

**Business Committee Meeting on Thursday 25 June 2026
at 5.15pm in the Raeburn Room**

Tea, coffee and biscuits will be available at 5pm in the Carstares Room



AGENDA

1. Welcome and Apologies
2.
 - a. Observations by General Council Assessors
 - b. Agenda for Court Meeting on 15 June

Paper 1
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

ITEMS for APPROVAL

4.
 - a. Minutes of the Meeting of 30 April 2026
 - b. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 30 April 2026

Paper 2
5. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

Papers 3a and b

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION

6. Half-Yearly Meetings
 - a. Feedback on 13 June 2026 meeting
 - b. 20 February 2027 arrangements – to approve
 - c. June 2027 – implications if possible to hold this HYM in London
7. Preparation for meeting with Frank Armstrong in October

ITEMS for REPORTING

8. Minutes of Standing Committee meetings

Papers 4 – 8

 - Academic Standing Committee – 4 June
 - Finance and Services Standing Committee – 5 May
 - International Standing Committee – 1 May and 28 May
 - Public Affairs Standing Committee – 14 May
9. Report from the Secretary of the General Council – items for information

Paper 9
10. Any other competent business (notified in advance to the Secretary)
11. Date of next meeting – Thursday 15 October 2026 at 5.15pm

The meeting should finish by 6.45pm for drinks reception to follow to thank retiring and welcome new members of the Committee, who will attend as Observers



University Court

15 June 2026

Engineering Forum

Alexander Crum Brown Road (King's Buildings), Edinburgh EH9 3FF

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 20 April 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 [OPEN] | B |
| | To <u>note</u> a report from Peter Mathieson, Principal | |
| 4 | Committee Business | |
| | • Policy & Resources Committee [CLOSED] | C1 |
| | • Governance & Nominations Committee [CLOSED – Court and committee membership to be published on the University website in due course] | C2 |
| | • Audit & Risk Committee [CLOSED] | C3 |
| | • Senate [OPEN] | C4 |

KEY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

- | | | |
|----------|---|----------|
| 5 | Finance and Planning Update Report [CLOSED] | D |
| | To <u>consider</u> a paper presented by James Gray, Chief Financial Officer | |
| 6 | 2026-27 Budget, Update on Planning and Cost Savings and 2027-31 Plans [CLOSED] | E |
| | To <u>approve</u> the University budget for 2026-27 and <u>note</u> the forward plans. Paper presented by James Gray, Chief Financial Officer | |
| 7 | Students' Association and Sports Union Reports [OPEN] | |
| | To <u>note</u> reports presented by Bradley Stevens, President of the Students' Association | |
| | • Students' Association Report | F |
| | • Sports Union Report | G |

8 Statement of Senate's Primary Responsibilities [CLOSED] H
To approve the Statement. Paper presented by Leigh Chalmers, Vice-Principal & University Secretary

9 Joint Education Program in Engineering [CLOSED] I
To delegate authority to the University Executive to approve the business case and to authorise the Principal to sign any MoU/MoA as needed. Paper presented by Iain Gordon, Head of the College of Science & Engineering

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

10 Donations & Legacies and Alumni Relations Activity [CLOSED] J
To note

11 Education Act 1994 requirements in relation to the Students' Association [OPEN] K
To note

12 Prevent Duty Annual Compliance Report [OPEN] L
To note

13 External Developments: Tertiary Education and Training Act, Future Framework, CUC (rUK) Code of Governance, National Review of Awarding Arrangements [CLOSED] M
To note

14 Resolutions

- Boards of Studies' Terms of Reference [OPEN] N
To consider the draft Resolution and to refer it to Senate and the General Council for observations
- Chair Resolutions [OPEN] O
To approve
- Degree Programme Regulations [OPEN] P
To approve

15 Any Other Business

16 Date of Next Meeting
5 October 2026

**Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting held on Thursday 30 April 2026
at 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)
	Mr Lorn Macneal
	Dr Lucy Blackburn
	Mr Jock Millican
	Professor Alice Brown
	Professor Graeme Reid
	Ms Ann Cormack (online)
	Dr Kate Richards
	Ms Candice Donnelly
	Mr Alan Ross (online)
	Dr Matthew Epton (online)
	Mr Devin Scobie
	Professor John Gillies
	Dr Dorothy Welch
	Dr Mary Gunn
	Ms Jess Williamson (online)
	Professor Judy Hardy
	Rt. Hon Sarah Wolffe (online)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies received from Max Browning, Manya Buchan, Alastair Dunlop and Thomas Wrench.

2. Observations by General Council Assessors

- JM reported on the open items from the recent Court meeting on 20 April held at the John McIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls;
- The Court agenda had been previously circulated (Paper 1)

Item 3. Principal's Report

- In early March c.130 of the University's senior leaders met for the latest Leaders Forum and considered the progress with the cost saving work. This included a summary of Court's position as indicated at the March meeting of Court and an update on financial progress. At the same meeting there were sessions from Interim Vice-Principal Research & Innovation, Professor Liz Baggs, on changes to UKRI funding policy and a discussion on developments and opportunities for Transnational Education initiatives;
- Continued to keep the broader staff body updated about projects within the University's change workstreams and the additional measures being implemented to help reach cost savings targets;
- February and March saw a focus on engaging with staff locally within Colleges and Professional Services groups. At least ten 'town hall'-style meetings were held across budget areas, with approximately 2,000 staff engaging in these sessions. An additional 200 staff have also taken part in sessions aimed specifically at leaders;
- Project leads have also been engaging with targeted groups of staff about how their projects are developing. For example, five meetings were held for staff to hear more about changes being developed around timetabling and course selection (attended by approx. 220 staff) and presentations have been given to the monthly Marketing and Communications staff forum (approximately 300 members) about the Marketing and Communications project;
- There will be further opportunities for staff to speak to leaders about the University's finances and the changes being made at all-staff information sessions in May;

- The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) issued their indicative funding allocations on 25 March 2026. In line with the approved Scottish Budget for 2026-27, the university sector will receive a £25 million increase in resource budget for Higher Education, and a £26.8 million increase (+8.1%) in capital budgets, incorporating research and innovation funding. The announcement covers the main areas of formulaic grant funding, but institutional allocations have not yet been provided for the Research Excellence Grant, Research Postgraduate Grant, and Knowledge Exchange & Innovation Fund;
- For Teaching, SFC has prioritised additional funding into increasing the 'unit of resource' which is the amount of funding provided per fundable student. For 2026-27 the University of Edinburgh will see a £2.2 million increase in teaching grants (+3.2%). Anticipated an uplift to total research and innovation funding; the University's sector share of these grants is generally larger than that for teaching;
- Dr Frank Armstrong was congratulated on his appointment as Court's newly elected Senior Lay Member from August;
- Vice-Principal Iain Gordon has been appointed Senior Vice-Principal with the University of Glasgow. Recruitment plans are underway and initially seeking an internal appointment for an Interim role;
- Following UCU Edinburgh's (UCUE) ballot via an "e-vote", five consecutive days of strike action commenced on Monday 30 March. This broke the agreement made in December for no industrial action in exchange for a number of specific arrangements, including a commitment to no one at risk of redundancy prior to 28 April;
- On 31 March UCUE confirmed their new ballot passed in favour of Industrial Action. Following the recent change to trade union legislation, this ballot will have a mandate for 12 months, rather than previous 6 months;
- Unison and Unite currently remain engaged and committed to continue discussions with the aim of avoiding job losses and identifying improvements to workload and job security;
- The latest voluntary severance offer (which was opened at the specific request of UCUE) for academic staff only has closed with 69 applications. This represents a maximum saving of £5.3m. Applications will be assessed and outcomes confirmed at the end of April. Most staff will exit by 31 July 2026;
- A number of senior colleagues, led by Associate Principal & Deputy Secretary Students, Lucy Evans, participated in a EUSA Representative Roundtable in March where there was a good discussion focused on the cost-saving activities and their current and potential future impact on students. It was a valuable opportunity to hear directly from student representatives and highlight how and why decisions are being made. The two student fora organised by Ash and colleagues this academic year have been constructive and worthwhile;
- Email communication received from some students, often using UCU template messages, shows support for the current industrial action. These messages are responded to, again signposting to the student-focussed FAQs that cover why action to address the financial situation is necessary and what the impact might be;
- A group of protestors, citing pro-Palestine demands, staged an occupation of the Gordon Aikman Lecture Theatre on Tuesday 24 to Friday 27 March, and on the Friday also occupied Appleton Tower. They were served with a Sheriff's Court Order on Thursday and left both locations on Friday. These occupations did however result in disruption to thousands of students due to have teaching in those buildings. The same group blocked access to Old College on the morning of 1 April. Staff relocated to other buildings during that short disruption;
- PM participated in a debate at the Edinburgh Union on the motion "This house believes that universities have forgotten their purpose." PM spoke against, alongside Lord Smith,

Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. There was a good and lively discussion from both sides on the issues and the debate afforded a welcome opportunity to hear from students and discuss these important issues. The event was well organised by students, who also made good contributions to the debate. It was also particularly heartening and fitting to be in the newly refurbished Teviot Debating Hall following the reopening of the refurbished Teviot Row House;

- Edinburgh was announced in February as one of four New National Compute Resources funded by UKRI via an investment of £76 million. The first to launch is Edinburgh, where a £19.5 million investment will be used to enhance and expand the capabilities of our Cirrus supercomputer. This development is designed to complement the forthcoming national supercomputer, which will also be located at the University.

