

**Minutes of the Finance and Services Standing Committee**  
**4.30pm on Thursday 19 February 2026**  
**Online via Teams**

**Present:** Manya Buchan, Convener, FSSC  
Lorn Macneal  
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:** Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer

**1. Welcome and apologies**

The Convener of the Finance and Services Standing Committee, Manya Buchan, welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies from Lucy Hunter Blackburn and Jessica Williamson.

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

**2. Presentation by Gavin McLachlan, Vice Principal, CIO and Librarian to the University**

Slides used during the presentation will be circulated to the committee.

**1. DIGITAL STRATEGY – THE “NORTH STAR”**

The strategy focuses on four key areas - which match the four strands of the University's Strategy 2030 - each with three distinct elements of emphasis:

People

**Digital Wellbeing and Safety** e.g., bullying and sexual harassment now happens mostly online. Digital e-safety officers offer guidance and support for students and staff with recommendations on how to make online meetings safe

**Human Centred Design Capability** ensures that platforms are intuitive and user friendly

**Data and Digital Skills** focuses on training

Research

**Learning Innovation in Digital Research**

**Digital as enabler for Research Excellence**

**Digital Research Services that work for everyone**

Technologies within the Research component are brand new, innovative and unique.

Teaching and Learning

**Coherence, consistency and continuity** is important in technology used for educational purposes (EdTech)

**Community and Belonging** – reported that much of this is now done online

**Student Assessment and Feedback** – further improvement needed

## Social and Civic Responsibilities

### **Public Access**

#### **City Deal, Data Capital of Europe**

**Sustainability** – the biggest carbon footprint after energy used for heating/lighting buildings is the energy used by all computers across the University

- Governance
  - The University has a new IT governance structure in place, which sits alongside the Digital Strategy and is headed by the Strategic IT Committee. The Committee is tasked with operational governance and reports to the University Executive;
  - The Committee has met twice and will be looking at how to manage IT budgets on a portfolio basis and prioritizing key groups such as Learning, Teaching and Student Experience IT; Research IT; Professional Services IT; Digital Infrastructure, Cyber and Web IT;
- Digital Strategy Review

Currently building version 2.0 of the Strategy, with focal points of consultation on Learning and Teaching (e.g., assessment and feedback, pedagogy and platforms), Artificial Intelligence, Leveraging Digital for Efficiency, and Data Strategy.

## **2. DIGITAL EFFICIENCY SERVICE**

- One of the strategic change projects the University is launching to ensure greater efficiency and cost savings;
- Reviewing a number of platforms and services that are faster and easy to implement and which will drive immediate financial gains;
- ISG will support digital efficiency across the University, focusing on the following 5 areas:

**Automation** – Microsoft Power Platform

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

- ELM – Edinburgh is the only university that has developed its own AI language model which has 18000 users across the institution;
- Teams Recap – an add on to the platform which will be able to produce a set of minutes immediately post meeting;
- Chatbots

**Digitisation** – Document scanning and archiving

**Self-Service** – aiming to replace emails and face-to-face interaction with entirely online methods e.g., SharePoint sites, online forms, AI Chatbots, policy navigator, book checkout and RFID (students can acquire books from the library without the need for human intervention). These initiatives have the potential to realise the most savings for the University.

**Training** – ensure staff and students have the skills to work properly and more efficiently by embracing Digital, Automation and AI

- Resources will be focused on long term, fully supported platforms which are

- sustainable, secure, accessible and ethically approved;
- Services that can be depended on for permanent efficiency and quality.
- **AskEdHelp (ELM chatbot): evidence of scalable efficiency**
  - Student-facing AI chatbot built on ELM which has been in operation since October 2025;
  - Enables 24-hour self-service model;
  - Handles 27k monthly queries with a reported 95% response accuracy (up from 75%);
  - This model is repeatable across other areas such as HR and Estates;
- Challenges to digital efficiency include engagement and adoption risk; resistance to moving away from trusted people based or manual ways of working; capacity and funding constraints; technical feasibility and dependency complexity, and; data quality concerns (due to questionable quality of foundational data).

