



**AGENDA for the Business Committee Meeting**  
**on Thursday 4 December 2025 at 5.15pm**  
**in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

1. Welcome and Apologies

**Items for Discussion/approval**

2. a. Minutes of the Meeting of 16 October 2025 Paper 1  
b. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 16 October 2025
3. Observations by General Council Assessors  
Agenda for University Court meeting on 1 December 2025 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

**Items for information**

5. Report from Lucy Hunter Blackburn on sex and gender identity 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 6 and of any matters which Members may wish to raise under item 7, 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 16 October 2025  
5.15pm in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

<b>Present</b>	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 Lucy Hunter Blackburn
	Mr Lorn Macneal
	Professor Alice Brown
	Mr Jock Millican
	Mr Max Browning (online)
	Dr Bruce Nelson (online)
	Ms Ann Cormack (online)
	Professor Graeme Reid
	Ms Candice Donnelly
	Dr Kate Richards (online)
	Dr Matthew Epton
	Mr Devin Scobie
	Professor John Gillies
	Dr Dorothy Welch
	Dr Mary Gunn (online)
	Ms Jessica Williamson
	Professor Judy Hardy
	Mr Thomas Wrench

<b>In attendance</b>	EUSA President, Ash Scholz
	EUSA VP Community, Arkit Ghimire
	EUSA VP Education, Katya Amott

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Convener of the Business Committee, Mr Gordon Cairns, welcomed all attendees to the first meeting of the session, particularly new members: Matthew Epton (ASC), Lorn Macneal and Jessica Williamson (FSSC); Kate Richards and Thomas Wrench (PASC). Devin Scobie, Dorothy Welch and Judy Hardy return to the committee for a further term, and a special mention was given to Manya Buchan, the new Convener of FSSC.

Apologies had been received from Richard Andrews, Alastair Dunlop and Sarah Wolffe.

The Convener introduced Ash Scholz (AS), President of the Students' Association, and invited them to address the committee on the EUSA sabbatical officers' individual and joint priorities and objectives for the academic year 2025-26.

**2. Presentation from Ash Scholz, President of EUSA**

- AS began by explaining the role of the Students' Association, which is separate from the University, but both work together to enhance student experience at UoE;
- Other sabbatical officers present at the meeting were Katya Amott, VP Education and Akrit Ghimire, VP Community;
- During the presentation, AS detailed various significant issues currently affecting students, including the cost of living, concerns about the future of higher education, political activism on campus, the impact and ethics of artificial intelligence, job market uncertainties, student loneliness and the need for the University to handle basic administrative and support structures more effectively;
- The objectives for the year were focused around three main goals: 1) Centering student voices throughout a period of challenging financial and structural change, with particular support for

students from marginalised backgrounds; 2) Making students' lives easier through affordable housing, transport, and better academic processes; and 3) Pushing for institutional change around issues that matter to students e.g., racial justice;

- Each sabbatical officer has specific projects and focus areas;
- The President focuses on strategic University changes and ensuring student voices are heard in decision-making processes; organises round table discussions with SLT and other student representatives from across the University, not just the sabbatical team; finding more accessible spaces where students can socialise more;
- John Rappa, VP Activities and Services, is implementing material support initiatives like a participation grant to allow students access to e.g., sports clubs, and a breakfast club in Potterrow where students can access a free meal from 8.30-11am, to help alleviate financial burdens and foster a sense of community;
- Arkit Ghimrie, VP Community is working towards improving options for affordable and nutritious food as well as advocating for better housing and transport policies;
- Katya Amott, VP Education is focused on transparency within academic processes and giving students a voice in proposed changes to the curriculum portfolio to include more interdisciplinary studies and transferable skills, as well as addressing colonisation in the curriculum;
- Syjil Ramjathan, VP Welfare is dedicated to enhancing student safety and belonging and working on initiatives to streamline support services, and address reform processes around e.g., the recommendations of the Race Review and the Code of Student Conduct;
- AS concluded the presentation by speaking about current projects such as the launch of an activism toolkit, and the continuous nature of the work of the EUSA officers, acknowledging that it often involves initiating long-term changes that may only come to fruition after their tenure has ended;
- This ongoing process allows each of the sabbatical team to build upon their predecessor's efforts, emphasising the gradual but steady improvement towards making the University a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

### Discussion

- **Relationship with the University's Senior Leadership Team (SLT).** In response to a question from DS, AS reported that SLT are largely supportive towards EUSA but, while interactions on issues where both sides agree are positive, there can be difficulty when disagreements arise, as SLT can become defensive around uncomfortable yet necessary topics which can frustrate productive dialogue. EUSA's view is that open and candid discussions work best;
- **Teviot Row Union.** TW asked if its closure had affected student collegiality. AS said that, initially, the closure of Teviot was a disappointment for many students due to the emotional and social bonds they had formed within that space, adding that, because the refurbishment has been ongoing for two years now, many current students largely haven't experienced Teviot, so that other venues such as Potterrow, have risen in popularity;
- Significant efforts were made to enhance Potterrow during Teviot's closure, making it a pleasant alternative space. It has been equipped with large screens for sports viewing and other events, encouraging communal activities and student interaction similar to those previously experienced in Teviot;
- There remains the hope that, once Teviot reopens it will recapture its role as a key venue for student bonding and social activities. The reintegration of familiar elements such as the moose decoration is anticipated to revive the traditional atmosphere and draw students back to Teviot;

- Regarding the re-opening timeline, AS confirmed that Teviot is projected to reopen in Spring 2026, ideally by March, pending completion of construction work and interior set up. WD said that this aligns favorably with the General Council's wish to hold its June 2026 HYM there. Continuous updates and engagement with contractors indicate that Teviot will be ready for use by then;
- **Financial challenges faced by students.** LB asked about the rising cost of living in Edinburgh. AS identified Scottish students as being particularly vulnerable to financial pressures, despite the absence of tuition fees for them, due to high living costs when they arrive in Edinburgh. Another group facing difficulties are international students who are limited by visa restrictions to working only 20 hours per week, which is often insufficient to meet their financial needs. The issue of escalating rent and the necessity for many students to have to work part-time to afford living expenses were highlighted as widespread concerns across the student body;
- **Student housing.** LM asked about the impact of City Council policies on Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and the shift towards purpose-built student accommodation blocks. AS noted the convenience of purpose built student flats, especially for international students, as they often do not require guarantors and include all bills in a single payment. However, there is a recognised preference among students to live within the community in areas like Marchmont and Bruntsfield for a more integrated experience, rather than being set apart in student-only residences;
- AS talked about instances where students have had to resort to temporary or emergency housing solutions, such as sleeping in hostels or couch-surfing. AS described initial provision by the University for temporary housing in shared spaces but acknowledged ongoing difficulties in securing permanent accommodation. The discussion reflected the broader issue of insufficient student maintenance loans not aligning with increasing rental costs, forcing students into precarious living situations for extended periods;
- **Top objective for EUSA President.** In response to a query by DW about what AS would most like to achieve as President, AS said that prime objectives include: the establishment of the Green Hub, which would be an important addition to the campus, the creation of a prayer space that accommodates the main six world faiths, and the provision of regular free meals to students, potentially across various schools within the University. Beyond these tangible projects, the broader aim is to ensure the University navigates its financial challenges with a focused commitment to student priorities;
- **Participation rates in EUSA elections.** MB asked how many of the approx. 50,000 students voted in the election of EUSA office bearers. AS responded by stating that approximately 12,000 votes are cast each year, equating to about 20-25% of the student body, which is similar to other universities. MB asked whether this figure was the number of individual voters or the total number of votes cast, given that students are able to cast multiple votes across different categories. AS reported that, while 12,000 votes were cast overall, the actual number of individual voters was between 7000-8000, noting a recent upturn in voter turnout post-pandemic, reaching higher levels than before, indicating a positive trend in student engagement;
- **Student feedback.** MB also asked whether SLT genuinely incorporates student feedback into their strategic planning or if they merely acknowledge it without substantive action. AS said the SLT response varies by issue. On matters closely related to student experience, student views are often considered integral. However, on broader University issues, student input tends to receive less attention, reflecting a degree of scepticism about student contributions to more general University matters. Despite this, AS underlined that there are areas where

conversations have led to positive action, particularly in improving feedback mechanisms within the University;

- **Student satisfaction.** AB asked about student satisfaction at the University, acknowledging its comparatively low ranking in this area compared to other universities in Scotland and the UK. AS highlighted tangible benefits that have enhanced the student experience such as improvements in specific areas like timely feedback, which has positively influenced student satisfaction scores, and the reform of the Board of Examiners, allowing students to receive their degrees earlier and thereby enter the job market or apply for postgraduate study sooner;
- AS also referred to ongoing challenges in how SLT communicates with and makes itself present to the student body. The perceived distance between students and senior leaders, who often seem only visible during events like graduation, contributes to a feeling of dissatisfaction, and emphasised the need for a more human approach from University leaders to improve student satisfaction;
- **Lecture accommodation space.** KR asked if there was sufficient space to accommodate high student numbers in lecture settings. KA confirmed this was an issue at the University. Students are told to arrive early to secure seating, and overflow areas are provided where lectures are livestreamed, which was felt to be particularly unsatisfactory for international students paying high fees. Recording lectures was a potential solution, although some lecturers have resisted this idea, fearing it might discourage in-person attendance;
- **Support for students out with the central campus area.** BN asked about this. AS said that the Vet School has its own student society which is very active and talked about the development of community and sports activities at the King's Buildings campus such as badminton courts and the King's Fest festival. Also mentioned were ongoing efforts to improve transport between campuses, and the importance of maintaining the shuttle bus service as it greatly benefits students who would otherwise rely on overcrowded public buses, and advocating for subsidised travel to the Easterbush campus;
- **Data on major issues affecting students.** ME asked if EUSA routinely collects such data. AS said a student society -Slurp - conducts annual surveys on student homelessness, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data across various campuses. This information is shared with the University and strengthens EUSA's case when discussing these issues with senior leadership. Additionally, data is collected on participation in breakfast clubs, with a significant increase in attendance noted this academic year compared to last, further supporting advocacy for this type of initiative;
- **Sense of belonging** JW asked about the sense of belonging to the University among students, particularly those groups who might feel this challenge most acutely. AS noted that international students, especially from China, often struggle with feelings of disconnect, due to cultural and environmental adjustments. Additionally, some Scottish students can also experience a sense of alienation, feeling marginalised by perceived classism within the University despite being local.

The Convener warmly thanked AS and colleagues for an interesting and informative presentation. The sabbatical officers then left the meeting.

### 3. Minutes of the Meeting of 26 June 2025

The committee approved the minutes

### 4. Matters arising from the Minutes of 26 June 2025

### **Item 5: Co-option to Business Committee**

Two vacancies arose since the elections held in February. Using the delegated powers given by the Constitutional Arrangements, the Business Committee agreed, unanimously by correspondence, to **co-opt Tom Wrench** to replace Tamara Raidt **and to co-opt Lorn Macneal** to replace Kirsty MacGregor. These co-options are for the remainder of the terms of those being replaced, being until July 2028 for Tom and July 2029 for Lorn.

### **Item 8: Secretary's Report**

#### Race Review

This major two-part Review was released in late July and received widespread mixed media coverage and reaction. An Implementation Group has been established to advise on the many recommendations made in the Review Reports.

#### Community Plan

- This was launched on 8 October 2025 at EFI. WD had attended.
- JH expressed disappointment at the lack of external input to the launch
- WD commented that all the speeches were from those within the University, who spoke well, but there seemed to be a significant number of external no-shows. He will give feedback on the arrangements when he next meets the new Head of Communications, Niall Bradley;
- AB noted the necessity of improving town and gown initiatives.

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

The University's governing body, the University Court, met on 6 October 2025.

Below is a summary of the key topics discussed:

#### **Update from the Principal**

Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, updated Court on policy developments in the Scottish and UK higher education sectors.

#### **Finance and planning**

Court received an overview of the University's financial position and on-going work to ensure financial sustainability.

#### **Student Surveys 2025: Results and Responses**

Court received a report on the results of the 2025 National Student Survey, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. It was noted that the University had seen notable improvements in its results in all three surveys, especially in those areas that had been of particular focus of recent work to improve the student experience. In national rankings, these gains had been masked by improvements also achieved at other institutions. Court welcomed the progress made and the recognition that further efforts would be required to consolidate and build on this progress.

#### **Sector-level Governance Report**

Court received detailed reassurances that the University's existing systems and practices were in line with those promoted in the 'lessons for the sector' identified in the recent report into previous financial oversight and decision making at the University of Dundee. Court also discussed opportunities for further enhancing governance practices.

### Other items

Regular reports were received from the Students' Association, the Sports Union, the Development and Alumni Office and Court's committees. Court approved revisions to the Remuneration Committee Framework for Decision Making, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy & Procedure and the Anti-Fraud Policy. Court approved the bestowal of benefactor status to two major donors, the appointment of trustees to a philanthropic trust and a change in the ownership of some museum artefacts to reflect longstanding practical arrangements. Court noted the establishment of the Responsible Investment Advisory Group. Court also approved required funding to complete essential Estates and IS contracts.

More detailed information on the University Court, including the membership, agenda, open papers and approved minutes can be found on the University Court webpages:

<https://governance-strategic-planning.ed.ac.uk/governance/university-court>

### Discussion

DS expressed concern that almost all the items on the Court agenda were closed, greatly inhibiting what the Assessors are allowed to report to BC.

