



**AGENDA for the Business Committee Meeting**  
**on Thursday 5 December 2024 at 5.15pm**  
**in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

1. Welcome and Apologies
  2.
    - a. Minutes of the Meeting of 10 October 2024 Paper 1
    - b. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 10 October 2024
  3. Observations by General Council Assessors  
Agenda for University Court meeting on 2 December 2024 Paper 2 (To follow)
  4. Topics for consideration arising from the Standing Committee meetings
    - a. Academic Standing Committee Paper 3
    - b. Finance & Services Standing Committee Paper 4
    - c. International Standing Committee Paper 5
    - d. Public Affairs Standing Committee Paper 6
  5. General Council Billet Paper 7
  6. Report from the Secretary of the General Council Paper 8
  7. Any other competent business
  8. Date of the next meeting
- Notice of any questions under item 7 and of any matters which Members may wish to raise under item 8, 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 10 October 2024 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room, Old College

**Present**

Mr Gordon Cairns, Convener of the Business Committee	
Dr Bruce Nelson, Vice-Convener of the Business Committee (online)	
Dr William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council	
Ms Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council	
Dr Nikhil Agarwal (online)	Professor John Gillies
Professor Richard Andrews	Ms Kirsty MacGregor
Mr Arron Ashton	Ms Tamara Raidt (online)
Dr Lucy Blackburn	Mr Alan Ross
Professor Alice Brown	Rt. Rev. Brian Smith
Ms Ann Cormack	Dr Dorothy Welch
Almira Delibegovic-Broome	Lady Sarah Wolffe (online)
Ms Candice Donnelly	
Alastair Dunlop	

**In attendance** Professor Christina Boswell, Vice-Principal Research and Enterprise

## 1. Welcome and Apologies

The incoming Convener of the Business Committee, Mr Gordon Cairns, welcomed all attendees to his inaugural meeting, particularly new members: Nikhil Agarwal, Richard Andrews and Max Browning (ISC); Lucy Blackburn and Alan Ross (FSSC); John Gillies, Judy Hardy and Dorothy Welch (ASC); and Tamara Raidt (PASC). Almira Delibegovic-Broome and Graeme Reid return to the committee for a further four-year term, and Bruce Nelson takes over as Vice-Convener.

Apologies had been received from Max Browning, Mary Gunn, Judy Hardy, Jock Millican, Graeme Reid and Devin Scobie.

The Convener introduced Professor Christina Boswell and invited her to speak to the committee about the University's Research and Innovation Strategy.

## 2. Presentation from Professor Christina Boswell, VP Research and Enterprise

CB began her presentation by referring members to prior circulated notes which gave an overview of the University's Research and Innovation Strategy, which is available to view on the University's website:

[Research and Innovation Strategy 2030 \(ed.ac.uk\)](https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-and-innovation-strategy-2030)

### Rationale

- Since beginning her role in August 2022, CB had observed strategic gaps and the need for internal prioritisation, acknowledging existing key programmes like the data-driven innovation initiative (DDI) and various micro-strategies across Colleges, Schools and departments, and the need to introduce a mid-level strategy to prioritise resource investment, decision making and deliverability within the University's devolved organisational structure;
- Highlighted the success in securing funding following a strong performance in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework. This allowed strategic investment in research and

innovation, with the majority of the £27m top sliced over a 5-year period dedicated to awarding more Chancellor's Fellowships as a means to support emerging research leaders;

- Noted the necessity of having a clear external strategy visible on the University website and the benefits of a unified internal and external strategy framework, with ongoing adjustments in the communication of the strategy to external stakeholders and partners to ensure clarity of the University's priorities and initiatives.

### Process

- Established fortnightly meetings with College Deans and Heads of Schools to maintain strategic alignment and co-ordination;
- Set up bespoke groups such as the Innovation Working Group co-chaired with Dr Catherine Martin, VP Corporate Services, and engaged in wider consultation across the University, with a focus on systemic support for impact and research culture;
- Described challenges in aligning diverse University activity within existing infrastructure.

### Key Features

- Mission areas have three broad themes, which encompass the University's expertise and distinctive areas of excellence in research: Shaping the future of health and care; Tackling the climate and environmental crisis; Harnessing data, digital and AI for public good;
- Emphasis on maintaining a robust commitment to foundational, disciplinary and blue-sky research and also support for early career researchers across the disciplines, for example the Chancellor's Fellows.

### Innovation

- Government and other funding bodies now place a strong emphasis on universities engaging with business and commercialization;
- Focus on innovation as a means to measure and enhance intellectual property impact and create financial returns from commercial and industrial partnerships; Innovation Development Scheme is supported by Edinburgh Innovations (EI);
- Innovation Engines – identifiable areas of research which are good investments;
- Aim to double to 400 the number of innovation-active academics and provide enhanced support for them – launch of a Capabilities Framework, developed by Kirsty Collinge, (Research and Enterprise), to outline skills across career stages and encourage recruitment into roles of reward-based activity;
- Updates to promotion criteria, and public recognition via a campaign to celebrate colleagues, to incentivize innovation-oriented academic roles, including creating a 3-year Innovation Fellowship scheme supported by Edinburgh Innovations.

### Implementation

- Tracked through a detailed plan of priorities and actions involving various University departments and teams e.g., HR; Edinburgh Innovations; Edinburgh Global; Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability;
- Developed a viable framework for assessing the impact and effectiveness of strategic initiatives through, for example, narrative and KPIs.

CB concluded her presentation by emphasising the importance of strategic investment in research and innovation amid current financial challenges and highlighted the need for ongoing assessment of strategy implementation to ensure alignment with the University's goals.

