

MINUTE OF THE STATUTORY HALF-YEARLY MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL HELD ON SATURDAY 17 JUNE 2023 AT 10.30AM IN PARLIAMENT HALL, SOUTH STREET, ST ANDREWS

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dame Sally Mapstone DBE FRSE, was in the chair. Welcoming 61 members to the meeting, she thanked them for their dedicated engagement with the University and for being such valued members of the University community. She then conveyed apologies from the Chancellor, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, who was unable to attend due to the recent passing of his wife, Lady Elspeth Campbell. Having been such an integral part of the University community since Lord Campbell became Chancellor in 2006, Lady Campbell's presence would be sorely missed. The Principal expressed profound gratitude to Lord Campbell for all he does for the University and said our thoughts are with him and that he would always find support and friendship among his St Andrews family.

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor then invited everyone to join her in a one-minute silence in honour of Lady Elspeth Campbell.

1. Minute of the last ordinary half-yearly meeting of the General Council held on 26 November 2022

The minute of the meeting was agreed upon as a correct record. (See [General Council Minutes](#)). There were no matters arising.

2. Report by the Convener of the Business Committee – Wendy Russell

The Convener explained that there was an issue over securing funding for the election of six new General Council members to the Business Committee. All University elections had been outsourced for some considerable time and the legacy system was no longer available. The estimated cost of running the elections was up to £5K, but since the Business Committee had no dedicated budget, a business case would have to be made for the University to be able to consider providing the relevant funds. Members of the Business Committee are preparing a business case in an effort to resolve the issue.

The Convener reminded members that the Committee has, for some considerable time, had no budget available to it and relies entirely on the goodwill of the University and its elected members.

Business Committee membership was held up by the Convener as an example of how a General Council member could serve and support the University beyond philanthropy. She reminded members of the representation role of the General Council – to take into consideration all questions affecting the well-being and prosperity of the University. The Business Committee aims to provide support as questions of well-being are considered by Court and may make representation from time to time on such questions to Court. In addition, the duties of the Business Committee outlined in Standing Orders are: to transact business remitted to it by the General Council; to frame the programme of business to be submitted to meetings of the Council;

and to act on behalf of the Council, under powers specifically conferred upon the Committee, or in circumstances of emergency.

In the meantime, the Committee will go forward with the six members elected in 2021. In addition, a number of outgoing members have pledged to give *ad hoc* support.

The Convener acknowledged the valuable contribution made by Grace Lyon, Gregory Newman and Stephanie O'Rourke over the last four years, and Annabel Hamid over eight years, as they stand down from the Committee at the end of June 2023.

Members were referred to the [minutes of the last Business Committee meetings held in October 2022 and February 2023](#) for details of its activities since the last General Council meeting.

Earlier in June, the Convener of the Business Committee, along with Alastair Merrill, Registrar and Clerk to the General Council, attended a meeting of the Conveners and Clerks of the General Council Business Committees of the four ancient Scottish universities, hosted on this occasion by the University of Aberdeen. This was the first opportunity since before Covid to meet and compare notes on the current status and interests of each Committee and shed light on the similarities and disparities between them. Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow have significantly larger elected memberships on their committees.

The Convener was delighted to hear that the Laidlaw Music Centre had won a prestigious award from the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) to add to the Scottish Design Award it was given last year. She urged those who had not yet visited it to visit, perhaps during this current Alumni Weekend.

The Convener was grateful to Dr Rebekah Widdowfield for agreeing to give a presentation on Diverse St Andrews, a key pillar of the University strategy. She thanked everyone involved in the preparation and delivery of the meeting, those who provide support throughout the year, Business Committee colleagues and the General Council members present for demonstrating their interest in General Council matters.

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor thanked the Convener and members of the Business Committee and invited comments and/or questions from the floor.

There being no questions, the Registrar and Clerk to the General Council then called upon the Principal and Vice-Chancellor to give the University address.

3. University Address – Professor Dame Sally Mapstone DBE FRSE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor

At the last meeting of the General Council in November 2022, the Principal had been pleased to report on the successful return to full in-person teaching. Now, at the end of another academic year, she was delighted to report on a wonderful week of Graduation celebrations with more than 2,000 students from 90 different countries having graduated, including 73 returning students from the Classes of 2020 or 2021 who missed in-person ceremonies due to the Covid pandemic.

The core of today's University address would be an update on the significant progress that the University has made since the last meeting under the pillars of the University Strategy 2022-2027. Work to launch the new Business School has commenced, the Eden Campus continues to grow as a hub for innovation, online learning is now live, as is our Kaleidoscope Alumni Network.

[The Principal's University Address to the General Council can be read in full online.](#)

Following the address, the Principal opened the floor to comments and questions.

The Principal was asked how committed the University is to ensuring the best teaching and research necessary to remain highly ranked and world leading in relation to the current pay negotiations. The Principal explained that pay negotiations are part of national collective bargaining between UCEA (University and College Employers' Association) and University and College Union (UCU), and therefore the University cannot negotiate separately. She appealed to UCU members to come to the negotiating table with UCEA and pick up the discussions on pay-related matters, which are very important to creating the conditions that make it possible to deliver a world-leading teaching and research environment. She recognised the challenges that all staff are experiencing and referred back to the initiatives outlined earlier in her address to assist staff. She added that at least one third of the more than 140 institutions across the country would find any increase in the current pay round very challenging.

