

**PAPERS FOR THE GENERAL COUNCIL HALF-YEARLY MEETING  
ON SATURDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2026**

**Edinburgh Futures Institute, Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9EF**

*10 – 10.30am*                Coffee, tea and biscuits in Room 2.55  
*10.30am*                      General Council Meeting in Room 2.55  
*After the Meeting:*        Lunch in the Playfair Library (see page 8 for details)

The meeting can be viewed live online at: [www.general-council.ed.ac.uk](http://www.general-council.ed.ac.uk)

Members are invited to submit questions in advance of the meeting by email to [general.council@ed.ac.uk](mailto:general.council@ed.ac.uk).

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**AGENDA FOR THE GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING**

- 1        Results of the Elections for Membership of the General Council Business Committee
  - 2        Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council held in the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, Infirmary Street, Edinburgh on Saturday 14 June 2025 (Paper A)
  - 3        Matters arising
  - 4        Report of the Business Committee
  - 5        Dates of future meetings of the General Council and Notice of forthcoming Elections
  - 6        Presentation by Professor Sir Peter Mathieson, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, of the Annual Report to the University
  - 7        Any other competent business
  - 8        Adjournment
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**PAPER A**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council held in Edinburgh on Saturday 14 June 2025**

Present:

Dr Bruce Nelson  
Vice-Convener of the Business Committee, in the Chair

Mr Gordon Cairns  
Convener of the Business Committee

Ms Leigh Chalmers  
Vice-Principal and University Secretary

Dr William Duncan  
Secretary of the General Council

Rev Dr Harriet Harris  
Chaplain

39 Members present (plus those attending online)

The Chaplain began the meeting with a moment of reflection.

**1. Appointment of Chair of Meeting**

The Secretary reported that due to other commitments, the Chancellor, the Chancellor's Assessor, the Rector and the Principal were unable to attend, and in such circumstances Ordinance 214 allows those present at the meeting to elect the Chair. The Business Committee recommendation was that Dr Bruce Nelson should chair the meeting, The Secretary asked if there were any other nominations for Chair, and none being proposed, it was agreed by show of hands that Dr Bruce Nelson be elected as Chair. He then joined the platform party and chaired the meeting.

**2. Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council held in the McEwan Hall, Teviot Place, Edinburgh**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 February 2025 were approved, subject to correction of the research income shown on page 17 of Billet to read as £1m per day.

**3. Matters arising**

The Chair invited the Secretary to report on matters arising, and the following was noted:

**a. Ordinance 217 on General Council membership**

The Privy Council approved the new Ordinance in February. This allows for the implementation date to be set by the University Court, expected to be 1 October 2025. This will result in almost 24,000 new graduate members and a 1000 professional staff in grade 8 and above being admitted to the General Council Register.

**b. Financial situation**

At the Court meeting in February, it was agreed that budget plans for 2025/26 should be based on a 10% reduction in operating costs. Staff were informed promptly of this intention by the Principal, but there has been a negative reaction resulting in a ballot of staff in support of strike action and action short of strikes.

c. **Supercomputer**

The cautious optimism expressed by the Principal at the February Half Yearly Meeting has proven to be well founded, with the excellent news that up to £750m of funding was included in the Spending Review. Congratulations were offered to all involved in securing this outcome, especially the Principal.

d. **Vice Principal (International)**

Following an informal review of the University's international activities by the Provost, it was decided not to fill the Vice Principal role meanwhile but allocate its responsibilities within the Senior Leadership Team.

e. **Race Review**

This has been completed and is expected to be available shortly. Sadly, Professor Sir Geoff Palmer, who chaired of the Race Review Steering Group, has just died. Amongst his many accolades, contributions and tireless work, tribute was paid to his support of the University's work to address contemporary and historic racism.

The Chair asked if members wished to raise any other matters arising, but there were none.

**4. Report of the Business Committee**

The report from the Convener of the Business Committee, Mr Gordon Cairns, involved updates from the Business and Standing Committees. Separate reports were presented by Ann Cormack and Professor Alice Brown, concerning the International and Public Affairs Standing Committees respectively, and these presentations were followed by extensive questions and discussion.

The Convener addressed some of the critical issues currently affecting the University as it continues to navigate significant financial pressures, exacerbated by volatility in international student numbers and rising operational costs. These challenges are part of broader national and international trends in higher education. Issues around freedom of speech and the impact of Middle Eastern and Ukrainian conflicts on the University community were other significant concerns.