### 3. UNIVERSITY DIGITAL ESTATE

- The major software and hardware platforms needed to support the University's strategic ambitions include over 1,200 centrally managed digital systems and platforms alongside a wide range of small, locally delivered, systems in schools and colleges;
- For the purpose of investment prioritization discussions, the focus is on around 70 major systems (the material items) of the Digital Estate, costing above £500k to replace, and which are critical to the University's operations;
- **The Digital Estate Heatmap** includes, for each of the portfolio groups, those elements which are nearing end of life or missing e.g., Data Loss Prevention – the University does not currently have a DLP system and will incur significant additional procurement costs; Identity and Access Management (ensuring users can access the University's digital services) (currently the largest cyber risk) and EUCLID, the Student Record System which supports the student lifecycle and learning and teaching administration;
- The items noted below are critical to the University's operations;
- **EUCLID** is 15+ years old and nearing end of life in around 4 years. The student record system is critical to the University and a large project is currently underway to look at its replacement. It is one of the most integrated systems (on the scale of People and Money) and its replacement would be a University-wide transformation (£40-50m) requiring process standardization and organizational change;
- **Data Centres**
  - Physical spaces that host the underlying IT infrastructure required for the University's on-premises digital services such as the Student Administration system and the computational services for digital research and storage for Research Data;
  - The University is reaching the end of its data centre capability. There are current capacity issues, research constraints and risks with existing datacentres that need to be addressed;
  - Multiple scenarios could cause catastrophic incidents resulting in severe impact to University operations;
  - These are expensive buildings and facilities and the team are currently looking at ways the University is able to invest in its Data Centres to mitigate these risks;
- **Educational Technology** platforms such as MediaHopper, the MyEd student portal and

- AV teaching estate and Lecture Recording systems are also coming to end of life;
- Replacing the above platforms will be costly but they are considered core parts of the University's educational offering and underpin many critical teaching and learning tasks and processes;
- Challenges include movement away from perpetual licenses to SaaS models, putting pressure on revenue, growing cyber threats across UK Higher Education, vendor pricing pressures and, in particular, the proliferation and inconsistency of the University's Digital Exams platforms and Assessment and Feedback platforms.

#### 4. Technology Near Futures

- **Agentic AI.** GMcL concluded by speaking about Agentic AI which is the next major development in AI and signals the beginning of the end of the ChatGPT era – the future of AI isn't about what models can *say*, but what they can *do*;
- The capabilities of OpenClaw involve autonomous agents that can browse, click, execute code and complete tasks on users' behalf e.g., send messages and emails, make phone calls, book travel and shop online;
- Volatility, fragility, and consolidation within the tech sector is also of concern to the University;
- The University's Strategy and its Digital Strategy must take into account these and other developments, such as advances in Quantum computing and evolved cyber threats, and educate students to prepare them for this new reality.

#### Discussion

- BN asked about security. GMcL replied that students and staff who wish to use AI agents (such as OpenClaw) are forbidden to share their log in credentials;
- BN also asked about the University's Heat Map and which of the missing software is thought to be critical. GMcL said that, in his view, an important requirement for the Professional Services Group would be an integrated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for the purposes of data sharing;
- WD asked about the scope for shared IT services between Scottish universities and a consortium approach to IT procurement to give better bargaining. GMcL replied that there was a good working relationship between the senior staff in other universities responsible for IT systems, with sharing of information and experiences
- LM raised concerns about the loss of future jobs. GMcL responded by saying that this is a society wide issue but Agentic AI relies on an AI database and so has its limitations. Most areas will be affected including subjects like law, accountancy and research. Creative industries may become increasingly important, leading to a shift in how universities teach and what they teach as this will inevitably change.

The Convener thanked GMcL for a fascinating presentation and he left the meeting.

#### 3. Minutes from the meeting held on 23 October 2025

Members approved the minute from the meeting.

#### 4. Matters arising from the minutes of 23 October 2025

- Item 5: Matters arising from the minutes of 6 May 2025
  - Lucy Hunter Blackburn had presented a paper on sex and gender to the Business Committee at its meeting in December 2025;
- Item 6: FSSC's work plan 2025-26
  - James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, will address the Business Committee at its meeting – on 5 March;
  - James Saville, Director of HR, will attend the final meeting of FSSC on 5 May.

## **5. University Finances**

WD gave an update on the meeting with James Gray, Chief Financial Officer, on 27 January, also attended by MB, Convener of FSSC.

### **Action:-**

***WD will invite members of the BC to submit questions for JG in advance of the meeting in March.***

## **6. General Council Budget**

- WD reported that the budget for the current academic year 2025-26 has been reduced by 10% and he had been asked to produce potential GC expenditure profiles for the next 5 years;
- D & A have since provided indicative future years' budget allowances which will allow better scope for forward planning of General Council activities, than the present annual allocation process .

## **7. Any other business**

None.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of FSSC will be held on Tuesday 5 May 2026 at 4.30pm, online via Teams, with James Saville, Director of HR.