



**Business Committee Meeting on Thursday 30 April 2026 at 5.15pm
Raeburn Room, Old College**

AGENDA

Tea, coffee and biscuits will be available at 5pm.

1. Welcome and Apologies
2.
 - a. Observations by General Council Assessors on Court Meeting on 20 April 2026
 - b. Agenda for Court Meeting on 20 April 2026 Paper 1
3. Minutes of the Meeting of 5 March 2026 Paper 2
4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 5 March 2026
5. Reports from the Standing Committees
 - a. Academic Standing Committee – 31 March Paper 3
 - b. Finance and Services Standing Committee – 19 February Paper 4
 - c. Public Affairs Standing Committee – 12 March Paper 5
6. Report from the Secretary of the General Council Paper 6
7. Draft Resolutions of the University Court [Tabled]
8. Arrangements for June 2026 HYM Paper 7
9. Any other competent business
10. Date of next meeting – Thursday 25 June 2026

Notes on the Agenda

- Notice of any questions under item 6 and of any other matters which Members may wish to raise under item 9 should be given to the Secretary and Convener not less than 24 hours before the meeting.



University Court

20 April 2026

Pentland Suite, John McIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls

Agenda

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

OPENING ITEMS

- | | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 1 | Minutes [Open version of minutes to be published in due course] | A1 |
| | To <u>approve</u> the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2026 | |
| 2 | Matters Arising & Review of Action Log [CLOSED] | A2 |
| | To <u>raise</u> any matters arising and <u>review</u> the Action Log | |
| 3 | Principal's Report | B |
| | To <u>note</u> a report from Peter Mathieson, Principal | |
| 4 | Committee Business | |
| | • Policy & Resources Committee [CLOSED] | C1 |
| | • Audit & Risk Committee [CLOSED] | C2 |
| | • Senate [OPEN] | C3 |

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

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|----------|---|----------|
| 5 | Students' Association and Sports Union Reports [OPEN] | |
| | To <u>note</u> reports presented by Ash Scholz, President of the Students' Association | |
| | • Students' Association Report | D |
| | • Sports Union Report | E |
| 6 | Student Experience Update [OPEN] | F |
| | To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by Lucy Evans, Associate Principal & Deputy Secretary Students | |
| 7 | Finance and Planning Update Report [CLOSED] | G |
| | To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by James Gray, Chief Financial Officer | |

- 8 Strategy 2030 Strategic Performance Framework mid-year report 2025-26 [CLOSED] H**
 To *consider* a paper presented by Rona Smith, Deputy Secretary Governance & Strategic Planning and *approve* a revision to one KPI.
- 9 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Data Report 2025 [CLOSED paper – reports to be published in due course] I**
 To *note* the content of the reports and *approve* the reports for publication. Paper presented by Fiona McClement, University Lead, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- 10 Responsible Investment Policy: Representations Process Update [CLOSED – process to be published in due course as an annex to the Responsible Investment Policy] J**
 To *approve* the process. Paper presented by Kim Graham, Provost
- 11 Identity and Access Management Replacement [CLOSED] K**
 To *approve* funding in principle. Paper presented by Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian
- 12 Computer Room 4 Supercomputer Preparation Project, ACF [CLOSED] L**
 To *approve* the project proceeding, with drawdown of grant funding. Paper presented by Damien Toner, Director of Estates
- 13 Small Works and Statutory Compliance Programme Budget Allocation [CLOSED] M**
 To *approve* the Small Works and Statutory Compliance Programme 2026/27 allocation and additional funding. Paper presented by Damien Toner, Director of Estates
- 14 Committee Effectiveness Reviews [CLOSED – aspects of decisions made will be reflected in public committee terms of reference in due course] N**
 To *approve* adoption of a new process. Paper presented by Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary
- 15 Development & Alumni Annual Report 2024-25 [CLOSED] O**
 To *note* a paper presented by Chris Cox, Vice Principal Philanthropy & Advancement
- 16 Scope Expansion of Alumni Club Recognition Process [CLOSED] P**
 To *approve* the proposed changes. Paper presented by Chris Cox, Vice Principal Philanthropy & Advancement
- 17 Award of University Benefactor [CLOSED] Q**
 To *approve* the proposed awards. Paper presented by Peter Mathieson, Vice Principal & Vice-Chancellor

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

- 18 Forest and Peatland Programme: Third Annual Report and Future Oversight** **R**
[CLOSED paper – information on the programme is publicly available at
<https://sustainability.ed.ac.uk/operations/forest-peatland>]
- To *note*
- 19 Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity [CLOSED]** **S**
To *note*
- 20 Resolutions [OPEN]**
- To *approve*
- Degree Regulations **T1**
 - Chairs **T2**
- 21 Any Other Business**
- 22 Date of Next Meeting**
15 June 2026

**Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting held on Thursday 5 March 2026
at 5.15pm, in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

Present:

Dr William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council (online)	
Mr Gordon Cairns, Convener of the Business Committee	
Dr Bruce Nelson, Vice-Convener of the Business Committee	
Ms Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council	
Professor Richard Andrews (online)	Mr Lorn Macneal
Dr Lucy Blackburn	Mr Jock Millican (online)
Professor Alice Brown	Mr David Ovens
Ms Manya Buchan	Professor Graeme Reid
Ms Ann Cormack	Dr Kate Richards
Ms Candice Donnelly	Mr Alan Ross (online)
Dr Matthew Epton	Mr Devin Scobie
Professor John Gillies	Dr Dorothy Welch
Dr Mary Gunn (online)	Mrs Jessica Williamson (online)
Professor Judy Hardy	Lady Sarah Wolffe
	Mr Thomas Wrench

In attendance : Mr. James Gray, Chief Financial Officer

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies from Max Browning and Alastair Dunlop.

2. Presentation by James Gray (JC), Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

- The Convener welcomed JG and invited him to address the committee, noting that topics of interest had been sent to him in advance and could be discussed after his presentation;
- JG explained he only began his current role as the University's CFO 6 months ago. He previously held a similar CFO position at Police Scotland for 9 years and prior to that in local government;
- JG provided an overview of the University's financial situation for fiscal years 2024-25 to 2026-27, structured as follows:

Annual Report and Accounts for 2024-25

This extensive Report had been circulated previously to the Business Committee and was taken as read.

