

Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting held on Thursday 25 June 2026 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room, Old College

Present	Dr William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council
	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) Professor Judy Hardy
	Dr Lucy Blackburn Mr Jock Millican
	Professor Alice Brown Professor Graeme Reid
	Ms Manya Buchan Dr Kate Richards
	Ms Ann Cormack Mr Alan Ross (online)
	Ms Candice Donnelly Mr Devin Scobie
	Dr Matthew Epton (online) Dr Dorothy Welch
	Professor John Gillies Lady Sarah Wolffe KC
	Mr Lorn Macneal Mr Thomas Wrench

In attendance	Professor Iain Gordon
	Professor Matthias Schwannauer
	Mr Charlie Atkinson - Newly Elected Member (online)
	Ms Emily Honeysett - Newly Elected Member (online)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the final meeting of the session and warmly welcomed the newly elected members who had been invited to attend as observers.

Apologies had been received from Dr Ian Conn, Alastair Dunlop, Judy Hardy and Jessica Williamson.

2. Observations by General Council Assessors

Sarah Wolffe (SW) gave an oral report of the Court meeting of 15 June held in the Engineering Forum (See Paper 1 for Court agenda).

- Reported on the morning briefing re the University's current financial situation;
- While required cost savings have not been achieved in the timeframe, there was a strategy in place to mitigate this;
- Expressed confidence in CIO, James Gray, who has an understanding of large and complex institutions like the University;
- Expecting a clearer position with regard to possible redundancies by the next Court meeting in October.

In relation to the following items on the agenda it was reported:

Item 4: Committee Business

Governance and Nominations Committee

- Co-opted member Rushad Abadan – demitting office early
- Professor Iain Gordon, Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Science and Engineering – leaving to become Senior Vice- Principal at University of Glasgow

Item 5: Finance and Planning Update Report

- Approved the budget for 2026-27
- CIO identified recurring savings

Item 7: Students' Association and Sports Union Reports

- "Incredibly positive" reports from outgoing sabbatical officers and the refurbishment of Teviot was described as a "highly successful project";
- A "governance" review previously announced by the outgoing EUSA President has been completed and will be implemented next year with details to follow;
- Many sporting success stories were reported from the Sports Union.

Item 10: Donations and Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity

- The general impression is that steady donations and legacies continue to be received similar to previous years. Although the quantity of legacies may have decreased, the value of what is received tends to be larger;
- There is an ongoing effort to maintain and enhance relationships with alumni through various activities, including international meetings and local events. These activities aim to keep alumni engaged and informed about the University's developments;
- Specific mentions of events include those planned or conducted in New York, Washington, Brussels, and Edinburgh among others. A flagship advancement event is also scheduled to take place in New York in October;
- The University is focused on a long-term strategy to build and nurture relationships with potential donors, recognizing that the process from first contact to donation may take around several years;
- There is an emphasis on improving co-ordination to prevent duplication of efforts and to address any gaps in alumni relations.
- Feedback and updates on event attendance are deemed essential for tailoring future engagements and donor approaches, with ongoing monitoring and reporting required to ensure effective management of alumni relations and fundraising efforts.

Item 11: Education Act 1994 requirements in relation to the Students' Association

Reported no fundamental change to EUSA's operations.

Discussion

- There had been no mention of the Marking and Assessment Boycott or the summer graduations at the Court meeting;
- A letter had been sent from Lucy Evans, Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students anticipating disruptive behaviour at the graduations and which had been sent to staff who were attending the graduation ceremonies.

The Convener thanked SW and JM for their contributions.

3. Update on Size/Shape from Professor Iain Gordon, VP and Head of CSE, and Professor Matthias Schwannauer, Head of School of Health in Social Science, and strategic lead for the University's Academic Size and Shape project

The Convener, Gordon Cairns, warmly welcomed **Professor Iain Gordon** (IG), VP and Head of CSE, and **Professor Matthias Schwannauer** (MS), Head of School of Health in Social Science, and strategic lead for the University's Academic Size and Shape project. MS joined the meeting online as was overseas. They explained:

- There are five different work streams dealing with different aspects of the changes considered necessary to make the University sustainable, both in the short term and longer term;
- The University is currently in surplus but unless corrective action is taken it would face an operating deficit due to costs increasing faster than income;
- Academic Size and Shape project (ASSP) is one of six projects in the University within the overall staff work stream project;
- ASSP is significant because it is not only about adapting to the challenges and changes that have already happened but aims to do so in a way that is aligned to Strategy 2030 and trying to ensure that academic excellence and ambition is maintained;
- ASSP has been running since October 2025 with IG and Lucy Evans, Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary (Students) as co-sponsors, and led by MS;
- ASSP work programme now split into 2 parts:
 1. **Design** – longer-term vision e.g., parameters for sustainable delivery of teaching programmes and research to inform future planning processes;
 2. **Implementation** – one strand for each of the Colleges and will run together with the design part to stay on track with achieving short term savings but without affecting long-term sustainability.

