

**MINUTE OF THE STATUTORY HALF-YEARLY MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL  
HELD ON FRIDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2015 AT 10.30am IN PARLIAMENT HALL,  
SOUTH STREET, ST ANDREWS**

The Senior General Council Assessor to the University Court, Mr Nigel Christie, was in the Chair. He introduced himself and welcomed 43 members to the meeting. The Chancellor's apologies were noted and Mr Christie invited members to join him in both congratulating the Chancellor, now Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, on his appointment to the House of Lords and in wishing him a full and speedy recovery from his recent surgery.

**1. Minute of the last statutory half-yearly meeting of the General Council held on 27 June 2015**

The minute of this meeting, held in St Andrews, was received and agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising from the minute which were not covered on the agenda.

**2. Notice of the forthcoming election of a General Council Assessor to serve on the University Court**

The Registrar and Clerk to the General Council, Mr Alastair Merrill, reported that Nigel Christie's initial four-year term of office as a General Council Assessor expires on 31 July 2016 and announced that the process for an election to fill this vacancy would now formally begin. The nomination period would run until 29 January 2016 and, in the event of there being more than one nominated candidate, an election would take place between 16 March and 6 April, using the alternative voting system. A secure online voting system would be used, with a postal ballot available on request. The results of the election would be formally intimated at the next statutory meeting of the General Council on 25 June 2016. Further information on the nomination process and the skills and competencies sought of a Court member would be available on the General Council website or from the Alumni Relations Office. Information would also be sent to all General Council members for whom a valid email address is held on the alumni database.

**3. Business Committee Report by Mr Graham Wynd, Convener of the Business Committee**

**a) Report of the Committee's activities**

**Committee Membership:** Following the election in June, the Business Committee had returned to full strength with seven new elected members. With one resignation due to work commitments, the current membership comprised eleven elected members offering a wide variety of skills and experience. Full details of the membership were listed in the billet and on the General Council website.

**Meeting:** The Committee had met on 3 October in Edinburgh. The draft minute of that meeting was recorded in the billet. 'Watching briefs' would continue to be assigned to members covering various areas of University activity. The Committee would also continue to seek economical ways to widen participation in General Council meetings and would be exploring this with key University stakeholders in the new year.

**Meeting of Ancient Universities' General Council Representatives:** The next annual joint meeting would be held in St Andrews in May 2016. Meeting with counterparts had already proved useful for example, in exchanging views on the Higher Education Governance Bill.

**General Council Meetings:** Mr Wynd reiterated the need for meetings to be driven by major issues relevant to the University for the General Council to be able to fulfil its purpose as one of the three arms of the University governance.

**b) Proposal to amend the electoral rules**

A proposal to amend the electoral rules in the Standing Orders had been considered by the General Council at its meeting in June. In light of concerns expressed about possible unintended consequences in relation to co-option, further discussion of the matter had been agreed and members were invited to submit comments. In the absence of any comments being received, the proposal was re-examined by two Committee members and further changes made to the satisfaction of all concerned. Mr Wynd invited members to approve the new proposal, as detailed in the billet. The revised proposal was duly approved.

### **c) Motion**

Mr Christie invited Mr Wynd to introduce a motion which had been received from the Business Committee by the Registrar and Clerk in advance of the meeting. Mr Wynd explained the background to the motion which sought to extend by one year the term of office of a member (who was serving the remaining year of a resigned member's term of office) on account of there being no election in 2016 when his term was due to expire.

*“General Council, having regard to the change from annual to biennial voting for the elected members of its Business Committee, agrees to extend the term in office of Mr Roger T Knox BSc by one year, until 30 June 2017. Council confirms that, on completion of such term, Mr Knox is eligible to stand for re-election to a second consecutive term, this term being of four years' duration”.*

The motion was approved.

### **4. Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill**

Further to the presentation on the above Bill given by the Vice-Principal (Governance and Planning) at the June 2015 meeting, Mr Christie invited the Convener of the Business Committee to update members on actions taken by the General Council since the last meeting.

Mr Wynd had written to some 25,000 General Council members, contactable by the University via email, setting out the main lines of criticism of the Bill and asking them to write to the Education and Culture Committee by the 4 September consultation deadline, sending a copy to himself. Within days, over 100 had written and, by the deadline, he had received over 300 copy emails and letters from all parts of the UK and some from abroad. Most were high-quality, carefully constructed communications and only three had been in support of the Bill. Mr Wynd thanked everyone who had written and confirmed that the Business Committee had also made its own representation.

In addition, the Students' Association had, following consultation but as a separate exercise, set up an online petition under the banner of “Save our Rector” and arranged for an email to be sent to General Council members, along with the student body, to support their petition. Within a week or so, over 3,500 had signed the petition. Media attention had been immediate, with *The Scotsman* and *The Herald* giving front page and editorial space to the campaigns and publishing several letters.