## Discussion

- In response to a question from DW, CB said that a research culture action plan for PGR students is being developed to ensure supervisors are trained and equipped, with pathways in place to report challenges; support for issues regarding hardship and welfare overlap with provision already in place for UG students;
- NA and AC raised the issue of practical support for engaging with alumni hubs and groups and a strategy for leveraging alumni networks worldwide to support university initiatives, including student recruitment, and supporting entrepreneurial activities among graduates;
- CB touched on the University's phenomenal success in fostering student start-ups and although the University did not own the intellectual property in these would like to be able to encourage global expansion of these innovations, and highlighted the importance of maintaining dialogue with students, particularly when they move abroad after graduation;
- CB suggested a follow-up conversation with AC and the International Standing Committee on alumni engagement strategies also involving Chris Cox, VP Philanthropy, given Development and Alumni's role in this activity;
- AD-B asked about the distribution of innovation-active academic staff across the University, particularly looking for potential hotspots of research and development activities; CB replied certain areas like the Institute for Genetics and Cancer, Institute for Regeneration and Repair, Informatics, and Engineering were particularly innovation active, whereas they were less so in climate and environmental research fields;
- JG asked about the difficulty in assessing the long-term impact of research and cited the work of alumnus Geoffrey Hinton, who had just been awarded the Nobel Prize, as an example of long delayed recognition of impactful research; the discussion briefly touched upon the pressures on academics to produce immediate outputs versus the need to carry out long-term curiosity-driven research;
- AB raised concerns about inclusivity in the University's strategic planning, particularly in terms of how it aligns – or fails to align – with the research focus of staff from various disciplines; CB responded by saying that Discovery Research is the bedrock of University activity and further discussions are encouraged to continue fostering an inclusive environment that supports both applied and foundational research pursuits.

The Convener warmly thanked CB for an enthusiastic and informative presentation and she left the meeting.

### **3. Minutes of the Meeting of 27 June 2024**

The committee approved the minutes

### **4. Matters arising from the Minutes of 27 June 2024**

The Secretary reminded members that the Business Committee Christmas Reception would take place on Tuesday 10 December at 5.30pm in the Talbot Rice Gallery and invitations will be issued shortly from the General Council office.

### **5. Observations by General Council Assessors**

- Sarah Wolffe said that an extra Court meeting had been held on 3 October to discuss responsible investment strategies and the following statement had just been released: [University Court Statement on Responsible Investment | The University of Edinburgh](#)
- An oral report of the open items from the Court meeting of 7 October 2024 (Paper 2) covered the following items:

- Strategic Priorities and Student Support Model: Senior leadership team presented their strategic priorities for the coming year, highlighting the continuing development and implementation of the student support model which aims to enhance student experience and address issues raised by the National Student Survey;
- International Issues: Despite Brexit, the University remains connected with European universities and continues to build research alliances in Europe and other global regions including Africa;
- Risk Assessment: Current risks including financial pressures and systemic underfunding of university places were discussed. Continue to engage in further discussions with the Government regarding funding;
- EUSA Report: An impressive and positive presentation was given by the EUSA President; the EUSA framework identifies important issues for students, for example, relating to housing and affordability issues. The discussion highlighted the importance of improving conditions to better meet student needs. Notable was the absence of past controversial topics e.g.; trans issues and occupation of the Old College Quad, with a focus instead on constructive approach and advocacy;
- Sport Union Report: highlighted accomplishments and challenges, particularly in terms of space constraints for indoor activities. The report conveyed a sense of pride in the University community's achievements at the Olympic and Paralympic levels;
- Committee Business: The Nominations Committee had agreed to proceed to fill the vacancy caused by Douglas Alexander's election as an MP and outlined the appointment schedule

## 6. Business Committee Work Plan for 2024-25

The Convener referred to paper 3, previously circulated, and noted the following:

- Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member of the University Court, will address the Business Committee meeting on 27 February 2025;
- There will not be invited speakers at other scheduled BC meetings to allow adequate time for members to discuss issues arising from Standing Committee meetings;
- Simon Fanshawe, University Rector, is the invited guest speaker at the lunch after the February 2025 HYM;
- The statutory HYM on Saturday 14 June 2025 will be held in the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, and a separate "showcasing" event for General Council members is being arranged, in conjunction with the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, at the Usher Institute on a weekday during May/June;
- Members are encouraged to attend General Council meetings and events in-person where possible.

## 7. Standing Committees' Work Plans for 2024-25

Paper 4, previously circulated, gave information about SC membership and dates of meetings.

- Conveners who were present at the meeting discussed respective areas of responsibility for the coming session;
- Alice Brown, Convener of PASC, highlighted primary focus areas i.e.:
  - Developing a robust communications strategy - considerations around the publication of Billet and future GC events;
  - Planned meeting with Chris Cox, Director of Development and Alumni, to discuss enhancing collaboration and alignment with University-wide activities to avoid duplication of efforts;
  - Engagement with General Council members and the wider community – proposed a survey of alumni resident in Edinburgh to see if more can be done in the local area;

- Revisiting “Town and Gown” relationship with local Council leaders;
- Finance and Services Standing Committee, chaired by Almira Delibegovic-Broome, discussed the committee’s schedule, with ongoing dialogue with the Directors of HR and Finance and a final meeting which will cover either Estates or Cybersecurity;
- Ann Cormack, Convener of the International Standing Committee, outlined potential aims for the year which centred on:
  - Bolstering the role of international alumni in supporting university initiatives, and pointed out the positive influence of the BC as ambassadors for the University;
  - Enhancing the University’s global reputation through strategic alumni engagement while also addressing staff and student satisfaction;
- Candice Donnelly, Convener of the Constitutional Standing Committee, explained that the focus of the committee is to review the internal workings of the General Council and address, for example, the implications of changing international representation and operational challenges such as the quorum for meetings. Recognition of the need for better attendance and explore proxy options for committee members unable to attend;
- Emphasized the necessity for cross-committee collaboration to maximise resource and avoid burdening staff;
- Addressed the importance of adapting to flexible meeting formats to accommodate members’ varying schedules including online participation;
- Gordon Cairns invited each committee convener to refine their focus areas at planning meetings with their committees and prepare for detailed discussions in subsequent formal committee meetings.

## **8. Draft Resolutions of the University Court**

None received.