- It showed a University Group EBITDA of £96m (up from £82m in the previous year);
- The operating surplus was £20m (down from £25m) and the better than expected outturn was primarily influenced by good performance by non-core activities, including better returns on investments and by connected subsidiaries;
- Core activities related to teaching and research were closer to break even or in deficit and there is a pressing need to improve their financial performance;
- The surplus margin remains modest (at 1.4% of income), indicating vulnerability to fluctuations and underscoring the importance of robust financial management.

Financial Forecasting and Budgets

- Recent financial outcomes have been better than earlier forecasts of possible deficits. This demonstrates a need to refine forecasting, particularly for subsidiaries (which produced an £8 million surplus against a forecast deficit) and research income timing, which aligns differently with fiscal and grant periods;
- Also, investment income performed better than conservative estimates, prompting a re-assessment in future budgeting strategies;
- The University continuously faces the challenge of aligning its budgeting and financial planning with its strategic objectives while managing a substantial debt (£550 million) and maintaining cash flows for necessary investments;
- The CFO emphasised the development of an integrated financial planning framework to consolidate various planning activities across the University. The aim is to enhance transparency and strategic alignment regarding capital expenditure, debt management, and surplus usage.
- A need for clearer communication and justification of financial practices to the University community was also acknowledged, with efforts underway to make financial allocations and impacts more transparent and understandable.

Balance sheet and cash flow

- The University has net assets valued at £3.1 billion, but the major components are fixed assets like buildings, which are not easily convertible to cash, or endowment funds which have to be used to meet donor restricted purposes and are not for general running costs;
- The large property asset base has initiated conversations about potentially reducing the number of buildings the University holds and addressing the utilisation and efficiency of the estate, with potential downsizing or repurposing of buildings to enhance operational effectiveness and reduce maintenance overheads;
- Treasury cash balances as of July 2025 stood at £703 million, a decrease of £66m from the previous year, primarily due to EBITDA being £96m and capital grants received £30 million, but capital expenditures was £200 million, resulting in a gap which was filled by utilising Treasury cash;
- This trend of using treasury cash to cover shortfalls was highlighted as undesirable and the focus now is on generating sufficient EBITDA to support necessary capital programs without relying heavily on treasury cash;
- Significant repayments on borrowings are scheduled to start in a decade, with discussions ongoing about handling those obligations. The need to avoid covenant breaches is recognised as essential.

Current year

- The Q1 forecast for 2025- 26, excluding restructuring costs, is very to near breakeven, which is behind budget;
- The Q2 financial forecast seems better than Q1, though exact figures are still being finalised. The University has shown resilience by retaining more students than expected, mitigating lower than anticipated new enrollments;
- There is a clear intention to maintain, and where possible enhance, recruitment efforts to sustain tuition fee income. This is especially critical given the risks to income projections currently estimated to potentially fall short by £28 million next year relative to the budget;

- Capital expenditure reductions are considered necessary next year as a temporary measure to adjust to reduced EBITDA projections due to tuition fee risks. However, long-term sustainability requires adequate investment in maintaining and expanding capabilities;
- Proposals are expected from the Estates Department regarding managing the University's extensive property assets more effectively, either through commercial use or disposal, to reduce operating costs while also potentially benefiting capital programmes.

Financial risks and material issues

- EBITDA should be in 7-9% range, but this was not achieved in 2024-25, and the forecast for 2025-26 is it will be worse;
- Further management of the cost base is essential to remain financially sustainable, with improved financial performance of core teaching and research activities

Emerging picture 2026-27

- There is an ongoing issue with delivering staff cost reductions in 2025-26, particularly at College level, which are not reducing as quickly as planned. These reductions are crucial for meeting future year's budget targets;

Discussion

- GC asked JG for his **prognosis for the University's finances**, given the various political, economic, and geopolitical challenges;
- JG highlighted the financial strain in Scotland's public funding and low economic growth, which will likely impact higher education funding despite ongoing reviews. There was concern over the potential political changes that might occur at Westminster that might not prioritise higher education;
- The focus is on how the University can build financial resilience to withstand these challenges through strategies like income diversification and managing its size and shape effectively;
- He expressed optimism in leveraging strengths in fields like informatics, engineering, and medicine to adapt and lead through turbulent times. He said that Edinburgh is well placed to lead the challenge from AI and what the future requirements of industry will be for graduates by embracing the opportunity to reshape the University into whatever the future looks like.
- RA asked about **inefficiencies in the use of the University estate** and the potential for reducing costs;
- JG said that the estates team has extensively analysed the utilisation of space and, by providing data and having an evidence base, is now able to inform proper discussions with the users of the space. The team is also exploring options to repurpose or dispose of certain buildings within one to three years, aiming for a potential 15% reduction in total estate size over several years;
- JG emphasised the importance of effective space utilisation over merely reducing square footage and advocated for strategic repurposing or disposal to optimise assets as net revenue streams rather than net costs;
- The key challenge now is transforming these ideas into tangible plans that can be finalised and then delivered promptly.
- MB asked about the **implementation of the "people and money" system**, particularly its operational challenges and the need for improvements;