Since the consultation period, the Education and Culture Committee had held two hearings, one in October receiving evidence; and the second in November hearing and questioning the Education Minister. The Committee's Stage 1 Report on the merits of the Bill's principles was due shortly.

***Mr Christie thanked Mr Wynd and called Mr Merrill for his update on the same topic.***

Mr Merrill began by reminding members of the Government's key proposals to legislate on Higher Education Governance that he had outlined at the June meeting. The Bill envisaged that ministers could dictate the composition of Senates and University Boards and set out Board chair appointments. It was a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to governance that would be firmly in the control of the Scottish Government. An important concern centred on the reclassification of charitable institutions which could have serious financial implications.

Mr Merrill acknowledged that the General Council had been at the forefront of raising public awareness and paid tribute to the Convener of the Business Committee for the success of his 'call to arms'. He himself had read the 300 plus responses and shared Mr Wynd's view of the quality of those responses.

The Bill had come in for strong criticism from many quarters, including Parliament's Finance Committee. Concerns had been raised at two public sessions, including concern expressed by Dame Jocelyn Bell at the damage the proposals were already causing to the international reputation of Scotland's higher education sector. Conservative MSP Liz Smith had requested a debate in the Scottish Parliament. Labour had voted with the Conservatives in calling for the Bill to be scrapped. Mr Merrill emphasised that it is yet to be articulated exactly what failures in governance the legislation is intended to address in its statements about modernity, transparency and equality.

As yet, there was no indication as to whether the Government was prepared to make concessions as a result of its consultations. The Stage 1 report expected in January would address whether, in the Committee's view, the Bill adequately meets policy aspirations. It would then be the subject of another Parliamentary debate. When it reaches Stage 2, the Bill will be examined clause by clause and amendments can be tabled by any MSP. At this point it will become clear what changes the Government might be willing to consider. At Stage 3, there will be a final debate, where the amended Bill will be voted on by Parliament. Any additional amendments at this stage would usually be political concessions. This is expected to be completed by early March, before Parliament rises for the election. The Bill becomes an Act once it receives royal assent, usually a couple of months after it receives Parliamentary approval. Higher education institutions then have four years to implement its provisions.

## **5. University Address by Professor Garry Taylor, Deputy Principal and Master of the United College**

Professor Taylor considered it a pleasure and honour to be invited to address the General Council. With Professor Richardson's departure to Oxford at the end of the year, and until a new Principal is appointed, he would be assuming joint responsibility for overseeing the running of the University in the capacity of Acting Principal, along with the Quaestor, Mr Derek Watson, who will serve as CEO. A vigorous selection committee was working with a global executive search company with a view to interviews taking place in February. It was unlikely that a new Principal would be in place before the start of the next academic year.

Professor Taylor was pleased to report that the University continues to excel, for example, having risen 20 places to 68th in the QS University World Rankings – our highest ever place in this survey and the ninth year in a row of making it into the world's top 100; and rising 25 places to 86th in the Times Higher Education World University rankings. Commenting on how remarkable these achievements are considering the University's relative size and distance from major population centres, Professor Taylor attributed this success largely to the increasing influence of research measured by citations around the world.

Professor Taylor went on to highlight four recent events which could change the landscape in which higher education currently operates: the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill; the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' recently published green paper, "Fulfilling our potential: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice"; a review of the UK Research Councils by Nobel Laureate Sir Paul Nurse; and George Osborne's Autumn Budget Statement earlier this week. The major focus of the green paper, which currently only refers to England, is the establishment of an Office for Students and a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to measure teaching excellence. As St Andrews has always placed teaching quality at its core, Professor Taylor was confident that the University would excel should TEF be implemented in Scotland. In relation to research, the Nurse review proposes changes in the governance of public funded research with the creation of an overarching body, Research UK, to reduce the administrative burden on the Councils. While the Spending Review outcome for higher education had been better than anticipated, with science funding protected in real terms, confirmation of the Government's intention to invest £7 billion up to 2021 in research capital and income maintained to Innovate UK which exploits science and technology discoveries, the teaching grant was, however, to be reduced by £120 million in cash terms by 2019-20, albeit with protection for high-cost subjects. The Scottish Government would not be setting out its budget until 18 December.

Professor Taylor next turned his attention to the University's current situation and future plans. With 45% of just over 8,400 students coming from outside the UK and 32% coming from outside the EU, St Andrews is cushioned compared to some of its peers as a result of 22% of its income coming from overseas fees as compared with 20% coming from the Scottish Funding Council. The quality of our research-led teaching and student experience means that demand for undergraduate places continues. The University continues to invest in developments which support its strategic aims in student experience, research and teaching, including the redeveloped Students' Association building and the £14m redevelopment of the Sports Centre currently under way.