Principles guiding ASSP

- Teaching and Education: a review of the portfolio of programmes and courses currently available, ensuring that they align with the University's academic mission;
- Research and Innovation: maintain a strong commitment to research and innovation, recognising that Edinburgh is a research-intensive university, and these elements must work in harmony with educational activities;
- Financial Sustainability: Adopting a long-term perspective and taking proactive steps to ensure financial stability and sustainability;
- Equity across the University: Ensuring that activity applied in one college is aligned with those in the other colleges to achieve equitable outcomes and consistency;
- Being transparent, fair and equitable in how the University will be reshaped and address wherever there are cross subsidies or differences in student experience;
- One-University approach i.e., seeing the connections that exist between the colleges although they may be different in terms of the type of work they do, their income and costs, and making sure they represent the whole of the institution.

MISSION/MARKET/MARGIN:

- ASSP driven by the mission of the University, which is about the creation and curation of knowledge, and making knowledge useful and impactful;
- Need to be aware of demand for this type of knowledge, in particular, with what students want to study and also of opportunities as things change;
- Necessary to be cost conscious in terms of money, resources and capacity.

Implementation

- Committed to an evidence-led approach for informed decision-making. This data-driven strategy aims to support the development of an activity-based resourcing model for both teaching and research activities;
- Reliable and unified data sets are crucial for discussing financial cross-subsidies and prioritising efforts effectively;
- An external supplier has been engaged to help analyse and compare the University's data with other sector benchmarks, a step viewed as essential in the University's broader strategic goals;
- MS provided more detail about the new framework, which aims to respond to both internal organisational needs and broader societal changes and includes:
 - Establishing clearer and more consistent processes across University structures to streamline staff and student engagement;
 - Anticipating future needs while addressing current societal and technological shifts, such as AI;
 - Addressing a revision of curriculum architecture, emphasising the incorporation of student feedback and expectations in the transformation of the curriculum, recognising their integral role in ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of educational offerings.
 - The goal is to create a holistic planning system that not only encompasses the academic size and shape initiative but also aligns with the financial and operational aspects managed by the Provost and Chief Financial Officer.

Discussion

1. Timetable for sharing information of proposed changes with staff who are particularly concerned about the implications.

- IG reported that changes are already embedded into the academic year planning for 2027-2028, with implementation starting slightly later and ongoing testing and adjustments occurring at the College level;
- While the budget for 2026-2027 has been ratified by Court and aims to achieve strategic savings, the necessary short-term measures are not completely defined yet and efforts are currently focused on outlining these, with a goal to keep staff well informed and involved.

2. What would a successful outcome for the University would look like post-implementation of the new strategies.

- IG said the aim was sustainable change, potentially setting the University's direction for the next 50 years in how it will deliver its work within a more flexible framework but with a greater focus on what it wants to pursue;
- There is an imperative to adapt how teaching and research are conducted brought about by advancements in knowledge and AI, making it necessary for the University to become more agile;
- The idea is to maintain a broad curriculum while possibly sharpening the focus on areas deemed strategically important, such as computing and digital disciplines, reflecting both current excellence and future opportunity.

3. What is student feedback re the University's approach to standardising the curriculum?

- MS said that recognising the value of current student input, there had been extensive consultations with student and the transformation process is highly collaborative, focusing on aligning the curriculum with the actual needs and expectations of the student body, rather

than relying solely on outdated models or the perspectives of those who designed the original programmes decades ago;

- The updated curriculum architecture is designed to better reflect current and future demands by facilitating integration across technical and humanities subjects. This approach is particularly relevant in areas like AI, where ethical and societal considerations are crucial, necessitating contributions from social sciences and humanities;
- The reformed structure aims to clearly communicate what students are opting into and ensure that the University fulfils these promises without excessive compromise. This includes maintaining the integrity of offerings from the beginning to the honours years;

4. How can anxiety and uncertainty amongst staff be reconciled with proposed strategic developments?

- IG outlined key approaches including acknowledging inevitable unknowns about the future of education but emphasising proactive engagement and inclusive decision making;
- Recent efforts have focused on increasing transparency regarding short-term operational issues, such as budget concerns. Senior leaders, including the Provost and Chief Financial Officer, have been actively engaging with staff to provide updates and clearer timelines, which help in setting expectations and reducing anxiety;
- MS added that predictability and a sense of control are vital for reducing anxiety. Through consultation processes, information sharing, and transparent decision-making frameworks, the University aims to provide a clearer rationale for changes, enhancing understanding and acceptance among University colleagues and the wider community.

