



Business Committee Meeting on Thursday 10 October 2024

at 5.15pm Raeburn Room, Old College

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Presentation from Professor Christina Boswell, Vice-Principal Research and Enterprise
3. Minutes of the Meeting of 27 June 2024 Paper 1
4. Matters arising from the Minutes of 27 June 2024*

Items for Discussion/approval

5. Oral observations by General Council Assessors on the Court Meeting of 7 October 2024 Agenda To follow
6. Business Committee Work Plan for 2024-25 Paper 3
7. Standing Committees Work Plans for 2024-25 Paper 4
8. Draft Resolutions of the University Court [Tabled]

Items for information

9. Report from the Secretary of the General Council Paper 5
10. Report on the Meeting of the General Councils of the "Ancient" Universities Paper 6
11. Any other competent business*
12. Date of the next meeting - 5 December 2024

N.B. *Notice of any matters which Members may wish to raise under items 4 or 11 should be given to the Secretary not less than 24 hours before the meeting.

**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 Manya 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 Wolfe.

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;
- Names suggested to fill one vacancy on FSSC were:
 - Dame Anne Richards CVO FRSE and 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; 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.



University Court
Chancellor's Building, Edinburgh
Monday, 7 October 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]** **A1**
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2024 and the Special Meeting held on 3 October 2024
- 2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log [CLOSED]** **A2**
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**
 - Exception Committee **[CLOSED]** **C1**
 - Policy & Resources Committee **[CLOSED]** **C2**
 - Nominations Committee **[OPEN]** **C3**
 - Audit & Risk Committee **[CLOSED]** **C4**
To approve updates to the Committee's Terms of Reference
 - Remuneration Committee **[CLOSED paper – Framework document to be published on the University website]** **C5**
To approve updates to the existing Framework for Decision Making
 - Senate (Senatus Academicus) **[OPEN]** **C6**

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

- 5 Finance** **D**
 - **Director of Finance's Report [CLOSED]**
To consider a paper presented by Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
- 6 Court External Effectiveness Review: Recommendations [CLOSED]** **E**
To consider a paper presented by Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
- 7 Student Experience Update:** **F**
Student Surveys 2024 Results and Response [CLOSED]
To consider a paper presented by Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students

- 8 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports**
To *consider* the reports presented by Dora Herndon, Students' Association President
- **Students' Association Report [OPEN, except financial reporting]** G1
 - **Sports Union Report [OPEN]** G2
- 9 College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine: Modernising Governance and Structure [CLOSED]** H
To *approve* modifications to the School structure within the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM), presented by David Argyle, Head of CMVM
- 10 New Darwin – Estates Project [CLOSED]** I
To *approve* funding as proposed in a paper presented by Damien Toner, Director of Estates
- 11 Strategic Acquisition Update [CLOSED]** J
To *approve* submission of a revised offer, as proposed in a paper presented by Damien Toner, Director of Estates

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

- 12 Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Outcome Framework and Assurances Model [OPEN]** K
To *note*
- 13 Development & Alumni: Alumni Relations Activity [CLOSED]** L
To *note*
- 14 Remuneration Committee: Senior Leadership Team Annual Remuneration Review 2025 – Proposed Approach [CLOSED]** M
To *endorse*
- 15 Any Other Business**
To *consider* any other matters
- 16 Date of Next Meeting**
Monday 2 December 2024

Business Committee Workplan for 2024-2025

10 October 2024

A presentation from Professor Christina Boswell, Vice-Principal Research and Enterprise, to discuss the implementation of the Research and Innovation Strategy, which was launched in early 2024, and how it will influence core areas of the University's activity.

5 December 2024

A report from the Conveners of the Standing Committees on the meetings held in Semester One.

27 February 2025

A presentation from Janet Legrand, OBE KC, Senior Lay Member of the University Court.

1 May 2025

A report from the Conveners of the Standing Committees on the first meetings held in Semester 2.

26 June 2025

A report from the Conveners of the Standing Committees on the final meetings held in Semester 2.

