**General Council meeting: 2 July 2022**

**University Address by Professor Dame Sally Mapstone,   
Principal and Vice-Chancellor**

***Introduction***

Good morning, everyone. As ever it is a pleasure to attend the General Council meeting to have the opportunity to provide you with an address. My last update to the General Council was delivered at the autumnal meeting on 27 November – our first in-person meeting in three years. The time between then and now has consolidated our transition away from the pandemic, which I will be invoking only to foreground the context in which we are operating: one of renewed opportunity, enriched by the skills development necessitated by the pandemic, and enlivened by the energy with which we are looking to the future.

The semester which has just concluded has been one of student and academic life in the normal, pre-pandemic way, and we expect that to continue in the new academic year, starting in September, in which students will return to St Andrews and receive in-person teaching as usual. That is not to gloss over the challenges of the semester which has seen – amongst other things – a significant rupture in the international order through the war in Ukraine, and which has impacted our community in ways which I will speak about later. But we have brought to the fore our sustained commitment to excellence and our aptitude for making the most of opportunity, and that is accounted for in our many successes.

Eminent amongst these is the summer graduation session which concluded on Wednesday of this week, and from which many of us are still recovering. To put this in context, in-person graduations returned in winter last year on 30 November and 1 December – right after our last General Council meeting. In those ceremonies I bestowed degrees upon 1078 students from 82 countries. The redevelopment of the Younger Hall meant that those occasions were staged in the University’s Sports Centre, which we stylistically transformed to provide a lustre which is fitting for these ceremonies.

The summer ceremonies which just concluded were the first of their kind in three years, they were staged in our newly reopened Younger Hall, and they were three weeks long – in contrast to our usual single week. The first week enabled us to celebrate the class of 2022 in the usual, pre-pandemic way; the second and third weeks accommodated celebratory ceremonies for the returning classes of 2020 and 2021 respectively. Across the three weeks, we saw over 5,000 students cross the Younger Hall stage in 26 separate ceremonies. Each of the Graduation days was preceded by the normal Graduation service in St Salvator’s Chapel, and they were followed by the usual garden parties, and a supplementary programme of celebratory dinners and Development events. Honorary degrees were bestowed throughout on honorands of note – too many to mention here (about 23 in all), but publicised on our website, and two special events took place to mark the summer session: the Dow Memorial Lecture, hosted every three years in partnership with the University of Dundee, which was this year delivered by our honorand, Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, on 16 June, and which took the title – ‘Alcohol: a pandemic within a pandemic;’ and we also had an in-conversation event with Dr Fiona Hill, an alumna to whom we also presented an honorary degree, on 23 June. This graduation programme and package of supporting events is unprecedented in our history in terms of both its scope and scale, and its flawless execution is a testament to the hard work of a huge number of people across the University, including our wonderful Chancellor.

Graduation is not just a chance to celebrate our students; it creates a moment of reflection in a University calendar of great pace in which each of us can consider the strength of our institution and its many contributions to the world. We do not need to look far to see this acknowledged. At our last meeting, I reported our first place ranking in *The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide* for 2022, as well as our attainment of the UK and Ireland Sustainability Institution of the Year award at the Green Gown Awards. We are entering league table season again and obviously I cannot predict our results, but early indicators are positive: the QS World University Rankings for 2023, released on 8 June, show a maintained position at 96th in the world – and that is reassuring to us given the ever-increasing competition from international, and in most cases, far better financially supported university sectors. And in sustainability terms, the University has been shortlisted as a finalist for the Institution of the Year Award in the International Green Gown Awards – at which we will face off against four other institutions from Canada, India, Australia, and Morocco, to be named the world’s leading university in sustainability terms for 2022. That’s a huge global acknowledgement already of the quality of our environmental interventions and the potency of our sustainability aspirations, both of which stem from the social responsibility statement that underpins our University Strategy for 2018 to 2023.

