Minutes of the International Standing Committee held at 12.30pm
Thursday 28 May 2026
Online via Teams

Present:	Ann Cormack, Convener of ISC
	Max Browning
	Mary Gunn
	Gordon Cairns, Convener of the Business Committee
	Bruce Nelson, Vice-Convener of the Business Committee
	William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council
	Alison McNulty, Assistant Secretary of the General Council
In attendance:	Andrea Taylor, Edinburgh Innovations (EI)
	Manya Buchan (FSSC)

1. Welcome and introductions

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Dr Andrea Taylor to give an initial overview of EI with exemplars, the future role of commercialisation and how members can engage.

2. Apologies

Apologies received from Richard Andrews.

3. Presentation by Dr Andrea Taylor, CEO, Edinburgh Innovations (EI)

Background

- Dr Andrea Taylor, herself an alumnus of the University, is currently serving as the CEO of EI and brings a robust background in innovation, commercialisation, and strategic deal-making within the life sciences and deep tech sectors;
- Her 30-year career features significant experiences in academia, industry, and the public sector. Initially trained in genetics, Dr Taylor furthered her expertise through postdoctoral research in cancer research and then transitioned into consulting, where she specialised in market forecasting and analysis;
- Her professional journey includes a pivotal role in providing deal-making support in healthcare and chemicals industries and working closely with investors to facilitate technical and commercial due diligence for investments. Dr Taylor also spent six years with Scottish Enterprise - Scotland's Economic Development Agency, before returning to Edinburgh;
- At EI, her ambitious goal is to double commercialisation outputs by 2030, a target set to significantly enhance the organisation's impact.

EI and the role of commercialisation

- EI, the UK's largest dedicated commercial arm, operates to translate research excellence into tangible societal impacts through commercialisation avenues;
- The institution not only facilitates but catalyses the translation process by ensuring that the research conducted within the University addresses real-world demands and contributes actively to future health, climate, and digital technologies;
- AT outlined the three primary functions of EI:

1. **Engagement**: This includes both external outreach to industry partners to understand market needs, and internal engagement with university staff and students to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and prepare them for commercialisation processes.
2. **Opportunity Development**: The organisation identifies and nurtures potential research

opportunities for greater impact, involving a network of professionals embedded across university departments.

3. **Support for Commercialisation Outcomes**: It encompasses promoting industry collaboration, supporting new venture creation through intellectual property, and direct engagements leading to commercial licensing of university-developed technologies.

- Reported impressive results in commercialisation, with the creation of 64 new companies in a single year, significant investments attracted, and substantial direct funding via industry collaborations;
- The work of EI has been pivotal in not only advancing research but also key in contributing to the University's economic stability and growth through various income streams such as consulting activities, royalties, and industry investments;
- AT also highlighted specific exemplary partnerships and projects such as the multi-million-dollar collaboration with Fujifilm and a significant licensing deal with Nuvectis Pharma for a new cancer treatment;
- Additionally, the University plays a vital role in promoting diversity in commercialisation, specifically aiming to increase women founders' involvement in spinouts.
- Highlighted the strategic importance of commercialisation in enhancing the University's global stature, attracting both talent and investment, and further integrating the University's core research and teaching missions with commercial endeavours to foster an innovative ecosystem capable of generating substantial societal and economic benefits.

Looking ahead

- AT described the ambitious goals and strategic advancements EI is pursuing to position the University as a sector leader in commercialisation and impactful research utilisation;
- Recognised the University's current standing (first in Scotland, within the top 12 in the UK), she emphasised the need not to become complacent as the demand for impactful research grows.

- Key challenges identified include:

1. **Research Readiness**: Edinburgh excels in discovery research, but transitioning these discoveries to applied and market-ready stages (termed 'proof of concept') is a significant hurdle. This gap, often referred to as the "valley of death," occurs where traditional research funding ceases and before industry or investor engagement begins. AT highlighted the necessity of funds specifically designed to bridge this gap.
2. **Business Mentorship**: The need for industry experts who can assist University staff in refining commercial plans and understanding market needs is crucial for shaping a robust commercialisation ecosystem.
3. **Geographic Disadvantages**: Unlike institutions within the UK's "golden triangle," UoE must work harder to ensure its research capabilities and opportunities are known both nationally and internationally. This involves proactive outreach efforts to cultivate industry partnerships.

- To overcome these challenges, AT outlined several strategic initiatives:
- **Commercialisation Action Plan**: Recently approved by the University Executive, this plan is integrated with the University's Research and Innovation strategy to enhance commercialisation efforts and accelerate research impact.
- **Enhanced Industry Outreach**: Establishing a presence in London to better connect with investors and international companies, forming part of a broader strategy to develop a global tech corridor.
- **Commercial Catalyst Fund**: Specifically aimed at addressing the "valley of death" funding gap, this initiative seeks to unlock early-stage research by providing crucial proof of concept funding.