Meeting Dates 2024-2025

Business Committee Meetings begin at 5.15pm, preceded by coffee and tea from 5pm

All meetings will take place in the Raeburn Room, Old College

2024-2025	
5.15pm, Thursday	Business Committee
10 October 2024	Raeburn Room, Old College

BC Meeting 10 October 2024 Paper 3

5.15pm, Thursday 5 December 2024	Business Committee Raeburn Room, Old College
Saturday 15 February 2025 10.30am	Half Yearly Meeting McEwan Hall followed by lunch in the Playfair Library
5.15pm, Thursday 27 February 2025	Business Committee Raeburn Room, Old College
5.15pm, Thursday 1 May 2025	Business Committee Raeburn Room, Old College
Saturday 14 June 2025 10.30am	Half Yearly Meeting Edinburgh Climate Change Institute NB a separate showcasing event will take place at the Usher Institute date tbc
5.15pm, Thursday 26 June 2025	Business Committee Raeburn Room, Old College

Standing Committee Membership and Work Plan 2024/25

Academic Standing Committee (ASC)

Convener: Graeme Reid

Brian Smith

John Gillies

Judy Hardy

Dorothy Welch

Dates of Meetings: 19 November (EUSA President*); **11 March; 5 June**

Finance & Services Standing Committee (FSSC)

Convener: Almira Delibegovic-Broome

Manya Buchan

Kirsty MacGregor

Lucy Blackburn

Alan Ross

Dates of Meetings: 4 November (Director of HR); **4 March** (Director of Finance); **6 May**

International Standing Committee (ISC)

Convener: Ann Cormack

Mary Gunn

Nikhil Agarwal

Richard Andrews

Max Browning

Dates of Meetings: 15 October (internal planning meeting); **31 March; 12 May**

Public Affairs Standing Committee (PASC)

Convener: Alice Brown

Arron Ashton

Devin Scobie

Candice Donnelly

Tamara Raidt

Dates of Meetings: 8 October (internal planning meeting); **8 April; 29 May**

*Shown in brackets where topic/speaker has been agreed. When a speaker has been decided for open meetings (except FSSC) an outlook invitation with a Teams link will be sent to all BC members.

Report of the Secretary of the General Council

1. General Council Assessor to University Court

Rt. Hon. Douglas Alexander resigned as General Council Assessor on 18 July, following his election as MP for Lothian East and subsequent appointment as Minister of State for Trade Policy and Economic Security. His term of office would have finished on 31 July 2025 unless he had been re-appointed for a second four-year term.

Helpfully, the Nominations Committee of Court has agreed to bring forward the recruitment of a replacement Assessor from the normal timescale for filling other Court vacancies.

There is an established procedure for appointing General Council Assessors and this involves a joint Selection Panel of 3 senior members of Court and 3 representatives from the Business Committee – namely, Convener, Secretary and Assessor.

Applications will be advertised in October. The shortlist of those called for interview will be decided on 9 December, with interviews on 13 January 2025. The recommendation of the joint Selection Panel will go via the Nominations Committee and the Exception Committee of Court so that approval can be made in time for the Assessor to attend the February 2025 Court meeting.

After the advert and role specification is available on Court Services website, an email will be sent to General Council members to alert them to the vacancy because only General Council members are eligible to apply. The advert will indicate a preference for applicants to have a financial background.

If Business Committee members (except those involved in the appointment process) know of General Council members whom they think might be suitable for the role, it will be in order to draw the vacancy to their attention, making clear that they are not involved in the appointment process.

2. University Consultation on Responsible Investment Policy

In addition to individual submissions from General Council members to the consultation, the Working Group was created to draft a response for approval by the Business Committee. This was submitted on 30 September and a copy of the final text is attached (see Appendix 1). For transparency, this is now available on the General Council website.