I will report further on our institutional progress and successes in line with the themes of the Strategy: World-Leading, Diverse, Global, and Entrepreneurial St Andrews. There is first, however, a series of other successes that I need formally to acknowledge – and which speak further to the world-leading nature of our institution. Three of our academics were recognised in the Queen’s New Year Honour’s List in January, and a further four staff were recognised in the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Honours List in June. At the beginning of the year, Dr Maggie Ellis of the School of Psychology and Neuroscience was awarded an MBE for her services to dementia care improvement; Professor Ailsa Hall, formerly the Director of our Sea Mammal Research Unit, was appointed OBE for her contributions to epidemiology and environmental protection; and Professor Anne Magurran, also of the School of Biology, was awarded a CBE in recognising her services to biodiversity. An honorary mention also of Tim Allan, a member of the University Court, who in January was also awarded a CBE for his services to business, charity, and the arts. Meanwhile, in June, Stephen Stewart, our Director of Sport, received an MBE for his services to sport; Dr Isobel Falconer likewise received an MBE for her services to the history of mathematics; Claire Lavelle, an Assistant Director of Student Services, received an MBE for her services to wellbeing; and I was personally honoured with the appointment as Dame Commander for my services to higher education. These successes are a real tribute to the way St Andrews draws the best from our people, and I know I speak for my fellow honorands when I express my appreciation to all of the colleagues with whom I have been privileged to work.

Further testifying to the transformative nature of our town are other staff successes, including the appointment of our Vice-Principal for Collections, Music, and Digital Content, Professor Katie Stevenson, to the role of Dean of Arts at Monash University in Australia – and Katie has just this week left our University to assume that post. Katie has primarily forged her career at St Andrews, both as an academic and as a professional leader, and it is with great collective pride that we recognise the significant appointment, convey our thanks, and wish Professor Stevenson the very best for her tenure. Also leaving the University’s Senior Management Team is Professor Paul Hibbert, Assistant Vice-Principal Dean of Arts and Divinity, who will return to his research and academic position in the School of Management from August onwards.

These departures from the leadership team have factored into a reorganisation of the Principal’s Office, my senior leadership team, the first parts of which we announced yesterday with more to follow in September. Ester Ruskuc, formerly our Director of Strategy and Policy, has become Vice-Principal for Strategy, Policy, and Planning; Niall Scott, known to many of you for his extensive community work, has been appointed Vice-Principal for Communications. Professor Monique Mackenzie, formerly the Provost, has been appointed Vice- Principal for Digital Education, Research, and Environment; and we have welcomed a new member to our University community: Dr Rebekah Widdowfield, formerly the Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, who in June became the inaugural Vice-Principal for People and Diversity. We are not recruiting a replacement for Professor Stevenson, whose portfolio has been split between the newly recast roles and that of the current Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation, Professor Tom Brown, who will now assume responsibility for Collections, nor will we recruit a new Provost which will instead be subsumed into the role of the Assistant Vice Principal Dean for Learning and Teaching – occupied by Professor Frank Lorenz Müller. We are, however, currently recruiting a replacement Assistant Vice-Principal Dean of Arts. This reconstituted Principal’s Office reflects the changing nature of priorities during the pandemic, the logical restructuring of responsibilities, and the shifting impulses which drive our University as we recast our aspirations.

***World-Leading***

The World-leading pillar expresses our commitment to bolstering our international excellence, and a key development this semester was the release of the outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework, or REF, exercise for 2021 – a national UK assessment of research quality with a key role in establishing domestic and international reputational profiles. We performed powerfully in the results released in May, where 88% of the research carried out by the University was evaluated as world-leading or internationally excellent, confirming the capacity of St Andrews to shape the future of academic disciplines for the betterment of society. As well as affirming that the overall quality of research at St Andrews has increased by 5.7% since the last assessment exercise in 2014, REF confirmed the University’s outstanding performance in several key research areas, including Physics, Earth Sciences, Art History, Anthropology, Modern Languages, and Chemistry, the latter of which was a joint submission to REF with the University of Edinburgh. On a ranking based on Grade Point Average, these Schools or subjects are top in Scotland. The subject areas of Medicine, Psychology, History, and Maths and Statistics have also performed strongly.