## **9. Report from the Secretary of the General Council**

Paper 5 had been circulated previously for information. The Secretary highlighted the following:

- The advert for the vacant General Council Court Assessor position will appear in late October with a closing date of 2 December and interviews by the joint Court/ Business Committee Selection Panel will be on 13 January, with its recommendation subject to approval by the Nominations Committee of Court;
- The Secretary will let all General Council members know about the advert shortly after it appears and to further encourage a strong field of candidates asked committee members to alert those who might be suitable know about the vacancy;
- The Secretary expressed gratitude to the Nominations Committee for accelerating the timetable for this appointment, and added that Sarah Wolffe, General Council Court Assessor and member of the Nominations Committee, will represent the General Council on the selection panel along with the Convener and Secretary as neither will be applicants for the role;
- The Secretary took the opportunity to record thanks to the members of the Working Group set up to draft a response to the consultation on the University’s responsible investment policy and which had been approved by the Business Committee prior to submission on 30 September
- The Secretary asked members of the Business Committee able to represent the General Council at the winter graduation ceremonies in November to indicate their availability by completing the form - <https://forms.office.com/e/ERY1BEjpMu>

**10. Report on the Meeting of the General Councils of the “Ancient” universities**

- Paper 6, circulated previously for information, noted the main difference between the University of Edinburgh General Council and the other “Ancient” General Councils was the level of support provided by the University,
- The next meeting will be held at Glasgow University in 2025.

**11. Any other competent business**

None.

**12. Date of next meeting – 5 December 2024**

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 5 December 2024 at 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room.



University Court  
Central University Area  
Monday, 2 December 2024

**AGENDA**

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

**OPENING ITEMS**

- |          |   |  |
|----------|---|--|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Minutes [Open version of minutes to be published in due course]</b><br>To <u>approve</u> the minute of the meeting and note of the seminar held on 7 October 2024  | <b>A1, A2</b>  |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Matters Arising &amp; Review of Action Log [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>raise</u> any matters arising and <u>review</u> the Action Log  | <b>A3</b>  |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Principal's Report [OPEN]</b><br>To <u>note</u> a report from Peter Mathieson, Principal   | <b>B</b>   |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Committee Business</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policy &amp; Resources Committee [CLOSED]</li><li>• Nominations Committee [OPEN]</li></ul> To <u>approve</u> amendments to the committee's Terms of Reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Audit &amp; Risk Committee [CLOSED]</li><li>• Knowledge Strategy Committee [CLOSED]</li><li>• Remuneration Committee Annual Report [CLOSED]</li><li>• Senate [OPEN]</li></ul> | <b>C1</b><br><b>C2</b><br><b>C3</b><br><b>C4</b><br><b>C5</b><br><b>C6</b> |

**KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION**

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|----------|--|--|
| <b>5</b> | <b>Finance [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> papers presented by Lee Hamill, Director of Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finance Update Report</li><li>• Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24</li><li>• Letter of Representation</li><li>• United States Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (US GAAP)</li></ul> | <b>D1</b><br><b>D2</b><br><b>D3</b><br><b>D4</b> |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Student Recruitment and Intakes, 2024/25 Entry [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning   | <b>E</b>   |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Performance Measures to Support Strategy 2030: 2023-24 Year-End Report [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning   | <b>F</b>   |



- |           |  |                        |
|-----------|--|------------------------|
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Audit &amp; Risk Committee Annual Report [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> the annual report presented by Douglas Millican, Convener of Audit & Risk Committee               | <b>G</b>               |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Risk Management Post Year-End Assurance Statement [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> the assurance statement presented by Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services | <b>H</b>               |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Responsible Investment Policy: Analysis of Consultation Responses [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services | <b>I</b>               |
| <b>11</b> | <b>Student Experience Update [OPEN]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students   | <b>J</b>               |
| <b>12</b> | <b>Students' Association and Sports Union Reports [OPEN]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> the reports presented by Dora Herndon, Students' Association President                        |                        |
|           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students' Association Report</b></li> <li>• <b>Sports Union Report</b></li> </ul>  | <b>K1</b><br><b>K2</b> |
| <b>13</b> | <b>Annual Court Internal Effectiveness Review [OPEN]</b><br>To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary                        | <b>L</b>               |

#### ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

- |           |  |          |
|-----------|--|----------|
| <b>14</b> | <b>Health and Safety Annual Report [OPEN]</b><br>To <u>note</u> the report and <u>approve</u> the Health and Safety Policy | <b>M</b> |
| <b>15</b> | <b>Donations &amp; Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity [CLOSED]</b><br>To <u>note</u>                                   | <b>N</b> |
| <b>16</b> | <b>Resolutions [OPEN]</b><br>To <u>approve</u>   | <b>O</b> |
| <b>17</b> | <b>Any Other Business</b><br>To <u>consider</u> any other matters  |          |
| <b>18</b> | <b>Date of Next Meeting</b><br>Monday, 24 February 2025, 9.30am-5pm (including Court seminar)                              |          |

**Minutes of the Academic Standing Committee Meeting**  
**4.30pm on Tuesday 19 November 2024**  
**Online via Teams**

**Present:** Graeme Reid, Convener of ASC  
John Gillies  
Judy Hardy  
Brian Smith  
Dorothy Welch  
William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council  
Bruce Nelson, Vice Convener of the Business Committee  
Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council

**In attendance:** Dora Herndon, President of the Edinburgh University Student's Association  
Manya Buchan (FSSC)

**1. Welcome and apologies**

The Convener (GR) welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the session and led the introductions. He thanked Dora Herndon (DH) for agreeing to present an updated version of her paper to the University Court, incorporating material she gave at a recent seminar on student experience, which had been circulated to the committee prior to the meeting.

Apologies received from Gordon Cairns.