- JG acknowledged that the system, initially set up to streamline operations, has been plagued with manual workarounds that have become the norm rather than temporary fixes;
 - Despite being stable, it provides poor user experience and is not delivering the promised benefits, particularly in efficiency and data insight;
 - The finance and procurement departments have had to expand to manage these shortcomings, leading to increased operational costs;
 - JG advocated for a business case to secure investment aimed at correcting these issues, enhancing user experience, and optimising team size to align with sector standards;
 - This initiative is expected to also prepare the University for upcoming projects like the student record system implementation, drawing lessons from current challenges.
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- In response to a question from TW about **tuition fee loans for rUK students**, given the high % of such students at Edinburgh University and recent media attention on the financial struggles of rUK graduates with repayments, and the doubts this is generating about the perceived value of university education. JG said the Principal is actively involved in discussions with both the UK and Scottish governments regarding the sustainability of the current funding model, which heavily relies on international student fees to subsidise domestic students;
 - There is support within the University for recent tuition fee increases that partly offset prolonged fee stagnation. The Principal does not hold a particular view on whether the funding should be direct taxpayer funding or include some contributions from students as deciding that is a political choice, but his concern is whatever model is adopted, it must be properly funded and at present it is not.
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- LM asked about **job security amid planned budget cuts**, and whether natural staff turnover (retirements, job changes) might mitigate the need for redundancies;
 - JG noted that academic staff turnover is extremely low, which complicates making potential savings from normal turnover only. For professional services staff, turnover is higher but mostly in lower-grade positions;
 - The University is using voluntary schemes to encourage departures wherever possible;
 - JG explained that the senior leadership team recognise the ongoing uncertainty is causing stress among employees and the need for clearer communication regarding which parts of the workforce might be most affected. They have been urged to provide more specific details on the timing and scale of any changes to help staff make informed personal decisions, but the expectation is the impact on most staff will be less severe than feared.

The Convener warmly thanked JG for a clear, highly informative presentation and invited him to return to address members of the committee at a future meeting.

Action: -

Slides used during the presentation to be shared with the Committee.

3. Observations by General Council Assessors

David Ovens gave the report from the recent Court meeting on 23 February at Pollock Halls. The Court agenda had been previously circulated and he covered the following open items:

- Principal's Report (Item 3)
Finance
 - The Principal opened the finance discussion by stressing the significance of 2026 as a crucial year for implementing plans and reshaping the university into a financially sustainable

institution. He acknowledged the challenges posed by uncertainty, especially for the staff, and noted that the senior executive team is striving to provide greater clarity soon. DO was pleased that James Gray echoed these sentiments, emphasising the urgency of completing the full restructuring within the next eighteen months;

- In his paper, Sir Peter reviewed the Scottish Government budget for the fiscal year 2026-2027, noting the lack of significant mentions of universities in the Finance Secretary's speech, except for a £20 million allocation to the University of Dundee. The overall funding increase for the university sector was about £55 million, amounting to a 4.8% uplift from the previous year. The resource budget rose by 3.2%, leading to a real-terms increase of under 1%, which was insufficient to counteract the past decade's financial erosion;
- He also welcomed the inception of the Joint Future Framework between the Universities Scotland and the Scottish Government, with an anticipated initial report aimed at quantifying the funding gap expected before the next budget announcement;
- Furthermore, he expressed approval of the UK government's decision to rejoin the Erasmus Plus programme starting January 2027, which could facilitate participation in the forthcoming framework programme.

– **Student Recruitment**

In relation to the current cycle of student recruitment, demand is being closely monitored, and while many metrics were ahead of the plan, at an aggregate level there remained a number of risks, particularly in variabilities by subject and volatility. He did note, however, that the University had significantly enhanced its speed of offer making.

– **Research and Innovation**

Reported an emerging new situation with regard to the UK research and innovation approach to the management of their funding schemes, which are to be more aligned with the UK government's industrial strategy. Three of the research councils have implemented temporary pauses on some of their funding schemes and there is much concern about the impact that these pauses are having on recruitment of early career researchers.

– **Engagements**

Sir Peter also referenced some events and engagements which he had attended during the period since the last Court meeting, e.g., he was a member of the panel appointing the next Russell Group Chief Executive and had presented his annual report to the General Council at the recent Half-Yearly Meeting.

– **Industrial Action**

Sir Peter has been actively engaging with the unions in relation to the ongoing restructuring. He noted that UCU had initiated the process of balloting for a new mandate for industrial action had started.

– **Research**

- Sir Peter noted the launch of the new Research Cultures Action Plan 2026-28, which restated the commitment to fostering an environment where research can thrive.

– **Court Elections**

- Peter reported that three candidates were being taken forward to election for the senior lay member position;
- There are two internal candidates: Hugh Mitchell, current member of the University Court and Frank Armstrong, a former member of the University Court, and who had chaired the Estates Committee for a number of years. The external candidate is Benny Higgins, who is a well-known business figure with a lot of different interests;
- Voting will take place between the 11th and the 17th of March.

- Committee Business (Item 4)
 - The Senate report summarised several formal motions related to restructuring, requiring the University executive to provide detailed information on restructuring plans, risk assessments, and other relevant details;
 - Additionally, the Senate passed a motion criticising the academic contribution framework approved by the senior executive team, which it believed represented a significant shift in the University's strategy concerning research and teaching. Specifically, the Senate opposed the use of quantitative metrics such as the number of publications, funding applications, and student contact hours, advocating instead for qualitative indicators like collaborative and collegiate working.

- Students' Association and Sports Union Reports (Item 5)
 - Ash Scholz, President of the Students' Association reported on the development of a strategic plan aimed at enhancing student experience over the next five years;
 - Concerns were raised about the University's restructuring, urging the executive team to incorporate student perspectives into these processes;
 - Significant mention was made of the Responsible Investment Advisory Group, criticised for its slow response in advising on ethical, social, and environmental investment policies amid calls for divestment from certain company shares;
 - Ash also discussed the recent student elections, the reopening of Teviot with significant investment by EUSA, and the results of a member survey that gathered 3,300 responses, showing that approximately 75% of students felt positively represented by EUSA;
 - The survey revealed that students prioritise campaigning on issues such as cost of living, teaching quality, mental health, facilities, and housing, while activism and divestment ranked lower.
 - The Sports Union report highlighted several achievements: the sports ball was a success, and membership within the sports union continued to grow. At the recent BUCS championships, Edinburgh maintained its fifth place, and Megan Keith, a sports science graduate, broke the European record for a 10K road race in Spain, surpassing the previous record held by Eilish McColgan.

- Academic Staff Member Election Regulations (Item 8)
 - There was a brief paper presented to allow the current academic staff member in the Court, Toby Kelly, to extend his 4-year term by 2 months so that it was aligned to the academic year, and the Court approved that resolution.

