on Tuesday, 12 December.

10. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would take place on Thursday, 29 February 2024 at 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room.

AGENDA

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

OPENING ITEMS

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. Minute [OPEN version of minute to be published shortly]
To approve the minute of the meeting and note of the seminar held on 9 October 2023 | A1, A2 |
| 2. Matters Arising [OPEN] & Review of Action Log [CLOSED]
To raise any matters arising and review the Action Log | A3 |
| 3. Principal's Report [OPEN]
To note a report from Peter Mathieson, Principal | B |
| 4. Committee Business | |
| • Senior Lay Member's Overview [OPEN] Verbal | C1 |
| • Court USS Sub-Group [OPEN] | C2 |
| • Policy & Resources Committee [CLOSED] | C3 |
| • Nominations Committee [OPEN] | C4 |
| • Audit & Risk Committee [CLOSED] | C5 |
| • Remuneration Committee Annual Report [CLOSED] | C6 |
| • Knowledge Strategy Committee [CLOSED] | |
| • Senate [OPEN] | |

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 5. People and Money – External Review Report [CLOSED but the External Review Report and a summary management response will be published shortly]
To consider the report presented by PA Consulting and the management response presented by Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary. | D |
| 6. Performance Measures to Support Strategy 2030: 2022-23 Year-End Report [CLOSED but measures will feature in the published Annual Report and Accounts] To consider a paper presented by Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning | E |
| 7. Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report [CLOSED]
To consider the annual report presented by Douglas Millican, Convener of Audit & Risk Committee | F |
| 8. Risk Management Post Year-End Assurance Statement [CLOSED]
To consider the assurance statement presented by Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services | G |
| 9. Finance To consider papers presented by Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
• Director of Finance's Report [CLOSED]
• Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 [CLOSED but will be published in January]
• Letter of Representation [CLOSED] | H1 H2 H3 |
| 10. Grade Scale Review [CLOSED but will be announced shortly] | I |

To approve a paper presented by Peter Mathieson, Principal & ViceChancellor

11. Student Experience Update [CLOSED]

To consider a paper presented by Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students

J

12. Students 'Association and Sports Union Reports

K1 K2

To consider the reports presented by Sharan Atwal, Students 'Association President

- Students 'Association Report [OPEN]
- Sports Union Report [OPEN]

13. Edinburgh Futures Institute [CLOSED]

L

To approve a paper presented by Gary Jebb, Director of Place

14. Research & Innovation Strategy [CLOSED but strategy was approved and will be published shortly]

To approve the strategy presented by Christina Boswell, Vice-Principal Research & Enterprise

M

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

15. Externally Facilitated Court Effectiveness Review [OPEN aside from costings, which are commercially confidential]

N

To approve

16. General Council Membership & Registration Ordinance [OPEN]

O

To approve

17. Health and Safety Annual Report [OPEN aside from one section and annexes]

P

To note

18. Development & Alumni: Granting of Probate [CLOSED – relates to an individual legacy]

Q

To approve

19. Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity [CLOSED]

R

20. Resolutions [OPEN]

S

To approve

21. Any Other Business [None raised]

To consider any other matters

22. Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 26 February 2024, 9.30am-5pm (including Court seminar)

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH ORDINANCE No. [insert new number]

GENERAL COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP AND REGISTRATION

Changes from the current Ordinance 186 are shown in red

At Edinburgh, the [Number] day of [Month], [Year]

WHEREAS the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, Section 10(1), provides that the University Court shall cause to be maintained a register of members of the General Council in accordance with provisions to be prescribed by Ordinance:

AND WHEREAS in terms of Sections 3 of the said Act and of paragraphs 1 and 5- of Part I of Schedule 2 thereto, the University Court has power to amend by Ordinance the composition, powers, and functions of, 'inter alia', the General Council, and to prescribe the conditions under which the register of members of the General Council is to be maintained:

AND WHEREAS the University Court deems it expedient to amend the composition of the General Council and to amend the conditions under which the register of members of the General Council is to be maintained:

THEREFORE the University Court of the University of Edinburgh, in exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Section 3 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, and with particular reference to paragraphs 1 and 5 of Part I of Schedule 2 to that Act, hereby statutes and ordains:

1. The General Council of the University of Edinburgh shall consist of:

- (a) all persons who **having successfully met the requirements of an academic award other than an Honorary Degree and have graduated from the University of Edinburgh and** whose names shall be recorded in the Register of Graduates referred to in Section 3 of this Ordinance, in accordance with the provisions of this Ordinance:
- (b) all persons on whom the University has conferred an Honorary Degree or on whom it has conferred the award of Honorary Fellow of the University. [Note: this provision does not apply to those appointed by Colleges or Schools as Honorary Fellows.]
- (c) during their tenure of office -
 - (i) the Chancellor of the University;
 - (ii) the members of the University Court;
 - (iii) **the Chaplain to the University.**

[Drafting note: all Professors, Readers, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers are now included under (d) below]

- (d) **during the tenure of their appointment: all staff of the University appointed to roles assigned to University Grade 8 or above and their grade equivalent(s).**
- (e) **those 'ex officio' members in Clause 1(c) who accept the invitation to retain their membership of the General Council on demitting office or completion of their period of appointment;** [Drafting note: former Professors are now included under (f) below]
- (f) **former staff (admitted previously as per Clause (d) above) who accept the invitation to retain their membership of the General Council after being employed by the University for a period of at least three years in a role assigned to Grade 8 or above or equivalent and who leave University employment except when dismissed or in other similar categories of case as may be determined by the Registrar.**

2. The University Court shall from time to time appoint a Registrar of the General Council, upon such conditions as the Court may determine, and the Court shall provide such assistance for the performance of the Registrar's duties as it may consider necessary. The office of Registrar may be held in conjunction with any other office in the University.

3. The Registrar shall ensure that a Register of Graduates is maintained, recording the full names of all persons on whom the University has conferred an **academic award** other than an Honorary Degree, the address of each graduand at the time of registration for graduation, the date of graduation, and the **award** conferred.

4. The Registrar shall also ensure that a Register of Members of the General Council is maintained, recording

(a) the full names in alphabetical order and addresses (where known) of all graduates whose names are recorded in the Register of Graduates and who are not known to be dead, or presumed dead failing contrary information after eighty years from the date of graduation, together with, in each case, the first **academic award** recorded in the Register of Graduates, and the year of graduation in that **academic award**.

(b) the full names, in alphabetical order, and addresses (where known) of all other members of the General Council not known to be dead and the offices in virtue of which they qualify for membership.

5. [Omitted by Ordinance No. 202, now superseded by Ordinance No. 213]

5. If any person whose name is not included in the Register of Members shall consider that it should be so included, it shall be competent for him or her to appeal to the University Court **and** if the Court considers that such person's name should be included in the Register of Members - in terms of this Ordinance, it shall direct the Registrar to amend the Register accordingly. The decision of the Court shall be final.

6. Ordinance No **186** (General Council Membership and Registration) is hereby revoked.

7. This Ordinance shall come into force after its approval by **His** Majesty in Council on a date to be determined by the University Court.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF

Approved by Order in Council, dated [insert date when known]

General Council Business Committee – 7 December 2023
Secretary's Report

1. Billet

Two editions of Billet are issued each year to General Council members primarily to inform them of the forthcoming Half Yearly Meetings in February and June, and to provide information on the work of the Business Committee and the Standing Committees. 800 members receive paper copies of Billet and c. 140,000 are sent it electronically. The extended production schedule and much of the cost relates to producing the papers copies. Hitherto, Billet was produced in-house by CAM (Communications and Marketing) but it is no longer able to do so and this has been outsourced to Lane Agency, which has completely redesigned Billet in an attempt to attract more General Council members to read it and as a result attend the Half Yearly Meeting, either in person or online. There is a significant increase in the cost arising from outsourcing the production of Billet, as well as much additional work falling to the General Council Office.

2. Election for Business Committee 2024/25

There are 13 Candidates competing for 7 places on the Business Committee next year and details about the Candidates, their Proposers and Seconders are given on the General Council website and in Billet. The election will again be handled by Civica Election Services, with voting papers issued in early January and the results announced at the HYM on 17 February 2024.

3. Election of next Rector

The Rector is elected by students and staff every three years. The next election will be from Tuesday 27 February to Friday 1 March 2024. In the absence of the Chancellor, the Rector chairs General Council Half Yearly Meetings.

4. Draft Resolution Nos. 112/2023 – 114/2023

These Resolutions were approved by correspondence by the Business Committee

5. Protocol for re-appointment of General Council Assessors to Court

This Protocol produced between the Business Committee and Court was discussed with the Assessors who are also basically content with it. The final stage is for Court Services to draw up a time line for the various stages so these are well aligned with the annual cycle for other appointments to Court. Due to staff changes and other workload pressures on Court Services, doing this has been delayed but will be discussed at meeting with the newly appointed Head of Court Services, Dan Wedgwood on 7 December