**2. Presentation by Dora Herndon, EUSA President**

DH presented on the Student Experience Framework, which focused on enhancing student experiences across the following four main areas:

**Navigating the University**

The University doesn't organize its information in an intuitive user-oriented way and this is overwhelming from a student perspective as the University is large, devolved and complex to navigate. It's really easy for students to get lost and miss key impactful information. The goal or vision for this factor would be that students are able to intuitively locate the appropriate services and resources.

**Expectation Accuracy**

This focuses on the University's dual responsibility to meet reasonable student expectations and to manage or temper unrealistic ones, ensuring that students' expectations align with the reality they experience.

**Actively Cared for**

Acknowledging that for a lot of students, the only proper adults they regularly interact with are University staff. That's why it's so important for the University to support and care for these students and explains why students look to the University for things like support on mental health or housing. There is a perceived gap between how much the University cares *about* students and how much the university cares *for* students. The goal is that students have access to support that respond to their needs and works to prevent potential issues from escalating. Students should see the University as

supportive and the University should provide not just reactive support, but proactive support that catches students before issues escalate.

### **Feeling of Belonging**

The University of Edinburgh is huge, both in numbers, geography and diversity and it is challenging, therefore, to build a student body that has any sense of unity. This is exacerbated by “faceless” University branding and elitist student stereotypes such as “white, privately educated and wealthy”, which doesn’t accurately reflect the student body and a lot of students feel like they don’t relate to this perceived idea of an “Edinburgh student”. While the University seeks to support students in finding smaller scale communities that they identify with, this connection to a larger whole is thought to be missing. The goal is that students are able to thrive in small communities while proudly identifying as part of a broader university community; to continue and strengthen those smaller bonds while building a connection to the university as a whole, creating a common sense of identity and pride.

DH concluded by suggesting that the issues students face are complex and cannot be fitted into just one of the above categories. In terms of making strategic improvements, suggest leveraging these insights to guide University actions which are aligned with a comprehensive understanding of students’ needs and expectations that can result in a more positive and inclusive student experience.

### **Discussion**

- In response to a question raised by DW, the experience of students tends to vary significantly across different schools and campuses, affecting the consistency of student experiences;
- Noted the difference in marking and assessment between subjects where it is more difficult to predict an essay score in arts-based subjects than science based, which has a more clear-cut process in terms of what is expected. CMVM has some of the worst rates for student mental health because of the intensity of workload in these subject areas so more mental health provision should be made available;
- BN asked about specific actions the University should take based on the framework, asking for tangible examples where changes could generate substantial positive impact for students;
- DH responded by stating that, while positive attempts have been made, for example, to reduce the turnaround times for assignment feedback, there remains a fundamental lack of trust between the student body and the University and the perception that the University prioritises research above teaching and appears to care more about acquiring new buildings within its estate than the interests of its staff and students;
- JG enquired about metrics to assess progress in the four areas identified by the framework. DH replied by saying that the concept of “student experience” has been diluted and it is more important to articulate what this actually means and the language with which to identify this, and how this is used in future discussion in order to benefit the student experience will be the real marker of success;
- DH highlighted the need for transparency during the initial recruitment process, especially concerning the challenges and realities of student life. Advice given at an early stage is vital to ensure students are adequately prepared and to avoid unmet expectations later;
- DH expressed concerns about the effectiveness of current student feedback mechanisms, describing them as inadequate. Students often feel as though their feedback disappears into a void without any acknowledgement or visible action. Suggestions include better

communication about what is done with student feedback and ensuring students are informed about the outcomes of their feedback;

- JH queried the balance and significance of different community interactions on the student experience;
- DH emphasised that students find a sense of connection most strongly at a local level with their peer group, in halls, on courses or involvement in student societies, and reiterated the challenges of fostering a broader, inclusive University identity;
- In response to a question raised by BS, DH responded by saying that the refurbishment on Teviot House is mainly to do with upgrading facilities while also taking into account students' preferences as to how these spaces might be used;
- DH said that students are not particularly aware of ongoing work relating to the Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP) but are able to currently feedback on existing courses through the usual channels;
- DW highlighted issues related to student housing, prompting a discussion on University actions and city relations concerning housing for students;
- DH outlined challenges students face, including affordability and accessibility and discussed the University's roles in both owned and external student housing;
- Suggestions for improvement included more transparency in housing processes, advocating for better living conditions through policy support, and direct engagement with student housing issues;
- On the topic of mental health, DH responded by underscoring the breadth of rising mental health challenges and the University's responsibility in providing adequate support structures;
- The discussion touched on interest in recent media reports of classism within the University and, while the University is aware of this issue and is supportive of its diverse student population, there is the challenge of policing individual cases and the need for a robust reporting system and better education on cultural respect and sensitivity;
- The relationship between EUSA and Edinburgh City Council varies annually, depending on the sabbatical officers and their political involvement. Despite some connections via campaigns, consistent engagement with city leaders is lacking;
- WD offered to facilitate a meeting with the City Council to address these concerns and improve the "town and gown" relationship;
- The discussion also highlighted misunderstandings about the role of students in the city housing crisis, suggesting a need for better communication to appreciate the economic contributions students bring to the city;
- Concerns were raised about the escalating costs of on-campus food and the impact on students' ability to afford nutritious meals. There is a significant issue of food security among students, where some must choose between essential expenditures like heating and eating;
- DH acknowledged efforts to keep prices low in certain locations, but admitted the broader challenge of maintaining affordability amid rising costs;
- DH elaborated on EUSA's strained relationship with the University Rector, Simon Fanshawe. EUSA has chosen to disengage from working with the Rector beyond necessary formal settings, such as Court, due to previous interactions described as difficult and unproductive to forming a working relationship.

The Convener thanked DH for an informative and detailed presentation, followed by an open and honest discussion.

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2024**

The minutes were approved.

**4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 28 May 2024**

**Action:-**

***Slides used by Colm Harmon will be circulated to new members of the committee for information.***

**5. Draft Resolutions**

No. 99/2024: Foundation of a Personal Chair of AI, Memory and War

No. 100/2024: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Educational Change and Diversity

The above Draft Resolutions were approved by the Committee.