Item 5. Students' Association and Sports Union Reports

Students' Association Report

- Ash Scholz gave her final report. Bradley Stevens will take over from Ash in June after being elected along with others recently;
- Teviot re-opening - The initial feedback from students, and in fact everyone who has visited since, has been incredibly positive with footfall and trading being ahead of that anticipated;
- The recent occupation by EUJPS of Gordon Aikman Lecture Theatre and Appleton Tower has undoubtedly caused significant disruption, affecting lectures, study spaces, and the day-to-day experience of many students. But, while this impact cannot be ignored, it also reflects a deeper frustration among parts of the student body about the pace of the University response, a year after passing the Responsible Investment Policy.

Sports Union Report

- Edinburgh will retain its fifth-place position in the BUCS table;
- Men's Hockey becoming the first University side to ever win the Scottish Premiership;
- The incoming Sports Union President is Connie Chen. She currently serves as Media Officer on the Sports Union Executive Committee and has been the Athletics Club Women's Captain.

Item 6. Student Experience Update

- Progress continues to be made in a number of areas of work on the student experience. Notable points include the following:
 - Learning & Teaching Strategy: initiated systematic implementation and monitoring.
 - Assessment and feedback: currently tracking at 82.5% of assessments returned to students within three weeks, which is significant year-on-year progress towards the target of 90%.
 - Academic Size and Shape: initial implementation work underway in each College, based on high-level Principles. Design of Framework has commenced.
 - Improvements to collection of tuition fees: in progress and yielding financial benefits.
 - Other important work in advanced planning or preparatory stages, including enhancements to timetabling, course selection, boards of examiners, market insight, administrative processes and relevant digital efficiencies.

Discussion

- JM responded to an enquiry from AC about the voluntary severance scheme and confirmed that applications were under review and not all 69 applicants would be accepted;
- LM addressed concerns over whether students would receive refunds due to the strike-induced disruption drawing parallels with responses to past events like the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions;

- JM clarified that, unlike during the pandemic, there has been no formal discussion or request for compensation related to the recent strikes and noted that, typically, refunds are not provided;
- DW asked about the University's progress toward achieving the £140 million savings;
- JM reported that progress has been slower than initially anticipated, however, there is still a belief that the target will be met, although it is expected to be reached in the next financial year rather than the current one;
- AB echoed concerns about the impact of potential strike actions, particularly regarding assessments and exams, and their consequences similar to issues experienced two years ago;
- She mentioned the detrimental effects past strike actions had on students' degree classifications and their further academic or career opportunities;
- In light of the renewed marking and assessment boycott, JM said there is a strong desire from the University leadership to avoid or mitigate such disruptions;
- JG asked whether the University had a strategy to deal with recurring industrial actions by UCU (Universities and Colleges Union) and the following discussion noted the localised nature of the current dispute with UCU, which is different from past national disputes and provides the University with greater responsibility and capability to address the issues directly, possibly through mechanisms like external arbitration to help resolve this highly polarised situation;
- JM reiterated the University's strategy to achieve £140 million in savings and noted a clear directive from the leadership team to prevent further delays and provide clarity to staff.

The Convener thanked JM for his report.

3. Minutes of the Meeting of 5 March 2025

The minute was approved.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 5 March 2026

Item 2: Presentation by CFO, James Gray.

- Noted that James Gray would be invited to address the BC at its March 2027 meeting;
- WD invited the committee to feedback on any questions/topics they would like covered during the presentation.

Item 7: Election of Senior Lay Member of Court

- Frank Armstrong was elected by a clear margin as the next chair of Court;
- Had a positive meeting with the Secretary to the General Council on 24 April and agreed to attend a meeting of the BC on 15 October;
- SW discussed the availability of certain Court papers, stating that some papers remain closed until approved by Court, after which they become open and acknowledged the high number of closed papers appearing in the Court agenda;
- SW also recognised concerns about excessive confidentiality and proposed engaging with SLT, the BC and Court Assessors to address these issues effectively;
- Furthermore, she mentioned her willingness, along with the other Court Assessors, to assist in discussions with Frank Armstrong at the BC meeting in October, and to prepare by revisiting notes that include unresolved queries due to the documents' closed status.

Action:-

In preparation for the BC meeting in October, members were asked to reflect on key issues they would like to see addressed by Frank Armstrong, and these will be discussed at the next BC in June.

5. Reports from the Standing Committees

a. Academic Standing Committee

- GR reported on the meeting with Lucy Evans (LE), Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary Students on March 31st (Paper 3), covering a wide range of topics, and highlighted Lucy's expanded responsibilities following VP Students, Professor Colin Harmon's (CH) departure from the University;
- LE will continue her previous role while also managing the areas previously overseen by CH and concerns were raised about her capacity to manage such extensive duties;
- Significant focus was given to the "academic size and shape project," which looks into the optimal number of staff and students at the University, as well as a portfolio review of the courses offered;
- This initiative is addressing the resource allocation across the University's programmes, especially targeting niche programmes with limited economic return but interconnected courses;
- Lastly, GR mentioned, with regret, the departure of Iain Gordon, Head of CSE, which casts uncertainty on future leadership in his areas of oversight.

Discussion

- SW highlighted LE's detailed Court presentation on enhancing the student experience, and praised her for providing a comprehensive and meaningful report, filled with detailed information, ambitions, and targets. She believed that this presentation marked LE as extremely capable in her new role, despite the perceived challenges;
- JG spoke to an interest in balancing the range of University programmes, from large, broad-based ones in the School of Medicine to smaller, specialised programs such as the Department of Celtic Studies;
- He emphasised both economic benefits and the historical and cultural significance of programmes, particularly the long-standing cultural impact of Celtic studies in Scotland, and argued for a cautious approach in evaluating programmes;
- He highlighted the importance of understanding the deeper implications and contexts behind purely numerical evaluations, acknowledging ongoing debates at higher levels of decision-making regarding the value and future of such programmes.

b. Finance and Services Standing Committee

- In the absence of MB, WD gave a summary of the meeting on 19 February with CIO, Gavin McLachlan (Paper 4) which focused on developments and challenges in the University's IT infrastructure;
- Some key points included concerns about the shift from human interaction to machine-based services, which are available 24/7, aimed at cost-saving;
- Despite the economic rationale, there are significant worries about the security and vulnerability of digital systems, and the need to balance financial costs of upgrades against potential reputational and financial risks from major IT system failures was emphasised;
- Additionally, the necessity to replace outdated systems, which are no longer supported, with new ones poses challenges regarding the smooth integration of these systems without causing operational disruptions.

Discussion

- The discussion centred on concerns and strategic considerations regarding the implementation of new IT projects at the University, specifically recalling past experiences with systems like “People and Money”;
- AC raised questions about whether lessons from past implementations have been adequately learned as the University anticipates upcoming major projects and queried if the targeted £140m savings is sufficient and whether these costs are accounted for in the University’s forecasted budget;
- Other key points included the potential replacement of human roles with AI systems, emphasising AI’s ability to operate continuously and ostensibly save money. However, this introduces concerns about systemic integration, the future relevance of human roles, particularly in teaching, and the ethical ramifications of increasingly relying on AI;
- AR commented on the choice of the new Euclid system for the University, noting that while most UK universities use this single supplier for this system, the UoE has assessed it and decided not to adopt it;
- This decision suggests that the University does not believe the system aligns well with its specific needs, differentiating it from the model used by many other UK universities;
- This choice raises early concerns regarding the alignment of IT systems with the University’s operational needs and priorities;
- AC referenced a talk by Professor Shannon Vallor (SV) who critiques AI’s reliance on historical data, which may not accurately represent all demographics due to unequal access to technology;
- SV argues that relying on AI for future decision-making might perpetuate past mistakes instead of fostering new opportunities, underscoring the irreplaceable value of human direction and teaching.

c. Public Affairs Standing Committee

- AB spoke to the meeting on 12 March (Paper 5), which was an internal planning meeting, and provided updates on the following events:

Showcasing events

College of Science and Engineering (CSE)

- Professor Iain Gordon was approached and expressed enthusiasm about hosting the event at his college, particularly in the new engineering building, with activities centred in the Nucleus building;
- The event is now scheduled to take place on Wednesday 24 June at 6pm;
- Currently identifying speakers who can present complex scientific and engineering topics in a manner accessible to the general audience, continuing the successful format of the previous showcase.

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS)

Early discussions with Professor Sarah Prescott, the Head of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and subsequent involvement from Chloe Kippen (Development and Alumni) is leading to plans for a language-focused event, which had been postponed due to budget constraint with the College. A meeting in May will explore this opportunity.

Parliamentary Events

- PASC had discussed potential involvement in parliamentary events in Westminster in June organised by Lynn McMath from Communications and Marketing (CAM);

- During the planning stages, issues arose concerning the complexities of venue logistics and very limited scope for attendance by general council members;
- Consequently, the decision was made by PASC not to participate in this specific event organised by CAM but to keep options open for future events at Westminster;
- Additionally, Sarah Prescott (CAHSS) expressed interest in organising an event at Westminster next year, enhancing the prospect of hosting diverse events there and engaging with a broader UK audience; The committee plans to maintain strong relations with CAM and explore various event possibilities in the future, potentially focusing on town-and-gown initiatives.

‘In Conversation’ Event

- The first of those was held in October 2025 with Joanna Cherry and Jim Wallace, chaired by the Rector;
- This successful event enjoyed a good turnout and people were very positive about holding another one;
- The next event will be held on 22 October at Teviot Row House and the speakers will be Ian Rankin and Alan Little;
- This will be announced at the HYM on 13 June but members are encouraged to mark the date in diaries in the meantime.

Scholarship Video

- Discussed the production of a third video for the General Council scholarship programme, which is intended to promote this initiative and include interviews with scholarship recipients;
- There were suggestions of potentially involving the Chancellor, Her Royal Highness Princess Anne, in an introductory role. However, this would require a delicate approach, and the Protocol department will handle this request;
- The draft script has been viewed and requires further refinement but aiming to progress with the project promptly.

Billet

The electronic version was circulated to the majority of GC members on 29 April.