## 6. Business Committee Work Plan for 2025-26

- The Convener referred to paper 3, previously circulated, and which contained the following information about Business Committee meetings for the remainder of the session;
- Business Committee Meetings begin at 5.15pm, preceded by tea/coffee in the Carstares Room from 5pm;
- All meetings will take place in the Raeburn Room, Old College, unless otherwise advised;
- The meetings on **4 December, 30 April and 25 June** will include reports from the Conveners of each of the Standing Committees of meetings in Semesters One and Two;
- The meeting on **5 March** will include a presentation from the University's Chief Financial Officer (tbc).

*Action:- WD to contact James Gray to invite him to address the BC on 5 March 2026.*

## 7. Standing Committees' Work Plans for 2025-26

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

- Conveners of the Standing Committees discussed their plans for meetings in the coming session;
- Graeme Reid, Convener of the **Academic Standing Committee** mentioned two scheduled meetings: one on 11 November with Professor Colm Harmon, VP Students who is invited to address the Committee before he leaves the University to take up an appointment in Australia. Lucy Evans, who is taking over much of Colm Harmon's role, will attend a joint meeting with ISC on 31 March, focusing on ongoing strategies and improvements in student and academic affairs, with a particular focus on international students;
- The new Convener of the **Finance and Services Standing Committee**, Manya Buchan, talked about a programme of meetings to include the Director of Estates (23 October) and Vice Principal Information Services (19 February); the Director of HR will be invited to the final meeting in May;

- Questions about student accommodation were raised, emphasising concerns over access to necessary facilities such as lecture theatres and the impact on student satisfaction;
- KR mentioned regulatory standards from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, particularly about facilities, hinting at broader compliance and quality issues that might be present in other areas as well;
- Noted that, unlike previous years, the Director of Finance will be invited to address the entire Business Committee at its meeting in March 2026. Specific issues relating to the University's financial challenges will be discussed, with particular focus on the overall strategy to address these issues;
- Ann Cormack, Convener of the **International Standing Committee**, said that the main challenge for arranging meetings of ISC revolves around finding times to suit its international members who are based in multiple time zones, from India to the UK and USA. To address this, meetings are being scheduled for midday in the UK;
- The content for upcoming meetings of ISC includes engaging with Chris Yeomans, Director of Global Engagement (4 November), focusing on alumni relationships and local engagement worldwide which link to crucial issues such as student satisfaction, international student recruitment, the University's global ranking, financial income and overall reputation;
- Noted the absence of a VP International since the departure of Professor James Smith, with responsibilities now shared across the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Discussions are planned to evaluate how effectively this redistribution is working and explore the implementation of the global strategy amid resource constraints;
- Emphasised the potential role of the University's alumni network which has grown significantly, suggesting it could be better utilised to support the University's goals;
- Alice Brown, Convener of **Public Affairs Standing Committee** (PASC) reported on the Committee's initial meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> October with Niall Bradley (NB) the Interim Director of Communications and Marketing (CAM). The agenda had covered a range of topics, notably the organisational restructuring of CAM as part of an ongoing review;
- The Committee also discussed communication strategies on sensitive issues that impact the University's reputation, such as finances and budget restrictions, ethical investments and topics such as the Race Review and Sex and Gender issues;
- Discussion also explored town-gown relations, parliamentary relations, and the importance of publicising positive stories about the University to counterbalance negative press;
- The open and frank discussion also addressed criticisms of the University's responsive rather than proactive communication methods and members provided suggestions about how to improve some of the issues highlighted. NB had agreed to provide future updates;
- Highlights from PASC's main business agenda, included: positive feedback from the recent "In Conversation" event held on 7 October, with Lord Wallace and Joanna Cherry, chaired by the Rector, Simon Fanshawe, and discussions about future plans included the latest video project about General Council Prince Philip Scholarships, an event to showcase the work of one of the Colleges and the production of Winter Billet;
- Preparations for future events included the Christmas reception on 9 December and the HYMs in February and June 2026. Professor Marion Thain, Director of EFI, will be the after-lunch speaker at the February lunch in the Playfair Library;
- Suggested inviting Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact, to a future meeting to update on the Community Plan but, given the extensive programme of PASC's activities, it is possible that the next meeting on 12 March will be an internal meeting to cover key issues and smaller committee groups will be established to take the workplan forward between meetings.

## 8. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

None received.

## 9. Appointment/re-appointment of General Council Secretary

- This Item was taken last on the agenda after WD had left the meeting;
- The Convener led a discussion on the approaching end of Dr William Duncan's (WD) four-year term as Secretary in July 2026 and the process of appointing his successor;
- GC reported that WD is content to continue in the role for a further four-year term, subject to good health, but is happy to step back from seeking re-appointment if others are interested;
- The decision with regards to re-appointment of the Secretary, typically informal under the current constitution, allows the Business Committee considerable autonomy;
- Members expressed an openness to William continuing in the role, while also recognising that future procedures should potentially be more formal and structured to ensure additional legitimacy to the appointment process;
- There is perhaps a need to also reconsider the duration of the terms of office of both Convener and Secretary, possibly staggering terms to prevent simultaneous turnover of key positions to ensure continuity and stability;
- Candice Donnelly, Convener of the Constitutional Standing Committee, has agreed to undertake a review of the Constitution but emphasised that, as the new appointment will be presented as a Motion to the June 2026 HYM, there is insufficient time to implement substantial changes before William's term expires and, given these time constraints, would also need to know promptly if the appointment is to be opened up to other interested parties;
- Members were in favour of a gradual shift towards formalising future processes over immediate changes, considering both the time limitations and the importance of maintaining effective governance during this transition period;
- Highlighted that the post is pro-bono and unremunerated, which elicited a surprised reaction from several of the committee members as the role of Secretary is an important one and involves a significant time commitment;
- Members agreed that WD has done "a wonderful job", that he is highly regarded within the University and that support for his re-appointment would be the best outcome for the Business Committee.

***Action:- Members are invited to contact GC, confidentially, in the next two weeks, if they would like to express an interest in the role of Secretary or to further discuss any of the points mentioned above.***

## 10. Report from the Secretary of the General Council

The Convener referred to Paper 5, which had been circulated previously and contained the following information for noting:

### **a. Meeting of the Secretaries, Clerks and Conveners of the General Councils of the 'Ancient' Universities in Scotland**

This was held on 4 August and hosted by the University of Glasgow. It had been intended to hold it as an in-person meeting but due to adverse weather affecting travel to Glasgow, it had to be held online. Dr Bruce Nelson and Dr William Duncan attended. There was an extensive agenda of matters of shared interest. The minute of the meeting, being produced by Glasgow, will be circulated when available. The University of St Andrews will host the 2026 meeting.

**b. Summer Graduations**

Many of these were disrupted by demonstrations by the graduands about the University's investment portfolio and the implied support this gave to Israel in the war in Gaza. These protests made it uncomfortable for Business Committee members to be on stage as part of the academic procession.

**c. Ordinance 217**

The widening of General Council membership allowed by this Ordinance was implemented smoothly on 1 October 2025. This resulted in about 25,000 new members being added to the General Council Register, but the University only has email addresses for 60% of these, and so only they will receive General Council communications.

**d. Videos about General Council**

These are available to view on the General Council website and have been well received.

**e. 'In conversation' event on 7 October at St Cecilia's Hall**

This conversation between Joanna Cherry and Lord Jim Wallace, chaired by Simon Fanshawe was very well received by the 100 members who attended the event, with very positive feedback. The Public Affairs Standing Committee will consider options for further 'Town and Gown' events.

**f. February 2026 Half Yearly Meeting**

This will be held on 14 February at EFI and followed by lunch in the Playfair Library, when the guest speaker will be Professor Marion Thain, Director of EFI.

**11. General Council Archive**

The Convener referred to Paper 6, circulated previously, for information.

**12. Any other competent business**

None.

**13. Date of next meeting – 4 December 2025**

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 4 December 2025 at 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room.



## University Court

1 December 2025

Raeburn Room, Old College, Edinburgh

This meeting will be preceded by a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Andrew Grant Bequest (which comprises the members of the University Court)

## Agenda

[Version for General Council Business Committee,  
indicating open or closed status of papers]

### OPENING ITEMS

- |          |  |           |
|----------|--|-----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Minutes [Open version of minutes to be published in due course]</b> | <b>A1</b> |
|          | To <i>approve</i> the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2025    |           |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Matters Arising &amp; Review of Action Log [CLOSED]</b>             | <b>A2</b> |
|          | To <i>raise</i> any matters arising and <i>review</i> the Action Log   |           |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Principal's Report [OPEN]</b>                                       | <b>B</b>  |
|          | To <i>note</i> a report from Peter Mathieson, Principal                |           |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Committee Business</b>  |           |
|          | • Policy & Resources Committee [CLOSED]                                | <b>C1</b> |
|          | • Governance & Nominations Committee [CLOSED]                          | <b>C2</b> |
|          | • Audit & Risk Committee [CLOSED]                                      | <b>C3</b> |
|          | • Remuneration Committee Annual Report [CLOSED]                        | <b>C4</b> |
|          | • Senate [OPEN]  | <b>C5</b> |

### KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

- |          |   |          |
|----------|---|----------|
| <b>5</b> | <b>Audit &amp; Risk Committee Annual Report [CLOSED]</b>  | <b>D</b> |
|          | To <i>note</i> the annual report presented by Douglas Millican, Convener of Audit & Risk Committee      |          |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Risk Management Post Year-End Assurance Statement [CLOSED]</b>                                       | <b>E</b> |
|          | To <i>note</i> the assurance statement presented by Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services |          |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Student Intakes Update [CLOSED]</b>  | <b>F</b> |
|          | To <i>note</i> a paper presented by Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning        |          |

- 8 Finance and Planning [CLOSED. The Annual Report & Accounts will be published in due course]**
- To *note* papers presented by James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, and Kim Graham, Provost, and to *approve* the Annual Report & Accounts, US GAAP Financial Statements and associated letters of representation
- Finance and Planning Report **G1**
  - Q1 Finance Report **G2**
  - Draft Annual Report & Accounts 2024-25 **G3**
  - United States Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (US GAAP) Financial Statements 2024-25 **G4**
- 9 Students' Association and Sports Union Reports [OPEN] H,I**
- To *note* reports presented by Ash Scholz, President of the Students' Association
- 10 Student Experience Update [CLOSED] H**
- To *note* a paper presented by Lucy Evans, Associate Principal & Deputy Secretary Students
- 11 Annual Court Internal Effectiveness Review [The review will be published in due course] I**
- To *note* a paper presented by Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
- 12 Amendment to the Delegated Authority Schedule: Strategic IT Committee [The updated Delegated Authority Schedule will be published] J**
- To *approve* amendments to the Delegated Authority Schedule. Paper presented by Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
- 13 Annual People Report [The Report will be published in due course] K**
- To *note* a paper presented by Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
- ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL**
- 14 Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity [CLOSED] L**
- To *note*
- 15 Laigh Year Regulations [OPEN] M**
- To *approve*
- 16 Senate Election Regulations [OPEN] N**
- To *approve*
- 17 Health & Safety Annual Report [CLOSED] O**
- To *note*
- 18 Chair Resolutions [OPEN] P**
- To *approve*
- 19 Any Other Business**
- 20 Date of Next Meeting**
- 23 February 2026, 9.30am-5pm (including Court seminar)

**Minutes of the joint Academic Standing Committee and International Standing Committee Meeting  
on Tuesday 11 November 2025 at 4.30pm  
Online via Teams**

**Present:** Graeme Reid, Convener of ASC  
Ann Cormack, Convener of ISC  
Matthew Epton  
Judy Hardy  
Dorothy Welch  
Richard Andrews  
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:** Colm Harmon, VP (Students)

**1. Welcome and apologies**

The Convener of ASC (GR) welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the session, which was a joint meeting with members of ISC, to hear from Professor Colm Harmon, VP Students (CH), who is leaving the University in early December to take up the role of Provost at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Australia.

Apologies received from John Gillies.

**2. Presentation by Professor Colm Harmon, VP Students**

CH began by saying how much he had valued his engagement with the Committee over the years. He has much enjoyed the discussions and thought them to be mutually beneficial. He highlighted his willingness to continue contributing insights from overseas and had provided the Secretary (WD) with his contact details in Australia.

CH had been provided with an advance list of topics of interest to the Committee and these were addressed in the following discussion:

**Update on Curriculum Transformation**

- CH addressed the practical and financial challenges facing the University in implementing Curriculum Transformation (CT), acknowledging a shift in focus due to the need to reduce operating costs;
- CH explained that, while the CT programme has officially ended, its ethos and objectives are being integrated into the broader Learning and Teaching Strategy and this has been approved by Senate. This integration aims to shift activities from design to delivery, ensuring that the transformational elements of the CT continue under the new governance structures within the operational framework of Schools and Colleges;
- CH is optimistic about the continued influence of CT principles in academic offerings, citing examples of successful implementation like the challenge courses. These popular courses not only enrich the curriculum but also streamline academic offerings by potentially reducing the number of smaller, less integrated courses;

- He noted that the University Initiatives Programme Board (UIPB) is now prioritising projects with direct financial implications, whereas those like CT are seen as long-term investments;
- RA expressed appreciation of the sustained commitment and impact of the CT work led by CH. He expressed some regret that financial realities are impacting the full potential of these educational innovations;
- WD suggested the General Council could play a constructive role within its remit of supporting the 'well-being and prosperity' of the University by keeping a focus on maintaining its well-being in the medium term, not just immediate financial concerns.

