

**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.