Concern was expressed on behalf of an absent member about the access denied by the University to a growing number of top pupils in Scotland. The Principal explained that the number of Scottish students that the University is allowed to admit is under the authority of the Scottish Government – there is a cap on the number of students for whom the Scottish Government funds tuition fees. If the unit of resource was increased and the cap lifted, the University would be very willing to admit more well-qualified and academically able Scottish students. However, under the current policy, the effect of the cap on numbers and the immense popularity of courses is that a number of students are not accepted by the Scottish university of their choice. The Principal acknowledged the risk of students who could not study at another Scottish university studying elsewhere in the UK or abroad and not necessarily returning to their country of origin, which is a real challenge to the economic benefit of the country. She assured members that conversations around this area are very current and, from her perspective, very important.

In answer to a request to elaborate further on the pay negotiations, the Principal accepted that the pay offer was below the rate of inflation but repeated the point that it was made on the basis of

national collective bargaining and reflected what institutions collectively are able to sustain and afford. The offer was specifically designed to benefit those on the lower grades, who would see an uplift of in the region of 5-8%. The Principal pointed out that there was also an opportunity for academic staff to apply for promotion every year and for professors to apply biannually for pay increases. UCEA remained at the negotiating table, waiting to hear from UCU.

The Principal then invited Dr Rebekah Widdowfield, Vice-Principal (People and Diversity), to deliver her presentation on Diverse St Andrews.

4. Presentation by Dr Rebekah Widdowfield, Vice-Principal (People and Diversity) on 'Diverse St Andrews, one of the key pillars of the University's Strategy'.

Dr Widdowfield began by sharing the University's very ambitious vision to be a beacon of inclusivity – placing diversity and equality at the centre of everything it does to create an environment in which anyone can flourish. This goes beyond the University just being diverse and inclusive, it is about making inclusivity a distinguishing and distinctive feature of the University. Diverse St Andrews being one of the five pillars of the University strategy is testament to that commitment. The University is taking action in this area because it is the right thing to do, but also because a wide body of research shows that diverse organisations perform better in terms of being more innovative, more productive and better at problem solving.

Diverse St Andrews is not just a pillar of the University Strategy, it underpins and helps the performance and achievement of the University Strategy more widely e.g. to be World-Leading we must be able to attract the best talent wherever it is found and to be Entrepreneurial and Sustainable requires the creativity that comes from being able to draw on a wide range of insights and experiences.

In concrete terms, a commitment to diversity means being at the forefront of best practice in teaching and research, thinking about our curriculum design and the way in which it is delivered and thinking about how we enable and support participation amongst all our students. It means looking at our research culture and how we value contributions - and not just the contributions of the professors or top researchers, but the contributions of technicians that underpin so much of the research work that is done at the University. It is about providing a positive working environment and fostering an inclusive culture where everyone feels able to be their authentic selves and do not have to hide aspects of their identify, whether that be around disability, race, sexuality, or social background. It is about making real progress on inequalities that impact on our community e.g. in relation to differences in attainment, pay or progression. It needs to build greater diversity, particularly at a senior level among our staff complement. It means supporting wellbeing, recognising that life and work are inextricably linked and both physical and mental wellbeing are important to working effectively.

Dr Widdowfield explained that there are a number of 'enablers' to help us deliver on those goals, one of which is about taking a community approach that recognises that everyone has a part to play in creating a diverse and inclusive St Andrews. Thinking about our behaviours, engaging in a respectful way, enabling inclusion, and calling out bad practice where we see it. There are a

number of specific actions the University is working on at the moment, including training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity – developing a set of behavioural expectations and thinking about what we incentivise and what in effect we disincentivise e.g. for our progression and promotion policies and looking at how we develop our allyship schemes. It is also about providing visible signals of inclusion e.g. whose images do we see and whose do we not see? This is not about ditching our traditions or our history, but it is about thinking about how we use our physical and digital spaces to celebrate the richness and the diversity of the University community, both past and present. The University has a project looking at this over the summer. It is also about thinking about our role model schemes which allow people to look into our community and see people like them and think that this is a place for them and not somewhere where they will stand out and stand apart.

We need to demonstrate institutional commitment and leadership – especially if we want to be a beacon of inclusivity e.g. using accreditation schemes to reflect on our policies, practices and cultures and to think about what changes might be required to support inclusivity. We also need to harness the power of data and evidence to highlight areas in which we are doing well and those where we need to do better, and to inform action and monitor progress.

Delivery of all these goals, and indeed the University Strategy as a whole, needs to be founded upon effective engagement that ensures that everyone has a voice, and that those voices are heard.

Dr Widdowfield then talked briefly about two substantive projects the University is currently working on – the gender equality charter (Athena Swan) and the Race Equality Charter (REC). She began by emphasising that charters are, of course, not an end in themselves, but provide a framework for self-assessment and reflection on policies, practices and culture as a basis for identifying areas for attention and action. The Athena Swan Charter was launched in 2005 to encourage and recognise the commitment to advancing the careers of women in Science, Technology and Maths. Since then, it has evolved to cover gender equality in HE more broadly and is widely used across the world.