- Self-Evaluation Action Plan (Item 11)
 - The University Court reviewed the self-evaluation action plan in its annual report to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), focusing on quality assurance and enhancement activities. Although not requiring Court approval, the document must be shared with the Court;
 - Highlights include noting a widening gap in degree attainment, with Scottish domicile students less likely to achieve a first or upper second-class degree compared to their peers from other parts of the UK and abroad;
 - Positively, the report mentioned advancements in the student support framework, where students are assigned advisors instead of personal tutors, facilitating access to broader university support. This model has reportedly been well received by both students and staff.

SW spoke to the afternoon seminars at the Court meeting. There were 3 productive sessions which focused on a radical review of the University's estate, to address the inefficiencies and sustainability of its buildings, many of which are historic.

Discussion

- LHB drew attention to **staff costs in the recently published Annual Report and Accounts** (p.69), particularly highlighting a 50% increase in University staff earning over £200,000 between 2023/24 and 2024/25, and a 10% rise generally in those earning over £100,000. This raised concerns given broader austerity measures and cuts taking place.
- Specific to the high earners, DW explained the increased number was mainly medical staff, with salaries determined by NHS agreements and this aspect was beyond the University's direct control;
- On the need for clear oversight to manage financial strategies. DO said that the Court had expressed confidence in the capability of the new CFO to deliver on these.
- TW remarked on the **successful refurbishment of Teviot Union**, which was echoed by AB who had attended the recent opening celebrations organised by EUSA;
- TW queried **why was the Court agenda relating to Alumni Relations Activity closed?** He said that, while donations and legacies will contain sensitive information, it would be helpful in planning for future PASC activities to understand the University's work in alumni engagement and how best to support it;
- AB raised a point about the Principal's remarks concerning the **Future Framework** and its implications for university funding in Scotland. She expressed concern that publication of the report on the first of the three pillars of this framework is now expected to be delayed until post-election, with some suggesting even later in the autumn, indicating a potential postponement of decisions;
- AB referred to an article by LHB about **student debt** in Scotland on the Royal Society of Edinburgh's website. Despite tuition-free education, Scottish students still incur significant debt. LHB added that this issue remains outside the scope of the current Future Framework funding review.

The Convener thanked the Assessors for their contributions.

4. Minutes of the Meeting of 4 December 2025

The minutes were approved.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 4 December 2025

These were covered in the Report by the Secretary (Item 7; Paper 3).

6. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

No. 1/2026: Foundation of a Chair of Large-Scale Database Systems

No. 2/2026: Alteration of the title of the Mary Dick Chair of Molecular Veterinary Medicine

The above Resolutions were approved, although concern was expressed over possible reaction to awareness that funding for the Chair of Large-Scale Database Systems will be by Huawei for an initial three years.

7. Report from the Secretary of the General Council

Paper 3, previously circulated, is shown in Appendix 1 and mainly dealt with matters arising from the Business Committee meeting on 4 December 2025. The following items were highlighted:

A. Matters arising

Item 1. Election of Senior Lay member of Court

WD emphasised the importance of the role of Senior Lay Member of Court but reported he had heard of disappointment at the lack of diversity in the candidates for election, as all were men who had had corporate business careers. SW responded that the University had encouraged a diverse pool of applicants including through an extended recruitment process, but only those candidates who met the specific criteria required by Court were put forward;

Item 2. International Standing Committee

The next meeting is with the Provost, Kim Graham, and is now scheduled for 1 May 2026.

Item 5. Report on Sex and gender issues

LHB will liaise with WD about compliance of policies on sex and gender with legislation.

Item 6. Elections to the Business Committee

Congratulations to Charles Atkinson, Max Browning, Ian Conn, and Emily Honeysett who were elected to join the Business Committee from August. As part of their induction process, they will be invited to attend the June Business Committee Meeting.

B. Other Matters

1. Summer Half Yearly Meeting on 13 June at Teviot Row House

Allan Little is no longer available to be the guest speaker and an alternative speaker will have to be found;

Action:

The Secretary invited members of the Business Committee to suggest speakers for the June HYM.

8. Old College Heritage and Values Project

- DW and LM attended a recent workshop to discuss options for Old College about the use of some of its spaces and artworks;
- DW reported poor attendance and said that many of those present were from ECA so it was not a diverse turnout. She felt that those running the project seemed to want to use the building as an art gallery to showcase the University's many paintings without giving proper consideration to the purpose of the artworks;
- She encouraged BC members to attend the next workshop on Monday 16 March 11am – 1pm.

9. Motions to June 2026 Half-Yearly Meeting

The Committee considered the following Motions and agreed they should be included in Summer 2026 Billet and presented for approval at the Summer Half Yearly Meeting

- a. Dates of Half Yearly Meetings.** Changes to the Standing Order (last revised in 2020) to allow for greater flexibility in setting the dates for the Half-Yearly Meetings and no longer requiring them to be held on Saturdays – see Appendix 2a
- b. Appointment of Secretary.** To recommend the re-appointment of Dr William Duncan as Secretary to the General Council from 1 August 2026 at the end of his current term – see Appendix 2b

10. Any other competent business

None.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 30 April 2026 at 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room.

Appendix 1

Report from the Secretary of the General Council

A. Matters arising from 4 December 2025 meeting

1. Election of Senior Lay member of Court

To conform with the requirements Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016, the appointment process is in three stages:

- i) advertisement, application and interview;
- ii) election;
- iii) appointment.

The first stage has just been completed and a competitive election will be held between 11 to 17 March 2026. (The legislation governing this appointment does not allow single candidate elections.)

The electorate comprises students, staff and Court members of the University; it does not involve alumni members of the General Council.

The candidate who receives the most votes is appointed, subject to satisfactory pre-appointment checks and agreeing to abide by the Code of Conduct for Court members.

2. International Standing Committee

As the Provost, Kim Graham, is now unlikely to be available on 14 April an alternative date is being arranged.

3. Half Yearly meeting on 14 February 2026

This took place at EFI, was livestreamed and recorded, with the recording is available on <https://general-council.ed.ac.uk/half-yearly-meetings/past-meeting>

The Director of EFI, Professor Marion Thain was the speaker at the lunch in the Playfair Library. Her talk was recorded and is also available on the General Council website link.