Town and Gown

- Follow up with Stuart Tooley (CAM) who will attend the PASC meeting on the 14th of May, with the topic expected to be revisited in the next academic session as a focus for the standing committee.

Community Plan activities

- Engagement with community planning activities, highlighted by a presentation from Gemma Gourlay (Sustainability) last year, may also be revisited.

Future Events

- June 2026 HYM
Academics Professor Ailsa Henderson, a former student of AB, and Alison Payne will speak at the summer HYM in Teviot Row House, offering insights and political analysis related to the recent elections;

Christmas Reception

- Planning is underway for this event which will take place on Tuesday 8 December;
- HYM February 2027

- Sally Magnusson was suggested as a possible speaker.

Discussion

- Regarding venues for future events, there was consideration of hosting an event at Holyrood given the logistical and cost benefits compared to Westminster;
- LHB suggested contacting individual MSPs to invite them to the “In Conversation” event in October as a way of establishing a closer relationship;
- Devin Scobie will take over from AB in August as the new Convener of PASC;
- AB was warmly thanked for her contributions.
- PASC will have 2 new members in August: Emily Honeysett and Dr Ian Conn, a former Director of CAM.

6. Report from the Secretary of the General Council

Paper 6, previously circulated, contained the following information:

Dates for the diary

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.

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.

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

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

Christmas Reception

Tuesday 8 December 2026, provisionally in the Informatics Building.

7. Draft Resolutions of the University Court

- Draft Resolution No. 3/2026: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Clinical Trials and Complex Intervention Evaluation
- Draft Resolution No. 4/2026: Foundation of a Personal Chair of High-Performance Computing Applications
- Draft Resolution No. 5/2026: Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations
- Draft Resolution No. 6/2026: Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations

The above Resolutions were approved by the Business Committee.

8. Arrangements for June 2026 HYM

- WD referred to Paper 7, which included the agenda and timetable for the summer HYM;
- He asked the committee to reflect on the key issues which should be contained within the Convener's report from the Business Committee;
- Responses included the concern over the University's cost saving strategy and communications around this issue.

Action:-

GC asked the committee to feedback on any other headline topics to the Secretary so he can begin drafting his Convener's report.

- WD spoke about the Motion re the dates of future HYMs which will be raised at the summer HYM;
- Flexibility around holding meetings on a date other than a Saturday may present an opportunity for a different format of HYMs to include, for example, input from EUSA re the student voice, and entertainment such as music in lieu of invited guest speakers.

9. Any other competent business

- GC reminded members to sign up for the 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, and letting Alison know in a separate email so she can monitor attendance.

10. Date of next meeting

- The next meeting will take place at 5.15pm on Thursday 25 June 2026 in the Raeburn Room;
- The newly elected members of the Business Committee have been invited to attend as observers;
- A modest drinks reception will follow the meeting, to thank the Business Committee members demitting and to welcome new members.



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

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17 June 2026

Dr William Duncan
Secretary of General Council
General Council Office
Charles Stewart House
16 Chambers St
Edinburgh

Dear Dr Duncan

In accordance with the agreed process, the following draft Resolutions are circulated for comment:

No.7/2026: Boards of Studies

No.8/2026: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Immunogenetics

For Resolution No.7/2026, I attach the paper that went to the Court meeting on 15 June 2026, which sets out the key changes and includes the draft Resolution.

For Resolution No.8/2026, the Personal Chair is being created for the appointment to Director of the Roslin Institute, further information is available at this [link](#).

These Resolutions will be considered in final form at the Court meeting on 5 October 2026 so please forward any observations by 21 September 2026.

Court at its meeting on 15 June 2026 approved the following Resolutions:

No.3/2026: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Clinical Trials and Complex Intervention Evaluation

No.4/2026: Foundation of a Personal Chair of High-Performance Computing Applications

No.5/2026: Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations

No.6/2026: Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations

If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your assistance.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirstie Graham'.

Kirstie Graham
Deputy Head of Court Services

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Draft Resolution of the University Court No. 8/2026

Foundation of a Personal Chair of Immunogenetics

At Edinburgh, the Fifth day of October, Two thousand and twenty six.

WHEREAS the University Court deems it expedient to found a Personal Chair of Immunogenetics:

THEREFORE the University Court, after consultation with the Senatus Academicus and in exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Section 3 of the Universities (Scotland) Act, 1966, with special reference to paragraph 5 of Part II of Schedule 2 to that Act, hereby resolves:

1. There shall be a Personal Chair of Immunogenetics in the University of Edinburgh.
2. The patronage of the Chair shall be vested in and exercised by the University Court of the University of Edinburgh.
3. Notwithstanding the personal nature of this Chair, the terms and conditions of appointment and tenure which by Statute, Ordinance and otherwise apply to other Chairs in the University shall be deemed to apply in like manner to the Personal Chair of Immunogenetics together with all other rights, privileges and duties attaching to the office of Professor.
4. This Resolution shall come into force with effect from 1 May Two thousand and twenty six.

For and on behalf of the University Court

LEIGH CHALMERS

University Secretary



University Court

15 June 2026

Draft Resolution: Board of Studies Terms of Reference

Description of paper	This paper invites Court to consider a draft Resolution with amendments to the Board of Studies Terms of Reference and to refer them to the General Council, Senate and any other interested party for comment before they return to Court for approval.
Action requested	Court is asked to consider the following draft Resolution and to refer it to Senate and the General Council for observations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draft Resolution No. 7/2026: Board of Studies Terms of Reference
Appendices	Appendix 1: Draft Resolution No. 7/2026: Board of Studies Terms of Reference
Resource Implications	Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) has given due consideration to any potential resource implications and there are none to be raised to Court.
EDI implications	SQAC considered the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) as part of its review of the policy. The EqIA noted little to no impact, as there is only a small number of changes to policy.
Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals	The proposals in the paper are expected to have no direct impact on the University's 2040 target or the Sustainable Development Goals.
Consultation	The proposed amendments to the policy have been considered by SQAC and recommended to Court for approval. The proposed amendments arose via consultation as part of the periodic review of the Programme and Course Approval and Management policy, which currently overlaps with the remit of the Board of Studies Terms of Reference. There are no significant policy changes proposed to the Board of Studies Terms of Reference, as the proposal is to consolidate existing key information into a single policy.
Freedom of Information status	Open paper
Further information	Author: Cristina Matthews, Senior Academic Quality and Standards Manager Academic Quality and Standards cristina.matthews@ed.ac.uk

Draft Resolution: Board of Studies Terms of Reference

Summary

1. The paper invites Court to consider a draft Resolution with amendments to the Board of Studies Terms of Reference, and to refer them to the Senate, General Council, and any other interested party for comment before they return to Court for approval.
2. There are a small number of proposed amendments to this policy, which are described in the Key Changes tables provided in the Discussion section of the paper.

Background

3. The Universities (Scotland) Act 1966 enables the Court to exercise by Resolution approval, on the recommendation of / following consultation with Senate: "...to regulate and alter the constitution, composition, and number of the faculties and boards of studies, and to create new bodies of the same kind." The Boards of Studies Terms of Reference document is the mechanism by which Court exercises these powers with regard to Boards of Studies.
4. At its meeting on 25 January 2018 the Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC, the predecessor committee to the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee) approved a proposal to simplify the Board of Studies Terms of Reference, and incorporate the remit and operation of Boards of Studies into the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy.
5. The Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy is now governed by Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC). The policy has been reviewed this academic year 2025/26 as part of its periodic review. Consultation indicated that having key information for Boards of Studies split across both the Terms of Reference and the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy has resulted in overlapping remits between both policies and created confusion amongst staff who are consulting the policies. During its review of the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy, SQAC recommended that the key information regarding Board of Studies governance, remit and composition be included in the Terms of Reference, and that the operational detail be removed, this not being necessary for the policy.
6. A Draft Resolution has been formulated to incorporate the recommended amendments.

Discussion

7. The majority of the proposed amendments to the Board of Studies Terms of Reference are a result of incorporating information about Board of Studies previously contained in the Programme and Course Approval and Management (PCAM) policy into the Terms of Reference, rather than as a result of changes to policy. The table below includes the list of amendments, and indicates where the amendments are not proposed policy changes.

Section of policy	Amendment
New headings corresponding to content that was previously in the Programme and Course Approval and Management policy	New headings for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governance and remit - Composition
Section 2	Reworded to include credit and non-credit bearing courses, and additional sentence to clarify where Boards of Studies need to seek approvals from College Committees - to note that this is not a policy change and was previously part of the Programme and Course Approval and Management (PCAM) policy
Section 3	Additional text to clarify Boards of Studies responsibilities - to note that these are not new responsibilities as they were previously part of the PCAM policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that proposals are supported by the necessary documentation - Ensure that proposals comply with the University's regulations and policies - Maintain oversight of programme and course handbooks
Throughout policy	Replacement of Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC, predecessor committee to the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee) with Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC), as the Committee now responsible for reviewing the Board of Studies Terms of Reference
Section 6	Requirement to meet at least once per academic year - to note that this is not a policy change and was previously included in the PCAM policy Consultation with Colleges has indicated that there is no fixed timescale for reporting, so the proposed amendment is to remove "but at least annually" for the frequency of reporting
Sections 7 and 8	Amendment to clarify that a Deputy Convener must also be appointed, and additional information about membership and quorum - to note that these are not policy changes as they were previously part of the PCAM policy information on Board of Studies composition Remove statement "CSPC (or its successor Committee) will define further membership requirements and define the quorum for the operation of Boards", given that this does not happen in practice.