### **Course closures**

- GR enquired about the recent closures of courses and programmes at the University, questioning if these closures are as negative as portrayed or if they represent a necessary "tidying up";
- CH responded by explaining that the closures are not as inherently negative as reported. Some are overdue necessary steps towards streamlining and managing the University's extensive catalogue of courses and programmes, which is disproportionately large compared to other institutions with similar student numbers;
- He explained that the volume of offerings at the University had not been critically assessed for some time, and upon review, it was clear that maintaining some programmes was not viable, adding that, while he supports maintaining small, valuable courses, there must be a compensating balance with larger, revenue-generating courses to sustain them financially;
- CH thought there was a need for a more systematic approach to evaluating and managing the array of courses and programmes offered, ensuring they are justified and sustainable;
- Despite necessary thinning out, he acknowledged that the implementation of these changes has been somewhat challenging and has faced considerable resistance from within the academic community.

### **Impact of budget reductions on the Student Experience**

- BN asked about the impact of financial cuts on the student experience at the University;
- CH acknowledged the potential risks associated with financial cuts to the student experience.
- He emphasised the success of the recently introduced student support model and stressed the importance of prioritising the student experience and ensuring that essential services, like student support, are not compromised due to cost reductions.

### **Institute for Academic Development (IAD)**

- GR enquired about the future of the functions performed by the IAD, which is reported to be closing. He highlighted its importance in supporting students and staff and facilitating the sharing of best practices across the University;
- CH explained that he was limited in what he could report due to not being part of the consultation process over IAD's future, noting that Lucy Evans was leading on this.

### **Contributions from alumni**

- AC asked on how the University alumni, especially those overseas, regard its reputation given actions being taken to reduce its cost base:

- CH recalled his motivation for joining the University, driven by the desire to highlight its strengths in education and student affairs, which he felt were underappreciated by comparison with University's research reputation;
- He described the challenges today's students face and the need to adapt the University's educational offerings to meet contemporary needs;
- CH mentioned international interest in the University's innovative approaches to student support, which are becoming topics of global discussion. He supported AC's view about improving communicating these educational strategies to alumni, with alumni communications possibly including more about students' achievements and career progressions, rather than focusing largely on research achievements;
- CH expressed a shared optimism with AC about the future impact of the University's ongoing reforms and welcomed his openness to continuing to the dialogue around the University's evolution and reputation internationally.

### **National Student Survey (NSS)**

- GR asked about the current status of student satisfaction at the University, particularly referencing the latest results from the NSS;
- CH explained that the recent NSS showed there had been significant improvements in certain aspects, particularly the feedback times on assessments, which has been an issue of longstanding concern in some Schools. This demonstrated the necessity of maintaining focus on areas of student feedback and starting to address other areas like assessment rubrics;
- CH commented internal metrics now provide better insights compared to the past, allowing the University to validate its progress independently of the NSS metrics;
- Despite local improvements, other institutions had also improved, making it difficult for the University to advance in the rankings;
- CH discussed the limitations of the NSS, suggesting it reflects a broader cumulative student experience rather than immediate changes, which may not be as perceptible in the survey's results. He pointed out that postgraduate students, who typically have shorter durations at the University, show more immediate recognition of improvements compared to undergraduates, whose survey responses reflect their cumulative experience;
- Despite its flaws, he expected the NSS will continue to be influential, especially as government policies might increasingly align resources and regulatory measures to survey outcomes;

### **Winter graduations and potential disruption**

- WD asked what measures are being taken to avoid a repetition at the Winter graduations of the disruptive and unsettling protests that marred the Summer graduation ceremonies.
- CH acknowledged the adverse impact that these demonstrations had on those at the summer graduations and that foot-stomping and clapping during ceremonies created safety and respect concerns.
- CH said that discussions had taken place about how to avoid a repetition and these had focussed on the Schools where disruption had been most notable but acknowledged the difficulties in managing politically charged environments at graduation events;
- Specific measures included reminding both staff and students about the decorum expected at such events, emphasising respect and considering the broader implications of protests during such ceremonies;

- CH commented that the protests are part of a national campaign, making local mitigation challenging. The University had attempted to provide alternative platforms for expressing dissent, including proposing an arrangement to archive the protests in a scholarly manner within the University's records but, disappointingly, these suggestions had been rejected when informed that opposing viewpoints would be included in the archive.

**Future of the role of VP Students**

- JH expressed disappointment that a replacement of the VP (Students) is not being recruited;
- CH appreciated these remarks but explained that Lucy Evans will take over many of his duties and is exceptionally capable, although unlike CH, she will not be part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT);
- JH suggested that this is an important issue for the Business Committee to consider, given the impact of CH's work and the institutional decisions taken at SLT level;

The discussion concluded with a warm acknowledgment of CH's contributions and expressions of good wishes for the future. CH expressed his gratitude to the Committee and emphasised his willingness to remain engaged following his move to Australia.

CH then left the meeting.

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2025**

The minutes were approved.

**4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 5 June 2025**

Item 2: Discussion

- DW enquired about the suggestion from WD to hold a future event for GC members to facilitate a deeper understanding of transitional changes the University is undergoing;
- GR said that this could be explored further with Lucy Evans at the next meeting of ASC in March.

**5. Draft Resolutions**

No. 88/2025: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Thoracic Oncology and Imaging

No. 89/2025: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Philosophy of Education

The above Draft Resolutions were approved by the Committee.

**Action: -**

***AM will forward to the Business Committee for further consideration before the Court meeting on 1 December.***

**6. Any other Business**

None.

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

- Lucy Evans, Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary Students will attend the next meeting, which will take place on Tuesday 31 March 2026, 4.30pm, online via Teams;
- Suggestions for speakers for the final meeting of ASC on 4 June 2026:

- EUSA VP Education, Katya Amott, to update on progress as the EUSA officers complete their sabbatical term 2025-26, and how the University's current financial situation has impacted their activities;
- Interim VP Research and Innovation, Professor Liz Baggs on the University's research agenda;
- A representative from one of the Colleges to get their perspective on current issues.

***Action:-***

***GR will liaise with the committee about which speaker would best fit in with the committee's workplan and will advise WD about whom to approach.***

**Minutes of the Finance and Services Standing Committee  
4.30pm on Thursday 23 October 2025  
Online via Teams**

**Present:** Manya Buchan, Convener, FSSC  
Lorn Macneal  
Jessica Williamson  
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:** Damien Toner, Director of Estates

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The new Convener of the Finance and Services Standing Committee, Manya Buchan, welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the session and led the introductions.

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

**2. Presentation by Damien Toner, Director of Estates**

- DT said that he had been with the UoE for the last three years and prior to that had been in a similar role at Queen's University in Belfast for around 8 years. Previously worked in the private sector in construction, property and facilities management;
- The Secretary and Convener had prepared a list of topics of particular interest to the committee which were forwarded to DT in advance of the meeting and the discussion focused on the following areas:

**CAPITAL PLAN IMPACT**

- DT updated on the University's capital plan, explaining that due to financial constraints, a decision was made last March to pause several Court approved but not yet contractually obligated projects for 12 months;
- There is still uncertainty about whether some of these projects will proceed, even if they are demonstrably income-generating and affordable, and reflects some of the apprehension around making big capital decisions at a time of broader financial challenges affecting the University, which already has significant estate overheads, and has led to the need for cost savings in this area.

**DRAFT NEW ESTATE STRATEGY**

- DT outlined the development of a new estates strategy in response to significant changes and challenges faced over the past 5 years, including Brexit, Covid-19, advancements in AI, global instability and resulting inflation;
- These factors have greatly increased construction and maintenance costs, altering the economics of capital investment decisions and impacting on the viability of projects like student accommodation;

- The strategy also confronts the realities of increased operational costs, notably energy expenses (c.£40m per year) and the ageing infrastructure of the University's buildings, some of which require significant maintenance to address wear and tear on elements such as roofs, windows and lifts;
- Furthermore, the strategy aims to address under-utilisation and inefficient use of space across the University's estate and considers the changing needs for teaching spaces influenced by current timetabling models that do not maximise room usage;
- The main priority of the new strategy is managing the University's physical size more effectively and sustainably, incorporating environmental goals like net-zero emissions and preparing for climate impacts on historic old buildings e.g., increased rainfall and ensuring efficient drainage methods are in place;
- In addition, the strategy reconsiders the University's civic responsibilities, emphasising the need to balance public usage of the University's buildings, especially during the Edinburgh Festival, with the financial and physical toll it takes on the facilities;
- The overall aim is to transition from expansion to optimisation, ensuring the estate not only meets current functional and operational demands but also anticipates future needs and challenges;
- DT discussed the financial and logistical challenges of managing a large and costly estate and suggested that simply stopping activities and selling assets won't significantly improve the financial situation. Instead, he proposed making a serious investment in downsizing by demolishing buildings not fit for purpose and creating smaller, more efficient collaborative spaces;
- DT acknowledged that this process would involve substantial investment and might cause significant disruption but, despite these challenges, he believes it is necessary to consider all options and make bold decisions, guided by the priorities within the strategy.

## **UNIVERSITY ESTATE**

- The University is utilising connected wi-fi devices to accurately capture occupancy data of the estate. This data reveals that the central office estate is only about 50% utilised, indicating substantial inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement;
- The central office estate comprises 16 different buildings or parts of buildings, presenting challenges in consolidating these spaces into a unified location but this could lead to significant disposal, commercial or redevelopment opportunities for buildings which would otherwise lie empty;
- Instead of selling off buildings at potentially less than their actual worth, the strategy is to invest in order to transform these assets into revenue-generating properties. This aligns with broader efforts to address the University's financial challenges through enhanced income from its property portfolio;
- The University participates in a national data collection exercise that helps compare its estate size, utilisation, and density against other universities. The University was found to have among the largest estates after Oxford and Cambridge and was above average in terms of space per full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and student;
- Part of the reason for such an extensive estate size is the historical absorption of previously stand-alone institutions (e.g., Edinburgh College of Art, Moray House) which now constitute part of the University's infrastructure;
- Income per square metre is below average compared to peer institutions, suggesting

- inefficiency in how space is utilised relative to income generation;
- Despite perceptions of inadequate teaching space, data shows the University has more teaching space per FTE than many peers, hinting at possible issues with space management rather than actual scarcity of space;
  - The use of data is critical in engaging with Schools and Colleges within the University to address misconceptions and plan more effectively based on factual insights rather than assumptions;
  - Accurate occupancy data helps in rationalising space usage among staff, helping to alleviate concerns and resistance to changes in workspace allocations;
  - BN raised a concern about student overcrowding in classes. DT acknowledged the issue and spoke about an initiative named “spaces for students” aimed at optimising the utilisation of the University’s extensive but under used estate. This initiative focuses on consolidating information about various student-designated spaces – not just teaching areas but also common rooms, social areas and study spaces. The goal is to create a mapped, bookable and easily accessible resource for students to find available spaces suited to different needs, whether for quiet study or social interaction;
  - DT addressed a specific complaint from the Students’ Association about classes occasionally being held in spaces too small for the number of students if all attend. He suggested that it isn’t a widespread problem but acknowledged that it can happen and is related to issues with current timetabling practices. He said that there is an ongoing effort, involving a dedicated working group, to optimise timetabling so that space allocation better matches the actual needs of classes, which includes avoiding the misuse of large lecture theatres for smaller groups;
  - In response to a question raised by JW, DT expressed the University’s strong preference for in-person class delivery, emphasising the importance of the on-campus experience, which extends beyond lectures to include social. He stressed the significance of personal interaction in an increasingly digital world, underlining his commitment to addressing any genuine space constraints to ensure if a student wishes to attend classes in person, they can do so;
  - LM raised concerns about inefficient use of educational facilities, highlighting an initiative he had previously been involved in, where a space audit had led to a realignment of timetables and increased utilisation in schools. He suggested similar measures could significantly enhance the efficiency of the University’s buildings which he noted were less than half occupied;
  - DT acknowledged that general under utilisation of buildings was a sector-wide issue and admitted that revising the academic timetable could potentially unlock more efficient use of space. He also suggested considering various scheduling adjustments, like extending class times into evenings or better utilising Wednesday afternoons, traditionally reserved for sports.

## **NET ZERO**

- DT provided an update on the University’s progress towards a net zero energy target, particularly focusing on emissions related to electricity and gas, which respectively constitute 5% and 10% of the University’s total emissions;
- The current reliance on combined heating and power (CHP) plants that

generate both heat and electricity from natural gas contribute 30% of the University's electricity requirements;

- There is a significant push to decommission these gas-powered CHP engines in favour of cleaner energy sources, especially as the first engine at King's Buildings approaches the end of its economic life;
- Transitioning away from gas poses substantial financial challenges due to the high costs of electricity in the UK and the need for alternative technologies like heat pumps;
- The upcoming energy master plan to be presented to the Estates Committee will outline various strategies for this transition, which could have significant financial implications for the University. The plan aims to offer a range of options, allowing the University to make informed decisions in the context of its broader financial and environmental goals, signaling a crucial point in the institution's journey towards achieving its net zero target by 2040.