4. Senior Leadership Team vacancies

In response to questions submitted by Professor John Gillies about this, the Principal replied at the Half Yearly Meeting. It seems there is little prospect of the vacant Vice Principal (Students) or Vice Principal (International) being filled while the University is seeking to substantially reduce its staff budgets.

5. Report on Sex and gender issues

In response to question submitted by Lucy Blackburn Hunter, the University Secretary replied at the Half Yearly Meeting that the University's policies and guidance on this matter were being kept under review.

6. Elections to the Business Committee

As announced at the Half Yearly Meeting, the 4 candidates elected were:

Charles Atkinson
Max Browning
Ian Conn
Emily Honeysett

As part of their induction process, they will be invited to attend the June Business Committee Meeting.

B. Other Matters

1. Summer Half Yearly Meeting

This will be held at the newly refurbished Teviot Row Union on 13 June.

Following the formal business meeting (10.30- c.11.15), there will be a talk by Allan Little. Lunch will be available thereafter, with a dining fee of £15, to encourage attendance and networking.

Appendix 2a

MOTION TO THE HALF YEARLY MEETING ON 13 June 2026

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
Seconded by the Vice-Convener of the Business Committee

Appendix 2b

MOTION TO THE HALF YEARLY MEETING ON 13 June 2026

Secretary of the General Council

That the General Council reappoints 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
Seconded by the Vice-Convener of the Business Committee

**Minutes of the Academic Standing Committee
on Tuesday 31 March 2026 at 4.30pm
Online via Teams**

Present: Graeme Reid, Convener of ASC
John Gillies
Judy Hardy
Dorothy Welch
Gordon Cairns, Convener of the Business Committee
Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council

In attendance: Lucy Evans, Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener of ASC (GR) welcomed everyone to the meeting to hear from Lucy Evans in her new role as Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students.

Apologies were received from William Duncan, Matthew Epton and Bruce Nelson.

2. Presentation by Lucy Evans, Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students

LE had been provided with an advance list of topics of interest to the Committee (Appendix 1), which were addressed in the following discussion. Slides were used throughout the presentation.

Role

LE updated the committee on her new role and noted her previous collaboration with Colm Harmon (CH), former VP Students. Her responsibilities are strategic oversight of learning and teaching aligned with the University's academic mission, enhancing student services throughout their educational and student life journey, improving internal operations and responding to financial challenges.

STRATEGY AND VISION

- LE discussed the newly approved Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030 which was developed alongside CH;
- This strategy aims to equip students as lifelong learners ready to thrive in an ever-changing world, and aligns with the broader University Strategy 2030;
- The strategy has three inter-related core purposes: (i) developing a curriculum which is future ready; (ii) engaging and empowering learners; and (iii) supporting inspiring teaching;
- The emphasis is on student success, support, expectations, and fostering a community of care, which are foundational for delivering excellent education and student experiences;
- She highlighted the importance of integrated support services to enhance the student experience from pre-arrival to post-graduation and developing the necessary infrastructure for broader academic and administrative coordination across the University.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

- LE acknowledged the challenges faced by universities at a national and global level and emphasised the need for strategic positioning in competitive spaces, focusing on student satisfaction, well-being, collaborations, and financial sustainability;

- She reflected on a recent University debate that questioned the core purpose of universities, illustrating the ongoing discussion about the role of higher education institutions in society, their operational models, and government funding;
- Highlighted the critical need for universities to adapt to current realities while ensuring they continue to play a significant role on a global scale, impacting society at large.

UNIVERSITY CHANGE PROGRAMME

- LE noted that the University is examining its academic size and shape, operational methods and financial strategies in response to broader economic challenges within the sector while still aiming to meet the objectives outlined in Strategy 2030;
- In addressing these challenges, the University is strategically managing costs and income, focusing on avoiding hasty decisions and maintaining a commitment to its staff and students but in a changed operating environment;
- LE is leading a 'learning and teaching' work stream - part of five strategic activity streams which also focus on research and innovation; staff; the physical and digital estate and other operating expenditure - which prioritises enhancing educational quality and student experiences;
- This involves shaping a curriculum that is prepared for future demands, improving student services, and ensuring efficient support and administration. The efforts are set within the wider context of maintaining financial viability without compromising the University's core educational objectives.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE PRIORITIES

- LE elaborated on pivotal elements concerning the University's learning and teaching strategies, including portfolio review, academic size and shape, and adapting to generative AI in a positive manner, all aimed at enhancing the educational journey and quality of programmes;
- Additional focus areas are robust student support models, optimised teaching timetables, and effective student representation;
- Key digital tools like virtual learning environments are emphasised alongside fostering a community characterised by belonging, pride, and respectful communication;
- The **Academic Size and Shape Project** led by LE and Professor Iain Gordon, VP and Head of the College of Science and Engineering, seeks to review staffing models and capacity in line with strategic objectives covering teaching, research, and innovation to ensure sustainability and competitiveness;
- This initiative involves setting principles regarding class sizes, student-staff ratios, and research funding models, while each school applies these principles to shape their specific academic and financial strategies;
- Through this process, the University aims to balance financial sustainability with its societal contributions, ensuring the programmes offered allow staff to innovate in teaching and provide students with genuine choices in their studies, despite existing challenges like over-assessment and complex programme structures;
- The current scale of programmes at the University is not manageable – it is overloaded/overstretched, unnecessarily complex and resource intensive;
- The **Portfolio Review** is not just about cutting costs but is deeply tied to reinforcing the University's academic mission, ensuring a broad yet sustainable educational offer.

Assessment and Feedback

- LE discussed the challenges related to student assessment and feedback as highlighted in student surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS);
- Specifically, at the University of Edinburgh, there has been noticeable student dissatisfaction regarding the timeliness and quality of feedback;
- Data analysis revealed that the University was not meeting its commitment to providing students with prompt feedback;
- Efforts to address this included monitoring and managing feedback timeliness more effectively, which led to notable improvements;
- The University is aiming for a much higher rate of timely feedback, acknowledging that achieving 100% may not always be realistic due to various practical constraints like unplanned changes in staff availability;
- Improvements in feedback timeliness have positively impacted student satisfaction. However, LE emphasised that enhancing assessment feedback is not just about speed, it's also crucial to ensure clarity in marking criteria and the quality of feedback, enabling students to understand how they can improve based on the feedback they receive.