The Working Group was chaired by FSSC Convener, Almira Delibegovic-Broome, and the other members were: Ann Cormack, Gordon Cairns, Alan Johnston and Bruce Nelson. The Group met with Dave Gorman (Director, Social Responsibility and Sustainability) who is leading the consultation. He has responded positively to our submission, subject to clarification of the reasons behind our comments on the need to define KPIs for the Social Investment Fund before further investments were made.

There have been about 2000 submissions to the consultation – a reflection of the high level of interest in this topic. These are being analysed and a report on this is expected to go to Court at its meeting in December.

3. Standing Committee meetings

Paper 4 gives the dates and membership of the various Standing Committees.

At a meeting of the Standing Committee Conveners on 26 September it was agreed:

- Apart from an initial ‘getting to know other members’ meeting, the normal format will be for meetings to be online via MS Teams. This puts all members on an equal footing and avoids reliance on the online conference facilities in University meeting rooms which are of variable quality and not supported locally. It also places less of a time demand on guest speakers as they do not need to come in person to Charles Stewart House and allows some flexibility in start times to suit the availability of members with busy day jobs!
- Apart from FSSC meetings (which will be only for its members given the sensitivity of information that can be discussed) and the Constitutional Standing Committee (CSC), all other Standing Committee meetings will be ‘open’ to any Business Committee member who wishes to attend to hear the presentation by the guest speaker, although preference will be given to members of Standing Committees when asking questions. When the guest speaker leaves, so will those Business Committee Members who are not members of the Standing Committee in order that it can deal with other business.

4. Attendance at graduations

All Business Committee members should have received an invitation to join the academic procession at the November graduations. Please note link below to register attendance as it would be much appreciated if members could attend any of the graduations on 22, 23, 26, 27 and 28 November:

<https://forms.office.com/e/ERY1BEjpMu>

5. ‘Showcasing’ meeting at the Usher Institute in June 2025

At the June HYM, Professor Andrew Morris invited the General Council to visit the Usher Institute in the Bio Quarter. There has also been an enthusiastic response to this from Vice-Principal and Head of College, David Argyle, and involving discussions with staff in D & A and from the College of Medicine and Vet Medicine.

BC Meeting 10 October 2024 Paper 5

The Usher Institute is a most impressive new building and the innovative work taking place in developing data enabled solutions for health and wellbeing will provide much suitable material for a showcasing meeting of widespread interest.

The Usher Institute in common with most other University buildings, is not open at the weekends. Hence, this showcasing meeting will be held on a weekday in the late afternoon/early evening in June on a date to be decided with David Argyle.

This means the showcasing meeting will be entirely separate from the statutory Half-Yearly meeting, which will be held on Saturday 14 June 2025 at the ECCI.

Dr William Duncan

Secretary of the General Council

Appendix 1

Business Committee of the General Council

Submission to the Consultation on Responsible Investment Policy

General comments

The Business Committee of the General Council was pleased that the consultation was opened up to allow members of the General Council to submit their views individually.

We are also grateful for the extension given to submit this response from the Business Committee. In producing this response to the consultation, we are not seeking to summarise the views of individual General Council members, but to offer the following more general observations and comments. These are framed within the recognised role of the General Council, both in terms of its statutory role and as a 'critical friend' concerned to enhance the wellbeing of the University. Accordingly, we do not comment on matters of detail that are the responsibility of the University executive and limit our responses to matters of overall policy and approach.

1. Clarity, consistency and transparency

In our review of the relevant materials, we found that those documents relevant to the proper understanding of the University's investment approach and its current portfolio were not always easy to access. Moreover, once accessed, documents are not always consistent with each other, or with public statements issued on behalf of the University, and that not simply on minor issues.

We would like to illustrate the point: The **consultation document** states that the current investment policy provides 'mandatory requirements' for the assets managers investing on behalf of the University. Reference is made to progress having been made in embedding Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) approaches, including divestment from all fossil fuels. Yet in the **Statement of Investment Principles**, paragraph 1.6, it is only stated that the University 'would strongly prefer' that ESG are among the factors which investment managers will take into account and that this policy is implemented on a 'best endeavours' basis.