### **STUDENT ACCOMMODATION**

- DT discussed the state of student accommodation in Edinburgh, detailing findings from a report co-commissioned with three other universities and carried out by Cushman and Wakefield. This report served to clarify the actual situation of student housing in response to local council concerns about oversaturation. Key points from the report included:
  - Significant student population growth in Edinburgh, notably international students, with the University of Edinburgh hosting the largest share
  - The city currently has 22,190 purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) beds, with the University managing nearly half of these
  - Compared to other cities, Edinburgh ranks fourth lowest in PBSA provision and has a lower than average percentage of directly let PBSA beds
  - Even with no growth, Edinburgh would need an additional 3,800 beds by 2030 to meet national student-to-bed ratios, highlighting a potential current shortfall of about 6,000 rooms if university populations grow
- The discussion highlighted concerns about affordability and accessibility of student housing, noting that high costs could force students to commute, thus impacting their university experience;
- The University aims to maintain its accommodation capacity to uphold a housing guarantee for students, but the fluctuating market poses challenges;
- Feedback from the EUSA sabbatical officers indicates a need to better support commuting students, stressing the importance of understanding and addressing barriers like affordability to prevent students from opting out of University housing.

### **REINFORCED AUTOCLAVED AERATED CONCRETE (RAAC)**

- DT provided an update on the 'RAAC' project, confirming that the necessary works were almost complete and had been executed under budget;
- This project involved significant financial expenditure to maintain the functionality of some of the University's heavily utilised buildings, reflecting that if the same need arose under current financial constraints, securing funding would be much more challenging, potentially leading to building closures as had been the case with other institutions;

- DT concluded his presentation by stating that the buildings are now back in use and expected to last well into the future.

## Discussion

- During a discussion on the maintenance of the university's building stock, particularly concerning windows and roofs at the turn of the century, DT clarified the University's approach towards dealing with building disrepair. He explained that the necessary maintenance isn't generally expected after only 20 years but should be planned for as buildings age, highlighting issues such as the failure of double-glazing units and the need for major roof repairs to keep them wind and watertight. He also mentioned costly updates needed for lifts in those buildings;
- DT emphasised that the university does not just build and hope for the best; rather, it is actively planning to invest more in maintenance. He detailed that the university was calculating its backlog maintenance requirements and planning to propose a baseline investment of about £30 million per year to prevent further deterioration;
- Currently, the university spends about £10 million annually from its revenue budget on maintenance, with an additional potential reinvestment of £20 million per year from a minor works fund previously used for compliance and School improvements. He stressed that with proper funding, they can maintain the estate adequately and meet the conditions required in the future;
- JW inquired about potentially under-utilised spaces within the University, particularly regarding their suitability for innovation spaces, co-working areas, or for use by start-ups initiated by alumni or University spinouts;
- DT confirmed that repurposing surplus University assets for innovation purposes is a key agenda item, though he recognised the risks associated with uncertain rental income from start-ups, which often face high failure rates;
- Despite these challenges, he is optimistic about finding viable ways to utilise these spaces for innovation. A recent exercise provided full visibility of current innovation spaces and related rental incomes, which are managed under proper occupancy agreements;
- DT identified this groundwork as a strong basis for further developing commercial innovation spaces as part of the University's new strategic focus, despite the potential difficulties in refurbishing buildings for this purpose;
- WD expressed his approval that a new Estates strategy is being developed, acknowledging the need for this as the previous strategy was written for a rather different world than today. He asked about the completion process of the strategy and particularly how the consultation process would ensure broad buy-in, mentioning a tendency at universities for strategies to appear top-down;
- In response, DT detailed the comprehensive approach being taken to develop the strategy, emphasising the importance of collaboration and consultation. The strategy will include numerous projects aimed at consolidating space, optimising asset use, and potentially disposing of less valuable properties to better align with the University's needs and goals;
- The team is working closely with various Schools within the University to understand their specific needs and align the strategy accordingly;
- DT acknowledged the strategy's dependence on a yet-to-be-finalised capital plan, highlighting the financial uncertainties still needing resolution;

- DT invited the General Council to help promote the strategy once finalised, stressing that the development of the strategy has been a collaborative effort involving wide-ranging input from across the university, ensuring it is holistic and inclusive.

The Convener thanked DT for an interesting presentation and he left the meeting.

**Action:-**

***Slides used during the presentation will be shared with the committee.***

**3. Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from Lucy Hunter Blackburn.

**4. Minutes from the meeting held on 6 May 2025**

Members approved the minute from the meeting.

**5. Matters arising from the minutes of 6 May 2025**

**Item 6: Any other business**

WD said that Lucy Hunter Blackburn will present a paper to the Business Committee at its next meeting in December on the contentious issue of sex and gender.

**6. FSSC's work plan 2025-26**

- The next meeting of FSSC is scheduled for the 19<sup>th</sup> February with Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer and Librarian to the University, Gavin McLachlan, to update on the University's digital estate;
- WD said that, due to the current level of interest in the University's finances, the new Chief Financial Officer, James Gray (JG), will be invited to address the Business Committee at its meeting in March. WD and MB propose to have a pre-meeting with JG at least a month ahead of this meeting because financial matters will be an important part of the Principal's presentation to the Half-Yearly Meeting in February.

**Action:-**

- ***WD to invite James Gray to the Business Committee meeting on 5 March 2026;***
- ***Invite James Saville, Director of HR to the final meeting of FSSC on 5 May 2026.***

**7. General Council Budget 2025-26**

- Papers 2 and 3, circulated previously, gave a detailed statement of General Council operational receipts and payments for the past year 2024/25;
- WD highlighted that the actual payments for the past year had resulted in a significant underspend, mainly because the cost of producing two editions of Billet was far less than in previous years, and cost of the 'showcasing' event was £6000 lower than budgeted due to the Usher Institute meeting some of the costs of holding the event there in May;
- For the current academic year, the allocation from D&A for operating cost has been reduced by 10% from last year, which was £64,000, although the reports received from the People and Money system showed a lesser allocation;
- WD plans to discuss with the Public Affairs Committee how to avoid further significant

underspends and ensure funds are used effectively, to try to reduce the risk that continuing underspends will lead to reduced budgets in future years;

- Concern was expressed about the lack of financial information about the Prince Philip Scholarship Fund due to continuing challenges with the People and Money system;
- Notwithstanding this difficulty, WD suggested continuing the appointment of one new replacement scholar each year to maintain a steady state of 4 in post each year; this was agreed.

**8. Any other business**

None.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of FSSC will be held on Thursday 19 February 2026 at 4.30pm, online via Teams.

**Minutes of the International Standing Committee held at 4.30pm  
Tuesday 4 November 2025  
Online via Teams**

**Present:** Ann Cormack, Convener of ISC  
Richard Andrews  
Max Browning  
Mary Gunn  
Gordon Cairns, Convener of the Business Committee  
Bruce Nelson, Vice-Convener of the Business Committee  
William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council  
Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council

**In attendance:** Chris Yeomans, Director, Global Engagement  
John Gillies (ASC)  
Jessica Williamson (FSSC)

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Convener warmly welcomed everyone to the initial meeting of ISC for this academic session. After the introductions, AC invited CY to address the committee in his role as Director of Global Engagement. CY has senior management responsibility for the University's global partnerships and its community and regional portfolio, including the service projects and activities across those areas, and provides senior support to the Director of Edinburgh Global, Alan Mackay. CY is also Director of the University's Confucius Institute.

**2. Apologies**

No apologies had been received.

**3. Presentation by Chris Yeomans, Director of Global Engagement**

CY used slides during his presentation which covered the following areas:

**THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

- The University is facing a shifting landscape in the global higher education sector, marked by significant geopolitical changes and competitive pressures;
- Notably, the rise of China and India has led to substantial investments in their higher education research, and development sectors, creating new challenges and opportunities for universities worldwide;
- China's research and development budget is nine times that of the UK's, accelerating developments there faster than in Western counterparts. Furthermore, Asian universities have climbed in global rankings, while traditionally dominant English-speaking institutions have seen stagnation or decline;
- This global shift is impacting student flows, with traditional streams towards English-speaking countries no longer reliable;
- The University has observed a reversal in the growth of Chinese applicants, a trend that demands strategic adjustments to maintain student numbers. This includes increasing offer rates to secure the desired number of enrolled students;
- The broader educational landscape is evolving as regions like China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia enhance their educational infrastructures, meeting local student demands and decreasing their need to study abroad;
- By 2030, it's expected that regional demand for higher education will be met locally, potentially

reducing the number of international students seeking education in countries like the UK. This backdrop calls for a re-evaluation of international strategies and operations in response to these global shifts;

- The University is navigating a complex environment shaped by UK government policies and global politics, presenting both challenges and opportunities;
- Recent government approaches, particularly towards immigration and international partnerships, have significantly affected universities;
- Changing regulations on how international students can remain in the UK post-graduation have impacted prospective student decisions negatively, while fluctuating governmental approaches to international relations, especially with China, have prompted universities to adapt swiftly to evolving diplomatic stances;
- A notable instance was the previous UK government's directive to potentially shut down Confucius Institute partnerships, demonstrating direct intervention in university affairs. However, shifts in government attitudes toward China have led to a more balanced approach, now characterised by operation, competition, and challenge, allowing more pragmatic engagements while acknowledging the need to manage the risks;
- The University faces operational difficulties like adapting to new administrative and regulatory demands, including the need to register influences from overseas, but there are also supportive frameworks like the Trusted Research Framework and the Research Collaboration Advisory Team, between governments and universities, which aid in navigating these complexities;
- Additionally, collaborations, particularly in AI between the UK and China, highlight the importance of international partnerships in maintaining world-class research outputs, emphasising the delicate balance between national interests and global academic collaboration;
- In response to some of these challenges, the University is actively working towards becoming more agile to better operate within the complex global educational landscape;
- Changes in regulatory frameworks are being considered to allow for more flexible collaborative and degree models, such as joint degrees and potentially international branch campus franchises - modes of operation previously avoided by the University;
- This agility extends to new models of internationalisation like transnational education, where UK degrees are increasingly being delivered overseas, and distance learning opportunities are expanding, with a large percentage of the University's students currently enrolled on online courses residing outside the UK;
- To guide these efforts, the University has implemented a set of nine **Principles for Global Engagement** after three years in development, approved by the University Executive at the end of 2024;
- These principles serve as a consistent baseline for decision-making in international affairs, ensuring transparency and integrity regardless of external changes;
- Additionally, the University is focusing on the Trusted Research Evaluation Framework to measure progress in terms of security, human rights, and export control issues in global engagements, aiming to enhance compliance and ethical standards in its international operations.

## **INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS**

- CY discussed a series of strategic reforms and organisational restructuring at the University, led by the Provost, Professor Kim Graham. These changes are aimed at enhancing the University's agility and alignment with global trends in higher education;
- Strategic Consolidation: The University has abandoned the practice of maintaining separate

strategies for different aspects like internationalisation, opting instead to integrate these into the three core missions of the university: Teaching and Learning, Research and Enterprise, and Civic Engagement. This shift supports a more unified and mature approach to global operations;

- **Leadership Restructuring**: Leadership for international affairs has transitioned from a Vice-Principal International to a distributed model across the Senior Leadership Team, ensuring that international priorities are embedded across all University functions. Furthermore, Regional Deans roles have been removed, and will be replaced by two University-wide International Deans who will support the University's international priorities. Regional Directors remain in Edinburgh Global but their role is more operational than strategic;
- **Global Plan**: A new single global plan is being developed to outline the objectives for the University's international activities and how they support its three core missions. This plan is overseen by the Global Partnerships Group, chaired by the Provost, which provides centralised oversight and has significant authority to guide and assess the University's global strategies;
- **Stratified Partnerships**: The University is refining how it categorises its various partnerships. The goal is to clearly differentiate between university-level, college-level, and school-level partnerships, allowing for more targeted management and resource allocation;
- These initiatives are part of a broader move to make the University a more globally oriented and responsive institution in the face of rapid international changes in higher education.

## INNOVATIVE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

- CY highlighted the evolution and strategic development of the University's international partnerships, illustrating this through the following examples of collaborations with Zhejiang University in China and Gujarat Biotechnology University in India;
- These partnerships signify a shift from traditional educational exchanges to deep, integrated collaborations that include not only education but also research and potentially commercial ventures;
- **Zhejiang University Partnership**: Collaboration in Biomedical Sciences, initiated in 2016 this partnership has grown into a robust model of transnational education, transitioning from a small cohort of students to now engaging 750 students in a mixture of joint and Edinburgh-only degrees. It establishes a significant presence of the University in China, including the provision of 1300 square meters of dedicated University research lab space, demonstrating a research-led approach in an international setting;
- **Gujarat Biotechnology University (GBU) Partnership**: This partnership represents innovative collaboration where the University played a crucial role in designing India's first dedicated biotechnology university. This involved creating the curriculum, academic policies, and faculty development programmes in partnership with a local institution, thus embedding the University within the educational ecosystem of India;
- These examples reflect the University's strategic direction in fostering global partnerships that are diverse in function, deeply integrated into local contexts, and innovative in scope - pushing beyond traditional academic boundaries and emphasising active participation in global innovation ecosystems.