Student Voice Actions

LE addressed challenges regarding student voice at the University and said that schools and colleges are working directly with EUSA and the Student Representative system in an effort to improve.

Student Journey

- LE emphasised the importance of supporting students throughout their educational journey at the University, particularly focusing on their well-being and integration into the community;
- She acknowledged the challenges students face transitioning from diverse backgrounds and educational systems, and stressed the need for tailored support to equip them for success, both academically and in future employment;
- The University has invested significantly in student well-being, including early interventions and support for special needs;
- Highlighted also the importance of fostering a community where students can share positive experiences and feel valued members of the University.

Working with students

- LE discussed efforts to enhance student engagement and representation at the University, through the EUSA Student Experience Framework and Student Partnership Agreement, and shared events such as the Winter run and the Teaching and Student Awards;
- Along with the Principal, she has attended sessions with EUSA and student representatives to ensure senior management remains in touch with student perspectives, recognising that although many colleagues frequently interact with students, direct engagement at the senior level is crucial;
- Despite efforts, feedback from the National Student Survey (NSS) indicates that students feel disengaged from EUSA;
- LE sees potential for mutual benefits through strengthened collaboration e.g., Student Lifecycle Management Group;

- She also emphasised the importance of fostering a community that supports dignity, respect, and the expression of diverse beliefs and cultures, particularly focusing on working with under-represented groups.

Discussion

- **Role**
 - GR asked about managing the expanded scope of her duties and LE explained that instead of handling the work of two people or dropping tasks, she has strategically reallocated responsibilities, specifically, working more closely with the Deans of Education and empowering the directors of her services to take a more operational role;
 - This approach allows more focus on strategic educational responsibilities while still supporting her team's efforts toward enhancing the student experience;
 - She acknowledged the support from the Provost and emphasised the importance of the senior leadership team in addressing educational issues;
 - She highlighted the realistic limitation of not being able to do everything and focusing instead on prioritising key areas;
 - JH expressed approval of increased collaboration with the Deans of Education, enhancing their roles which had previously been underutilised;
- **Current Priorities**
 - JH asked about Lucy's current priorities given the broad scope she presented;
 - LE said that her top priority is ensuring the academic size and shape align with the University's financial challenges and strategic mission;
 - LE also highlighted the importance of not losing sight of past successes in curriculum transformation while exploring new, sustainable, and cost-effective academic frameworks;
 - The overarching goal is to address these complexities quickly yet holistically across the University;
- **Student Recruitment**
 - In response to an enquiry from GR about the current year's recruitment data, LE reported that undergraduate recruitment is generally strong, including from Scottish and international students;
 - Highlighted challenges in the postgraduate taught sector, especially with a notable decrease in Chinese student applications;
 - Efforts are being made to expedite offer turnarounds to improve conversion rates;
- **Student Support Model**
 - DW asked about the impact of financial pressures on the student support model, particularly in light of staff changes due to the voluntary severance scheme;
 - LE assured that the student support model, which she is proud of, remains robust and effective;
 - She highlighted the ongoing contributions of student advisers and the student well-being team, noting that these roles continue to be replaced as needed despite recruitment restraints;
 - Acknowledged challenges in engaging certain student groups and the additional pressures on remaining staff due to departures. However, she emphasised that there is no current plan to reduce or eliminate the student support model;
- **Curriculum Transformation**

- JG enquired about the continuation and development of CH’s curriculum transformation efforts;
- LE confirmed that the work to build on past developments are ongoing with a focus on integrating successful elements into the curriculum and expanding popular initiatives such as challenge courses and experiential learning;
- JG expressed concern about maintaining diverse academic offerings like Celtic Studies amidst resource constraints;
- LE acknowledged this challenge and discussed the need for more interdisciplinary and streamlined approaches to preserve broad academic offerings in a financially sustainable way and is reviewing existing incentivising structures with the Chief Financial Officer, James Gray;
- **Health Concerns - Meningitis B**
 - JG asked about the University’s response to the recent outbreak at Kent University;
 - LE detailed the proactive measures taken, including distributing Public Health Scotland guidance to student-facing staff, directing students to health and safety resources, and monitoring the situation closely;
- **Institute for Academic Development (IAD)**
 - Concerns were raised about the operational changes within IAD;
 - LE said that the decision for dissolving IAD was part of an internal review and reassured that despite cost-cutting measures, the essential work of IAD, such as academic development and support for postgraduate researchers, will continue;
 - She expressed a strong commitment to these core functions and announced ongoing plans to focus more in staff academic development;
- **General Council Event**
 - DW suggested a possible event aimed at updating General Council members on the current academic offerings of the University and which could also help illustrate how fields such as Chemistry have evolved over the years;
 - LE was enthusiastic about the idea and said that she was keen to hear what might interest GC members in order to choose specific areas to focus on;
 - Further discussion with PASC should be arranged to plan this event, possibly to align with Half-Yearly Meetings.

Action:-

- ***DW to discuss her idea in more detail with the Secretary and Convener of PASC;***
- ***LE will then liaise with colleagues for their suggestions.***

- **Use of AI**

- LE also addressed concerns about AI, especially regarding plagiarism and the potential non-engagement of students with direct learning processes;
- She indicated that there was some nervousness among staff about AI as it is a fast-moving area and a better understanding as to how it will impact teaching and learning is needed across the institution;
- She noted developments which continue to explore the positive applications of AI in teaching (e.g., marking) and increased efficiency in administrative processes, while managing risks associated with its misuse;
- A seminar had recently been held at the University Court to discuss future strategies and trainings related to AI.

- **Academic Size and Shape**

- JH enquired about the timescales associated with the restructuring of academic size and shape;
- LE provided an overview of current plans, noting ongoing collaboration with all three colleges on reviewing academic portfolios, which could lead to changes such as not recruiting for certain programmes by 2027-2028, and adjustments to optional courses as early as the next academic year;
- She emphasised that this is a multi-year project, with more concrete plans expected within the next year that will subsequently inform the planning for 2027-2028.
- LE acknowledged the slow nature of changes in academic settings due to the need to honour commitments to current students and staff;
- She highlighted the financial imperatives driving these changes and stressed the importance of carefully managing transitions;
- JH remarked on the challenges of aligning staff with new initiatives, as academic colleagues can be deeply invested in their existing programmes and courses.

