



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Welcome to *Billet* summer 2026

We hope you enjoy this issue, which contains information about the June 2026 General Council Half-Yearly Meeting, to be held at the recently refurbished Teviot Row House on Saturday 13 June 2026 at 10.30.

The General Council provides graduates with a continuing voice in the management of the University's affairs, and every graduate automatically becomes a member. Senior staff and members of the University's governing body, the University Court, are also members of the General Council. It meets twice a year and has the right to comment on matters affecting the University's prosperity and wellbeing. For more information on the work of the General Council, visit: <https://general-council.ed.ac.uk>

The General Council Meeting, Saturday 13 June 2026

The next statutory General Council Meeting will take place at 10.30am in **Teviot Row House**, 13 Bristo Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9AJ.

Registration and refreshments available from 10am.

As usual, those attending in person are asked to sign the General Council register on the day. For those unable to attend in person, please note that the meeting will be live-streamed and recorded for viewing on the General Council website: www.general-council.ed.ac.uk

General Council Half-Yearly Meetings are open to all General Council members and are free to attend.

The 10.30 formal business meeting in the Debating Hall will be followed by a discussion session about *The Scottish Parliament Election 2026 - Analysis and Reflections*.

We are delighted to welcome General Council members and their guests to hear presentations from Professor Ailsa Henderson and Alison Payne, followed by discussion chaired by the Rector, about the implications of the election outcome.

Professor Ailsa Henderson, Professor of Political Science at the University of Edinburgh, conducts research on political culture(s) and political behaviour in federal and multi-national states.

She runs the Scottish Election Study, co-runs the State of the Union survey, and publishes widely on national identity and political behaviour. Associate Dean for Research Impact at the University of Edinburgh she is also Deputy Chair of the Politics & International Studies sub-panel for REF and Chair of Boundaries Scotland, which sets electoral boundaries for local and devolved elections in Scotland.

Using data from the ESRC-funded Scottish Election Study, Professor Henderson will explain predictors of vote choice, examining the role of constitutional preferences, identities and values. This will also include an analysis of tactical voting and the nature of party contests across Scotland's constituencies and regions, and reflect on what the results might mean for political debate over the next five years.

Alison Payne, Research Director, *Enlighten*, will provide her assessment and reflections on the election result following the analysis by Professor Henderson.

Alison has been the research director of the think tank, *Enlighten*, (formerly known as Reform Scotland) since 2008. An Economics and Politics graduate of the University of Edinburgh, Alison has over 25 years' experience working in Scottish politics, including six years at the Scottish Parliament working for the Scottish Conservatives, and is also a regular contributor to Scotland Tonight's 'Monday Night Panel'.

Ahead of the election, *Enlighten* joined calls from other bodies such as the RSE, Audit Scotland and the Scottish Fiscal Commission in warning that the next Parliament would face a perfect storm of declining tax revenues, a shrinking working-age population and growing demand for services. As a result, there needed to be a shift away from a politics which focused on spending and inputs, to one centred around outputs, service delivery and value for money.

Difficult decisions and political courage would be required to delivery long-term sustainability and improvement over short-term political gains. But what might this mean for our public services and institutions such as our universities?

Reflecting on the parties' manifestos, the campaign and the election results, Alison will consider whether the warnings have been heeded and what the next five years of policy discussion in Scotland might look like.

The General Council Lunch - Saturday 13 June, 2026

Following the Half-Yearly Meeting, members of the General Council and their guests will be able to have a buffet lunch in the West Reading Room (former Dining Room).

Tickets, at £15 each, include a 2-course lunch, with wine/soft drinks and tea/coffee.