Section 10	Bodies established at College or University level to fulfil the functions of Boards of Studies are unusual, and may review programmes or courses that are outwith Schools (e.g. programmes owned by Colleges, some non-credit bearing courses). The proposed amendment proposes that these recommendations should be made by the Head of College (for College level committees), and approved by Senate Quality Assurance Committee.
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Risk Management

8. SQAC has considered any risks arising from the proposed amendments and there are none to be raised to Court.

Next steps/implications

9. Court will invite Senate and the General Council to comment on these draft Resolutions and notice of these will be published on the website. Final Resolutions will be referred to Court at its next meeting thereafter for consideration and approval.

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Draft Resolution of the University Court No. 7/2026

Boards of Studies

At Edinburgh, the Fifth day of October, Two thousand and twenty six.

WHEREAS the University Court deems it expedient to prescribe new regulations for Boards of Studies:

THEREFORE the University Court, on the recommendation of the Senatus Academicus and in exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Section 3 of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, with special reference to paragraph 1 of Part II of Schedule 2 to that Act, hereby resolves:

1. The Board of Studies Terms of Reference are hereby set out:

Governance and Remit

1. Each School (or equivalent) must have at least one Board of Studies or a body that fulfils the role of a Board of Studies.
2. Boards of Studies must review and approve new courses and programmes, and amendments to existing courses and programmes, including credit-bearing and non-credit bearing courses. New programmes and major changes to programmes (as defined in the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy) must also be approved by the relevant College Committee.
3. Board of Studies are responsible for:
 - ensuring that proposals are academically appropriate, and are supported by the necessary documentation
 - ensuring that proposals comply with the University's regulations and policies
 - assessing whether the proposals will contribute to a good student experience
 - oversight of programme and course handbooks, although the approval can be delegated to members of staff within a School
4. Boards of Studies are also responsible for keeping the teaching, learning and assessment methodologies under review, and for offering advice on the School's portfolio of programmes.
5. Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) (or any successor committee to whom Senate delegates its responsibility in relation to curriculum approval) will

determine further requirements for the criteria and reference points that Boards should take account of when considering proposals.

6. Boards of Studies must meet at least once per academic year, and must report direct to the relevant College committee(s) as necessary.

Composition

7. The Convener of a Board of Studies, and the Deputy Convener, are academic members of staff appointed by the Head of School.
8. The membership of each Board includes: the Head of School and the Director of Teaching (or equivalent); all staff involved in the teaching of a degree programme which the Board is responsible for; one student member from within the School; and one external member from another Board of Studies within the University. The Head of College has the right to appoint an ex officio College member to every Board of Studies in the College. Boards of Studies can include members from other areas of the University, for example from other Schools or from relevant support services. There is no formal quorum for the Board of Studies, but the minimum composition of Board of Studies meetings needs to provide effective academic oversight of the decisions made by the Board and therefore some roles may have to be represented for the Board to be considered robust.
9. SQAC (or its successor committee) will determine the requirements for the operation of Boards of Studies, and may add additional requirements for Boards of Studies.
10. While normal practice is for Boards of Studies to operate within individual Schools, bodies may be established at College or University level to fulfil the functions of Boards of Studies, with the approval of SQAC (or its successor committee) on the recommendation of the Head of College.

2. On the date on which this Resolution comes into force Resolution 5/2019 shall be repealed.

3. This Resolution shall come into force with effect from a date to be confirmed.

For and on behalf of the University Court

LEIGH CHALMERS

University Secretary

**Minutes of the Academic Standing Committee
on Thursday 4 June 2026 at 4.30pm
Online via Teams**

Present: Graeme Reid, Convener of ASC
Matthew Epton
John Gillies
Judy Hardy
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: Katya Amott, EUSA VP Education
Manya Buchan (FSSC)
Lorn Macneal (FSSC)
Devin Scobie (PASC)

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener of ASC (GR) welcomed everyone to the meeting to hear from Katya Amott (KA) on the current challenges in education at the University and how these are impacting students.

Apologies were received from Gordon Cairns and Dorothy Welch.

2. Presentation by Katya Amott, EUSA VP Education

- KA is the outgoing EUSA sabbatical officer for Education in 2025-26 and will finish her term of office on 5 June;
- Slides were used during her presentation and these will be circulated to the committee.

Current student priorities

Top three priorities of students according to EUSA's annual (October) member survey:

- Cost of living (82%) An overwhelming majority answered that the cost of living was either their top or high priority
- Mental Health and Well-Being (74%)
- Teaching and Learning (74%)

Overview of 2 key issues: AI and Finances

These topics are what most students are acutely worried about. These have informed the work of the Students' Association in 2025-26 and will remain a priority going forward:

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- AI in education is a contentious issue, with concerns that students might eschew traditional learning methods by generating essays with fictional sources, thereby missing out on genuine academic experiences. This has spurred a push for more traditional in-person exams;
- At the University, the number of exams has surged by 47% over six years, significantly impacting the student body, especially those with external responsibilities or learning

adjustments. This increase is considered without solid evidence of widespread AI-facilitated academic misconduct, suggesting re-evaluation might be necessary;

- AI's influence spans various levels and areas within education and is leading to anxiety among schools over potential cheating. However, the spectrum of AI use is broad, with some students refusing to utilise AI at all; concerns range from environmental issues to potential inaccuracies in AI-generated content;
- Concerns also exist about AI's role in deteriorating student-staff relationships, with AI sometimes acting as a stand-in where students feel unsupported;
- The use of AI by academic staff for grading and feedback was criticised for prioritising style over substance and potentially reducing engagement with academic content;
- There are also fears that student work could be used to train AI models without consent, raising ethical questions;
- The entry-level job market is contracting due to companies utilising AI for cost-saving measures, affecting sectors like science, business, and media. This has worrying implications for the nearly one million UK graduates entering the job market annually.

Finances

- From a student's perspective, financial operations at the University appear opaque with many uncertainties, such as the prospects of graduating in their chosen programmes or potential staff redundancies;
- Public financial statements are showing a surplus so students question the necessity of budget cuts, particularly fee-paying, international students who wonder about the justification for their fees;
- The need for cost-saving measures is evident in logistical changes, like the discontinuation of renting the Edinburgh International Conference Centre for exams, leading to more exams being scheduled on Saturdays and in two sessions a day, which poses its own set of challenges;
- Higher education funding emerged as a significant issue in the recent Scottish elections. Over the past decade, funding per student in Scottish universities has dropped by 22%, even as costs have escalated due to factors like rising energy prices, wages, and fuel costs—expenses that are not necessarily visible to students;
- Students primarily learn about the state of the University's finances through their lecturers or EUSA, neither of whom are typically privy to detailed financial information due to their exclusion from major decision-making processes;
- Secondary sources include local and national news, which further contributes to the sense of uncertainty among students about the University's financial health;
- The lack of transparency and budget cuts negatively impact students, reducing resources like funding for cohort activities and opportunities for PhD students;
- Anxiety is prevalent among students about the potential closure of programmes/courses and job security for their lecturers.
- There is significant distrust among students towards the University's senior leadership, exacerbated by perceptions of mismanagement and high salaries of senior members amidst financial cuts;
- Student support for staff, particularly in matters like strike actions over assessment marking, remains high. This support reflects complex feelings among students who need to balance their educational aspirations with their support for fair staff treatment;

- The current student dissatisfaction coupled with a lack of clarity and communication, have fostered an environment of anxiety and mistrust among students, with potential long-term consequences for the University's reputation and appeal.

A look ahead

- KA spoke to potential improvements in the University's engagement with students for the upcoming academic year;
- Key is increasing transparency and honesty in communications about the University's finances. Regular updates can prevent misinformation and reduce distrust, even if the updates contain no significant changes;
- There is also a call for more compassionate communication that recognises and addresses the anxiety prevalent among students;
- There is a strong emphasis on inclusivity in decision-making processes. By involving students directly and listening to their diverse viewpoints, the University can foster healthier dialogues and create a more informed student body;
- Finally, enhancing the visibility of decision-makers is crucial. Students should be aware of who is responsible for making decisions that affect their academic and campus life. Achieving this through initiatives like roundtable discussions between students and University leadership can significantly improve trust and transparency within the University community.

Discussion

Communication

- In response to points raised by GR, KA emphasised the need for enhanced communication within the University, noting that, while some colleges have proactive communication measures such as organising town halls, others have not communicated significant decisions like budget cuts, leaving students uninformed and dependent on sporadic information;
- Drew attention to email communication in the latter part of 2025 which had outlined the University's financial situation but noted the absence of follow-up University-wide communications;
- A lack of consistent information leads to students speculating or relying on hearsay;
- Regarding inclusion, KA said she appreciates the University's effort to integrate sabbatical officers but suggested that greater engagement with student representatives at the school level could improve oversight;
- KA praised the senior leadership for their engagement in roundtable discussions, which have been well-received by students. However, she notes these roundtables are limited to once per semester and argues this frequency is insufficient given the large student population and the existing anxieties amongst them;
- She suggested increasing the frequency of these roundtables to enhance direct interactions between students and senior leadership, beyond seeing them as distant figures in the media or in parliamentary sessions, in order to address student concerns more effectively.

University Court

- WD asked whether the frustration felt by Business Committee members at the lack of information from University Court meetings was also experienced by EUSA;
- Katya acknowledged a shared frustration and described her experience on Court as challenging, especially when observing decisions that she believed were not in the best

interest of the students and staff, and supported the push for greater transparency, as evidenced by ongoing requests from Senate for open access to court documents;

- KA proposed that Court and Senate should hold joint sessions at least annually to foster open communication and transparency. She believes that such meetings, although possibly contentious initially, could help demystify the decision-making processes of the Court and enhance understanding and accountability among the University community;
- WD said that he has already brought up these concerns with the incoming chair of Court, Frank Armstrong, around the need for improved transparency and communication within the University's governance structures to alleviate frustrations and increase trust among those represented;
- DS acknowledged the long-standing issue of court secrecy, which he has consistently challenged, advocating that information should only be withheld as an exception rather than a rule;
- BN posed a question about the balance of attention the Court gives to academic and student issues versus financial matters, questioning whether Court is maintaining an appropriate focus;
- KA responded by stating that it is difficult to separate academic and financial concerns because they are inherently intertwined and criticised the Court's tendency to dismiss the impact of financial decisions on students, staff, and the educational mission as merely operational concerns;
- She asserted that these should be central considerations because of the University's role as a charitable educational institution and concluded that the current balance is not right, suggesting a need for a shift in how these issues are prioritised and addressed within the Court's discussions.