**Action: -**

***AM will forward to the Business Committee for further consideration before the Court meeting of 2 December.***

**6. Any other Business**

GR thanked JH and DW for agreeing to be co-opted to the committee and for their insightful contributions.

**Action:-**

***WD and GR will draft a summary of the priorities for ASC in academic session 2024-25 for inclusion in Winter Billet 2025.***

**7. Preparations and date of the next meeting**

**Action:-**

- ***Invite Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students to the meeting on 11 March 2025 to update the committee on progress concerning issues around housing, student welfare and financial support;***
- ***Invite Colm Harmon, VP Students to the final meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2025 to give an update on the Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP) and the potential impact on student satisfaction scores;***

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 11 March 2025, 4.30pm, online via Teams.

**Minutes of the Finance and Services Standing Committee  
4.30pm on Monday 4 November 2024  
Braid Room, Charles Stewart House**

**Present:** Almira Delibegovic-Broome, Convener, FSSC  
Lucy Hunter Blackburn  
Manya Buchan (online)  
Kirsty MacGregor  
Alan Ross  
William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council  
Gordon Cairns, Convener of the Business Committee  
Bruce Nelson, Vice Convener of the Business Committee  
Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council

**In attendance:** James Saville, Director of HR

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Convener welcomed the committee to the first meeting of the session, including new members Lucy Blackburn and Alan Ross, and invited James Saville to provide an update on HR and staffing matters.

This was a closed meeting and only FSSC members, Business Committee Office Bearers and secretariat were present.

**2. Presentation by James Saville, Director of HR**

- The Secretary and Convener had prepared a list of questions for Mr Saville, which were forwarded to him in advance of the meeting and the discussion centered on those areas;
- JS began by looking at the challenging context within which the University is currently operating, including geopolitical events, the financial pressures facing the sector from which Edinburgh is not immune, and the debate around Artificial Intelligence. He spoke about the unexpected costs with issues relating to Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) which continues to affect University buildings, and the resulting impact on teaching, research and student satisfaction;
- He remarked on the welcome progress made since his last presentation to the committee in March 2023, including a positive revaluation of the USS and local SBS pension schemes affecting the contribution rates for employees and employers, and reported that there has been no industrial action since the Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) in 2023, which has allowed the University to work more positively in partnership with local unions and make significant progress on a number of joint initiatives.

**Hybrid/Flexible Working policy**

- A review in early 2024 of hybrid working and its effectiveness concluded that the current policy was fit for purpose and a further review would take place in 3 years, unless there was a need to adapt sooner, because of the introduction of new UK government legislation;

- The University has an ongoing commitment to flexible working practices and JS highlighted how hybrid working policies have evolved, and how they are seen as a major draw for new starters. Some concerns about equity in flexible work policies were acknowledged, particularly around staff with disabilities and their capability to adjust to on-site work requirements, as well as the need to address changes in building utilisation, especially on Mondays and Fridays.

### **Recruitment “freeze”**

- JS explained that it was a misnomer to refer to what was happening as a freeze, but given the need to reduce staff costs (due to reduced international student numbers and increasing operational costs) a more rigorous approach was being adopted to filling vacancies and there was a general ‘tightening’ of recruitment;
- The impact on remaining staff due to reduced recruitment was recognised, with the need to maintain staff morale and operational efficiency being balanced against efforts to achieve financial targets and set the organisation up for success as part of Strategy 2030;
- BN described the challenges of trying to predict where resource was most needed;
- JS explained the overall level of staff turnover was low because of the high standing and reputation of the University, and this made it challenging to deliver significant cost reductions purely through attrition, and some control on recruitment was needed;
- Plans to strategically manage spending without compromising on the quality of staff, particularly in research driven areas, were related to consideration of the future size and shape of the University. It may be necessary to suspend certain initiatives or programmes that are no longer sustainable or relevant.

### **Staff satisfaction and morale**

- JS noted the following examples of recent positive action by the University:
  - Equalized annual leave, which has benefited staff on grades 1-5;
  - Staff are now allowed to carry forward 5 days leave which can be used throughout the following year instead of having to be taken by March;
  - Introducing a life cover scheme for NEST members;
  - 286 academic promotions were awarded in the last year;
  - Review of the pay grade scale in 2024 benefited the majority of staff and reduced 1% of the gender pay gap due to changes at grade 10; this was the first review since 2006 and there is an agreement with the Trades Unions to revisit progress much more regularly in future.
- The results of the next two-yearly staff survey are due in 2025 – looking to improve the low participation rate of the last survey (36%);
- There was some discussion relating to a possible correlation between staff and student satisfaction. Suggested taking a more holistic approach by looking at the high rates of student satisfaction in, for example, the Vet School, and focusing on activity taking place across the University that might encourage a similar sense of belonging. The Teviot student union building will not re-open until 2026, which presents a challenge in that respect.

### **Autumn 2024 Budget update**

- There was positive news on research funding, but the University will be impacted by additional NI contributions from employers (2.1%);
- The minimal increase in student fees for next year announced after the Budget by the UK government could provide some financial offset to the extra NI costs but we are yet to see what approach the Scottish Government will take.

The Convener thanked JS for an interesting and encouraging presentation.

### **3. Apologies for absence**

None.

### **4. Minutes from the meeting held on 21 May 2024**

Members approved the minute from the meeting.

### **5. Matters arising from the minutes of 21 May 2024**

#### Item 5.c: Protocol for General Council Involvement in University strategies

WD reported that a revised version retitled as a 'Practice Note' had been drafted by the former Convener of the Business Committee, Sir Philip Mawer, with the Secretary who will raise this with the University Secretary, Leigh Chalmers, at an appropriate time.