If you would like to have Lunch, it is essential to book online at:

www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/half-yearly-meetings/forthcoming-meeting

**PAPERS FOR THE GENERAL COUNCIL HALF-YEARLY MEETING
ON SATURDAY 13 JUNE 2026**

Teviot Row House, Bristo Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9AJ

<i>10am</i>	Registration and coffee/tea and pastries
<i>10.30am</i>	General Council Meeting in the Debating Hall
<i>11.15am</i>	Break
<i>11.30am</i>	Presentations and discussion
<i>12.30pm:</i>	Lunch in the West Reading Room
<i>2.30pm</i>	Guests depart

The meeting can be viewed live online at: www.general-council.ed.ac.uk

AGENDA FOR THE GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING

- 1 Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council held in the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) on Saturday 14 February 2026 (Paper A)
- 2 Matters arising
- 3 Report of the Business Committee
- 4 Dates of future meetings of the General Council and Notice of forthcoming Elections
- 5 Motion (Paper B) Amendment to Standing Orders: changes to the timing of Half-Yearly Meetings
- 6 Motion (Paper C) Appointment of Secretary
- 7 Any other competent business
- 8 Adjournment

PAPER A

Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council held in Edinburgh on Saturday 14 February 2026

Present:

Mr Simon Fanshawe
University Rector, in the Chair

Ms Leigh Chalmers
Vice-Principal and University Secretary

Professor Sir Peter Mathieson
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

Dr William Duncan
Secretary of the General Council

Mr Gordon Cairns
Convener of the Business Committee

Rev Dr Tony Clark
Interim Chaplain

62 Members present (plus those attending online)

The Chaplain began the meeting with a moment of reflection.

1. Results of the Elections for four Members of the General Council Business Committee

The Secretary announced that the four members of the Business Committee elected to serve for a period of four years from 1 August 2026 to 31 July 2030 were: Mr Charles Atkinson, Mr Max Browning, Dr Ian Conn and Ms Emily Honeysett.

2. Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council held in the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute (ECCI), Infirmary Street, Edinburgh

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 June 2025 were approved.

3. Matters arising

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

4. Report of the Business Committee

The Convener, Gordon Cairns, warmly welcomed members, both in-person and online, to the meeting in the Edinburgh Futures Institute (the 'Old Royal Infirmary') and began by extending congratulations to the four newly elected members to the Business Committee.

He reported that the implementation of a new ordinance on General Council Membership — effective from October 2025 — represented an additional 15,000 graduate members and 1,200 additional members of senior staff bringing the overall total of General Council membership to 347, 218. He paid particular thanks to Dr Lewis Allan (Court Services) and Leigh Chalmers (University Secretary) for their help in securing Privy Council approval of the Ordinance and to Jenny Shaw (D&A) for smooth updating of the General Council Register.

Gordon then gave an update on the work of the Business Committee and its Standing Committees, indicating that there will be a more complete account at the summer meeting.

At its meeting in March, the **Business Committee** will meet the new Chief Financial Officer, James Gray, to discuss highlights of the recently published University Accounts for 2024/2025, the financial situation for the current year and future prospects.

The **Academic Standing Committee**, led by Professor Graeme Reid, met in November with Professor Colm Harmon, the Vice Principal (Students) and thanked him for his regular informative reports over many years on curriculum transformation and progress in improving the student experience and wished him well as he prepared to take up a new post in Australia.

The **Finance and Services Committee** (FSSC), led by Manya Buchan, had met with the Director of Estates, Damien Toner, who outlined the development of a new estates' strategy in response to the significant changes and challenges faced over the past 5 years.

The committee had also met with Gavin McLachlan, the University's Chief Information Officer and Librarian to update on the University's digital estate.

The **Public Affairs Standing Committee** (PASC) led by Professor Alice Brown had a thought-provoking discussion with Niall Bradley the interim Director of Communications and Marketing on appropriate communication strategies when dealing with the many contentious topics that can attract negative responses that impact on the reputation of the University.

PASC had been involved in the creation of two videos about General Council membership and the workings of the Business Committee and these are now available to view on the General Council website. A third video is planned about The Prince Philip Scholarship Fund.

PASC had also played a key role in organizing a successful "In Conversation" event in October, featuring notable alumni Lord Wallace of Tankerness KC and Joanna Cherry KC. The event provided insights into how university life has evolved across generations and potential future changes. Sadly, Lord Wallace passed away unexpectedly in January. His contributions and the impact of his career in law and politics are remembered through the recording of the event and a tribute on the General Council website, expressing widespread respect and admiration for him. Condolences were extended to his wife, Rosie, and his family.