We recognise why some flexibility is desired, but this should not be through lack of clarity or consistency.

To ensure that documents fit together well and convey the same consistent message, we think it would be helpful for:

- All the material relevant to the University's investment policy and its investments to be set out in one easily accessible place, both in relation to the investment policy overall (including operational elements such as the expected rate of return, spread of risk, quality ratings) and to the responsible investment aspect of it.
- The presentation of the University's investment policy and its outcomes are treated as part of the University's public interface, with the material being presented in a clear straightforward, verifiable, and attractive way (like, for example, the University's Annual Report and Accounts).

2. Clarity on the relevance of University's investments and the rationale for investment returns

We believe it would be beneficial for there to be a clearer and more proactive approach to explaining the make-up of the University endowment fund (and any other funds invested by the University), and the benefits the University is able to deliver as a result of its investment portfolio. We did not find the annual Endowment Fund report very informative in that respect, providing only very basic facts and figures.

The University community would benefit from knowing clearly, every year, not only what particular levels of return were achieved, but for what purposes the investment income was used - for example, how many scholarships were supported or projects carried out. The wider credibility of how the investments are managed depends not just on the extent of the returns, but how they are used and their impact on our community and more widely.

The existing governance rules for the Investment Committee should be complied with and kept under review, to reflect best practice. Although the rules for tenure clearly state that membership is for 3 years with the option of extension for another 3 years at the discretion of Court, we were surprised to see from the University website that several members have been on the investment committee for much longer than this.

3. Long term impact and views

As a long-term investor, the University is able to take a long-term strategic view in its approach to investment policies and practices and can align these to the core values of a leading international institution for learning and research. Accordingly, the University has a role to play in providing stewardship and leadership for our society and our planet.

While there will always be a range of views within the University, there are certain core values widely shared that could be spelled out more clearly in the investment arena and assist our asset managers in delivering in accordance with these values.

To demonstrate these values, the University should consider:

- the extent to which it could make more use of proxy voting at company AGMs (and explore our asset managers' own record of proxy voting);
- asking our asset managers to present us with ideas how to make our portfolio more in line with our overall values as expressed in Strategy 2030 and related documents; and
- how well our asset managers' values are aligned with ours.

4. Getting the best out of University's asset managers

Although substantial at over £700m, we understand the size of the University's investment portfolio may mean it would be difficult to justify having an in-house investment management team. We consider, though, that more could be asked of our external asset managers in terms of presenting us with solutions that work best with our overall investment approach and our values. The University

should be clear about its values and needs, ensure its investment processes are transparent and capable of effective scrutiny, and expect performance from its asset managers in line with our overall values and our needs. That type of approach does not mean that the University should be asking of its asset managers to do 'more' than they are doing now (leading perhaps to unintended consequences, such as higher management fees) – but rather being clear on what the University wants and making sure it gets what it (already) pays for.

5. Disinvestment Campaigns

It was unfortunate that the consultation was announced **after** a high-profile occupation of Old College Green by those campaigning for the University to disinvest in companies implicated in supplying material for the production of weapons or systems used in the Israel/Gaza conflict. This could give many the impression that the consultation was issued in response to this disinvestment campaign and create expectations on the outcome, although we understand that a review of the Responsible Investment Policy had been in preparation long beforehand.

The inherent tension between protest groups demanding immediate action, on the one hand, and the complex multi-layered internal decision-making processes within the University over changes in investments, on the other, presents a significant challenge to the University executive. This is exacerbated when other universities facing similar situations appear to be able to act more decisively.

We are entering a phase of political instability and global tension on many fronts. The conflicts in Israel/ Gaza/ Lebanon precipitated the recent occupation of Old Quad Green and this conflict continues and expands. Moreover, there are many other potential sources of controversy, for example, Russia/ Ukraine, tension between mainland China and the West, signs of alienation of countries in Africa and the global South from the global North. All of these and others have the potential to affect perceptions of the University's investment policy and could lead to further calls for disinvestment and campus action, as well as having implications for recruitment of students and staff.