We must match world-leading talent with resources which befit their standards, and it is in that context that I want again to acknowledge both the redeveloped Wardlaw Museum and the new Laidlaw Music Centre. Both of these I spoke to at our last meeting, but I invoke them again because they have come wonderfully into their own in the last semester, coalescent with the post-Covid cultural flourishing throughout our town. The Wardlaw Museum on the Scores opened last summer and has since hosted several exhibitions. Over Graduation, the Wardlaw was used as an events space of great beauty, and it currently hosts a 40th-birthday photographic portrait of our alumna, Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge, which will reside there until September. This venue was chosen jointly by The Duchess and the National Portrait Gallery in recognition of the importance of St Andrews to her life. The Wardlaw will benefit in due course from the University’s major acquisition of the photographic archive of Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert, an award-winning and internationally known Scottish photo-journalist, which comprises one million photographic items that accentuate what is already one of the most historically valuable photographic archives anywhere in the world. I take a moment here to mention the preview last night of a small, wonderful exhibition at the V&A in Dundee of the work of Valentine’s factory, which produced postcards and greeting cards for a very lengthy period right through to 1994, having been originally founded by an alumnus of the University and for which we hold a substantial archive, which we acquired in 1971. Exhibits from that archive form a substantial part of the excellent exhibition.

Meanwhile, the Laidlaw Music Centre opened for use in September, and this was formally marked in April of this year with a gala performance of Mozart’s *Così Fan Tutte* and a concert of student performances. Just three days ago, the Laidlaw won the Public Building of the Year award in the Architecture category at the Scottish Design Awards, evincing national recognition of its supreme quality. Earlier last month, I attended our annual University opera, which this year was Debussy’s *Pelleas and Melisande,* directed by Kally Lloyd-Jones, Co-Director of the Byre Theatre, and conducted by Dr Michael Downes, Director of Music, in the Laidlaw’s McPherson Recital Room – an unforgettable three-and-a-half-hour performance. It was a spectacular use of a truly world-class space, and I encourage any of of you who have not yet experienced the building to do so at your earliest opportunity via our programme of public events.

The Byre has equally hosted key events, including the launch of SANDS, the international film festival of St Andrews, in March. This was founded by the University with the support of Joe Russo – one of the world’s highest-grossing film directors of all time. SANDS was, again, a community-facing event, and it took us by surprise with its quality, popularity, and breadth of content. In just its inaugural weekend, it has ingrained itself as a mainstay of the University calendar for years to come.

As indicated, students have also returned to their usual levels of activity – inside and outwith the classroom - and societies and sports clubs are operating at full speed. Saints Sport, in particular, has enjoyed an extremely good year and we currently rank 15th out of 146 institutions in the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) league – remarkable for such a small student populace. Saints Sport has just over 5,500 members, with 75% of students active in sport and 55% being members of a sports club. Alongside many individual achievements, our University teams won the BUCS Championship for Women’s Water Polo and the BUCS Match Play Team Golf Championship. The University’s ice hockey team are UK National Champions and our women’s football team won the Scottish ‘She Can She Will Cup’.

These opportunities, existing alongside over 140 societies at the Students’ Association, attest to the scale of the experiential offering at St Andrews which combines with our academic reputation to make our University a highly desirable one at which to study. We see this reflected in our admissions cycle for the year ahead, in which we are on target to meet our objectives and with applications increasing in comparison to this time last year. We are already amongst the most over-subscribed universities in the country, and we have the highest entry tariff of any UK university.

Our new and returning students will, from September onwards, enjoy an in-person pedagogical experience, although our plans are necessarily resilient to any unexpected changes. Preparations for the new semester include a Main Library refurbishment project that is taking place throughout the summer and which will make the building fit for purpose for the incoming cohort, and the further development of digital resources – capitalising upon knowledge gained during the Covid era. Our returning student population will be roughly the same size as that which we have accommodated this academic year – giving us a total of circa 10,500 students. As previously reported, that’s an unexpectedly large cohort above our long-term goal of 10,000 students, forced upon us by last-minute Governmental changes to the production of school-leaver outcomes during the pandemic. A student intake strategy over the next five years will reduce that population to 10,000, and we are concentrating substantial energy on accommodating the increased cohort – which we successfully navigated this academic year – in the meantime. Our halls of residence continue to house a significant proportion of the student body, and we are proactively providing for students who prefer to live in Dundee whilst sustaining dialogue with private providers in St Andrews.