## IMPACT

- CY discussed the impactful role the University plays in global education and community support through various partnerships and programmes;
- These efforts highlight the University's commitment to positively influencing global challenges and civic responsibilities. Key examples include:
- **Tara Shchenko University Partnership**: This twinning partnership with the National University of

Kiev aims to foster collaborative research and create new opportunities for students. A significant aspect of this partnership is to support learning in Ukraine during ongoing conflict, exemplified by facilitating the education of seven Ukrainian students at Edinburgh and securing over £1 million in external funding to aid Ukraine's education sector during the war;

- **MasterCard Foundation Partnership:** This long-standing association enhances access to education and employability for young people from Africa. The first phase has already provided scholarships to 240 students from 26 African countries, involving 13 schools within the university. The second phase aims to offer 850 postgraduate scholarships by 2030, supporting education in Edinburgh and digitally within Africa;
- **Education Without Borders Programme:** This programme supports displaced student and staff refugees by providing scholarships and online education opportunities. It currently covers regions like Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine, and others, offering a total of 30 postgraduate scholarships and 20 online scholarships, helping displaced individuals continue their education despite being unable to travel to the UK.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- CY outlined several challenges and opportunities facing the University in its efforts to expand and optimise global engagement. Key points include:
- **Capacity Challenge:** The University faces significant constraints in terms of the available capacity of academics and students who are already committed to their current responsibilities. This limitation means the University must turn down significant opportunities due to a lack of resources to adequately support new activities and maintain the infrastructure required for a global institution. Expanding this capacity is crucial for the University to capitalise on the most significant opportunities that arise.
- **Intentionality in Strategy:** Historically, the University has been more reactive rather than proactive due to the abundance of incoming opportunities, such as international recruitment and partnerships. However, there is a growing need for the University to become more intentional and strategic, independently identifying gaps, challenges, and areas for growth without relying solely on external offers. This approach will be particularly important as transnational education becomes more central to the University's operations.
- **Opportunity through Transnational Education (TNE):** CY considers TNE as potentially the most significant factor in the next phase of internationalisation for UK universities. Emphasizing TNE could redefine the University's global engagement and educational delivery.
- **Improved Internal Dialogue:** Enhancing communication and co-ordination among the various University departments and leaders is critical. Establishing a unified internal dialogue regarding global strategies could transform the University's ability to engage globally and achieve its core objectives in research, teaching, and impact.

## Discussion

- MB raised concerns about the decreasing number of applications from Chinese students to the University and suggested that this was due to several factors including higher tuition fees, perceived safety issues in the UK, insufficient language support, and a lack of overall student support. He also noted the damage to the UK's reputation on Chinese social media;
- CY responded by acknowledging these challenges, while noting that, as far as he was aware, negative experiences of Chinese students was not in the majority, and discussed the steps the University is taking to address any issues, which includes working closely with the Chinese embassy and understanding the challenges from both the UK and Chinese perspectives;
- CY also mentioned efforts to influence UK government policies that affect international students

- and highlighted the ongoing work to improve support for these students at the University;
- In response to a second question from MB about what the University does to help its overseas graduates obtain employment, CY explained that the University has a range of partnerships with business for research funding and degree opportunities, though admitted that creating internship and employment opportunities through these partnerships remains a challenge due to conflicting principles between the University and potential employer organizations;
  - CY confirmed that, while these partnerships don't currently generate many employment opportunities, efforts are being made to develop them in alignment with the University's principles;
  - RA raised concerns about the perceived lack of a clear strategic approach at the University and how to effectively manage its numerous partnerships involving 300 HE institutions and 190 global partners;
  - CY acknowledged the challenges of maintaining such a broad portfolio and indicated that while a direct reduction of partnerships is unlikely, there will be more stringent assessments of their value and alignment with university goals leading to natural attrition;
  - In relation to a second question from RA on potential external pressures similar to those experienced by Sheffield Hallam University, which was urged to close a human rights centre due to overseas political influences, CY stated that the University has not faced comparable pressures;
  - He mentioned if, for example, a request from an overseas embassy to take down specific content from the University's website were received, it would be refused and highlighted that such interactions would be handled diplomatically without succumbing to external pressures, maintaining the integrity of the University's academic freedom;
  - In a discussion regarding challenges faced by international students in the US, JW enquired if these challenges could present an opportunity for the University to attract those students. She suggested that the University considers increasing support and resource, particularly in PR initiatives, to become a more appealing option;
  - CY acknowledged the evolving geopolitical contexts that impact international student decisions. He mentioned a specific challenge from the US government related to the University's equality, diversity, and inclusion policies, illustrating external pressures not usually associated with the US. Despite these challenges, he reported that the number of US applicants has slightly increased, which might indicate a shift of student preferences due to these geopolitical factors;
  - JG expressed reassurance about the University's stance against intimidating foreign influence while also highlighting broader geopolitical complexities, such as the UK's relationship with China as both a partner and an adversary. He highlighted the importance of vigilance in maintaining the University's integrity and reputation amidst such pressures;
  - CY concluded that, although there is no substantive change in recruitment campaigns, the University continues to leverage its competitive advantages in attracting students;
  - He conceded that future strategies might need to consider broader shifts in global student flows and adapt to changing circumstances in international educational dynamics.

AC thanked CY for a comprehensive and fascinating presentation and he left the meeting.

#### **4. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2025**

The minute had been previously circulated and was approved.

#### **5. Matters arising from the minutes of 12 May 2025**

Item 5: Any other competent business

- Suggested inviting Professor Liz Baggs, Interim VP Research and Innovation, to a meeting of ISC in Semester 2;
- Interim Director of Communications and Marketing, Niall Bradley, had addressed a meeting of the Public Affairs Standing Committee on 9 October.

#### **6. Meeting to discuss Work Plan for ISC 2025-26**

**Action: -**

***AC will engage with individual committee members for their input.***

#### **7. Any other competent business**

None.

#### **8. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 14 April 2026 online via Teams.

**Action:-**

***Time of meeting and speaker tbc.***

**Meeting of the Public Affairs Standing Committee  
At 4.30pm on Thursday 9 October 2025  
Online via Teams**

**Present:** Professor Alice Brown (Convener of PASC)  
Ms Candice Donnelly  
Dr Kate Richards  
Mr Devin Scobie  
Mr Thomas Wrench  
Dr William Duncan (Secretary of the General Council)  
Mr Gordon Cairns (Convener of the Business Committee)  
Ms Alison McNulty (Assistant Secretary of the General Council)

**In attendance:** Mr Niall Bradley, Interim Director of Communications and Marketing  
Ann Cormack (Convener, ISC)

**1. Welcome and introductions**

The Convener, Alice Brown (AB) welcomed all attendees, especially new members of PASC, Kate Richards (KR) and Thomas Wrench (TW), and led the introductions.

The Interim Director of Communications and Marketing (CAM), Mr Niall Bradley (NB) was invited to speak on a range of issues of particular interest to the Committee, followed by discussion.

**2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from Bruce Nelson.

**3. Presentation from Niall Bradley, Interim Director of CAM**

- NB began his oral presentation to the Committee by giving a brief background to his new role, having worked in a number of different roles at the University over the past 20+ years, including Schools liaison, Student Recruitment, Admissions, and Communications and Marketing;
- He stepped into his current role following the retirement of his predecessor, Teresa Merrick, emphasising the need for stability within his department while managing imminent changes in marketing and communications across the University.

**Organisational structure of CAM**

- Heather McBain, previously Head of Marketing, has been promoted to Deputy Director, replacing Niall's former position. Other deputy directors, Ben Hall, Philip Graham, and Lynn McMath, have maintained their roles in external communications, internal communications, and stakeholder relations, respectively;
- NB reported that the department has experienced some recent staff losses that will not be replaced due to financial constraints, leading to a smaller team. An impending University-wide review of marketing and communications, influenced by previous challenges relating to the devolved nature of this resource and financial restrictions, is expected to lead to structural changes.

**Communications strategies for dealing with contentious topics that can attract negative responses that impact on the University's reputation**

University Finances and budget reductions

- The University is facing significant budget restrictions. It aims to handle this situation with maximum transparency;
- Misreporting in the media has been a specific issue, with incorrect reports of budget deficits, which the University has endeavoured to correct;
- The financial sustainability issue is not unique to UoE but affects all Scottish universities and similar issues are evident across the UK. The recent SFC publication on sustainability highlighted that this is a widespread problem, underlining the importance of addressing it as a sector-wide concern;
- A review of the university sector's funding gap by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is due to be published in June 2026. This development is seen as a very positive step and some members of senior University staff will be directly involved;
- Efforts have been made to inform the narrative around these financial issues by being on the front foot of communications. Strategies included placing opinion pieces, proactive interviews with media e.g., BBC Scotland, and attempting to raise the focus on broader sector issues;  
Engaging openly with the media and other platforms has helped to deliver more favourable coverage and a better public understanding of the issues facing the HE sector in Scotland.

Ethical Investments and divestment campaigns

- The University has established a Responsible Investment Advisory Group;
- Up to date information on this can be found on the University's website: <https://sustainability.ed.ac.uk/sustainability-in-operations-and-estates/responsible-investment>;
- Important to get the message across, not just to the wider community, but also the University's own student community that the funds that have been invested are not student fee income but from endowments;
- Noted that, while the University's endowment is a substantial financial resource, there is concern that this could lead to misconceptions regarding the University's need for additional financial support from the government.

Race Review

- The goal of the communications plan was to proactively manage adverse outcomes from the release of sensitive information contained in the findings of the University's Race Review report;
- Despite the potential risks and negativity, the University decided a transparent, proactive approach was essential;
- CAM worked closely with The Guardian and this included organising interviews and exclusive content over two weeks before the public release;
- The comms strategy involved creating a separate website, videos, stock imagery, and publishing the review itself, which was supplemented by briefings, detailed statements from the Principal, interviews with the key people involved and FAQs;

- Information release was strategically sequenced to control the narrative and prioritise internal communication before public engagement:
  - Internal messages to staff were disseminated the Friday before the public announcement
  - The Guardian released the story on the Sunday morning
  - The University's dedicated website went live at 6am on the release date, followed by all-staff and all-student emails at 6.10am
  - A press release was issued at 6.45am the same day
  - Political stakeholders were contacted later that evening
- The communication efforts led to high engagement levels with emails and extensive media coverage (positive and negative). It was a top story in The Guardian for several days, featuring nine in-depth articles under a dedicated banner;
- The communications plan anticipated and prepared for continuous management of media and public enquiries post-publication.

### Sex and gender issues

- Issues relating to sex and gender are complex and highly contentious areas for the University to deal with;
- Any decisions or actions taken by the University are heavily scrutinised and often criticised by the media and public;
- An example given was a course on Queer Geography, offered within the School of Geosciences, which was paused, alongside four other courses, due to low student uptake;
- Despite this straightforward reason for pausing the course, media coverage has been critical, with accusations that the course was paused for financial reasons or because of its focus on queer geography;
- There has been significant backlash to the existence of such a course, as well as criticism over its discontinuation, showing polarised views on the topic;
- NB mentioned that the course might be offered again if there is sufficient interest in the future, but notes that public and media reactions remain a challenge to manage.

### **Town and Gown relations**

- Acknowledged the recent successful launch of the University's Community Plan (CP), indicating a shared interest and participation in city-wide initiatives;
- University representation from Lynn McMath, Deputy of Stakeholder Relations, who actively participates on the Edinburgh Partnership Board on a voluntary basis. This involvement is significant as it connects the University to strategic city planning processes, helping to guide improvements at the local level;
- The University contributes to various partnership subgroups focused on sectors such as housing (chaired by Lynn McMath) economic development and community planning;
- Regular meetings are held concerning planning issues with community and city councillors, highlighting the University's integral role in addressing pressing local issues;
- Quarterly meetings take place with senior leadership at the University and City Council, including its Chief Executive, Paul Lawrence;

- Mentioned areas of shared interest e.g., Bioquarter, City Deal issues, tram extensions, and future funding opportunities around innovation and AI;
- Would welcome any potential support from the General Council to further enhance these town and gown relationships. This is not just about being involved but also about helping disseminate unified messages, ensuring broad and interactive engagement beyond key individuals and CAM is happy to provide briefings on items or topics in advance of meetings.

### **Parliamentary relations**

- Described extensive and strategic engagement between the University and various political stakeholders, primarily focused on improving relations and perceptions among politicians;
- Significant engagement in relation to the Supercomputer project, requiring discreet and continuous interaction behind the scenes;
- Since August 2024, the stakeholder relations team has intensified its efforts towards more outward-facing activities, shifting towards a proactive engagement strategy aimed at hosting high-profile events and visits that not only enhance the University's perception but also broaden political support across different parties. This strategic pivot aims to align more closely with the University's goals and has resulted in a 38% increase in recorded visits;
- Over the last 18 months, there has been an upscale in activity directed towards Westminster, involving meetings with high-profile political figures such as Patrick Vallance, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, the Innovation Minister, and the past and current Secretaries of State for Scotland.

### **Improving public awareness of good news stories**

- A new approach to improve public awareness of positive stories and protect the University's reputation includes being selective and creative in how and with whom stories are being shared e.g., successful collaborations with major media outlets such as The Guardian, The Times and Channel 4 News;
- A notable success was a nine-minute segment on Channel 4 News, resulting from the University's "Decode ME" study into ME, which received extensive positive coverage.