- **Rapid Spin-Out Pathway**: This new initiative caters to sectors like digital and AI, where traditional intellectual property approaches may not be suitable. It aims for faster commercialisation timelines (12-18 months) by employing more transparent and innovative deal terms.
- **Engagement with Alumni and External Organizations**: There is a call for collaboration with alumni and industry professionals who can offer mentorship, advice, and potentially participate in fundraising for the new initiatives.

Action:-
Slides used during the presentation will be circulated to the committee.

Discussion

Funding gap

- In response to a question from AC addressing the "valley of death" funding gap for early-stage research commercialisation, AT clarified the purpose and scope of commercial catalyst funds as these can help projects become commercially viable before they seek traditional investment opportunities;
- AT explained that while similar proof of concept funding exists through Scottish Enterprise, and despite a recent government allocation of £40 million over five years to support the sector, the amount is still minor relative to the needs identified by leading commercial organisations, including the UK, US, and Europe;
- She suggested that increasing this type of funding could involve philanthropy, including from alumni, and additional government support;
- AC further explored potential expansions of this funding concept, considering international and private investors, to augment the resources needed for taking university research through critical early commercialisation stages.

Spinouts

- BN raised a question regarding the University's approach to managing equity shares in its spinouts, particularly how the University balances its need to generate revenue without stifling the growth of emerging companies by demanding excessive equity shares;
- AT highlighted recent initiatives aimed at standardising equity and IP terms across universities, citing the creation of the UNIDESK guides and the Tracey Review. These efforts have sought to establish agreed industry standards for university spinouts, particularly in handling heavy IP sectors like therapeutics or deep tech, and in areas like software where founder know-how is crucial;
- AT emphasised that the UoE has been a leader in adopting these new standards, which are now supported by 49 university signatories;
- She stressed that the University's primary focus is on the impact of its spinouts rather than merely generating income, aimed at ensuring that public funding used in research translates into societal benefits.

Collaborations

- Manya Buchan enquired about the challenges that arise from the use of different terminologies between industry and academia, which can complicate the process of forming collaborations;
- AT acknowledged that engaging with industry requires a distinct communication style, which often differs from academic discourse;
- She explained that EI serves as an intermediary to facilitate effective communication, helping by

connecting industry representatives with appropriate academic research and ensuring that the dialogue is framed in terms that emphasise market needs and the potential impact of the research, rather than just the scientific details;

- AT outlined the strategies used to bridge the communication gap:
  - **Education**: Providing training to academics on how to pitch their research in a way that aligns with industry interests, focusing on impact and market needs rather than solely on scientific details.
  - **Material Production**: Developing external materials that differ significantly from typical academic outputs, tailored to speak directly to industry challenges and opportunities.
  - **Relationship Building**: Establishing early relationships between industry and academic science to foster mutual understanding and facilitate the integration of real-world use cases into academic research.
- Highlighted that the EI website and other external communications are crafted to be industry-focused, potentially enhancing engagement and collaboration.

Intellectual Property

- WD noted two critical issues regarding intellectual property management - a) the tension between the desire to publish academic research and the need to protect potentially commercial intellectual property and b) ownership of intellectual property rights between the University and its employees;
- AT addressed these concerns by emphasising the importance of education within the academic community about intellectual property and the necessity of early disclosure to allow for protection measures before publication;
- She detailed how EI works to integrate clauses in industry collaborations that permit publication while still protecting intellectual property through a brief window for patent filing;
- Regarding the specific management of intellectual property rights, AT explained that the University owns the intellectual property developed by its staff, whereas students retain their own;
- She described how EI strives to work collaboratively with academics to align commercialisation strategies with their preferences and aspirations, particularly when an academic is interested in forming a company;
- The approach is heavily reliant on building strong relationships and partnerships with academics to ensure that the commercialisation process is transparent and mutually beneficial, rather than unilaterally driven by the University.

Alumni Engagement

- Max Browning asked how EI is engaging with alumni, specifically regarding outreach and promoting awareness of its mission;
- AT mentioned her efforts to leverage alumni networks by tapping into alumni for their experience, expertise, and connections with the aid of the development and alumni team, and that she is eager to accelerate these initiatives;
- She has started meeting with academic alumni to discuss ongoing projects and is open to invitations to alumni events to broaden this engagement;
- Max Browning will follow up with AT on a possible event in London involving the Edinburgh University Club of London. This aims to engage more alumni in the region;
- Additionally, the potential for further outreach to North American alumni was noted, given MG's location in the United States, suggesting that similar efforts could be extended there.

Licensing

- MG enquired about the revenue EI generates from licensing, which AT noted is currently in the (lower) range of £2-3m annually;
- She emphasised the increasing strategic focus on generating significant licensing revenue as a priority, illustrating this with successful examples like Nuvectis, which has produced substantial income;
- MG pointed out that a major bottleneck in the "valley of death" for university innovations is the often protracted process of tech transfer, particularly the licensing agreements which can extend beyond a year, noting the preference of investors for much shorter timelines, ideally within three months;
- AT confirmed that EI is addressing this issue by standardising licensing protocols and exploring the use of AI to streamline tech transfer processes.