***Diverse***

The Diverse St Andrews theme establishes our intention to develop an environment in which these students, and our staff and people more broadly, can reach their fullest potential irrespective of their background – and I am pleased to report two key updates to progress this. The first is the secondment of Professor Catherine O’Leary from the School of Modern Languages to lead the University’s application for a renewed institutional Athena Swan award – the national charter programme coordinated by AdvanceHE which is recognised as best practice for redressing gender inequalities within the academy. The second is the appointment of Dr Akira O’Connor from the School of Psychology and Neuroscience to lead the preparations for our first submission to attain Race Equality Charter status – a process which will take approximately 18 months.

Dr O’Connor’s efforts are supported by the completion of a commissioned external review of the University’s practice and approach concerning race and ethnicity by SUMS Consulting. An Implementation Action Plan has been drafted in response to its outcomes by Dr O’Connor with the Vice-Principal (Governance) and our Head of EDI, Sukhi Bains. This will be one of the first areas of focus for Dr Rebekah Widdowfield, our new Vice-Principal for People and Diversity.

I continue to sponsor the Diverse St Andrews theme, although I will be sharing that responsibility with Rebekah now that she has started and her expertise and exclusive commitment to this new portfolio are assured to reinvigorate our efforts. These developments synergise with our broader sectoral leadership on diversity and inclusion, including my various national roles – the latest of which is my appointment as Convener for Universities Scotland, which I will assume on the 1 August – and which ensure we stay at the fore of best practice and positive change.

***Global***

The principles of the Diverse theme carry through into the Global St Andrews pillar and have informed our response to the war in Ukraine – coordinated primarily by the Senior Vice-Principal and Vice-Principal for International Strategy and External Relations, Professor Brad MacKay, and the Vice-Principal for Education, Professor Clare Peddie. We gained University of Sanctuary status in 2019, and the interventions which enabled that accreditation have held us in good stead to welcome and support displaced scholars. Much of this work has taken place in partnership with CARA, the Council for At-Risk Academics, although we have independent workstreams with Fife Council to support refugees who have been displaced by the war, building upon a connection established last year following the arrival of Syrian and Afghan refugees in Fife.

Ukrainian and Russian staff and students at our University have been directly impacted and are thus receiving direct support. A Development appeal launched to raise funds for affected students has reached over £150,000 – for which we are deeply grateful, and all those affected have received extensive pastoral and logistical help. These students are receiving specially tailored career advice and have access to a specially-crafted internship scheme created with UBS to support Ukrainian students, and the University will provide free accommodation for Ukrainian students, should they require it, over the summer and into the new academic year. We are actively exploring twinning opportunities with Ukrainian institutions, and just yesterday the Principal’s Office approved the principles of a formal cooperative agreement to be progressed with the National University of Ostroh Academy in Western Ukraine, with provisions ranging from study abroad opportunities and collaborative research programmes to the provision of emergency supplies and English-language instruction. We also continue to exercise any possible influence we have as an international institution to encourage a swift end to this evolving conflict.

The tragedy in Ukraine and its manifestations have been balanced against the burgeoning of other international relationships, and I led a delegation of Principal’s Office members and academic staff to the University of Bonn on 23 and 24 May, returning a visit to St Andrews by Bonn’s leadership team in October 2019. Bonn confirmed at the end of the visit that we are their most important strategic partner and, as one of Germany’s most successful Universities of Excellence, this relationship is of great significance for us. I also led a visit to the US in April, our first post-pandemic, during which I met with supporters and alumni in New York, and hosted supporters at the Masters tournament in Augusta. Later in the semester in June, we welcomed the President of the College of William and Mary, Professor Katherine Rowe, with whom we run the innovative BA International Honours Programme, and she came along with William & Mary’s Board members, to St Andrews for a two-day visit. New international partnerships are always in gestation, and I am pleased also to recognise the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indian Institute of Technology – one of India’s leading research institutions - in December.

Global St Andrews recognises that the expertise based here attracts international attention and generates partnerships for mutual benefit, and that has been demonstrated on several occasions this semester. In May, the University of the Arctic network hosted its annual conference in St Andrews – bringing together a diverse group of researchers exploring the development of multidisciplinary solutions for challenges in the Arctic. A showcase of St Andrews research included presentations on marine science, environmental change, and geological exploration, and Mairi McAllan MSP, Minister for the Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform, attended the conference dinner hosted by the Deputy Principal in Lower College Hall. Meanwhile, The Brain Health and Dementia Life Sciences Summit for 2022 was also hosted in St Andrews this May by Professor Frank Gunn-Moore, Head of the School of Biology, and attracted similarly high-profile academics and public figures from Scotland and further afield. At the beginning of last month, we transplanted these skills to the capital when the Chancellor generously hosted an event celebrating our Institute of Legal and Constitutional Research at the House of Lords, at which alumni, legal professionals, parliamentarians, and members of the UK Supreme Court were invited to engage with the Institute and its research.