### **Discussion**

- AB pointed out that the University often hears feedback questioning why it appears to be reactive and defensive rather than proactive and positive about promoting good news stories that are happening at the institution;
- NB acknowledged the feedback and agreed that there has been a deliberate strategic shift towards being more proactive. He explained that the University is aiming to focus on fewer, more impactful stories, despite the abundance of positive developments they could potentially showcase. He cited the previous example of 'Decode ME' to illustrate how dedicating more resources to fewer stories can lead to greater media coverage and overall impact, even though this approach may result in less attention for other notable stories;
- Collaborating with media partners such as The Times and Channel 4 for the 'Decode ME' story, allowed CAM to create a more detailed and impactful narrative compared

to simpler press releases. This method, while time-consuming and resource intensive, resulted in significantly better media coverage;

- AB suggested that understanding public sentiment through tools like the Scottish Social Attitude Survey could inform and enhance their efforts to engage more effectively with the public by focusing on issues that resonate widely;
- KR asked about the alignment of internal communications received by staff with external messaging;
- NB spoke about the significant time and effort devoted to internal University communications, something he has observed since taking up his post, and highlighted that one of his primary concerns has been the University's financial communications;
- CAM have been working on new messaging strategies regarding financial matters that are intended for both internal purposes and integration into their broader media strategy. The goal is to provide University colleagues with consistent key messages to unify communication across various parts of the institution, and he notes a growing appreciation for structured guidance on what to communicate, especially regarding complex subjects like finance where colleagues may feel less confident outside of their own areas of expertise;
- Working closely with finance colleagues is seen as essential for simplifying the complex nature of the University's finances and making them understandable for all staff members;
- DS shared his concerns about ongoing misrepresentations of the University by MSPs, MPs and local Councillors;
- NB responded by advocating for increased personal engagement with politicians through events and formal gatherings on campus as these settings provide valuable opportunities to influence perceptions and correct misunderstandings in a more relational and nuanced manner than press releases might allow, while also acknowledging the challenges of scaling such engagement with limited resource;
- He emphasised the importance of quiet, targeted diplomacy, as demonstrated in the University's response to the loss of Exascale, as effective strategies for managing and improving the University's relationship with political stakeholders;
- Mentioned collaboration with other local universities to tackle shared challenges such as housing. By pooling resources and presenting unified reports, they aim to foster a more positive dialogue and correct misconceptions;
- AB spoke about the effectiveness of breakfast meetings, previously run by the University during the initial years following the establishment of the devolved parliament in Scotland, which allowed MSPs to ask questions and learn about significant issues related to their legislative responsibilities. This strategy was designed not only to educate new legislators but also to establish the University as a valuable and accessible resource for parliament, enhancing its reputation and fostering strong governmental relations;
- NB expressed interest in learning more about these methods, particularly as this presents a proactive opportunity to engage in anticipation of upcoming Holyrood elections and can follow up with AB;
- In response to a question from TR, NB discussed the challenges of managing a broad and active engagement programme within a large university and the increasing reliance on Customer Relationship Management software (CRM). This software helps

record and monitor engagements more efficiently and allow the team to provide further briefings and clarification;

- Highlighted the extensive preparatory work that goes into engagements such as media and event training for staff and detailed briefing documents to ensure everyone is well prepared and on-message for these interactions;
- A specific example is the campaign related to the supercomputer project, where consistent messaging and a well-constructed argument were critical. The success of this campaign was attributed to rigorous preparation and the repeated use of clear, concise messaging across multiple interactions;
- WD asked whether NB would be involved in drafting the narratives about the University's financial situation in the next Annual Report and Accounts, given the importance of that document in clearly setting the public record straight about any possible surplus for 2024/25 and the financial outlook for the next couple of years. NB confirmed CAM was involved;
- NB responded enthusiastically to AC, agreeing with the potential for leveraging the University's alumni networks as a resource to help share good news stories, and confirmed ongoing collaboration with Tom Mortimer who heads up the communications team within D & A;
- A directory of experts could be shared with alumni clubs and societies to identify possible speakers for alumni events, especially in locations like London where many alumni are active, but also further afield through virtual meetings and events;

AB thanked NB for a comprehensive and lively presentation and discussion, and he looked forward to engaging with the Committee at a future meeting. NB left the meeting at this point.

**Action:-**

***Follow up with NB on issues identified.***

**4. Minutes from the meeting held on 26 May 2025**

The minutes were approved.

**5. Matters arising from the meeting held on 26 May 2025**

These were dealt with under other agenda items.

**6. Feedback from the 'In Conversation' Event held on 7 October**

- This successful, well-attended event was conducted in a respectful environment;
- Positive feedback received from GC members who had attended and indicated that they would like to see more of this type of event;
- The speakers had found it a valuable experience and had welcomed receiving briefings in advance;
- The ambience in St. Cecilia's Concert Hall had worked well for this type of event, while acknowledging that there was limited opportunity for offering hospitality if using this venue;
- The dinner afterwards in the Hotel Du Vin was enjoyable and a useful networking opportunity;

- A recording of the event will be sent to the speakers to review before appearing on the GC website;
- Committee members were invited to suggest ideas for similar events and WD highlighted the need to plan these well in advance.

### 7. PASC's work plan 25-26

- AB referred to Paper 2, which also included a summary of the work of PASC over the academic year 2024-25;
- During the current academic year 2025-26, the Committee will aim to focus on the following activities:

### Communications Strategy

#### Production of a third GC video in the series, covering Prince Philip Scholarships;

- WD explained that whereas the purpose of the previous two videos was to raise awareness of GC and Business Committee, this third video would also have the aim of encouraging more donations to the fund, which has around £160k capital. This produces an income currently able to fund a steady state of 4 scholars in post, with one replacement appointed each year, but maintaining this would be difficult should the stipend be increased;
- The award (£3k for each year of a four-year degree) has not changed for several years and at some stage the University will need to increase this to allow for inflation and to avoid students from disadvantaged backgrounds (which the Prince Philip awards are for) leaving the University purely for financial reasons in the middle of their degree;
- The video will be produced with support from Development and Alumni (D & A);
- Existing scholars have been approached recently to ask if they would be willing to be filmed;
- There will be a budget of up to £5k to produce the video, which will be commissioned when sufficient participation is known.

#### Production of Winter Billet 2025/26 and Summer 2026

- Billet will be produced in-house on the same simplified basis used to produce the Summer 2025 issue, with the intention that members are encouraged to make even greater use of the website as the main source of information about the GC

#### Half-Yearly Meetings

- Professor Marion Thain, Director of the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) where the February 2026 HYM will be held, has agreed to be the guest speaker at the lunch in the Playfair Library Hall, which follows the statutory meeting;
- Still to decide if a speaker will be needed for the June HYM. If, as seems likely, this can be held in the newly refurbished Teviot Row Union with tours and hospitality after the formal business, no speaker will be necessary. If the event is held instead at EFI, then having a presentation after the formal business would be highly desirable.

'In Conversation' Event on 7 October 2025

- Plans to make this an annual feature of the work of PASC. Although the following 'In Conversation' event is not expected to take place until early next academic year (2026-27), the planning will need to begin in 2025-26;
- AB spoke about a possible 'hustings' event around the Scottish elections in May 2026, previously proposed by DS, and suggested that Ailsa Henderson, Professor of Political Science at the University, could present on projections of the elections at this event. This would tie-in with the 'In Conversation' event but a proposal would need to be worked out. The tight timing of this event (end March/early April 2026) would mean that planning for it could be challenging.

**Action:-**

***Follow up with sub-group.***

Event to showcase some aspect of the University's activity

- Two options: The College of Science and Engineering or the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences;
- This would be held in Spring 2026 and will need advance planning and co-operation from the College on the same basis that the Usher Event in 2025 was organised;
- AB invited input from members of the Committee on the focus and topics for this event;
- TR suggested a theme around the University's new Supercomputer, echoed by WD, and AB proposed that a smaller sub-group should be established to take ideas forward.

**Action:-**

***Sub-group to be established.***

Christmas Reception

Arrangements are well in hand for this annual event, which will be held in the Informatics Forum on Tuesday 9 December 2025, and will include a performance from the Edinburgh University Chamber Choir.

**Action:-**

***Invitations for the Christmas Reception will be sent out in late October and a draft guest list will be sent to WD, GC, BN and AB to review beforehand.***

***Engagement with GC members***

- Ongoing engagement with the Director of D & A with a view to developing and agreeing a strategy for enhancing alumni participation in the life of the University and the General Council.
- Regular communications from the Secretary to the Business Committee to ensure members are aware of upcoming events.

***Engagement with the wider Community***

- Enhance the 'Town and Gown' relationship. Discuss possibility of identifying specific issue of mutual interest, e.g., how to manage the impact of Artificial Intelligence on both City and the University to achieve a positive outcome for both.

- Follow-up on the implementation of the University's Community Plan (launched on 8 October 2025), e.g., invitation to Gemma Gourlay to make a presentation to a future meeting of PASC.

**PASC Budget for 2025-26**

In line with the University's aim of reducing its operating costs by 10% in 2025-26, the General Council's operational budget allowance from D&A has been cut by 10% (c. £6.6K), but the significant reduction in the cost of Billet (from £32K to £2K) means there is sufficient scope within the allocation to PASC to fund its planned work programme and leave scope for further activities to enhance its remit. Ideas for this would be welcomed, recognising the constraints on the capacity of the General Council office to deliver new activities.

**Action:-**

***AB will give a brief oral report on the busy programme of PASC's activities at the next meeting of the Business Committee on 16 October.***

**8. Future Events**

Covered under Item 7.

**9. Any other business**

None.

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

- Suggested speakers for the remainder of PASC meetings in this session included following up with Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact on engagement with the University's Community Plan, or perhaps inviting a Council representative to continue with the theme of "Town and Gown" relations. The Committee were invited to reflect and feedback;
- The next meeting will be held on 12 March 2026 at 4.30pm via Teams and will potentially focus on internal Committee business planning.

## Sex and gender identity: round-up of recent relevant developments

1. Questions around sex and self-declared gender identity have become prominent in recent years. Universities have been among the institutions at the sharpest end of this subject. Further to the topic being raised at the Business Committee's half-yearly meeting in June, this paper provides a round-up of recent developments for the Business Committee.
2. It is in four parts.
  - Part 1 sets out the general context.
  - Part 2 sets out some recent developments specific to universities, including differences between Scotland and England.
  - Part 3 sets out some useful recent polling on public expectations on the role of institutions, including universities specifically, in managing EDI (quality, diversity and inclusion) and freedom of expression.
  - Part 4 looks briefly at the position in the University.
3. It concludes with an invitation for Committee members to note the current state of play and consider if there are any questions they would wish to raise with the University's management, in pursuit of the General Council's remit to engage with issues affecting the well-being and prosperity of the University.
4. I have personal involvement in this issue<sup>1</sup>, but the purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of relevant recent developments, not to discuss the substance of the issues.

### Part 1: General context

#### *The Equality Act and the Gender Recognition Act*

5. The Equality Act 2010 has two relevant 'protected characteristics' in this context:
  - Sex, which is defined as being a man or woman, with these terms further defined as a female of any age or a male of any age.
  - Gender reassignment, which is defined as "if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex." This protection applies from the moment a person declares an intention to alter any aspect of themselves in a relevant way. It does not require any physical alteration, or any other specific acts.
6. The Equality Act includes carve-outs permitting direct sex discrimination (normally not permitted) where this is a 'proportionate means to a legitimate aim.' Without this protection, any separate- or single-sex services or spaces generally, such as separate

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<sup>1</sup> I work with Murray Blackburn Mackenzie, a three-women policy analysis collective which has published extensively on this issue: see here [MBM Policy Analysis - Murray Blackburn Mackenzie](#). I have also co-edited a collection of essays in this topic *The Women Who Wouldn't Wheesht* (Constable, 2024).

changing rooms for women and men, would be vulnerable to legal challenge as unlawful sex discrimination.

7. The Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA) allows a person, subject to certain conditions, to obtain a gender recognition certificate (GRC). Under Section 9, that person's sex becomes 'for all purposes' in law the opposite one to what it was before, except where exceptions apply. In the case of *For Women Scotland v the Scottish Ministers* the Supreme Court was asked to determine whether the Equality Act was one of these exceptions, and therefore whether or not a GRC changes a person's sex for the purposes of the Equality Act.

### *The Supreme Court judgment*

8. On 16 April, [the Supreme Court clarified](#) that 'sex' in the Equality Act means, and has always meant, what it termed 'biological sex', regardless of whether someone has a GRC. It made clear that this referred to sex as a lifelong physical characteristic. It judged that this was the only interpretation that produced a cogent reading of the Equality Act across all its provisions. The Supreme Court judgment has immediate and retrospective effect: it provides a definitive account of what the Equality Act has always meant.
9. An earlier court case, determined by the Inner House of the Court of Session in March 2022, had already determined the characteristics of 'sex' and 'gender reassignment' in the Equality Act are wholly separate, and that 'sex' for the purpose of that Act was biological and unaffected by whether a person was covered by gender reassignment; that case did not explicitly consider the effect of a GRC, however. All parties to the Supreme Court case accepted the March 2022 judgment as the starting point for the Supreme Court's deliberation.