Disadvantaged student groups

- DS noted that Scottish students are significantly impacted by the high cost of living in the city despite not having to pay tuition fees and questioned whether there has been any improvement for this group;
- KA described some progress in addressing the degree awarding gap, which affects Scottish students, as well as other demographics like widening participation students, minority ethnic groups, and disabled students;
- She shared details of initiatives such as the formation of a group under the Senate Quality Assurance Committee to find effective interventions for these issues, and highlighted the approval of funding for a mentorship scheme trial set for the next academic year. This scheme aims to support students both financially and academically by involving them in paid mentoring roles within the University;
- KA expressed hope that this initiative will positively impact the homegrown students and improve their university experience.

Graduate employment

- JG acknowledged the challenging circumstances faced by university students regarding job opportunities for new graduates;
- He referred to a paper by Lambert & Schindler showing that working from home, rather than AI, is the primary cause of reduction in graduate entry level jobs:
[What if remote working, not AI, is to blame for weak junior hiring?](#)

<https://giftarticle.ft.com/giftarticle/actions/redeem/9739717b-329d-497f-826a-65f17c5004a7>

- KA voiced concerns about the current job market for graduates, emphasising that the problem isn't about new graduates being selective; rather, it's about the sheer difficulty of landing a job, with some graduates applying to hundreds of positions before securing employment;
- She is concerned that workplaces have not sufficiently adapted to train new staff in a hybrid or remote setting effectively, emphasising the need for more adaptive employment strategies to accommodate the evolving work environment;
- In response to a question from LM, KA indicated that while she has seen data on graduate outcomes from the last graduation cohort, which assesses if students are employed and whether their jobs align with their field of study, she does not have immediate access to comparative national data showing how Edinburgh ranks against other universities in terms of graduate employment;
- She mentioned that outcomes vary significantly across different schools within the University, and while top institutions like Oxford, Cambridge, and St. Andrews are known to lead, she would need to conduct further research to determine Edinburgh's precise standing;
- LM also asked if the University has a dedicated team or department to support student employment and KA confirmed the existence of a career service that provides assistance to students up to two years post-graduation;
- She noted the efforts of the career service to enhance their visibility and rebranding, though she acknowledged the limitations they face in a tight job market distinguished by a scarcity of graduate-level positions;
- She points out that while some graduates may find employment in sectors like hospitality, these jobs might not necessarily reflect their qualification levels, hinting at underemployment issues among new graduates.
- WD raised concerns about the impact of graduate employability on university rankings, emphasising its increasing relevance given changes in the job market. He questioned how feedback mechanisms between the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) and the career support service could be enhanced to improve graduate recruitment rates;
- In response, KA acknowledged the challenges faced by the career service in preparing graduates for a less-than-ideal job market. She mentioned that despite the efforts to support students and enhance their employability, external factors, such as nepotism, where some individuals secure jobs through parental connections, play a significant role. This situation creates an uneven playing field for those who do not have similar connections and rely solely on their merits and the support from the career service. She stressed the reality that there is only so much that can be done to level the playing field in the current societal context;
- She mentioned that often there are approximately four to five students vying for each job, highlighting the challenging environment for new graduates seeking employment.

Use of AI in academia

- ME queried the use of AI by university staff for marking students' work and student pushback to AI usage in grading;
- KA confirmed that trust is a major issue and cited a study from the University of Cambridge, which tested AI effectiveness in grading. The study found that while AI could generally award grades around the 2:1 level accurately, it undervalued work more deserving of higher grades, often rewarding verbose but insubstantial essays;

- This has led to concerns that the prioritisation of AI in academia might be more about cost-saving than maintaining educational quality;
- She also addressed specific student concerns about using AI tools like ChatGPT for feedback, noting instances where such use without student consent led to fears about intellectual property since input data becomes part of the model's training data;
- Concerns were also raised about AI's potential to "hallucinate" sources and marks, indicating issues with reliability;
- KA highlighted new rules around transparency which require students and staff to declare their use of AI, aiming to ensure fairness and maintain trust in academic evaluation processes.

Continuity within the work of the student sabbatical officers

- GR enquired about the interaction with newly elected sabbatical officers and the continuity of their work with the previous team;
- KA confirmed that there has been a two-week handover period where they engaged with the new team to discuss ongoing and upcoming issues, ensuring they are aware of the University's current projects and the relevant contacts;
- These discussions included major topics like AI use in assessments and decolonisation efforts at the University;
- KA expressed confidence in a smooth transition due to this preparation and the permanent staff who work at EUSA who aid in maintaining continuity.

The Convener thanked KA for her impressive presentation and a valuable discussion and she left the meeting.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2026

The minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 31 March 2026

- There was some discussion around the extended remit of Lucy Evans, Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, given the additional tasks she has recently had to take on;
- With no criticism implied about her performance, the committee felt the sustainability of this heavy workload should be monitored especially if the imminent departure of Vice Principal Professor Iain Gordon further increased her responsibilities in relation to the size and shape project which he is co-leading with Lucy;
- Also there was concern about her having to deal with a marking and assessment boycott and its implications not only for students but the forthcoming graduations;
- More generally concern was expressed about increasing frequency of staff overload at all levels arising from unfilled vacancies and departures of experienced staff by voluntary severance restructuring;
- Concerns about the transparency and efficacy of the University's communication, especially in the context of a marking and assessment boycott and its implications, were also highlighted;
- The discussion also commented on the negative implications of making interim internal appointments to senior posts as these would lack the status and credibility of a permanent appointment;
- It was suggested that the Convener's report to June Half Yearly Meeting should refer to these issues so that the senior leadership team receives constructive yet firm feedback about the prevailing challenges.

5. Draft Resolutions

None received.

6. Workplan for 2026/27

The committee agreed on the following topics for consideration:

- **Research** e.g., Professor Liz Baggs, VP Research and Innovation, particularly on the implications of major changes in UKRI funding streams
- **Impact of AI** on teaching and learning
- **Size/shape of the University** - discussion with one of the College Heads (e.g. Professor David Argyle, CMVM) about the impact of the University's academic restructuring project

7. Any other Business

DW had suggested that further information should be sought to follow up on recent press reports about University course closures (teaching out and withdrawal) and a structural reorganisation arising from the Academic Size and Shape project.

Action:-

- ***This will be an agenda item for the Business Committee meeting on 25 June;***
- ***WD will contact Leigh Chalmers, VP and University Secretary, seeking an update on the Size and Shape project that can be presented to the Business Committee.***

**Minutes of the Finance and Services Standing Committee
4.30pm on Tuesday 5 May 2026
Online via Teams**

Present: Lucy Hunter Blackburn
Alan Ross
Jess Williamson
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: James Saville, Director of HR

1. Welcome and apologies

- Lucy Hunter Blackburn (LHB) led the introductions and chaired the meeting in the absence of the Convener, Manya Buchan, who had sent her apologies, and welcomed everyone to hear an update from the Director of HR;
- This was a closed meeting and only FSSC members, Business Committee Office Bearers and secretariat were present.

2. Presentation by James Saville Director of HR

- JS reflected on the increasingly challenging international and internal University environment since his last presentation to FSSC in November 2024;
- External challenges include geopolitical tensions, social media and the impact of right-wing politics on university debates and policies, and difficulties in international recruitment and visa challenges;
- The growth in staff size in recent years had not been supported by a comparable increase in income, leading to the need to reduce staff numbers to avoid financial deficits arising in future;
- Financial constraints and short-term measures like recruitment restraints and operating expenditure reductions had been introduced to manage the University's budget and avoid deficits;
- These factors were affecting industrial relations, staff morale and, in turn, the University's operations;
- JS emphasised the need to transition from short-term unsustainable actions, including limiting travel where possible and three recent Voluntary Severance schemes, to long-term strategic changes to stabilise the University's situation and curb rising costs;
- He referred to the ongoing reviews across the University's three colleges and in professional services, focusing on marketing, communications, and IT;
- Although these reviews are taking longer than originally expected, it is essential that they are done thoroughly and have credible implementation plans;
- But the continuing uncertainty over where job losses will arise is creating anxiety and unrest among staff, complicating negotiations and leading to industrial actions, such as strikes during critical academic periods and a Marking and Assessment Boycott;
- Challenges with UCU relations centre on their demand for no compulsory

redundancies which the University cannot guarantee, although its clearly stated aim is to avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible;

- JS spoke about efforts to improve communications and in particular to engage with staff university-wide in the light of ongoing structural changes and this includes conducting town halls and workshops;
- While uncertainty over job losses remains a key issue and is impacting staff morale, JS said that the overwhelming majority of posts are expected to remain.

Discussion

1. Measures needed to complete the staff cutback phase and stabilise the University.

JW asked about this and what could be done to improve the sense of job security and restore morale among staff, especially those not directly affected by the job losses.