The **International Standing Committee** (ISC) led by Ann Cormack will hear an update in May from the Provost, Professor Kim Graham, on the University's international activities and relationships and how these are evolving to take account of changing geo-politics and ensure Edinburgh remains a world leading international university.

The Convener concluded his report with thanks to Sir Peter and the senior leadership team for their continued support of the Business Committee and General Council and for continuing to guide the University through an uncertain and unsettling period in its very long history, but which, nevertheless, continues to excel and achieve many great things.

The report of the Business Committee was approved.

A recording of the full report from the Convener can be viewed on the General Council website:
www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/half-yearly-meetings/past-meeting

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

www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/business-committee

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

The next Half-Yearly Meeting will take place on Saturday 20 February 2027, in the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) Lauriston Place, Edinburgh. Any Motions for discussion at this meeting should be received in the General Council Office by Wednesday 18 November 2026.

The following Statutory Half-Yearly Meeting will be provisionally held on Saturday 12 June 2027, date and venue tbc. Any Motions for discussion at this meeting should be received in the General Council Office by Wednesday 18 March 2027.

ii) Notice of forthcoming Elections

There will be elections for three Members of the Business Committee in February 2027. Nomination forms, available from the General Council Office and on the website, should be received in the General Council Office by Wednesday 18 November 2026.

6. Presentation by Professor Sir Peter Mathieson, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, of the Annual Report to the University

In his ninth annual report to the General Council, Sir Peter covered various topics such as; the financial challenges faced by most universities in the UK, updates on the University of Edinburgh's financial current position (detailed information on income and expenditure), and student numbers. He also discussed widening participation, research initiatives, and the achievements of the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region deal.

He explained that the University sector in Scotland and the UK is facing serious financial challenges, as highlighted by the difficulties of the University of Dundee and other institutions. The recently announced Budget by the Scottish Government provided much needed additional financial support to the colleges, but a minimal increase to universities just above inflation rates. The scenario also remains difficult due to external factors like geopolitical instability and increases in competition for students, particularly international ones. In response, the University has adopted policies not to pursue growth purely for the sake of expansion but to strategically manage its size and shape, influenced by the challenging financial climate and constraints on student recruitment due to governmental caps.

To reduce the cost base, efficiency measures are being implemented through systems reviews, along with staff recruitment restraint and postponing some capital expenditures, although certain unavoidable estate management costs remain. While the University managed to achieve a reduced overall surplus last year, this was derived mostly from non-core activities, with core areas like teaching just breaking even and research income not covering the full economic costs. Moving forward, Sir Peter said the University must make significant financial adjustments to maintain its overall sustainability, requiring cost reductions in both staff and operational expenses. Discussions continue with stakeholders, including trade unions, about how to manage these changes responsibly and avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible. The overarching goal remains to keep the University financially viable without compromising its long-term strategic objectives or educational excellence.

Sir Peter discussed student intakes and demographics at the University. Despite greater competition, the University managed to maintain steady student intake levels, without reducing its high admission standards. The student body predominantly consists of undergraduates, constituting 60% of the total student population. The trends in postgraduate taught programmes show a significant majority of overseas applicants, highlighting their financial contribution through higher fees, although there has been a recent decline in applications, particularly from China.

Efforts to diversify the geographical mix of international students continued to make steady progress, with the aim of fostering a more diverse student body, aligned with the University's global goals. The Principal's presentation highlighted ongoing challenges in student recruitment and the strategic measures underway to manage these dynamics effectively.

Sir Peter emphasised his strong support for widening participation initiatives at the University, through generous financial support packages, partnerships like "Into University," which significantly boosts University-going rates among its participants, and mentioned specific scholarships targeting disadvantaged home students and international students from conflict zones.