The ambitious plans for the Guardbridge site and its new green energy centre, which are key to the University's aim to be carbon neutral by 2018, will also provide much-needed library space and work

places for many of our professional services. This, in turn, would allow further renovation of the Main Library to provide more student study spaces and release some of our iconic town buildings to be used as enhanced teaching and research space. An architectural competition had been recently launched for a new Music Centre which would allow the Younger Hall to be refurbished as a flexible teaching space and enhance its facilities as a venue for graduation and concerts. There were plans to improve the aquarium and research facilities at the Scottish Oceans Institute and also provide an opportunity for public engagement.

In terms of the University's research impact, Professor Taylor remarked that hardly a day goes by without news of St Andrews' achievements and discoveries being broadcast to a global audience, thanks to its research portfolio and the digital revolution. With too many to mention, he gave some examples which included neuroscientists discovering new ways of studying the effects of Motor Neurone Disease leading to possible new treatments, marine biologists facilitating effective conservation of marine mammals and medical researchers discovering how zinc plays a key role in regulating heartbeat.

Amongst other news, Professor Taylor was pleased to report that St Andrews now has a fleet of ten electric vehicles, making it Scotland's most densely populated electric vehicle town; that this year's staff survey had found improved levels of job satisfaction; and that the University had been awarded an Athena SWAN Charter in recognition of its commitment to advancing women's careers in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine in higher education and research.

Questions from the floor included questions about library research resources, widening access targets and any particular challenges facing the University. Members were assured that the Guardbridge initiative would only serve to enhance Library facilities and that the Main Library would continue to cater for undergraduate, postgraduate and academic staff with 25% more books being available. The University remained committed to widening access to encourage those with the potential to succeed to come to St Andrews irrespective of their background and had in fact exceeded its target. With respect to challenges, the Deputy Principal mentioned the need to enhance other forms of income beyond public income. Particular threats were competition from other markets for our overseas students and competition for research grants given our relatively small size.

## **6. The University's Enterprise Agenda – presentation by Professor Verity Brown, Vice- Principal (Enterprise and Engagement)**

Professor Brown is responsible for delivering the University's enterprise agenda and for engaging with the University's external stakeholders to ensure that the University's activities deliver social and economic benefits. She began her illustrated talk with an update on the Guardbridge project under construction on the site of the former paper mill, which she cited as an example of economic regeneration. The Guardbridge project, alongside another major renewable energy project – the Kenly windfarm development – is a key part of the University's drive to become the UK's first carbon neutral university for energy.

In addition to reducing energy costs and carbon emissions by pumping water four miles underground to heat science buildings and student residences on the North Haugh in St Andrews, the £25m green energy centre will create jobs and provide the University with research, office and library space, as well as flexible space for businesses to rent. Professor Brown also gave examples of research at the University that is currently receiving global recognition and which would help attract business to the Sustainable Power and Research Campus (SPARC) to be developed at Guardbridge. While the Guardbridge project would cause considerable disruption to residents, local businesses and commuters in the short-term (15 February - 8 April 2016) due to road closures necessary for pipe-laying work between Guardbridge and St Andrews, Professor Brown gave assurances that all reasonable measures would be taken to minimise the disruption, which would be more than offset by the economic, environmental and community benefits gained.

Professor Brown then went on to mention some of the opportunities for engagement with the local community afforded by the University taking on the management of the Byre Theatre. *Moana: The Rising of the Sea*, for example, was an ambitious play raising awareness of global warming that was

made possible thanks to the academic links between the University's Centre for Pacific Studies and the University of the South Pacific. The School of Physics & Astronomy had joined forces with the Music Centre to celebrate 2015 as the International year of Light with the SHINE science, music and art festival. In terms of student-led social enterprise projects, Professor Brown was proud to report that Enactus St Andrews had been awarded Rookie and Team Leader Awards by Enactus UK. Transition University of St Andrews (student, staff and local community) had also received a highly commended Green Gown award.

#### **7. Any Other Competent Business**

Mrs Jane Watkinson, former Convener of the Business Committee, congratulated the Business Committee on reinvigorating itself.

Mr Ken Cochran, General Council Assessor to the University Court, said that he had asked Court at its last meeting to note the General Council's strong representation on the Higher Education Governance Bill as a prime example of the General Council and the University working together to protect the welfare of our University.

There being no further business, Mr Christie thanked the speakers for their contributions and members for coming out on a bitterly cold day for the meeting.

Mr Nigel Christie  
Senior General Council Assessor to the University Court