- JS explained that the focus is on continuously promoting the University's strengths, ensuring it remains an attractive and fair workplace, and leveraging these aspects to uphold a positive reputation and maintain morale among current and prospective staff;
- The overarching strategy for the coming financial year involves clear planning, communication, and visible action;
- Continuously addressing and improving pay equity issues, such as gender and ethnicity pay gaps also helps. Past initiatives in restructuring pay scales contributed to stabilizing the workforce and preventing high turnover;
- Successfully navigating through the ongoing changes at the University will require time, which is challenging for individuals eager for immediate answers, but producing effective detailed plans will need time to work through to ensure fairness and good implementation;
- Voluntary Severance schemes were offered to avoid enforced layoffs, with varying degrees of uptake across different rounds and groups within the University;
- Despite some progress in reducing staff numbers over the past year, the current number is still much higher than in 2020 and given the financial uncertainties, it is likely that hiring restraint, travel restrictions, and promotion pauses will continue into next year;
- The change programme is expected to span several years, during which ongoing evaluations of staffing strategies concerning diversity, participation, and reward systems will also be considered to ensure we continue to be an attractive place to work;
- The goal is to align these strategies with desired organisational behaviours while maintaining academic freedom amid external pressures;
- There is also the challenge of adapting to rapid changes in today's world, particularly with the advancements in AI and global shifts, suggesting that effort should be focused on helping people recognise and adapt to new realities and the requirements for success in a dynamically evolving environment;;
- Expectations that after a period of reduction it will be possible to revert to how things were previously are unrealistic;

2. Communicating positive news. JW asked about maintaining and promoting the University's positive image, particularly amidst challenges;

- JS explained key measures to do this include:

- Highlighting the university's ongoing achievements and strengths in media channels such as notable research breakthroughs, the visibility of high-profile academics, and advocacy for government support and mobility changes.
- Ensuring the university's accomplishments and positive attributes are recognised both internally and publicly. Despite challenges, there remains strong approval ratings from the University community, as reflected in metrics like a Glassdoor score of four out of five, with high marks in diversity, inclusion, and work-life balance.
- Reinforcing the University's appeal to prospective employees and ensuring it remains a desirable workplace. This is evidenced by positive feedback on interview experiences and aspects like flexible working conditions and competitive salaries.
- BN said it seemed the trade unions have been more effective in their communications to date and he supported the promotion of positive University stories, particularly those that demonstrate the institution's broader impact on the community and beyond—a task the Business Committee is eager to assist with;
- WD highlighted the General Council's efforts to showcase the achievements of the University, with upcoming events at the College of Science and Engineering, and College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences;
- JS noted a challenge in shifting the narrative from focussing on individual achievements to collective University contributions, which could include improving communications about the economic and civic impact of the university and the broader sector, noting that the University's contributions to Scotland's economy aren't widely recognised;
- JS welcomed suggestions to further communicate the University's extensive role in the community and would discuss these points further with colleagues, emphasising a strategic approach to public engagement and media relations;

3. How long is 'interim'?

WD raised concerns about the prolonged use of interim appointments for significant senior positions and asked how long roles with long term purposes, such as Director of Communications or Vice Principal for Research and Innovation, should remain filled on an interim basis and what will serve as a trigger for making these permanent appointments, noting that extended interim status can project negative external perceptions.

- JS recognised concerns regarding the prolonged use of interim appointments, explaining that each role is considered individually based on specific circumstances. For example, the interim appointment for the Vice Principal of Research was strategic due to the REF exercise that requires consistent leadership. In the case of the Communications Director, the interim status fitted into a broader review for reshaping that function because making a permanent appointment too early could delay needed changes;
- He also commented that making internal appointments gave organisational continuity and created a positive narrative of career development within the University.

4. How has the HR function changed?

LBH asked about the transformation of the University's HR department over the past eight years that JS has been HR Director.

- JS reported that the HR department had changed from a primarily tactical reactive role to a strategic one with significant influence within the university. It now has an integral place in executive and strategic meetings with HR heads actively involved in College operations and essential change management plans.

LHB thanked JS for a candid and thought-provoking session and he left the meeting.

3. Minutes from the meeting held on 19 February 2026

Members approved the minute from the meeting.

4. Matters arising from the minutes of 19 February 2026

AR suggested it would be helpful to seek further information about the decision-making around new IT systems at the University. He specifically mentioned that UoE differs from most other UK universities in not choosing the dominant IT system provider, Tribal. Understanding why it isn't the UoE preferred system would be relevant given need avoid repeat of past difficulties in change management of major IT systems. The limited timeframe to research and deploy an alternative system due to the few the remaining years with the current setup was noted;

Action: -

AR to draft text to be agreed with WD about this issue and follow up with CIO, Gavin McLachlan .

5. Finance Director's presentation to the Business Committee.

The CFO James Gray's (JG) highly informative presentation at the BC meeting in March was very well received and members had indicated they were positive about inviting him to return to a future meeting to address all BC members;

If JG agrees to this it would be instead of the regular slot with the Director of Finance and FSSC.

Action: -WD will invite JG to invite to the March 2027 meeting of the BC and will also ask him to provide an update on the University's current financial situation in advance of the HYM in June 202

6. Workplan for 2026-27

There will be 3 meetings of FSSC in 2026-27. Suggested speakers/topics (tbc):

- CIO, Gavin McLachlan (digital estate)
- Director of Estates, Damien Toner (physical estate)
- Director of HR, James Saville (staff)
- VP Corporate Services, Catherine Martin
- University's investment strategy, particularly in response to continuing disinvestment campaigns
- There was also discussion about whether FSSC meeting should be closed, given the Finance Director's willingness to address the full Business Committee

Action: -

WD will follow up with MB whether to open up online meetings of FSSC to all members of the BC.

7. General Council Budget

- WD referred to papers 2 and 3 (see Appendix 1) and discussed the financial strategy for the GC office operational budget for 2026/27 , which has been confirmed as £57,752 - an increase of 2%
- As shown in Paper 2, the projected underspend for 2025-26 is c. £15k, assuming £20k is spent on two showcasing events with the CSE and CAHSS this year;
- Although the underspend in 2024/5 was significant, this did not affect the allocation for 2026/7, but WD emphasised the necessity of spending the allocated budget for 26/27 to avoid reductions in future years allocations;
- He underlined the need for early event planning, allocating about £40k to PASC for its 2026-27 programme.

8. Any other business

- LHB thanked AR for his contributions during his time on FSSC as he prepares to end his term on the BC.

Appendix 1

Finance and Services Standing Committee – 5 May 2026

Budget Allocations to General Council for 26-27 to 30-31

Unlike in previous years when we have only known the budget allocations to General Council on a year-by-year basis and not until the start of the academic year, we now have been given indicative budget allocations as follows:

	Forecast 26-27	Forecast 27-28	Forecast 28-29	Forecast 29-30	Forecast 30-31
Staff costs	£52,601	£53,668	£54,756	£55,866	£56,998
Dept & Admin Expenses	£58,752	£59,927	£61,126	£62,348	£63,595
	111,353	113,595	115,882	118,214	120,594

Having the above allocations for future years is most helpful as it allows planning future years' activities to begin much earlier.

For some events that PASC wants to hold, long lead times are involved.

A major reason for the significant underspend in 2025/26 was planning for several events could only begin in late 2025 or early 2026 and it has not been possible to hold these events before the end of the budget year (31 July 2026)

University finance rules do not allow underspends to be carried forward to the next academic year. We are in a normal public sector situation of ' spend it or loose it'!

The indicative allocations to General Council could, of course, alter if there is a material mismatch between the overall University Budget assumptions/ expectations and the actual situation and there is need to reduce overall operating costs.

The notification of the above allocations was also accompanied with the following:

1. If you anticipate an **underspend of more than £2k** from your allocated budget for this financial year, you should inform us as soon as possible so that any unspent funds can be reallocated and utilised before the end of this financial year.
2. We will also need the predicted forecast for the **Expenditure** for the **next five financial years**. The figures above are based on a 2% annual increase. Please let us know if that's what you are expecting and if there are any known increases or decreases. Unless we hear back, we will assume these figures.

WD

1 May 2026

**Minutes of the International Standing Committee held at 1pm
Friday 1st May 2026
Online via Teams**

Present: Ann Cormack, Convener of ISC
Richard Andrews
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: Kim Graham, Provost
Kate Richards (PASC)

1. Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Professor Kim Graham (KG) to update the committee on the implementation of the University's international strategy.

Apologies received from Max Browning.

2. Presentation by Professor Kim Graham, University Provost

The Global Action Plan, published on 14 April 2026, had been previously circulated.

Current context

- KG began by describing her position as the University's Provost, effectively serving as deputy to the Principal;
- She works closely with the Heads of College, as well as the senior leaders overseeing our research, innovation and international strategies;
- Working closely with Leigh Chalmers, University Secretary, and Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students on student-related initiatives, the Provost plays a crucial role in shaping and executing the academic mission of the University;
- Following James Smith's departure from the role of VP International, the Provost now chairs the Global Partnerships Group, which includes College Deans of International, Deputy Vice-Principal International, and members of Edinburgh Global, Edinburgh Innovation, and other key University departments. This Group aims to manage a clearly-owned set of goals for international engagements aligned with the University's global action plan;
- UoE has an impressive international research and teaching profile, with nearly 50% of its students—over 25,000 individuals—from more than 130 countries studying either on campus or online. This proportion far exceeds the typical non-UK student ratio at other UK universities;
- Additionally, about a third of the University's staff are non-UK nationals, with nearly 60% of research-only staff coming from abroad;
- The global alumni network extends to over 360,000 members, with active clubs and networks in major cities worldwide, such as New York and Washington DC;
- The University's international reputation and operational effectiveness are significantly influenced by immigration policies at both Scottish and UK levels;
- Changes in these policies, as well as educational strategies aiming to educate more young people in their home countries are impacting international student recruitment and global priorities, across all UK Universities.