### *The EHRC and its Code of Practice*

10. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the statutory regulator for the Equality Act. The EHRC's role is to support the correct implementation of the law. As part of this, under Section 14 of the Equality Act 2006 it is empowered, though not obliged, to issue statutory codes of practice which are intended to facilitate compliance with the law, regarded as especially useful for those organisations less able to take their own legal advice.
11. Codes issued by the Commission do not create any new legal obligations of themselves. A failure to comply with a provision of a code does not of itself make a person liable to criminal or civil proceedings. However, any extant code is admissible in evidence in criminal or civil proceedings, and shall be taken into account by a court or tribunal in any case in which it appears to the court or tribunal to be relevant (Section 15, Equality Act 2006). In the event that an organisation is challenged for failure to comply with any aspect of the Equality Act, there is no defence provided for in the Act that the EHRC has *not* produced a Code or other form of guidance in that area.
12. Following the Supreme Court judgment, the Commission consulted on revisions to its existing Code of Practice on Public Services, Functions and Associations, to bring it into line with the judgment. (A separate statutory Code covers employment: this is not being revised.) The revised draft was presented to Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities in September.

13. The Secretary of State has now informed Parliament that she is seeking an impact assessment from the Commission. She has also stated that she is obliged to consult the devolved administrations. This appears to be based on a new reading of a provision of the 2006 Act, compared to the process followed when the Code was originally produced in 2011.
14. It is unclear how long this may take, but indications are of a process which could run well into next year. Meantime, although the Commission is unable to withdraw the current version of the Code (only the Secretary of State has that power), it has stated that parts of the Code as originally issued in 2011 are legally inaccurate (hence the revision) and on 15 October formally asked Ministers to revoke the current version.<sup>2</sup> There does not yet appear to have been any formal response to that request.
15. If the Secretary of State is content to do so, she will lay the revised Code before Parliament, and it will come into force after 40 days, unless MPs who oppose its contents are able to obtain a debate, and a majority then vote against it.

### *Organisational obligations and responses*

16. The absence of a revised Code is irrelevant to the legal obligations on individual organisations under the Equality Act 2010. The EHRC has put on record its view that it is a misunderstanding of the law and of the status of its Code to delay responding to the judgment until a revised Code is issued, and that organisations therefore should not wait for that to do so.
17. Based on taking their own legal advice, some organisations, including the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments and some universities,<sup>3</sup> have withdrawn policies which previously gave access to single- and separate-sex services based on gender identity, and replaced these with rules based on biological sex, supplemented by access to additional 'gender neutral' facilities. There has been a growing trend towards provision in this form in recent years.<sup>4</sup>
18. Other organisations, including the Scottish Government, reacted to the judgment by maintaining that they would defer changing policies until the EHRC's revised Code was available. The Scottish Government has however now revised its policies on its own single-sex facilities,<sup>5</sup> replacing self-ID with sex as defined for the purposes of the Equality Act for toilets, possibly after legal action was threatened on this.<sup>6</sup> Further legal proceedings have now been initiated against the Scottish Government: permission was granted on 7 November for a judicial review of its prison policy, which it has declined to alter.
19. Some organisations and individuals who believe some or all of those covered by gender reassignment should be entitled to access to services or spaces based on how they identify have stated that they are exploring the potential for further forms of legal action. In

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<sup>2</sup> The letter is available here [Our letter to the Minister for Women and Equalities about government action on our draft code of practice | EHRC](#)

<sup>3</sup> For example, the University of Reading: see here [University of Reading explains plans to police new toilet policy | Reading Chronicle](#)

<sup>4</sup> The University of Edinburgh's relevant policies (discussed further below) note that the University is committed to providing appropriate facilities for its staff and students, adding "This includes suitable male, female and gender-neutral facilities across our campuses, new buildings and refurbishments, where possible."

<sup>5</sup> [Civil service union's turmoil over toilets for transgender staff](#), The Times, 2 October 2025

<sup>6</sup> [Letter before action to the Scottish Government - Sex Matters](#)

November, a judicial review was heard of an “interim update” issued by the EHRC immediately following the judgment, which set out the Commission’s view on the application of the ruling to the operation of single-sex spaces (expected to be reflected in the revised code of practice). The judgment in that review is expected sometime in the New Year, with any appeal (if permitted) taking longer again to resolve. Organisations’ legal obligations under the Equality Act continue meantime.

### *Workplace Health and Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992*

20. Workplaces are governed both by the Equality Act and by separate health and safety legislation, which requires that workplaces to have separate facilities for women and men (toilets and changing rooms, where relevant), unless these are provided in fully self-enclosed lockable rooms. The widely-reported employment tribunal *Peggie v NHS Fife and Dr Upton*, heard earlier this year, is concerned with a situation covered by these regulations, and their relationship with the Equality Act. It is now expected to report before Christmas. The Case of *Kelly v Leonardo*, a specific challenge to the adoption of self-ID policies for workplace toilets, was heard in October and, as a simpler case than *Peggie*, may report relatively soon. Losing parties in either of these cases may appeal.

## Part 2: Academic environment

### *Regulatory developments in England*

21. The relevant recent development in England is the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. Under this the Office for Students (OFS) has acquired new free speech functions and appointed a Director of Free Speech and Academic Freedom (philosopher Arif Ahmed).
22. New legal duties on universities and colleges under the Act to protect the freedom of speech of students, academics and external speakers came into force on 1 August. Under the new rules, universities must “actively promote” academic freedom - ensuring that on campus, “robust discussion” can take place “without fear of censorship” of those expressing lawful opinions.
23. Prior to this, in March, action was taken by the OFS, under Section 15 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, against the University of Sussex, consequent to the events there surrounding Professor Kathleen Stock. The University [was fined](#) £585,000 after an investigation found the university’s governing documents failed to uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom, as well as failings in the university’s management and governance processes.
24. The OfS's final ruling criticised the university's trans and non-binary equality policy statement from 2018, contending that it created a 'chilling effect' potentially leading to self-censorship among staff and students. The OfS also said the level of fine had been reduced, in view of it being the first time the powers had been used. In September, the High Court granted the University permission to proceed to a judicial review of the OFS decision.<sup>7</sup>
25. There has been no equivalent development in Scotland, where the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 covers the principle of academic freedom in Scotland and there is no equivalent to the OfS. A [useful piece](#) from The Herald in May, by solicitor Melanie Steed,

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<sup>7</sup> The University has published its full [Statement of Facts and Grounds](#) on its website.

reflected on the implication of developments in England. She noted that “Advance HE, the organisation whose template informed Sussex’s policy, also works closely with Scottish institutions; many Scottish universities have adopted or adapted similar policies [to Sussex], often in pursuit of charter marks or DEI goals.” She added: “Three principles emerge from the Sussex case that are relevant for Scottish institutions:

1. Freedom of speech and academic freedom must be given real and substantive protection. This means being cautious about policies or practices that could discourage staff or students from expressing legitimate, lawful views — even when those views are controversial or unpopular.
2. Legal boundaries matter. Universities cannot redefine what constitutes harassment or unlawful speech based on internal values or strategic priorities. Overreach – even in pursuit of inclusion – can carry legal risk and reputational damage.
3. Context, clarity and consultation are key. The Sussex policy was criticised not simply for its content but for how it was introduced. In Scotland, a transparent, inclusive process that encourages open dialogue may help pre-empt conflict.”

and

“Scottish universities are not expected to walk away from their commitments to diversity, equality and inclusion. Nor should they. But they must ensure that DEI policies do not unintentionally undermine legally protected speech or create an environment where certain viewpoints are effectively excluded from academic life.”

### *The Sullivan review*

26. In July, Professor Alice Sullivan of UCL published the second part of a review commissioned from her by the previous UK Government. [The second review report](#) set out to investigate and describe barriers to research on sex and gender identity, and to make recommendations to assist in addressing such barriers.<sup>8</sup>
27. The Executive Summary notes:

In a climate where wider public discussion has been constrained, it is particularly important that universities provide a space where critical analysis, dialogue and the pursuit of knowledge can occur without fear. This matters for science and scholarship, for education, for public trust in universities, and for democracy. Academia must tolerate and encourage diverse viewpoints. But the university cannot fulfil its proper function if it permits behaviours which threaten the norms which are essential to the pursuit of truth and the dissemination of knowledge as a public good. This report comes at a time of grave financial difficulty for universities.

We have sought to provide recommendations which, wherever possible, would tend to reduce rather than increase costs.”

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<sup>8</sup> I was involved in providing support for this review as part of policy analysis collective Murray Blackburn Mackenzie.

28. The University of Edinburgh is referred to in the report, in relation to protests over an event in May 2019<sup>9</sup>, difficulty with the screening of the film *Adult Human Female*, the launch of a book edited by Prof Sullivan, an event related to schools, and a number of open letters produced by staff and students.

#### *UCU Employment Tribunal*

29. A discrimination case was brought against the University and College Union by two of its members, who made the film *Adult Human Female*, due to their experience at the University of Edinburgh and the involvement of the University's UCU branch in that. The claims were of direct discrimination and harassment on the grounds of the claimants' gender critical beliefs and their lack of belief in gender identity theory under the Equality Act 2010. In May, the tribunal [found for the UCU](#). The claimants have since announced that they have been granted leave to appeal. The appeal hearing is expected late in 2026 or early in 2027.

#### *Other recent relevant legal actions*

30. In November, the London Mathematical Society withdrew a Statement of Commitment to Trans Inclusion, which it had issued after the Supreme Court judgment, after a threat of legal action by Professor John Armstrong of King's College.<sup>10</sup>
31. There is an ongoing legal dispute between the University of Leicester and third sector organisation Freedom in the Arts, over Trans-Inclusive Culture Guidance published by the University's Research Centre for Museums and Galleries in September 2023 and amended in part this October.<sup>11</sup>

### Part 3: Public expectations of universities

32. A report published by charity More in Common, UCL and the University of Oxford in March included some useful material on wider public opinion. [The report, Finding A Balance](#), draws on national polling and focus groups to uncover the public's starting points on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and the perceived role of institutions, including universities. It notes:

“On balance, the public think it is appropriate for businesses and universities to make statements such as condemning the invasion of Ukraine or Hamas' attacks, to hold Pride events and to support Black Lives Matter protests. There are, however, some limits here. The public are less supportive, for example, of universities engaging in potentially controversial and polarised debates, such as condemning Israel's bombing in Gaza, or of businesses and universities actively promoting trans rights. The distinction here appears to be that the public are more comfortable with businesses and universities engaging in activities which, while sometimes political in nature, have a high degree of consensus - whether that is condemning terror or celebrating equality. But it is not seen as appropriate for public institutions to engage

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<sup>9</sup> I was a speaker at this event.

<sup>10</sup> Prof Armstrong set out his concerns with its approach to single-sex spaces and freedom of expression, here: [Why I am threatening to sue the London Mathematical Society | The Spectator](#). One of the Society's Vice-Presidents is at the University of Edinburgh.

<sup>11</sup> The material relating to this case, including both parties' correspondence, is available here: [FITA Legal Action – FREEDOM IN THE ARTS](#). The guidance was jointly authored by academics from various institutions, including the Law Faculty of the University of Edinburgh.

in activity that tips over into active promotion of one side or another of a more contentious debate.”

33. The data on which this is based is in the Annex, together with data gathered on expectations about students’ exposure in higher education to different views, even those they find offensive. More in Common found high support for universities fulfilling this role.

## Part 4 University of Edinburgh Policies

### *Half-yearly meeting*

34. At the half-yearly summer meeting<sup>12</sup> on 14 June, Ann Henderson, Rector between 2018-21, described how her period in office had been adversely affected by the reaction within the University to her position on this topic (which is in line with the Supreme Court’s judgment). She asked whether the Court’s ruling would be on the Business Committee’s agenda. She further noted reputational damage not just to her but to the University at the time, and that this continues. She further asked what was being done in respect of single-sex facilities, data collection, women’s networks based on sex, and any other actions necessary to comply with the ruling across the whole institution, to avoid further reputational damage and harassment of individual staff and students.
35. Leigh Chalmers, the University Secretary, responded that the University had “refreshed its trans policy for staff and students in advance of Supreme Court ruling and is in the process of doing some practical guidance around what that means but those policies still stand in the light of that guidance.” She added that the university was “currently consulting on responses to the EHRC in relation to their current consultation in relation to the Code of Practice that aligns with their activity post the Supreme Court ruling so we are actively engaged in that space.”
36. On same-sex facilities across campus she said, “we are largely already there with our infrastructure so our estates are currently looking at everything across campus ... the vast majority of [the buildings] are in a position that they provide those sort of facilities.” On behaviour and attitudes she added “there is a continued piece of work going on in that space in relation to academic freedom and freedom of expression. We have a working group that’s been looking at that in detail across a whole spectrum of activities across the institution including policy intervention and how that interacts with things like our dignity and respect policy and other requirements under the law. That’s a continuing piece of work and will be continuing for much time to come.”

### *University policies*

37. The University’s refreshed policies for students and staff are available online.<sup>13</sup> The further practical guidance referred to at the half-yearly meeting requires further assistance to find.