The Convener thanked LE for a useful discussion and she left the meeting.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2025

The minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 11 November 2025

None.

5. Draft Resolutions

No Draft Resolutions were received.

6. Any other Business

None.

7. Preparations and date of the next meeting

- EUSA VP Education, Katya Amott will attend the final meeting of ASC in the current session on Thursday 4 June 2026, 4.30pm, online via Teams;
- As she prepares to demit role, she will give her impression of the student perspective of the effects of the current challenges for the University and the impacts on their education.

**Academic Standing Committee meeting with Lucy Evans on 31 March 2026
Topics of interest and likely questions**

1. Lucy's enhanced role.

- What are the main changes to your role following Colm Harmon's departure and the Vice Principal (Students) post not being filled?
- How is the voice of students heard at Senior Leadership Team meetings?

2. Impact of cost savings on students and staff.

- What is the scale of cutbacks due to cost savings?
- What have been or will be the main impacts on the student experience, how is this being measured, and what is the University doing to mitigate these?
- Have cutbacks resulted in course closures or planned closures
- What will be the impact of increased class sizes on the student experience?
- What impact are cost savings having on staff morale and how is this affecting students?

3. Institute for Academic Development

- What was the rationale for dissolving this?
- How are its main functions (for staff and student development and for facilitating exchange of best practice in learning and teaching across all the Schools and Colleges) now being carried out?

4. NSS.

- What are the main conclusions to draw from the results for Edinburgh University?
- What further measures are proposed to try to bring Edinburgh up the rankings?

5. Adequacy of Lecture theatre accommodation.

- How often are students not able to get into lecture theatres or be unable to get a seat due to lack of capacity in the lecture theatres? [This problem was mentioned by EUSA sabbaticals in their presentation to Business Committee, and they expressed concern on how this can impact on student satisfaction, especially for high fee-paying students, but does the university collect data on this issue and if so, what does this show?]
- If this is more than an occasional issue, what are the plans to address this?

6. Meningitis B.

- What precautions or advice for students is the University currently undertaking, appreciating there is a balance to be struck between sensible advice and avoiding panic?
- What are the plans should an outbreak occur at the University, given that the current Kent outbreak is, for reasons yet to be established, much more severe than has been the norm?

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.

**Meeting of the Public Affairs Standing Committee
at 4.30pm on Thursday 12 March 2026
Braid Room, Charles Stewart House**

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

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener, Alice Brown (AB) welcomed all attendees to the in-person business planning meeting. She also welcomed Thomas Wrench (TW) who attended online.

Apologies received from Dr Bruce Nelson and Ms Alison McNulty (Assistant Secretary of the General Council).

2. Minutes from the meeting held on 9 October 2025

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the meeting held on 9 October 2025

These were dealt with under the items on the agenda.

4. Discussion re PASC's work plan 25-26

The Convener referred to the Work Plan (Paper 2) that had been produced in October 2025. The proposed activities set out in the Work Plan were discussed and actions agreed as follows:

- **Showcase event:** the decision was made to approach the Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Science & Engineering (Professor Iain Gordon) with a view to holding the next Showcase event in late June or early July at the Nucleus Building in King's Buildings. The format would be similar to that held last year with a number of presentations from members of staff followed by a buffet supper for those attending.

Action: *William Duncan (WD) to approach Professor Gordon.*

- **Parliamentary events:** WD circulated previously a proposal received from Lynn McMath to organise two events at the Westminster Parliament in June. This proposal followed a meeting that WD and AB held with Niall Bradley and Lynn McMath (Communication and Marketing) on 27 January 2026 to consider 'Town and Gown' activities and options for possible complementary activities between the General Council and CAM in relation to Edinburgh City Council, the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament. The details of the proposal were discussed. It was decided that, in principle, PASC would like to be involved with the

proposed London engagements, but it would be helpful to discuss and clarify the details of the proposal before a final decision can be reached. A key requirement for a funding contribution (of up to £10K) would be that General Council members are invited. It was agreed that WD would contact Lynn McMath to arrange a meeting as soon as possible with her involving WD, AB and Devin Scobie (DS).

Action: *WD to contact Lynn McMath to arrange a meeting.*

- **'In Conversation' event:** Following the success of the first 'In Conversation' event held in October last year, it was agreed that PASC should seek to organise another such event this October. It was agreed that the format should be similar to last year's event, involving two speakers with the Rector (Simon Fanshawe) chairing the conversation and the Q&A session that follows. Ideas for different topics and speakers were discussed with the possibility of the event being held in the newly refurbished Teviot Row house on Tuesday, 6 October. No decision was made to approach potential speakers at this stage until the speaker for the Half Yearly Meeting in June had been confirmed - see item under 'Future Events' below.

Action: *Alison McNulty (AMcN) to ascertain the availability of Teviot Row House as a venue for the event. WD to contact Rector to check his availability on 6 October.*

- **General Council Scholarship Video:** Planning for the third Video in the series, covering The Prince Philip Scholarships, is underway. WD reported that he will be attending a meeting on Friday, 20 March to progress plans for the Video. WD will also be exploring the potential involvement of the Chancellor of the University, The Princess Royal, either in participating in the recording or providing a brief statement to be included.

Action: *WD to follow-up.*

- **Summer 2026 Billet:** WD reported that preparation of the Billet is underway.
- **'Town and Gown':** See discussion under 'Parliamentary Events' above. Lynn McMath from CAM will be giving a presentation to the Committee at its next meeting on 14 May. It was agreed that this would be an opportunity to follow-up potential complementary 'Town and Gown' activities, for example in relation to Edinburgh Council.
- **Engagement with Community Planning activities:** It was agreed that Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact, be invited to a meeting of PASC during the 2026-27 academic session with a view to obtaining an update on the progress of the Community Plan and discussing how best PASC can support some of the activities set out in the Plan.

Action: Invitation to be sent by AMcN on behalf of the new Convener of PASC when the dates of PASC meetings are decided.