#### **Action:-**

***Secretary to circulate a copy of the Practice Note to the committee.***

### **6. FSSC's work plan 2024-25**

- As Lee Hamill has recently resigned as Director of Finance, the committee will invite his interim replacement (when this has been announced) to the meeting in March 2025 to review the University's annual published set of report and accounts to 31 July 2024;
- The committee agreed that the final meeting of this session should focus on the University's digital infrastructure and that the Director of Estates could be invited to the first meeting of the next session in 2025-26;
- The Convener invited members of the Committee to consider future topics for FSSC to explore, and to feedback comments from each meeting to her and the Secretary, both in terms of any follow up actions the members would like to suggest, and in order to select appropriately the points to highlight in the Committee's report to the Business Committee. She reminded members to try to submit questions for the speaker in advance of each meeting, as that was helpful in structuring the discussion and in using the time with speakers effectively;
- Kirsty MacGregor raised the issue of online meetings for standing committees and expressed a strong preference for the committees to meet in-person;
- The Secretary explained that FSSC meetings would continue to take place in-person as these were restricted to FSSC members and office bearers, but for other standing committee meetings, which were open to all Business Committee members, it was more practical for them to be held entirely online, given the constraints on the size and availability of meeting rooms in Charles Stewart House.



- **Action:-**
- **Invite Gavin McLachlan, VP and Chief Information Officer to the final meeting on 6 May 2025;**
- **Secretary to send a farewell message, on behalf of the Business Committee, to Lee Hamill, who had been a regular contributor to meetings of FSSC during his time as Director of Finance.**

#### **7. General Council Budget 2024-25**

- Papers 2 and 3, circulated previously, gave a detailed statement of General Council operational budget receipts and payments for the year 2023/24; due to substantial expenses incurred for the June 2024 HYM and the more realistic cost of producing two editions of Billet, the budget allocation was almost fully spent;
- Operational Budget for 2024/25 remains the same as in previous years at £64k, despite budget cuts in other areas of the University;
- Costs in 2024/25 are likely to be similar to those in 2023/24; except that:
  - the allocation for a joint summer event at the Usher Institute with D & A/CMVM in 2025 will be capped at £10K;
  - if the Business Committee agrees at its December meeting to proceed with a digital alternative to Billet and no longer have an externally designed and printed version, the saving in cost of producing a summer Billet (around £15k) could be put towards a different project.

#### **Action:-**

**The Secretary will provide FSSC with a more detailed budget at the meeting in March 2025.**

#### **8. Any other business**

None.

#### **9. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of FSSC will be held on Tuesday 4 March 2025 at 4.30pm in the Braid Room, Charles Stewart House.

**Minutes of the International Standing Committee held at 4.30pm  
Tuesday 15 October 2024  
Online via Teams**

**Present:** Ann Cormack, Convener of ISC  
Max Browning  
Gordon Cairns, Convener of the Business Committee  
William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council  
Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Convener welcomed those present to the first meeting of the session to agree the programme of work for the International Standing Committee for 2024-25.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies received from Nikhil Agarwal, Richard Andrews, Mary Gunn and Bruce Nelson.

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 May 2024**

The minute had been previously circulated and was approved.

**4. Matters arising from the minutes of 7 May 2024**

Item 2:10 and 2:12

Relates to alumni engagement and the need to be realistic about existing resources and to be clear where to focus activity;

Item 3

It was felt that the University's partnerships within SE Asia varied in size and quality, and previous online discussion with members of ISC had raised the question of why some of these partnerships were regarded as 'strategic' as opposed to a relationship which exists, for example, at School level as the driver of some of these links.

**5. Meeting to discuss Work Plan for ISC 2024-25**

- Paper 2 had been circulated with the papers for the meeting. After receiving feedback from members unable to attend the initial planning meeting, the two main outcomes for this academic year were identified as follows:
  1. The ISC will have supported the reduced Development & Alumni (D&A) team in enlivening alumni clubs and networks in their practical support of the university in their geography;
  2. had a positive effect on international reputation through the ISC members' ambassadorial role locally, and via alumni clubs, and by encouraging a systemic approach to addressing academic staff satisfaction rates as well as the specific areas for improvement identified from student feedback.
- The discussion touched upon delays to the Global Strategy and underscored the importance of recruiting a VP International, or re-assigning the responsibilities of the role, and clear, international strategy implementation guidance from the University's leadership with consequent measurement and reporting to track success or otherwise;
- WD reported that meetings of the University's Global Executive had been twice postponed since the departure of Professor James Smith in his role as VP International;
- Engage with senior University colleagues with related areas of responsibility e.g., Provost, who is leading on some of these aspects in the absence of a VP International; University Secretary, who has oversight of Student Services and Development and Alumni; or Rona Smith, Deputy

- Secretary for Governance and Strategic Planning, to seek clarification about the current status of the international strategy and address the noted gaps in partnership strategy and operations;
- MG had previously raised the question of University funding to recognise and support alumni clubs/hubs and encourage membership growth, but the variation in size and quality of these organisations and the difference in fundraising culture in the UK, as compared with, for example, the United States, would indicate that this was unlikely to happen;
  - MB talked about potentially better ways that EUSA could collect feedback from all students about their experience at the University;
  - MB also raised concerns from the student perspective about the lack of adequate support for international students, including career prospects and language challenges, suggesting better access to proper support available for non-native speakers and better career guidance/clarity around visa arrangements to allow students from other countries the right to live and work in the UK after graduation, while also recognising that having an Edinburgh degree is intrinsically valuable;
  - There is the sense that the University relies upon the broad appeal of the city of Edinburgh to encourage students to study there, but the environment is not always conducive to allow them to develop the skills needed to participate properly;
  - Many international students - who are paying high fees - feel they are not getting value for money and this could influence the University's international reputation and potential recruitment;
  - WD reported that the University has retained its place at number 29 in the international league tables but student satisfaction remains a significant challenge;
  - There was some discussion on improving assessment feedback mechanisms between students and staff using digital tools like apps to measure how often students receive feedback, while also recognising the importance of the quality of the feedback;
  - Suggestions included integrating this functionality into existing student apps, such as the one EUSA currently uses;
  - ASC has a meeting on 19 November with the EUSA President, which can address some of these issues.