Edinburgh Research has shown remarkable success in the fiscal year 2024-2025, with a research income increase to £375 million from £365 million the previous year. This growth reflects the high performance of researchers who secured larger grants. Although other metrics like the number of new patents and licenses increased, the number of start-ups and spinouts decreased due to a strategic shift at Edinburgh Innovations towards fostering fewer, but more robust companies with better long-term viability. Over the years, applying for more grants has led to increased research income, and a strong recovery in research funding has been noted post-pandemic.

The City Region Deal initiated in 2018 is a 15-year program that has already surpassed most of its targets midway. Significant progress includes exceeding data science education goals, achieving £187 million in research activity, and reaching 81% of the total research target. Other accomplishments include starting 89 data-centric companies and exceeding the follow-on funding target by over 700%. The Data Driven Innovation (DDI) programme won the Collaborative Initiative of the Year award at the Institute of Economic Development, reflecting its success and high performance. Additionally, under this deal, the Scottish Prevention Hub focuses on preventative actions against youth crime and gang formation through collaborative efforts involving multiple sectors including public health and law enforcement.

Sir Peter spoke about the various awards presented by the University such as the EUSA teaching awards, the Chancellor's Awards, presented by Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal, and the Principal's Medals. He congratulated the winners and acknowledged the excellence of all who had taken part.

The University places high value on its alumni, striving to keep them informed and engaged through various communications about developments at their alma mater and encouraging them to share these updates widely. Hammed Kayode Alabi, who received the Edinburgh 2025

'Being Edinburgh' award was noted by Sir Peter for his achievements as a public speaker and entrepreneur. The University maintains active alumni clubs globally and runs the "Insights" programme, which offers students from disadvantaged backgrounds the chance to gain world experience by spending time with alumni in various locations, utilising their Edinburgh connections to expand their perspectives and opportunities.

Sir Peter concluded his presentation by highlighting some of the University's recent achievements. He described the demanding process of reversing the decision in summer 2024 of the newly elected Government to withdraw funding for an Exascale computer and eventually securing up to £750 million in 2025 for a UK national supercomputer based at the University of Edinburgh. The strong case for doing this was built on decades of experience in high performance computing at the University.

Further, the Principal was proud to announce the University had been awarded a Queen Elizabeth Prize. This is for education in fire safety, recognising the leading role of Edinburgh's fire safety unit globally. The University also shows progress in sustainability, ranking fourth worldwide in the SHS ranking of sustainability, an improvement from the previous year.

Additionally, the University is involved in significant refurbishments, like the Teviot Row student union building renovation, and continues to thrive in research and commercial activities. Sir Peter gave several examples, which highlight the University of Edinburgh's role as a community leader and a sanctuary for international students and scholars.

The Principal's closing remarks included other positive developments such as the UK re-joining the Erasmus programme, allowing the University to again play a significant role, its successful international partnerships and how its international rankings remain very strong, despite huge investments being made by other countries in their universities.

Sir Peter ended by thanking the General Council, staff and students, alumni and supporters of the University across the world for their support in promoting these successes.

An extensive question and answer session followed, which covered a wide range of topics including: the recruitment 'pause' and low staff morale, senior leadership team vacancies, social media coverage of the University, compliance of Sex and Gender policies with legislation and guidance, disinvestment, research funding and the Race Review.

The Principal was warmly thanked for his comprehensive report and for his thoughtful and candid responses to the questions.

A recording of the Principal's full presentation is published on the website at: www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/half-yearly-meetings/past-meeting

7. Any other competent business

There was no other competent business.

8. Adjournment

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

The Rev Dr Tony Clark closed the meeting with a benediction.

PAPER B (Motion)

Motion:

Amendment to the Standing Orders (1 February 2020)

Preamble

Revised Standing Orders approved by the General Council on 1 February 2020 specified that the Council would meet twice a year, on a Saturday, in February and June. In response to the need for greater flexibility around the date of Half-Yearly Meetings:

The Business Committee proposes:

That the Council will meet twice a year, in February and June, on a day (except Sunday) as determined by the Business Committee and notified to General Council members in advance in the issue of Billet preceding the issue which contains the papers for that meeting, as well as on the General Council website.

The Business Committee invites the General Council to approve this amendment to the Standing Orders (1 February 2020).