These are just a few examples of the myriad conferences and events taking place at any one time, and which ensure the transmission of our skills and research to every country on the planet. The utility of University expertise has been powerfully demonstrated through the establishment of the Scottish Council on Global Affairs – a joint venture between the universities of St Andrews, Glasgow, and Edinburgh with support from both the Scottish and UK Governments, and which was launched at a reception at Edinburgh Castle hosted by the First Minister in April.

***Entrepreneurial***

Of increasing international attention is our Eden Campus, which provides the infrastructure and resources required to take our Entrepreneurial St Andrews theme to the next level – and about which I have spoken previously. The work at the Eden Campus continues to occur under the supervision of StAAR, or St Andrews Applied Research, the goals of which are represented by its four key workstreams: portfolio management aimed at advancing entrepreneurial quality and performance; cross-community skills development programmes to generate enterprise activities amongst students and staff; awareness-raising of the StAAR brand and its capabilities across the community; and the consolidation and pursuit of external relationships with industry. In addition to being located at the Eden Campus, StAAR is beginning to create a digital access point to share information on its services, and a virtual front door will launch later in the summer.

The entrepreneurial provision for students and staff based at the Campus increases daily. Through our Entrepreneurship Centre, the University’s Fast Start courses targeted at enhancing entrepreneurial skills have met with immediate popularity, and a Dragons’ Den-style pitching event saw 13 community ideas supported with entrepreneurship grants. Meanwhile, the Associate Dean for Education is leading work to embed entrepreneurial education within the curriculum more broadly, and later this summer we will open the first Makers Space at Eden Campus – a fully-resourced space which will enable innovators to develop devices with the support of skilled technical assistance – available to both students and staff. We have had some substantial success stories in this general field already: last year, Professor Rebecca Goss of our School of Chemistry won the AccelerateHer Award for her spinout company, X-Genix, which increases the efficiency and sustainability of pharmaceutical manufacturing. X-Genix performed equally well as a finalist at the Scottish Converge Challenge 2021 alongside Lightwater Sensors, another spinout founded by Dr Ross Gillanders in our School of Physics and Astronomy. Meanwhile, Professor John Irvine of our School of Chemistry continues as a world leader in the development of hydrogen fuels and their implementation, with his hydrogen train project being showcased at COP26 last November. Each of these researchers is benefitting from the facilities and expertise that are concentrated at the Campus, and they, in turn, contribute their own experience and guidance to aspiring innovators.

Visitors to the Campus this semester have included the new CEO of Scottish Enterprise, Adrian Gillespie, in January, as well as Marco Mensink, Director General of the European Chemical Industry Council. Later in the semester, I welcomed Kate Forbes MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, to the Campus, where amongst other activities she formally switched on the Solar PV renewable energy facility – the latest renewable energy source on the site, and one with a transformative effect on our ever-declining institutional reliance upon fossil fuels.

***Conclusion***

In conclusion, I spoke about Sustainability at length at our previous General Council meeting, but let me reaffirm that it will continuously underscore every decision we make via its central position in our Strategy. We are currently undertaking a refresh of the University Strategy to cover the period 2022 to 2027, which we will publish in autumn of this year with an amendment to our existing tenets: the subsumption of the Global St Andrews theme into the World-Leading St Andrews theme, and the introduction of two new themes: Sustainable St Andrews, and Digital St Andrews. The reorganisation of the Principal’s Office will provide us with the critical mass needed to take our existing themes to the next level and to put our new ones into practice.

What I hope has come through from what I’ve been saying is the scale of our ambition and the pipeline of talented leaders and researchers that we have amassed to deliver on that – for the benefit of our institution and its people, but also our town, county, and country. As a nationally leading University, a pioneer in sustainability matters, a focal point for private and public investment, and an energised centre for positive change, we all stand to benefit from the plans we are laying for the future.