**Action: -**

***AC will contact Christina Boswell, VP Research and Enterprise, to follow up from the BC meeting of 10 October, and discuss how the Innovation and Research Strategy aligns with the wider International Strategy framework and invite her to a future meeting of ISC;***

***Secretary to invite Professor Kim Graham, Provost, to the next meeting of ISC on 31 March 2025 to discuss updates to the Global Strategy;***

***Secretary to invite Chris Cox to the final meeting of ISC on 12 May 2025 - along with Christina Boswell – to look at engagement with international alumni clubs.***

**6. Any other competent business**

WD suggested that AC should contact Alice Brown (Convener, PASC) before a planned meeting with Chris Cox, VP Philanthropy, to ensure a consistent approach towards the desired objectives of both committees.

**7. Date of next meeting**

Monday 31 March at 4.30pm online via Teams.

Public Affairs Standing Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 22 October 2024  
Online via Teams

**Present:** Ms Alice Brown (Convener of PASC)  
Mr Arron Ashton  
Ms Candice Donnelly  
Ms Tamara Raidt  
Mr Devin Scobie  
Dr William Duncan (Secretary of the General Council)  
Mr Gordon Cairns (Convener of the Business Committee)  
Mr Bruce Nelson (Vice Convener of the Business Committee)  
Ms Alison McNulty (Assistant Secretary of the General Council)

**In attendance:** Ms Ann Cormack (ISC)

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Convener welcomed all present to the first meeting of PASC to agree the work schedule for academic session 2024-25.

**2. Apologies for absence**

None.

**3. Minutes from the meeting held on 13 May 2024**

The minutes were approved.

**4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 13 May 2024**

None that would not be covered under the following agenda items.

**5. PASC's work plan 2024-25**

- Paper 2, prepared by AB, had been previously circulated and outlined the proposed work plan for PASC, with a focus on the following areas:
  - Communications Strategy – notably production of future Billets and plans for GC Half-Yearly Meetings and events;
  - Engagement with GC members – includes a proposal to conduct a survey of alumni residents in Edinburgh to ascertain their views on how alumni participation can be enhanced;
  - Engagement with the wider community

**Discussion**

- DS emphasised the importance of engaging with local Councillors and senior politicians, discussing the University's profile and influence within the City;
- Noted that PASC should aim to establish stronger working links for a mutually beneficial relationship which cover areas that concern both the City and the University and which affect students and staff e.g., housing and other infrastructure issues;

- WD raised concerns about mismatched perceptions between the University and the City Council regarding their relationship's quality and suggested further engagement with, for example, the chief executive of the City of Edinburgh Council, Paul Lawrence, and The Lord Provost, Robert Aldridge, through upcoming events to better align perceptions and expectations;
- The complementary relationship between the GC and D & A could intensify certain outreach and engagement strategies e.g., assistance with the process of conducting and analysing the results of the suggested survey of alumni resident in Edinburgh (around 44k!) and provide support for any additional GC digital communications to involve community members and alumni more effectively in the University's activities;
- The Committee agreed that Paper 2 was an excellent summary of PASC's priority areas and were content with the proposed workplan but will need to consider how to implement some of the suggestions and the cost implications.

### **Actions:**

- ***Invite Chris Cox, VP Philanthropy and Executive Director of Development and Alumni to a future PASC meeting to develop and agree a strategy to encourage alumni participation with the University and its General Council;***
- ***Invite Simon Fanshawe, Rector, to speak to the committee in order to identify areas of common interest and activity;***
- ***Follow up the presentation given to the Business Committee on 2 May 2024 by the City of Edinburgh Council leader, Cammy Day, with a view to agreeing ways in which the "Town and Gown" relationship can be enhanced.***

### **6. Billet**

- Members noted Paper 3, previously circulated, and the following points were highlighted:
- Billet is the General Council's traditional publication which goes out to members twice yearly, providing information and papers for the statutory meetings; the winter edition gives additional information about elections to the Business Committee;
- It is sent electronically to around 140k members and sent by post to approx. 800;
- The production of Billet is expensive. The cost of Winter and Summer Billet in 2023/24 was £32,495 which was 50% of the General Council budget;
- Noted three main issues to consider:
  1. The rationale for phasing out printed copies, noting increasing postage and distribution costs, particularly for overseas members, as well as sustainability reasons;
  2. How to improve readership when only around 2% of those receiving the email open the pdf attachment;
  3. CAM no longer support the production of Billet which has been outsourced to an external media agency, and this creates additional workload for the GC office which is now required to undertake a complicated procurement process and ensure a DPA is in place in order that data can be released to the printer for each new edition of Billet;

- The committee were asked to consider if Billet is the only (and most effective) way of communicating to members, particularly as much of the information included in Billet is also available on the GC website;
- Although it was felt that there were certain benefits to receiving paper copies and the committee liked the new design by Lane, there was a need to reflect if this was the best use of resource going forward;
- WD pointed out that there is yet no contract arranged with a design agency for Summer Billet 2025, and another procurement procedure would need to begin in January if no credible alternative has been proposed;
- A meeting has been scheduled with Tom Mortimer, new Head of Communications, D & A, to discuss possible alternatives to engaging with the GC membership.

[Post meeting: The main points arising from the discussion with Tom Mortimer on 24 October were as follows:]

### **1 - How to improve readership of Billet, and other General Council communications, when they are sent digitally.**

Currently the emails perform at around the same level as other D&A mailings, but the desire is to increase engagement, with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of people attending the General Council meetings and events.

The concerns are that some recipients do not realise that they are automatically a part of the General Council or that they have the right to come to these meetings and events. Improved messaging in the mailings may help to alleviate this, ensuring alumni understand the Council.

Alice from the Lane Agency has a number of ideas about how the email could be improved and Brian (D & A comms) has agreed to meet with her to discuss her ideas for Winter 2024/25 Billet and what she could provide for the current design and/or wording.

The D&A Comms team will also explore increased promotion of General Council activities through the main UoE social channels.