5. Future Events

- **June 2026 Half Yearly Meeting:** AB reported that, unfortunately, Allan Little was no longer able to be our speaker at the HYM in June to be held at Teviot House. Members proposed and discussed a number of other potential speakers who might be approached. It was decided that, in the first instance, Ian Rankin would be invited.

Action: AB to contact Ian Rankin to ascertain if he would be available to be our speaker at the HYM, which failing at the proposed 'In Conversation' event in October.

- **Christmas Reception 2026:** Noted the Christmas Reception has been fixed for Tuesday, 8 December and the conference room in the Informatics Building booked. Members were not keen on using that venue again and discussed the possibility of alternative venues for the event and favoured holding it at the College of Art in recently refurbished spaces there if available. As the University Principal is not available on the date, the Vice Principal of the College could be asked if he was available to welcome guests if the CoA is chosen as the venue.

Action: WD to contact CoA Principal about availability of suitable space there for reception.

- **February 2027 Half Yearly Meeting:** Noted that EFI (Room 2.55) has been booked for the business meeting and the Playfair Library for the lunch, as at present there was no suitable space in EFI for a seated lunch for up to 100. Concern was expressed for members with mobility difficulties about the distance between EFI and Playfair and the difficulties of accessing Playfair. Concern was also expressed over the cost of the dining fee (£34). The preference was for a venue where the business meeting and lunch were co-located and for a reduced dining fee. The venue for the meeting and lunch will be given further consideration at the next meeting. Also discussed were potential speakers. It was agreed that Sally Magnusson should be invited to be the speaker at the HYM next February.

Action: AB will contact Sally Magnusson to ascertain if she would be available to be our speaker.

6. Any other business

- **Next Convener of PASC:** AB was pleased to inform members that DS had agreed with WD and GC to succeed AB as Convener of PASC after she demits office in July. Two new members will need to be appointed as Candice Donnelly (CD) also demits office in July.

Action: WD and GC to discuss new PASC member options.

- **PASC meeting dates in 2026-27:** AB recommended that it would be useful for the spacing of dates for PASC meetings in the new session be given consideration, e.g., it would be helpful to have an early meeting of the Committee to agree the Work Plan for the year, followed by two meetings that are equally spaced out and in line with meetings of the Business Committee.
- **Teviot Row House:** AB noted that a number of members of the Business Committee attended the launch of the newly refurbished Teviot Row House and were impressed with the new facilities available for students and staff.
- **Next Senior Lay Member of Court:** Noted that election of the next Chair of Court was taking place with the outcome known next week. WD suggested there should be early engagement with whoever is elected and GC suggested inviting to the October Business Committee.
Action: WD to send congratulations to successful candidate and invite to October Business Committee.
- **Enlighten Paper by Des McNulty and Huw Morris:** AB drew attention to their paper regarding the funding of universities and colleges, circulated to members and to the Business Committee.

7. Preparations and date of the next meeting

The next meeting of PASC will be held on Thursday, 14 May. Lynn McMath (CAM) will give a presentation to the Committee.

Report by Secretary to April 2026 Business Committee

A. Matters arising from 5 March 2026 meeting

1. Presentation by James Gray.

Would Business Committee wish to invite James Gray to give presentation to its March 2027 meeting?

2. Election of Senior Lay Member of Court

Frank Armstrong was elected by a clear margin as the next chair of Court. He is meeting the Secretary to General Council on 24 April. An oral report on the discussion will be given to Business Committee

B. Dates for the diary

1. Business Committee meetings in 2025/26

Final meeting of the current session will be held in the Raeburn Room 25 June. Newly elected members are invited to attend as observers. Meeting will be followed by an informal drinks' reception.

2. Standing Committee meetings for 2025/26

All meetings (except ISC) begin at 4.30pm and are online via Teams.

- **International Standing Committee – 1 May at 1pm.** All members of the Business Committee are invited to engage in a discussion with the Provost, Professor Kim Graham.
- **Finance and Services Standing Committee – 5 May.** This is a closed meeting for members of FSSC to hear from Director of HR, James Saville.
- **Public Affairs Standing Committee – 14 May.** All members of the Business Committee are invited to engage in a discussion with Stuart Tooley, Communications and Marketing.
- **International Standing Committee – 28 May at 12.30pm.** This is a closed meeting for members of ISC with Andrea Taylor, CEO, Edinburgh Innovations.
- **Academic Standing Committee – 4 June.** All members of the Business Committee are invited to hear the presentation from EUSA VP Education, Katya Amott.

3. Business Committee meetings in 2026/27

- Thursday 15 October 2026
- Thursday 10 December 2026
- Thursday 11 March 2027
- Thursday 6 May 2027
- Thursday 24 June 2027

4. Half Yearly Meetings

- 13 June 2026 – Teviot Row House
- 20 February 2027 - Edinburgh Futures Institute

5. Christmas Reception

Tuesday 8 December 2026, provisionally in the Informatics Building.

C. Other matters

1. Summer Graduations.

Business Committee members are welcome and encouraged to attend graduations as part of the academic procession and will receive details shortly via email from Alison

Those who wish to attend should complete and return the proforma to the Academic Registrar (who is responsible for organising graduations) giving their availability, with copy to Alison so she can monitor attendance by Business Committee

General Council Half Yearly Meeting on Saturday 13 June 2026 at Teviot Row House,

Timetable

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

Agenda

- 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

Presentation and discussion session

The business meeting will be followed by a discussion session about the implications of the Scottish Parliament elections. This will begin with expert analysis and reflections by Professor Ailsa Henderson and Alison Payne, followed by discussion chaired by the Rector, Simon Fanshawe.

Many thanks to Professor Alice Brown (Convener of PASC) for arranging the speakers. This was not an easy task!

Thereafter, a two-course lunch with wine or soft drinks will be available for £15. **As places for the lunch are limited, prior booking is essential, so if you wish lunch, please book now:**

[The General Council Half-Yearly Meeting 13 June 2026 | University of Edinburgh](#)

There is no need to register to attend the formal business meeting or talk; only the lunch.

Dr William Duncan

Secretary to the General Council

April 2026