To help deal with this more challenging situation internationally, we would suggest that:

a. There should be more regular reviews of investment policies.

The existing policy was approved in 2016 and had not been updated, although there had been significant subsequent changes, such as disinvestment from oil and gas.

b. The University should seek to be better prepared to deal with other future disinvestment campaigns and be better placed to demonstrate a more proactive approach, rather than appearing largely reactive.

This could involve:

- Horizon scanning to anticipate future disinvestment campaigns which reflect changing ethical expectations within student and academic communities;
- drawing on expertise within Edinburgh University's academics (e.g., potentially Edinburgh Business School) to evaluate and advise on the merits (or otherwise) of disinvestment campaigns;
- clarity (both internally and externally) about where responsibility and authority lie to deal with disinvestment campaigns. (It is not self-evident who within the senior management team is ultimately responsible for investment policy management and scrutiny.)

We also believe that if the recommendations we have made are adopted in relation to providing greater clarity and consistency in the description of policies, and more transparency in reporting the benefits that the investment income is used to support, this will improve the ability to respond to divestment campaigns.

30 September 2024

Consultation Questionnaire

We respond below to the specific questions set out in the consultation questionnaire.

1. Do you support the proposal to incorporate socially positive investment into the remit of the responsible investment policy?

Yes

2. Do you have further comments on how we can incorporate socially positive investment into our investment activities?

We were surprised to find out that, already some years into the existence of the £8m Social Investment Fund, it is only now that its performance is being assessed in more detail.

We consider that **before** further funds are committed to socially positive investment, clear KPIs should be set for how the performance of those funds is going to be assessed, and how frequently the performance will be reviewed. Those KPIs, in our view, should include both pure financial indicators, as well as ways of measuring the 'socially positive' impact of the investments.

3. Do you support the proposal to align our investment portfolios with a 1.5 decarbonisation pathway?

Yes

4. Do you have further comments on the proposal to align our investment portfolios with a 1.5°C decarbonisation pathway?

We note that the University hosts some of the UK-relevant high-energy consuming equipment at its premises. Some thought should be put into how such hosting – of wider relevance to the country as a whole – should be treated in any future thinking and reporting of progress on decarbonisation pathway.

5. Do you support the proposal to measure carbon impact metrics annually, as outlined by TCFD best practice guidance?

Yes

6. Do you have further comments on the proposal to measure carbon impact metrics annually?

No

7. Do you support the proposal to incorporate the protection of nature and biodiversity into the Responsible Investment Policy?

Yes

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8. Do you have further comments on the proposal to incorporate the protection of nature and biodiversity into the Responsible Investment Policy?

We would refer to our comments under point 4 above, on requiring advice and performance from asset managers and taking into account when selecting asset managers how well they manage the protection of nature and biodiversity through their investments.

9. Do you support the proposal to explore an Active Ownership approach in our new Responsible Investment Policy?

Yes

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10. Do you have further comments on the proposal to explore an Active Ownership approach to our investments?

As suggested in our opening remarks, we consider that the University should be more robust with its asset managers. The onus should be on the managers to present the University with ideas on how best to act in line with our values and our long-term investor status.

11. Do you support our commitment to review our definition of ‘controversial weapons’ in the context of our Responsible Investment Policy?

Yes

12. Do you have further comments on the definition of ‘controversial weapons’ we should use in our Responsible Investment Policy?

We understand that the internal expert group set up to advise on this aspect has reported and we defer to that advice, which we would wish to see published when the results of this whole consultation are issued.

13. Do you have further views on definitional issues associated with armaments?

This is an evolving issue. We should be clear on our intent and then ask our fund managers to provide us with a range of options how to implement that intent in the most satisfactory way.

14. Do you support our commitment to review our responsible investment policy to ensure that our investment activities are appropriate in an international context?