The Convener thanked both speakers and wished IG well in his new appointment at the University of Glasgow.

4. Minutes of the Meeting of 30 April 2026

- a. The minutes were approved.
- b. Any matters arising were covered in the Secretary's Report (Item 9: Paper 9)

5. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

The Business Committee was content to recommend approval of the following Resolutions:

- Draft Resolution No. 7/2026: Boards of Studies
- Draft Resolution No. 8/2026: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Immunogenetics

Action:-

A letter will be sent to Court Services before these are considered in final form at the Court meeting on 5 October 2026.

6. Half-Yearly Meetings

- a. 13 June 2026 meeting
- Members who had attended the HYM congratulated the Convener on a "detailed" and "substantive" report and remarked that it had "come across really well". There was "good energy" in the dining room during lunchtime;
 - The Motion to allow for greater flexibility regarding dates for holding future HYMs was approved and these can now be held on any day except a Sunday, with Members notified in Billet and on the GC website of the dates chosen by the Business Committee;
 - The Motion to re-appoint the Secretary for a further 4 year term was approved unanimously.

b. 20 February 2027 HYM arrangements

- This event will be held on a Saturday as the date has already been announced;
- The statutory meeting will take place in the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) and the lunch will be held in the Debating Hall in Teviot Row Union instead of the usual Playfair Library because: a) it is more accessible; b) the catering is less expensive; and c) it has better acoustics for the 'In Conversation' discussion between Sally Magnuson and the Rector, Simon Fanshawe.
- The committee approved these arrangements.

c. June 2027.

- Given the flexibility given by the Motion approved at the June 2026 HYM, the intention is to hold the June 2027 HYM on a weekday evening as part of a 'showcasing' event;
- Chris Cox and Chloe Kippen (D&A) are intending to organise a major showcasing event in London in summer 2027 for the alumni there and, as part of that, are favourably disposed to it including a General Council HYM. The implications of doing this will be considered further.

7. Preparation for meeting with Frank Armstrong in October

- The Convener invited the committee to reflect on items for discussion with the new chair of Court, Frank Armstrong (FA) in advance of the initial meeting of the BC on 15 October;
- Possible topics could include: the large number of closed items at Court meetings resulting in restricted communications from Court to Business Committee; and whether there are any plans for recruiting a successor for the Principal, Sir Peter Mathieson, as he approaches the end of his second term in office.

Action:-

Members of the BC to contact WD directly with questions/topics to raise with FA

8. Minutes of Standing Committee meetings

- Papers 4-8 containing reports from recent Standing Committee meetings, had been circulated in advance to the Business Committee;
- In the interests of time, GC asked members of the BC to email the GC office with any particular observations from the minutes and invited the Conveners of the standing committees to comment briefly;
- MB, Convener of FSSC, said that as the CFO, James Gray, will attend a meeting of the Business Committee in March 2027 she is considering opening up future meetings of FSSC
- The Convener conveyed grateful thanks to the departing members of the Business Committee, Professor Alice Brown, Candice Donnelly and Alan Ross for their valued contributions during their terms of office.

9. Report from the Secretary of the General Council

Paper 9, previously circulated, included matters arising from the Business Committee meeting on 30 April 2026 and dates for future meetings and events, for noting:

Matters arising from the 30 April Business Committee

Item 4: Presentation by CFO, James Gray. He has agreed to come to the March 2027 Business Committee

Item 5c: Showcasing events

- College of Science and Engineering (CSE). This is on 24 June at the Nucleus Building and the new Engineering Forum. Currently over 120 have registered. Details about the event are available on the General Council website;
- College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS). This is on 9 July at the Informatics Forum. Currently about 90 have registered. Details about the event are available on the General Council website.

Item 8: June 2026 Half Yearly Meeting

The Motion allowing future HYM's to be held on any day except a Sunday was passed without dissent.

Dates for the diary

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

Half Yearly Meetings

20 February 2027 - Edinburgh Futures Institute and lunch at Teviot Row House
June 2027 – to be decided

Christmas Reception

Tuesday 8 December 2026.

A. Other matters

Meeting of the four “Ancient Universities” General Council Secretaries and Conveners.

This will be held in St Andrews on 26 June. Dr William Duncan, Gordon Cairns and Alison McNulty will attend.

10. Any other competent business

- WD reported that the GC office is now accepting applications for elections to the Business Committee in February 2027 and reminded the deadline for nominations is 18 November 2026;
- Email reminders seeking nominations will be circulated to GC membership in September and October;
- Replacements will be sought for the two GC Court Assessors due to demit in July 2027. The open recruitment process is managed by Court Services and involves a joint Selection Panel with General Council representation.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Business Committee will take place at 5.15pm on Thursday, 15 October, 2026 in the Raeburn Room, Old College.