### *Students*

38. The policy for students states (at para 8.2) “All students can use the toilet facilities that align with their gender identity where appropriate facilities are available, including gender neutral

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<sup>12</sup> Ann Henderson’s contribution begins at 01:01:40 and Leigh Chalmers’ at 01:03:38, for those wishing to see them in full. [Past Meeting | The General Council | The General Council](#)

<sup>13</sup> See [Trans Policy \(Students\).pdf.pdf](#) and [Revised Trans Policy \(Staff\) and new Reasonable Adjustments Policy | Staff news | The University of Edinburgh](#)

or individual spaces.” It adds (paras 8.4 and 8.5) “Use of certain facilities such as changing rooms, showers, saunas or any other space where individual cubicles may not be available, may be governed by reference to local formal policies which should be clearly communicated to users. Questions regarding access to facilities, should be directed to the relevant service. Concerns about access should be directed to the Students’ Association Advice Place.”

39. On accommodation it says (para 11.1) “The University will ensure as much flexibility and discretion as possible when dealing with requests in relation to trans students and accommodation. Housing includes mixed-gender, men’s and women’s accommodation.”
40. On sport, it states (para 17.3) “National sporting governing bodies may restrict participation of trans people in certain national and international competitions, but these do not restrict participation in our own sports clubs and programmes.” The restrictions referred to imposed by sporting governing bodies are sex-based, for example, preventing all biologically male people, including those who identify as women, from participating in competitions designated as being for women.<sup>14</sup>

#### Staff

41. The policy for staff (at para 3.5) states that “All staff can use the toilet facilities that align with their gender identity where appropriate facilities are available, including gender neutral/individual space. It may be helpful to have a discussion with your manager as to which facilities would be appropriate for you in both the short and longer term.” It also notes “It should be noted that use of certain facilities such as changing rooms, showers, saunas or any other space where individual cubicles may not be available, may be governed by reference to local formal policies.”

#### Approach to single-sex services, spaces and activities: general

42. The University’s policies therefore do not at present explicitly provide that where spaces, services or activities are provided separately for women and men, or only for one of these groups, those must be accessed only based on biological sex and on an ordinary reading appear to provide for access based on gender identity for toilets, and based either on sex or gender identity for other facilities, depending on local policies.

#### Data

43. The Supreme Court judgment is also relevant to data collection, wherever this needs to be compliant with the Equality Act, for the University to fulfil obligations under that Act. The University is however tied in to the requirements of the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA), which currently mandates that the field for sex is based on the most recent of what is recorded on certain documents.

#### Dignity and Respect

44. As noted by the University Secretary, the Dignity and Respect Policy is also relevant to what speech University policies permit. For example, paras 9.1 and 9.2 of the Student Trans policy state: “The University recognises and respects that a person’s name and pronouns are

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<sup>14</sup> The Equality Act (s195) allows sex discrimination in competitive sports (at any level) where physical strength, stamina or physique of average persons of one sex would put them at a disadvantage compared to average persons of the other sex as competitors, with additional provision making clear that there is no gender reassignment discrimination involved where exclusion is needed for fair competition or safety.

integral to their self-identity. Pronouns may include, but are not limited to, 'he/him', 'she/her', 'they/them', 'he/she/they/ze'. Whether intentional or not, consistently addressing someone by their previous name, and/or repeatedly failing to use the correct pronouns, can negatively impact on a person's sense of identity and belonging and in some instances may amount to a breach of the University's Dignity and Respect Policy."

### *Organisation-wide action LGBTQ+ action plan*

45. In July, the University announced under [Advocating LGBTQ+ Matters Across the University](#), that "Four new working groups have been established to support the University's LGBT+ Sub-Committee's work and help the implementation of a new organisation-wide action plan." These are looking at: Access and facilities: Culture and voice: Communications and storytelling: and Staff and student data and systems. It is not clear how this work is being tied into the University's wider work on compliance with the Supreme Court judgment, and how it will take into account any other interests or considerations.

### *University response to consultation on the Code of Practice*

46. In response to the EHRC consultation on the Code of Practice, a published Freedom of Information response<sup>15</sup> suggests that the University did not itself submit any institutional view. Instead, it offered staff the opportunity to comment on the draft, collated the 215 responses received, and submitted this summary to UUK with the proviso that "The views and feedback expressed in this submission are entirely those of individual staff members at the University, and should not in any way be understood as the views, comments or queries of the University itself, which has simply collated these comments by staff and reviewed key themes."<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

47. The issues here range from legal risk and therefore financial exposure, through to the nature of the University as an academic and social environment for students and staff, and public reputation and support.
48. Committee members are invited to note the current state of play and consider if there are any questions they would wish to raise with the University's management, in pursuit of the General Council's remit to engage with issues affecting the well-being and prosperity of the University.

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<sup>15</sup> Available on the What Do They Know site, retrieved 10 November 2025 [Response and enclosures FOI2025 00620.pdf](#)

<sup>16</sup> I was unable to find the UUK response to the EHRC consultation.

FINDONG A BALANCE: DATA ON UNIVERSITIES

Figure 17

For each of the following please say whether you think it is appropriate for a [business/university/police force] to:

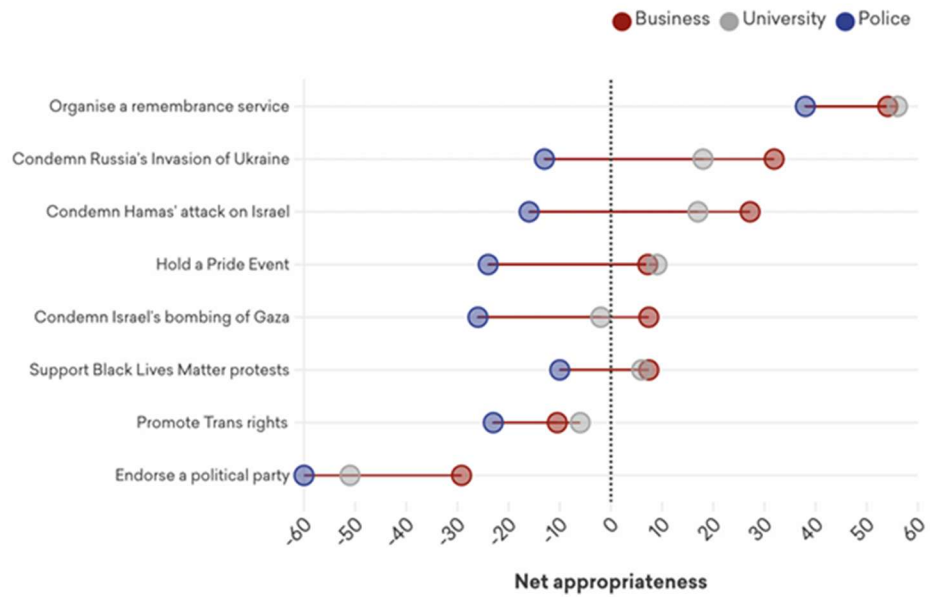
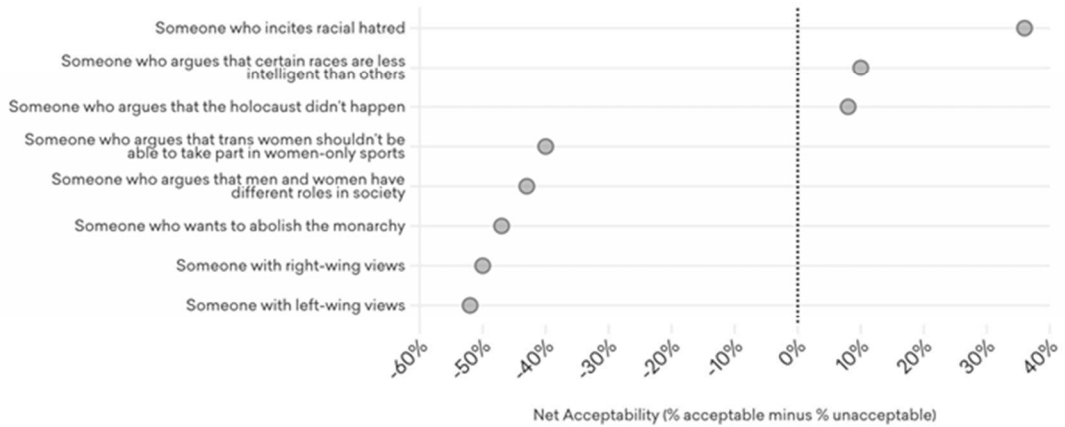


Figure 24

"No platforming" refers to preventing someone from taking part in a public debate or meeting, due to them holding views perceived as unacceptable or offensive. For each of the following speakers, please say whether you think it would be acceptable or unacceptable to prevent them from speaking in a public debate or meeting:

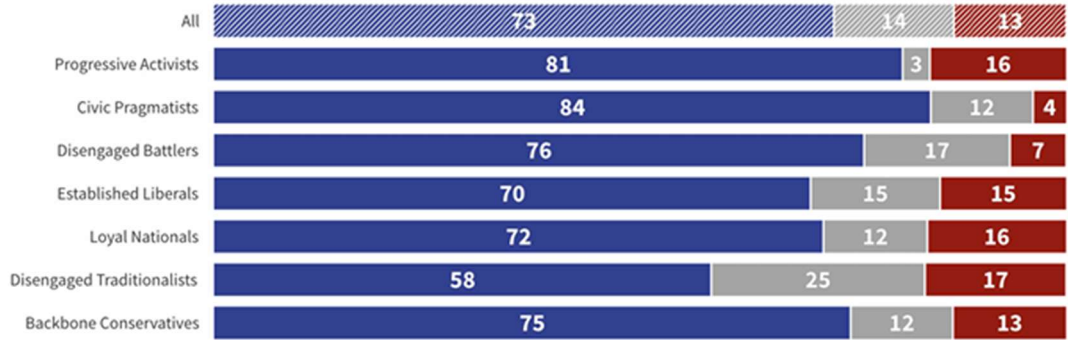


Source: November 2023 • Net responding acceptable minus unacceptable

**Figure 23**

Thinking about university students, which comes closest to your view:

- It is more important that students are exposed to a range of different views , even if they may find them offensive
- Don't know
- It is more important that students are protected from views that they might find offensive , even if it means they don't get exposed to a range of different views



**Secretary's Report to Business Committee on 4 December 2025**

**A. Matters arising from meeting on 16 October 2025**

1. **Responsible Investment Advisory Group** – the membership has now been made known and includes two external members, Louisiana Salge and Amanda Young. The full membership can be seen on [Responsible Investment Advisory Group Membership | www.committees.ed.ac.uk](#) The Group met on 8 October and agreed its workplan for 2025-27. The current priority tasks are:

Task 1 – Publish a summary of the principles that will guide RIAG's work.

Task 2 –Development of a representations process for staff and students.

Task 3 – Publish a statement on RIAG's ways of working.

Task 4 – Consider the Court request to consider whether the University should depart from its currently adopted definition of controversial armaments (the Sustainalytics definition) and move towards a bespoke extended definition to include Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) and AI-directed lethal targeting.

Task 5 – Provide advice on the Court request on updating the Responsible Investment Policy to include a clearer, actionable commitment to respecting human rights, in alignment with the focus on human rights within the University's Social and Civic Responsibility Delivery Plan.

Task 6 – Provide advice on the current pause on new investments in 2 companies

2. **Meeting the new Chief Financial Officer, James Gray.** He readily agreed to come to the next meeting of the Business Committee (on 5 March). Manya Buchan (Convener of FSSC) and I will meet him separately on 27 January, by which time the Annual Report and Accounts for 2024/25 should be generally available.
3. **Meeting of the Secretaries, Clerks and Conveners of the General Councils of the 'Ancient' Universities in Scotland.** The next meeting of this group will be at St Andrews University on 26 June 2026.

**B. Other Matters – for information**

1. **Business Committee elections.** By the closing date of 19 November, there were 5 valid nominations for the 4 vacancies to fill next academic year. Hence the outcome will be decided by an election held January/February with the result announced at the 14 February HYM.

Details about the candidates, including a 2-page CV, will appear shortly on the General Council website. Meanwhile, the attachment shows the information about Candidates that will be sent along with the voting papers to General Council members in January. Two of the candidates - Charles Atkinson and Emily Honeysett - are based in US.

There would have been more nominations, but the requirement to have a Proposer and Secunder who are current members of General Council, was an inhibiting factor for some. Also, some Candidates had difficulty given their location or that of their Proposer

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or Seconder, to arrange for the completed signed paper copy of the nomination form to arrive at the General Council office by the closing date but provided I received email confirmation direct from their supporters before the closing date or an electronic copy of the completed nomination, was prepared to accept the nomination as valid.

### 2. **Resolutions from Court.**

The following Resolutions received for comment from the University Court were circulated to the Business Committee and approved by correspondence:

No.88/2025: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Thoracic Oncology and Imaging

No.89/2025: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Philosophy of Education

It was noted that these Resolutions were created and backdated to 1 August 2025 due to the decision of the Central Academic Promotions Committee to uphold two Academic Promotion Appeals.

3. **Christmas Reception on 9 December 2025.** This will be held at the Informatics Forum. Following a welcome and introduction by the Convener, the Principal will address those present. Thereafter, Christmas carols will be sung by the University Chamber Choir.

**Will those members of Business Committee who wish to attend but have not yet replied to the invitation from Alison, please let her know.**

Dr William Duncan

Secretary to General Council