Dr Widdowfield was very pleased to report that in the University of St Andrews all 19 schools have an Athena Swan award, which is conferred at bronze, silver, or gold levels, currently with 15 schools having bronze, three silver and the School of Biology having a gold award.

The University is looking at its policies and culture leading to some specific proposals and actions for change e.g. most recently to increase maternity leave. Progress since the last award, a bronze institutional award in 2018, is in three particular areas: support for carers, advancing women's careers and creating a safe working environment. The University is using that weight of evidence, analysis, and staff engagement to develop an action plan to support further progress around gender.

At same time, the University is also developing an application for the Race Equality Charter or REC. This is a newer charter having only been launched in 2016. Like Athena Swan, it is focused on advancing equality, specifically to improve representation, progression and success for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff and students. Like Athena Swan, the process provides a

framework to reflect on policies and practices and to identify institutional and cultural barriers to race equality and how we can address them.

This is very much a work-in-progress. We are currently focussing on a number of areas: the staff lifecycle, student lifecycle, culture, and the curriculum. Earlier this year we completed a survey of staff and students to look at the experience of working and studying in St Andrews and how that differs across different groups. As with Athena Swan, the outcomes of the research and self-assessment will be used to inform an action plan. While Athena Swan and REC are two separate charters, with different requirements, the University is taking the opportunity to look across the two different charters to share data, findings and identify prime areas of action.

Charter work relies heavily on the input of staff from across the University, most of whom are volunteers. But Dr Widdowfield was very clear - the University becoming a beacon of inclusivity will not be achieved by those working on projects and working in EDI roles, but will require each and every member of the University to make a contribution.

Dr Widdowfield ended with a quotation which sums up the value of diversity and difference and the importance of a community collaborative approach:

“No-one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.”

The Principal thanked Dr Widdowfield for her excellent presentation and opened up the floor for any questions and comments.

A member of staff, who had arrived when only 5% of the Science Faculty were women, congratulated the Principal and her team on all the work that had gone into embedding the equality and diversity principle, commenting that it was really encouraging to see it and to have witnessed the change in the University as a result. In reply, Dr Widdowfield commented on how, since her arrival, she had been struck by the amount of good work and commitment around diversity right across the University and how one of her jobs was really about connecting it all up better.

The Principal acknowledged the leadership shown by colleagues in the School of Biology. It is still rare to receive an Athena Swan Gold award and they have frequently challenged the University when they felt that it was not being pioneering enough, creative enough or inclusive enough. This had provided an opportunity to think, reflect, re-shape and re-start where necessary. The continuing dialogue is making a very big difference.

A comment was made about there having been no mention of diversity within the context of the broader community of St Andrews. Dr Widdowfield acknowledged that Diverse St Andrews was focused, in the first instance, on diversity within the University, but pointed to the work being undertaken in the town as part of the Diverse Action Plan e.g. engagement with schools to address the problem of anti-social behaviour, particularly on Friday nights.

In reply to a comment made about the lack of respect shown by some students for their neighbours, the Principal gave assurances that the University would act wherever possible to

address such issues through its Conduct Team and gave the example of action taken by the University to address litter issues following end-of-exam celebrations.

Another member raised the issues of gender and ethnic pay gaps, insecure contracts and salary deduction in response to the Marking and Assessment Boycott. Dr Widdowfield referred members to the People Strategy, which has just been approved by Court, which looks at a number of issues pertinent to the industrial dispute, such as workload and contracts. With reference to the Marking Assessment Boycott, the Principal added that an Equality Impact Assessment carried out in May found that there had been minimal impact on any protected characteristic and said that it was important to remember that the decision to take part in the boycott is an individual one.

A question was raised concerning provision for students with mental health issues and for neurodiverse students. Dr Widdowfield referred to there now being much better diagnosis and made the point that, for neurodiverse students, it is often about how the curriculum is delivered and making adjustments. She emphasised the importance of treating students as individuals. The Principal made reference to the Santander Universities UK autism internships which offer early employment opportunities for students with autism. A pilot scheme will help determine any enhancements this brings to employability.

A final comment was made about the lack of affordable housing in St Andrews for staff, specifically single people. Dr Widdowfield referred to provision being made for postgraduate students, as well as for new staff with families. While the University has no control over the housing market, it has introduced cost-of-living and other measures, such as extending the Stagecoach bus subsidy scheme, in an effort to alleviate some of the pressures.

Thanking Dr Widdowfield for her excellent presentation, the Principal commented on the remarkable fact she had been in post barely a year. She highlighted the importance of the role and the value added to the Diverse St Andrews theme by the range of Dr Widdowfield's expertise and knowledge.

5. Any Other Competent Business

The Registrar & Clerk confirmed that there had been no intimations and no further business to be discussed.

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor brought the meeting to a close, thanking members for their presence and inviting them to rise for the Benediction.

Alastair Merrill
Registrar and Clerk to the General Council