### **2 – Future format for Billet**

There was little desire to enter another round of procurement for a print publication, and instead wished to look at digital alternatives. Currently Billet costs around £30k, which could be redistributed to other activities if Billet is no longer a print publication. Discussed the possibilities of instead hosting the information on the General Council website. This would avoid a lengthy procurement process, the creation of the PDF and the cost of printing and fulfilment. It would also allow for information to be more regularly updated.

Suggestion that the University design teams could help to initially redesign the site to feature this information most effectively.

Agreed to move forward with exploring the move to the General Council website, instead of a printed Billet.

**Action:-**

***AB will draft a paper which will go to the Business Committee at its next meeting on 5 December, for members to agree whether paper Billet should be phased out in favour of digital communication.***

**7. Future Events**

The committee agreed to invite representatives from the City of Edinburgh Council to the General Council Christmas Reception on 10 December at the Talbot Rice Gallery to help foster relationships.

**8. Any other business**

**Action:-**

***AB will meet with DS to discuss some of the ideas touched on during the meeting and draft a proposal to circulate to the committee for feedback;  
Take forward any action points raised before the next meeting of PASC.***

**10. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 8 April 2025, 4.30pm, online via Teams

## Billet

### Background information

The primary purpose of Billet is to notify General Council members of the two Half-Yearly Meetings and to encourage them to attend, either in-person or online, and to provide members with the papers for these statutory meetings. It has also been used as a vehicle to convey other formal information, thus:

- Winter Billet gives details of candidates for election to the Business Committee
- Winter and Summer Billet each contain a Report from the Convener of the Business Committee on its meetings and those of the various Standing Committees.

The written content of Billet is produced in the General Council office; it is currently designed by the Lane agency, printed by J Thomson (which also posts out the paper copies), and the electronic pdf version is emailed via Dot Digital by Development and Alumni to those General Council members with accessible email addresses in the General Council Register (c. 50% of all General Council members)

Previously, the design and print production of Billet was managed by the University's Communications and Marketing division but as they no longer support this, the General Council office has had to become responsible for this aspect. This includes managing a competitive tender process for contracts with University approved suppliers for the design and printing; also for ensuring that a Data Sharing agreement is agreed between the University and the printer for every edition of Billet so that mailing data can safely be released.

### Issues

1. **Cost.** Billet is expensive. The cost of Winter and Summer Billet in 2023/24 was £32,495 which was 50% of the General Council budget.
2. **Paper Copies.** About one third of the overall cost is in printing and postage of 800 paper copies. These are 0.6% of the total distribution because copies to the other 140,000 members (for whom there is email contact information) are sent out electronically.

To comply with University sustainability policies, we need to try to reduce/phase out sending paper copies, not least because the cost of postage (especially to overseas members) is increasing rapidly. A covering note will be included in the imminent distribution of paper copies to encourage members to receive future editions of Billet electronically and to ask those who still wish to receive paper copies to return a form to General Office to confirm this, making it clear that only those who opt in to receive paper copies will continue to be sent them.

3. **Low reader statistics.** Although c.40% open the email with the pdf attachment, only about 2% then open the pdf itself to read Billet. This is very disappointing, but apparently typical for other University publications sent as pdfs.
4. **Design of Billet.** The design and layout are basically conceived as a paper edition and looks good in the paper version, but this is sent as a pdf electronically to 99.5% of the members. We need to turn this situation round and create a version that works better as an electronic publication.



5. **Procurement.** The current contract with Lane only covers Winter Billet. There will have to be a competitive procurement exercise, compliant with the complex rules and procedures used by the University, to secure the design and print services for any further editions. The value of the contract has been insufficient in previous procurement rounds to attract enough quotes to satisfy the University procurement requirements and this has required dispensations to be negotiated with the Procurement Office, adding to the complexity of an already non-trivial process.

6. **Website.** Much of the information in Billet is also available on the General Council website and could be viewed there. Providing the information through the website allows it to be kept up to date. Transitioning to a website only version of Billet, where members would receive an email giving a link to an electronic version of Billet on the website, will require further development of the website (which has recently migrated to a new less user-friendly platform) and additional training and support. Discussions about this are taking place with the website development staff (part of Information Services Group). At present it is not clear whether the necessary work could be done in time for the Summer edition of Billet, which is due to be issued in late April.

This creates a dilemma, because a decision will be needed in January whether to proceed with procuring Summer Billet

Dr William Duncan

Secretary to General Council

29 November 2024

## Secretary's report

### 1. Election to Business Committee

As previously notified, there are 13 candidates for the 6 places on the Business Committee next academic year. Details of the candidates are on the General Council website [List of Nominees for 2025 Elections | The General Council](#) Information about the Candidates (but not their statements) will also appear in Winter Billet

The outcome will be decided by election, held in accordance with the Protocol for General Council elections [Microsoft Word - Document1](#) . The ballot papers will be issued by Civica on 9 January with a closing date of 11 February so that the results can be announced at the Half Yearly Meeting on 15 February 2025

### 2. General Council Assessor to the University Court

There has been a moderate response so far and as a result, the University Secretary decided to extend the closing date for applications to Wednesday 4 December. Those to be called for interview will be decided by the joint Selection Panel on Monday 9 December and interviews will be held on 13 January. Final approval of the appointment will be made by the Nominations Committee of Court, but it is expected that the new Assessor will be in post and able to attend the Court and Business Committee meetings in February.

### 3. Resolutions from Court

- No. 99/2024: Foundation of a Personal Chair of AI, Memory and War
- No. 100/2024: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Educational Change and Diversity

The above Draft Resolutions were considered by the Business Committee and approved by correspondence.

### 4. Christmas reception

This will be held in the Talbot Rice Gallery on the evening of Tuesday 10 December beginning at 5.30pm. There has been an excellent response to the invitations with over 100 acceptances. The Principal is expected to arrive at 6pm and following a welcome from the Convener, he will address those present. Thereafter Christmas carols will be sung by the University Chamber Choir

Dr William Duncan  
Secretary to General Council