International Partnerships

- The University collaborates with over 300 universities worldwide, spanning various degrees of engagement, from school-level MOUs to significant partnerships, including collaborations with the Gujarat Biotechnology University and with the University of Witwatersrand, the latter in partnership with the MasterCard Foundation, focusing on education and climate sustainability in Africa;
- The Provost emphasised the importance of making international partnerships more strategic with the Global Partnerships Group prioritising more effective evaluation and rationalisation of our current international relationships;
- Focus has shifted towards ensuring that partnerships align with the University's core missions of Teaching and Learning, research and innovation, and civic impact;
- Examples include the Education Beyond Borders initiative supporting at-risk academics and students displaced by conflict (strongly aligned to our civic impact priorities), and the NEURii programme, a partnership aimed at using AI for dementia care, demonstrating the University's commitment to innovation in an international context;
- Additionally, the University aims to enhance its international innovation activities, leveraging existing relationships and exploring new collaborations with industry partners globally;
- This approach will extend the University's impact through a more thoughtful and strategic engagement in its international operations.

Una Europa alliance

- The University of Edinburgh is a founding member of the UNA Europa Alliance, which includes 11 leading research-intensive universities across Europe, such as Leiden, Zurich and Bologna;
- The collaboration offers joint degree programmes like a Joint BA in European Studies and a bachelor's in sustainability, along with virtual mobility opportunities, collaborative research projects, summer schools, and online courses;
- Additionally, the alliance features a virtual intercultural program known as the Student Project Incubator, which encourages students from various universities to work together on global challenges over an eight-week online collaboration;
- This initiative not only enhances cultural understanding and network building but also focuses on the practical application of research to address diverse global issues.

Insights programme

- The University's Insights programme is a significant initiative designed to support widening participation students by helping them build confidence, skills, and connections for their future careers; around 700 students have already taken part;
- For some, the programme includes an international component where students travel to cities like New York and Washington DC to meet with alumni and explore potential career paths, enhancing their global perspective and professional networks;
- This initiative leverages the University's global alumni network to provide valuable real-world skills enhancement for our students, making it a standout program that underscores the University's commitment to student development through global alumni engagement.

Geopolitical challenges

- Current geopolitical and geo-economic tensions are significantly reshaping the global environment, influencing international research and collaborations;
- The volatility in trade, partnership dynamics, and technological advancements in areas like AI

and quantum computing is prompting a critical evaluation of ongoing projects;

- These shifts necessitate enhanced security measures and thorough vetting of international partnerships, particularly in sensitive fields such as AI, semiconductors, and biosciences;
- This environment has led to closer cooperation among Edinburgh Innovations, the Edinburgh Research Office, and Edinburgh Global to strategically manage and develop these collaborations, ensuring they align with core strategic objectives and respond aptly to global challenges;
- Engagement with European institutions remains crucial, especially post-Brexit, for maintaining strong research and educational alliances. Such connections are vital tools for soft power and knowledge diplomacy;
- Domestically, there's a need to better communicate the University's relevance and impact to the public. This involves articulating the University's efforts in a holistic manner that integrates the international component as part of its broader civic impact;
- Financially, the University heavily relies on international student tuition fees, which constitute a significant portion of its income. Given increasing global competition in higher education, it's critical to remain attractive and competitive in international student recruitment;
- Strategically, the University has moved towards a more proactive and clearly owned international strategy, focusing on integrating international activities into its core academic mission;
- Discussions at the university level are also focused on transnational education and exploring potential new models and collaborations, particularly in countries like China, to adapt to the evolving educational landscape globally. This strategic shift is facilitated through platforms like the Global Partnerships Group, which helps streamline and enhance international engagements.

Conclusion

- KG concluded by highlighting that this is an exciting yet challenging time for implementing the international strategy at the University;
- She emphasised the necessity to evaluate and potentially discontinue certain activities that do not yield sufficient value, focusing instead on reshaping the University's portfolio to be more strategic, benefit-driven, and aligned with its values;
- Highlighted the importance of communicating the significance of the international dimension in the University's academic mission with a push for ensuring measurable outcomes and appropriate investment in these international initiatives;
- KG acknowledged the progress already made in articulating new directions for the University, particularly in enhancing civic impact, innovation, and new market opportunities, and invited feedback on the current strategy and suggestions for future directions.

Discussion

- RA expressed support for the University's international strategy and highlighted the challenge of managing numerous global partnerships. He emphasised the importance of maintaining strong relationships with major strategic partners, such as universities in Sydney, Toronto, and other global cities;
- KG discussed the strategic approach being taken, where the significance of each partnership is reviewed to decide on its continuation. The approach involves assessing current outcomes from collaborations, but also the future potential of existing partnerships, focusing on high-value relationships at the university level while allowing less critical connections to be managed at the school level. The goal is to optimise resources, streamline partnerships, and ensure impactful collaborations are prioritised and thoughtfully and effectively managed;
- BN expressed concerns about the University's reactive communication strategy and its past focus

on individual stories rather than conveying a strong message about the University's overall community benefits. He asked KG how she plans to enhance communications given the budgetary limitations and inquired how the General Council and Business Committee could assist in these efforts;

- KG emphasised the role of the General Council in spreading positive messages about the University's global work and impact, particularly highlighting its significant research impacts and successful student stories, for example around mobility abroad. She suggested that promoting these positive stories can help counteract the generally negative media coverage about higher education;
- KG acknowledged the difficulty of enhancing communications within budget constraints but mentioned ongoing efforts to improve our approach, with work underway to refine the University's website and communication strategies around its three core areas: civic mission, teaching and learning, research and innovation;
- KR expressed agreement with the need to diversify our international student cohort, highlighting the importance of not relying heavily on any single country, especially considering geopolitical tensions;
- She then asked about the University's knowledge of schools in countries targeted for Transnational Education (TNE) initiatives, using the example of Glasgow Academy's partnership with a school in India;
- She enquired whether the University has similar strategies to ensure continuity for students from these schools who may seek further education in Scotland;

Action:-

- KG offered to follow up on this query with Dr Shane Collins, the Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions, for a more knowledgeable response and report back to the committee;
- WD remarked on the importance of focusing on how innovation operates internationally, and referred to the forthcoming ISC meeting involving Dr Andrea Taylor. He acknowledged that the University's innovation outputs are only recently meeting expectations and emphasised the need to accelerate progress in this area;
- WD also highlighted the importance of alumni clubs as sources of potential ambassadors for the University and queried how best to leverage these relationships globally;
- KG discussed the strategic objectives of enhancing the University's brand, particularly in innovation hubs like London and internationally, and agreed this was an important objective for the future;
- She highlighted the work done with Edinburgh Innovations to assess and build on existing innovation ecosystems, such as in Nagoya and the Yangtze River Delta, leveraging established successes for future initiatives;
- Additionally, KG emphasised the importance of alumni clubs to the University, sharing insights from her recent engagement with the North American alumni, noting the diverse needs and interests of alumni in different regions, like New York and Washington DC, which influence the way they wish to engagement with the University;
- It was agreed that there was high potential for increased alumni involvement in supporting University initiatives, especially with opportunities to foster closer relationships through organised events and personal interactions;
- AC mentioned that MG had been discussing innovation with a focus on alliances, particularly citing an example led by UCL in pharmaceuticals;
- MG's enquiry was about how the University could play a leading role in forming alliances rather than just joining existing ones. She also suggested practical measures to foster innovation and hasten commercialisation, like using standard templates for legal processes in spin-outs to reduce

the time from concept to market, aiming for a more efficient two-month timeline rather than a year;

- KG agreed with the idea of speeding up the process, and considering where we needed to be present and visible, if we were not currently;
- RA voiced a concern about the University's decline in the QS World Rankings, where it fell from 15th in 2023 to 34th currently, while maintaining the 29th position in the THES rankings;
- Despite successes in specific subjects internationally, he questioned the reasons behind the overall ranking drop and asked what actions are being taken, beyond existing strategies, to improve the University's position in these rankings;

Action:-

- KG noted that the changes in rankings are sometimes influenced by factors beyond the University's control, including the performance of other institutions worldwide. She suggested she would provide a more detailed response to the question after the meeting.

AC thanked KG for a deeply stimulating presentation and she left the meeting.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025

The minute had been previously circulated and was approved.

4. Matters arising from the minutes of 4 November 2025

None.

5. Any other competent business

- The final meeting of ISC will be held online on Thursday 28 May 2026 at 12.30, with Andrea Taylor, CEO, Edinburgh Innovations;
- This is a closed meeting to include a discussion on ISC's programme for 2026-27.

**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.

-
- 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.

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.

**Meeting of the Public Affairs Standing Committee
at 4.30pm on Thursday 14 May 2026
Online via Teams**

Present: Mr Devin Scobie
Ms Candice Donnelly
Mr Thomas Wrench
Dr William Duncan (Secretary of the General Council)
Mr Gordon Cairns (Convener of the Business Committee)
Ms Ann Cormack (ISC)
Mr Lorn Macneal (FSSC)
Dr Dorothy Welch (ASC)

1. Welcome and apologies

- In the absence of the Convener, Alice Brown, who was overseas and unable to connect to a Wi-Fi link at the time of the meeting, Devin Scobie (DS) welcomed all attendees and led the introductions;
- He invited Stuart Tooley, Head of Public Affairs, to update the committee on the University's political mapping post-election.

Apologies received from Professor Alice Brown, Dr Bruce Nelson and Dr Kate Richards.

2. Presentation from Stuart Tooley, Head of Public Affairs, Communications and Marketing

Stuart Tooley (ST) gave a detailed analysis of the elections to the Scottish Parliament as shown in the slides that accompanied his presentation. Note that Cabinet and opposition spokesperson shadows have since been appointed (bringing considerable change).