Yes

15. Do you have further comments on how we can ensure that our investment activities are responsible in an international context, in accordance with our values and the UN Principles for Responsible Investment?

The University has already had a working group devoted to this issue and we expect it to produce a report (which, like the report on the definition of ‘controversial weapons’ we would like to see published). We would like to see the University committing itself to a set of principles/resources which would ensure it upholds human rights and does not act in breach of international law. That commitment will need to be backed up by an effective scrutiny mechanism, including reporting by the asset manager and the quarterly reviews of their performance.

16. Do you support our commitment to improve the transparency of our investments?

Yes

17. Do you have further comments on how we can improve the transparency of our investment activities?

We have set out our proposals in relation to this in sections 1 and 2 of the General comments given above.

Meeting of Conveners and Secretaries of the General Council of the Ancient universities

When the Conveners and Secretaries of the General Councils met in Aberdeen in June 2023, it was agreed that the next meeting would be held at Edinburgh University. This took place on 26 July 2024 and the attendance and agenda is attached.

Gordon Cairns chaired the meeting and there was a wide-ranging exchange of information. A detailed note of the meeting has been prepared. The following key points emerged:

Although all the university General Councils had a common start point in the Education Scotland Act 1858, each had developed to differing degrees. The position at Edinburgh University is different to most of the others.

- Only Edinburgh has a Secretary independent of the university administration or a dedicated member of staff to support the work of the General Council;
- The General Council in Edinburgh has a separate budget and discretion over how this is spent; none of the others has a separate budget;
- The various Business Committees have different standings within the university and the St Andrews Business Committee is having to justify its continued existence. There have been no elections in recent years to the St Andrews Business Committee with only 4 remaining members whose term of office is due to expire next year;
- The election of members of the Business Committee at Edinburgh is managed externally with a good response from members; other General Councils have a disappointing level of engagement.

It was agreed that these meetings should continue on an annual basis and the next meeting will be held at Glasgow University in summer 2025.

Appendix 1

Conveners and Secretaries of the General Councils of the 'Ancient' Universities

Raeburn Room, Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh - 26 July 2024 - (12.30 – 4pm)

Aberdeen – Duncan McNiven (Convener); Tracey Slaven (Secretary)

Edinburgh – Gordon Cairns (Convener-elect); Bruce Nelson (Vice-Convener elect);
William Duncan (Secretary); Alison MacLeary (Assistant Secretary)

Glasgow - Cameron Marshall (Convener)

St Andrews – Matthew Lawson (Convener); Alastair Merrill (Secretary)

Agenda

1. Note of meeting on 2 June 2023 – for approval ENCLOSURE
2. Oral reports by each Convener of key issues since the last meeting.
3. Discussion of specific suggested topics: (Order of topics to agreed at meeting)
 - 3.1 Governance and Constitutional issues
 - a. University Ordinances changes to widen eligibility of General Council membership and the implications when approved by Privy Council.
 - b. Increasing international representation on the Business Committee and its implication for the conduct of meetings.
 - c. Who should preside at General Council Half Yearly meetings?
 - d. Election arrangements to Business Committee.
 - 3.2. Improving contact with and involvement by General Council members
 - a. Communications with members. Frequency; relationship to other University communications; format (electronic or paper or social media); GDPR restrictions.
 - b. Alumni engagement – what role should the General Council Business Committee play (beyond its statutory responsibilities), given the widening diversity and geographic location of Business Committee members?
 - c. Student experience. How to encourage continued association with and loyalty to University after graduation?
 - 3.3. Dealing with contentious issues and role of Business Committee
 - a. Disinvestment campaigns and protests.
 - b. Demands for the repatriation of stolen artworks
 - c. Historical involvement in/benefits from the slave trade; how to acknowledge this and make appropriate reparations?
 - d. Making formal representations to University Court on 'matters affecting the well-being and prosperity of the University'
 - 3.4. University funding challenges and opportunities. Implications for General Councils
4. Any other business.
5. Conclusions and summarising agreed action points.