Proposed by the Convener of the Business Committee, Gordon Cairns

Seconded by the Vice-Convener of the Business Committee, Dr Bruce Nelson

PAPER C (Motion)

Motion:

Appointment of Secretary

The Business Committee proposes:

That the General Council appoints Dr William Duncan, BSc, PhD, as Secretary of the General Council for a second period of four years from 1 August 2026.

Proposed by the Convener of the Business Committee, Gordon Cairns

Seconded by the Vice-Convener of the Business Committee, Dr Bruce Nelson

Officers

<i>Chair:</i>	HRH The Princess Royal	
<i>Secretary:</i>	William Duncan, BSc, PhD, MCIPD	2026
<i>Registrar:</i>	Leigh Chalmers, University Secretary	ex officio

Chancellor's Assessor: Sheriff Principal Alastair Dunlop KC ex officio

General Council Assessors on the University Court:

Jock Millican, BSc, FCILT	2027
The Hon. Lady Wolffe (Sarah Wolffe KC)	2027
David Ovens, LLB	2028

Business Committee:

<i>Convener:</i> Gordon D Cairns, LLB	2028
<i>Vice Convener:</i> Bruce Nelson, BSc, MBA, PhD, FCMI	2028
Convener of Academic Standing Committee: Graeme Reid, BSc, PhD, FRSB	2028
Convener of Constitutional Standing Committee: Candice Donnelly, LLB (Hons), Dip LP, NP, WS	2026
Convener of Finance and Services Standing Committee: Manya Buchan, BA (Hons), MBA	2027
Convener of International Standing Committee: Ann Cormack, MBE, MA, PGDip	2027
Convener of Public Affairs Standing Committee: Alice Brown, CBE, FRSE, AcSS, FRCP ^{EDIN} , CIPFA (HON)	2026

Members

Max Browning, MA, MSc	2026
Alan Ross, MA	2026
Mary Gunn, PhD, MBA, MA, LLM	2027
John Gillies, OBE, FRSE, FRCGP, FRCPE	2028
Lucy Hunter Blackburn, MSc, PhD	2028
Nikhil Agarwal, PhD	2028
Richard Andrews, MA, PhD, PGCE	2028
Mr Thomas Wrench, MA (Hons), MSc	2028
Judy Hardy, BSc, MSc, PhD, MinstP, FHEA	2029
Dorothy Welch, BSc PhD	2029
Devin Scobie, MA (Hons), MPRCA	2029
Dr Matthew Epton, BSc, DPhil	2029
Dr Kate Richards, BVM&S DipM MA FRCVS	2029
Mrs Jessica Williamson, BA (Hons), MSc	2029
Mr Lorn Macneal, MA(Hons) DA FRIAS FRSA RIBA	2029

Assistant Secretary: Alison McNulty, MA (Hons)

BOOKING FORM - The February 2026 General Council Lunch

West Reading Room, Teviot Row House on Saturday 13 June, 2026, at 12.30pm.

Please send me ____ tickets (£15 each)

A cheque for £____ is enclosed payable to **The University of Edinburgh**

- 1. Name
- 2. Address
.....
.....3. Postcode
- 4. Preferred contact information i.e. telephone/email.....
- 5. Basis of General Council membership, please complete A or B

- A.** (i) Degree:.....
(ii) Year of graduation:.....
(iii) Subject of study.....

B. Other reason for General Council membership, e.g. University staff/Court member:

.....

6. If you intend to bring a guest(s) to the Lunch please supply their name(s) and email address:

.....
.....

Please notify the GC Office of any access or dietary requirements for yourself or your guest(s):

.....

Please return to: Ms Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council, University of Edinburgh, Charles Stewart House, 9-16 Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1HT, Scotland, UK, or by email to general.council@ed.ac.uk.

Alternatively, book online at:

www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/half-yearly-meetings/forthcoming-meeting

Closing date for applications, Friday 29 May 2026. **Please note that registrations after this date will not be accepted.**

Photography/video material from the event will be used for the General Council website and publications.