The key points emerging from the presentation and subsequent discussion were as follows:

1. The opinion polls consistently showed SNP was expected to continue as the Scottish Government, but the final election outcome was less predictable because:
 - Large turnover of MSPs (over 40 retired but with incumbent losses on the day, 64 of the 129 MSPs are new)
 - The popularity of all party leaders declined during the election campaign
 - Support for Labour and Conservative declined significantly over previous 2 years
 - Support for Reform UK had increased significantly over same period
 - Tactical voting and voters varying party support between constituency and list ballots
 - Boundary changes affecting the majority of Scottish constituencies
2. SNP are still by far the largest group, with 57 MSPs but this is 6 less than the previous Parliament which again means it will again need the support of another party (or parties) to pass legislation and budgets.
3. The biggest change was the Conservatives losing 19 MSPs and Reform gaining 17 MSPs. The Greens increased their representation to 15 and the Lib Dems doubled their number of MSPs, from 5 to 10.

4. Although half of the MSPs are new, the distribution of new MSPs amongst the various parties is markedly different; no new Conservatives, less than half new in Labour and SNP, 60% new Lib Dem MSPs and all new Reform MSPs bar their one Tory defector (Graham Simpson) who was re-elected.
5. For the Edinburgh and Lothians, 6 of the 9 constituency MSPs were re-elected, but only 1 of the 7 Regional list MSPs returned (Miles Briggs). This means that for Edinburgh and Lothians, just over half the MSPs are new.
6. Edinburgh University engaged constructively with 4 of the 6 party leaders during the election – John Swinney, Anas Sawar, Malcolm Offord, Alex Cole-Hamilton.
7. A new Cabinet will be needed as several long-standing members did not seek re-election. Two prominent MP's (Stephen Flynn and Stephen Gethins) were elected as MSPs, which will result in by-elections for their Westminster seats.
8. It is now just months until the City Council elections, but those Councillors elected as MSPs can continue as Councillors until the May 2027 elections, due to a dispensation in Disqualification Regulations designed to avoid multiple expensive short term by-elections, but their Councillor 'wages' for the remaining term goes to charity.

Action:-

Slides used will be circulated to the committee.

3. Minutes from the meeting held on 12 March 2026

The minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 12 March 2026

WD updated the committee on planning for the following events:

Half-Yearly Meeting – 13 June at Teviot Row House

- Arrangements for the forthcoming half-yearly meeting are well underway and will include a discussion session with Professor Ailsa Henderson and Alison Payne 'in conversation' with the Rector about the implications of the recent election;
- Invitations will be sent to politicians who are also members of the General Council, noting that our events do not have fundraising purpose, but instead can bring important opportunities for engagement and networking, prior to any later fundraising by D&A.

Showcase visit to College of Science and Engineering (CSE)

- WD referred to Paper 2;
- This event on 24 June at the Nucleus Building is being arranged with the College of Science and Engineering and will include a visit to the new Engineering Hub;
- A notice about the event will be sent all General Council members on 18 May and WD will discuss with the Head of CSE, Prof Iain Gordon, invitations to external VIPs.

Showcase event at the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS)

- WD met with Head of College, Professor Sarah Prescott, on 23 April and had follow up discussions with senior College staff who are enthusiastic. The feasibility of holding this event on 9 July at the Informatics Building is being actively pursued;
- This event will be coordinated with Chloe Kippen, D & A, and will focus on AI and large language models, illustrating that the UoE is keen to preserve its language schools amid broader closures at other universities.

The last item discussed concerned a video about the Prince Philip scholarships, for which PASC hopes to gain an endorsement or introduction from the Princess Royal.

DS thanked WD for his meticulous planning and execution of events, noting the challenges of managing multiple significant projects simultaneously.

5. 2026/27 Work Programme

a. 'Town and Gown' Events

- DS introduced a discussion on future event planning and engaging effectively with Edinburgh City Council, recognising its current complex political alignments and the prospect of the May 2027 elections resulting political shifts;
- WD highlighted the challenges in engaging with the City Council and the importance of having specific subjects for engagement to ensure effectiveness rather than general lobbying;
- Suggestions included hosting bespoke events focused on party perspectives on specific city priorities, which may help create more successful interactions with Council members;
- DS discussed the potential of making events more personal and tailored to ensure better attendance and engagement, contrasting this with past University events where general invites yielded low turnout;
- He emphasised the importance of clear communication to indicate that our events are not for fundraising but opportunities for genuine engagement and collaboration;
- Discussed the potential for using City Chambers for drop-in type events to foster closer interactions between University representatives, Councillors and City officials. The central municipal venue could make their participation easier;
- PASC will consider immediate next steps, including direct engagements and brainstorming sessions to refine the focus of future events, ensuring alignment with both university goals and political realities.

Action:-

WD will arrange a meeting with DS and Stuart Tooley to refine the focus of future events of this type and ensure alignment with the University's goals.

June 2027 HYM (Paper 3)

- Discussion revolved around a proposal to hold the next summer half-yearly meeting in London, with the aim of integrating the GC statutory meeting within a larger event organised by D & A, primarily geared towards alumni engagement;

- This is viewed as a strategic move to better connect with London-based alumni and potentially increase the impact and visibility of the event, as historically, meetings held in London had been productive and well-received;
- Furthermore, a weekday, early evening London event might attract the presence of HRH The Princess Royal, who is the chair of the General Council and has a longstanding connection with the University, to elevate the stature of the event;
- Committee members expressed general support for the idea, recognising the importance of discussing further logistical and administrative details with Chris Cox, D&A, and confirming the support of the Principal before any invitation issued to HRH;
- WD recommended the involvement of experienced organizer Chloe Kippen (D & A) for the practical execution of the event, highlighting her past successes with similar University events in London;
- Subject to approval of the Motion to allow Half Yearly Meetings to be held weekdays, and support from senior D&A staff being confirmed, it was agreed to recommend to the Business Committee that the June 2027 HYM be held in London

Action:-

WD will follow up with Chloe Kippen and Chris Cox to determine their interest and support.

b.

"In Conversation" Event – 22 October 2026 at Teviot Row House

- The Committee reflected on the successful "In Conversation" event in October 2025 featuring Lord Jim Wallace and Joanna Cherry, noting its high attendance and positive feedback;
- Plans for a similar event on 22 October are underway with Sir Ian Rankin and Allan Little as speakers;
- Recorded thanks to AB for her efforts in securing the speakers;
- Discussed a nominal entry fee of £5 to add perceived value and manage attendance more effectively;
- Agreed to have a drinks reception after the discussion to enhance networking opportunities and make the event more appealing, which was not possible at last year's event at St Cecilia's Hall;

20 February 2027 HYM

- WD spoke to planning for next February's HYM and confirmed that Sally Magnusson has agreed to an "in Conversation" type exchange with the Rector, Simon Fanshawe in a half-hour slot during the lunch;
- The preferred venue for the lunch is Teviot Row Union Debating Hall and WD commented on why this would be a more suitable venue than Playfair Library due to its accessibility for individuals with mobility issues, and its closer proximity to EFI where the statutory meeting will be held;
- Teviot Row Union also had the potential also for a reduction in catering charges and using Blue Sky's menu would respond to concerns about the previous high costs of the lunches.

Billet Summer 2026

- The discussion moved to the latest copy of Billet with some members citing their disappointment at its appearance and suggesting improvements like better quality covers;
- It was noted that only 76 members receive paper copies leading to a broader discussion about possibly phasing out printed materials altogether;
- Noted that costs saved in not engaging the services of a professional media agency to produce Billet meant that more funds could be allocated to events for General Council members;
- CD suggested that invitations to VIPs should be made more attractive in an effort to make events more appealing and noteworthy.

6. PASC Budget for 2026/27

- The discussion revolved around budget considerations related to PASC activities, as outlined in paper 4;
- Devin Scobie encouraged the committee members to examine the budget more closely, and suggested possibly adding a local government event, which isn't currently included, to enhance the committee's agenda, even though it might incur additional costs;
- WD underlined the budget flexibility for certain planned items, mentioning that the items relating to College showcasing events with an allocated £10,000, could potentially be reduced;
- He stressed the importance of early planning for events;
- A significant point discussed was the saving of £30,000 pounds achieved by changing the format of *Billet*, which has released funds for other potential uses.

7. Indicative schedule of PASC meetings in 2026/27

- DS emphasised the importance of involving AB in discussions about future events and the process for scheduling meetings before she retires from the BC;
- WD noted the necessity of setting meeting dates to match the overall schedule of standing committee meetings and determining the number of guest presentations per meeting due to their tendency to extend beyond the planned duration;
- CD reflected on her experience as a member of PASC, and suggested limiting the number of presentations to allow more time for thorough discussion on topics, rather than constantly moving to new subjects without sufficient consolidation;
- DS acknowledged the effectiveness of having smaller subcommittees, like the one which helped organise the "In Conversation" event last October;
- He concurred with CD about the challenges of managing time during meetings when presentations run longer than their allotted slot;

Action:-

- ***WD and DS will consult with AB for her input on proposed events and the organisation of PASC meetings;***
- ***WD will liaise with DS re dates for meetings in 2026/27***

8. Membership of PASC in 2026/27 and inducting new members

- Newly elected members of PASC are Dr Ian Conn, former Director of CAM, and Emily Honeysett who is based in the US;
- WD suggested that it would be helpful if he and DS held an online induction session for the new members before the first PASC meeting in the next academic session;
- WD mentioned the significant ongoing review within CAM, which is expected to lead to reductions in staff and this is causing considerable anxiety among staff, which The committee agreed that understanding the reorganisation of the University's communications and marketing division will be crucial item for the Past future work programme.

9. Any other business

- Members expressed their gratitude to AB and acknowledged her significant contributions as Convener of PASC and as a long-serving and active member of the Business Committee. She will continue in this role until the end of July 2026;
- DS highlighted Alice's extensive network and her generosity in helping organise events;
- DS will replace AB as Convener from 1st August 2026 and expressed hope that PASC will maintain its productivity moving forward with 'Town and Gown' at the heart of its deliberations.
- Candice Donnelly was also thanked for her past role as Convener of PASC before her tenure as BC member also comes to an end in July 2026.