A noteworthy achievement was securing the funding to allow the installation of a Supercomputer at Edinburgh University. This development places the University at the forefront of national efforts in technological innovation, benefiting the wider research community across the UK. Congratulations were given to the Principal, Professor Sir Peter Mathieson, for this remarkable achievement following the decision by the UK government in summer 2024 to pause the installation of an Exascale computer.

Notable meetings of the Business Committee had included a discussion with Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member of the University Court, and an update on the University's Race Review from Chris Cox, VP for Philanthropy and Executive Director of Development and Alumni.

The International Standing Committee, convened by Ann Cormack, had examined key issues including how the University's global image is perceived, and strategies for engaging with international alumni networks.

Important progress has been made in fostering strong alumni relations globally through various strategies. Events, student recruitment initiatives, and global alumni clubs play crucial roles in maintaining and promoting the University's international presence. Special efforts were made to keep alumni connected and informed, aiding in student recruitment and enhancing the University's reputation worldwide.

The Committee learned of the contributions of international alumni in supporting research and innovation strategies, along with the development of an ethical framework to navigate sensitive research areas in response to geopolitical shifts.

International objectives are directly embedded within the University's core missions, highlighted in a significant meeting with the Provost to discuss global strategies, emphasising multi-institutional collaborations.

The International Committee Convener concluded her presentation by inviting General Council members to engage with the committee, to share interests and help shape its future work programme.

The new Convener of the Public Affairs Standing Committee, Professor Alice Brown, gave a presentation highlighting the Committee's activities, which are aimed at enhancing the public face of the University and the General Council.

The Committee, in line with its remit, focused on the development of various communication strategies and forging stronger engagement, not only with General Council members through regular updates and events but also with the wider community.

Pivotal efforts include modernising the way communication happens, such as a shift towards digital distribution of Billet and other digital formats such as informative videos showcasing the role and activities of the General Council.

In addition, the Committee facilitates essential dialogue between the University and external stakeholders such as Edinburgh Council to enhance 'Town and Gown' relations and contributes to ongoing strategies like the University's Community Plan.

Moving forward, the Committee plans to continue these engagements and seeks feedback on prospective activities to ensure alignment with member interests and broader community engagement.

The Finance and Services Standing Committee, chaired by Almira Delibegovic-Broome, had discussed digital transformation in the University's Library system, a commitment to reducing carbon footprint through more efficient energy use in data centres, and addressing cybersecurity threats effectively.

The Academic Standing Committee, chaired by Professor Graeme Reid, reported extensive curricular reforms focusing on student-centred learning and operational enhancements designed to improve student experiences and outcomes. These reforms involve significant changes in course design, assessment methods, and student support systems.

The Constitutional Standing Committee, chaired by Candice Donnelly, is preparing for changes following approval of a new membership Ordinance 217, welcoming new eligible members to the General Council from October 2025.

In concluding his report, the Convener warmly thanked the three members of the Business Committee who would be retiring on 31 July – Arron Ashton, Rt Rev Brian Smith and Almira Delibegovic-Broome - and congratulated the four re-elected members, Judy Hardy, Kirsty MacGregor, Devin Scobie and Dorothy Welch. He paid particular tribute to Almira for her role in chairing the Finance and Services Standing Committee.

The report of the Business Committee was approved.

*A recording of the full report from the Convener can be viewed on the General Council website:*

[www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/half-yearly-meetings/past-meeting](http://www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/half-yearly-meetings/past-meeting)

*Reports from Business Committee and Standing Committee meetings can be found on the General Council website:*

[www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/business-committee](http://www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/business-committee)

## **5. i) Dates of future meetings of the General Council**

The next Half-Yearly Meeting will take place on Saturday 14 February, 2026, in the Edinburgh Futures Institute, Lauriston Place, Edinburgh. Any Motions for discussion at this meeting should be received in the General Council Office by Wednesday 19 November 2025.

The following Statutory Half-Yearly Meeting will be held on Saturday 13 June, 2026, possibly in the Edinburgh Futures Institute, Lauriston Place, Edinburgh. Any Motions for discussion at this meeting should be received in the General Council Office by Wednesday 25 March, 2026.

## **ii) Notice of forthcoming Elections**

There will be elections for four Members of the Business Committee in February 2026. Nomination forms, available from the General Council Office and on the website, should be received in the General Council Office by Wednesday 19 November, 2025.

## **6. Any other competent business**

There was no other competent business.

## **7. Adjournment**

The Motion by the Convener of the Business Committee that, for the purpose of considering matters which may be transmitted to the General Council by the University Court or any other business of a competent nature, the Business Committee be empowered to act on behalf of the Council, and that this meeting be adjourned to a date to be fixed by the Business Committee, was approved.

Rev Dr Harriet Harris closed the meeting with a benediction.