Showcase events

- WD mentioned the General Council's showcasing events, which focus on the University's activities across the different colleges and suggested that the University should also highlight its achievements in commercialisation and innovation;
- AT responded positively, underlining the importance of such platforms to promote the University's commercial achievements and impact agenda and welcomed the opportunity to collaborate around these themes with the General Council.

Internal collaborations

- AC asked about internal collaborations within the University, specifically the relationship between EI and the Business School or Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) highlighting the potential overlap in interests, especially in areas like the ethics of data and AI;
- AT outlined the structured approach EI takes to foster collaboration across the University and mentioned that they have a team embedded within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science, which actively engages with key figures like Sarah Prescott, and Deans to identify and pursue collaboration opportunities through consulting opportunities or through tenders requiring specialised knowledge;
- This team also liaises with EFI and the Business School, exploring areas where staff and students can contribute their expertise in sustainable business initiatives and executive education.

AC thanked AT for an interesting and stimulating presentation and wished EI every success in the future. AT said that she is very keen to engage with alumni and the GC and left the meeting.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2026

The minute had been previously circulated and was approved.

5. Matters arising from the minutes of 1 May 2026

Professor Kim Graham had provided her response to queries raised during the meeting and these are contained in Paper 2 (Appendix 1).

Discussion

- WD suggested that two reasons contributing to the decline in the University's standing in international rankings were other countries, such as China, were investing heavily in education and research and were moving up the rankings, whereas support and investment by the UK and

Scottish governments in universities was static or declining, thereby reducing their previous comparative advantage.

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- BN and AC touched on the importance of the University's brand, which carries historical significance and an esteemed reputation, noting that while league tables are influential, they often do not fully represent a university's unique objectives and contributions. There was particular concern about how ongoing industrial actions and negative publicity could harm the University's image;
- The discussion emphasised the need to enhance the profile of EI, proposing more active engagement with alumni, especially those in influential positions, to highlight the importance of commercialisation and innovation in academic settings and ensure the University's narratives and successes are compellingly presented to broader audiences, including policymakers and potential collaborators.

6. Workplan for 2026-27

- Proposed speakers:
- Invite Chris Cox (CC), VP Philanthropy and Executive Director of Development and Alumni (D & A) to the initial meeting of ISC to focus on engagement with the University's various alumni clubs;
- Invite the Presidents of some of the larger alumni clubs to attend as guests to hear from CC at a further meeting;
- Professor Kim Graham, Provost, who has overall responsibility for the University's international agenda.

7. Any other competent business

None.

Appendix 1

Paper 2 ISC 280526

General Council - International Standing Committee on 1 May at 1pm

Global rankings and international recruitment

Edinburgh is ranked 34th in the latest QS World University Rankings, down from 27th last year and 15th in 2023. Our positions in the other main global rankings are 29th in Times Higher Education and 40th in Shanghai. We remain a top 50 global university, but the recent QS trajectory matters, particularly in an increasingly competitive international environment.

QS is a relative ranking, and movement reflects both institutional performance and the rate at which competitors improve. Edinburgh remains broadly stable across most indicators, but competitors have strengthened in areas that QS particularly rewards. The main pressure point for us is Citations per Faculty. Our citation performance has improved in absolute terms, but our score on this metric has been affected by growth in academic staff FTE. Changes to QS's score calculations have also contributed to movement across the table.

We know that rankings matter; for reputation, partnerships, talent, and recruitment. While they should not drive institutional strategy, the current trend does imply a need for a more deliberate and coordinated approach to supporting performance, and we are actively considering how best to take this forward.

Our international recruitment strategy is guided by Size and Shape and the Strategic Recruitment and Enrolment Plan. The aim is targeted growth within overall cohort stability, with a strong focus on diversifying the international student intake while protecting performance in key markets, notably China. Recruitment effort is concentrated on postgraduate taught level, where both opportunity and risk are greatest.

Oversight is provided through the Future Students Committee and its supporting groups. Delivery is led by Student Recruitment and Admissions, particularly the International and Postgraduate Recruitment Team, working with Colleges, Schools and external partners across outreach, agents, sponsors, counsellors, admissions, scholarships and programme development. Work is also underway to develop a more integrated Future Students International Recruitment Plan.

In undergraduate recruitment, international schools remain an important channel, supported by strong engagement through counsellor networks and direct relationship building. On international foundation pathways, we are reviewing current practice across the three Colleges with a view to greater consistency, clearer public information, and stronger engagement with pathway providers where this can support recruitment.

In case the Committee would be interested in hearing directly from colleagues who are leading the University's international recruitment efforts, Clare Mackay, Deputy Director (International and Postgraduate Recruitment), clare.mackay@ed.ac.uk, and Robbie Willis, Paper 2 ISC 280526 Head of International Recruitment, robert.willis@ed.ac.uk, both from Student Recruitment & Admissions, would be very happy to attend a future meeting.