

Autumn Meeting of the General Council: Saturday 26 November 2022

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

Introduction

Good morning everyone. My last update to the General Council was delivered during the summer meeting on 2 July. Since then, we have commenced the Martinmas semester with a successful return to full in-person teaching and it is wonderful to see St Andrews full of such life and vibrancy. The after-effects of the pandemic do, of course, still occasionally make themselves felt within our institution, and the profoundly serious issues of the war in Europe and the cost of living crisis mean that we operate within unsettled times. However, the last few years have shown that St Andrews is an incredibly resilient institution, and that we can change, adapt and research our way out of even the most testing of times.

When I spoke to you in July, I mentioned that we had just undertaken a very busy and nearly month-long graduation season in the newly-renovated Younger Hall, including our very special golf graduation to mark the 150th Open. We are now looking forward to making use of this outstanding building again next week, to host our winter graduation days on 29 and 30 November during which I will bestow degrees on 1171 students from 78 countries. Graduation is an immensely special time of year that we await with as much enthusiasm as the graduands themselves, and my colleagues and I take great pleasure in watching our students collect the degrees for which they have worked so hard and seeing them celebrate with their families and friends.

I have many positive developments to update you on today. However, it would be remiss of me not to mention the sombre time which followed the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September. In recognition of our longest-reigning British monarch, St Andrews quietened to mark the significance of the loss, and the University initiated a formal mourning protocol as a mark of respect. Flags on University buildings were half masted, the maces were hooded with black cloth and book of condolence for the community was opened at College Gate. I wrote to His Majesty The King and our alumni, now Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales, on behalf of the University to express our condolences and have received appreciative acknowledgement.

Further to this, I would like to let you know that, this afternoon at 2pm in St Salvator's Chapel, the University is holding a Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. The service will allow the University community to gather to reflect on the Queen's life of service and commitment. All are welcome regardless of faith or philosophy of life. If you cannot attend, the service will also be livestreamed and you can find the link on the University Chaplaincy's webpage. I do hope you can join us to give thanks for the life of the Queen.

Notwithstanding this note of solemnity, the core of my address today will be an update on current activities under the pillars of our refreshed University Strategy for 2022-2027 which, I am pleased to report, the University Court signed off during its October meeting. The Strategy is the essential outline of our trajectory and mission, and of the principles which guide key decision making and our constant pursuit of excellence.

There is first, however, a series of other developments and successes that I wish formally to acknowledge, including our recent accomplishment within the UK's key league tables. We are, by now, accustomed to performing superlatively within the main university domestic league tables; however, even by our standards these recent months have brought exceptional recognition. In July, we learned that, once again, St Andrews is top in the UK for student academic experience according to the National Student Survey 2022, the UK's authoritative national student-feedback mechanism. This represents the fourteenth time in the past sixteen years that we have been at the very top for student experience so the message is abundantly clear - we consistently offer one of the very best student environments in the country.

This success was followed by two excellent rankings in September - *The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide* named us as their Scottish University of the Year 2023 and, closely following this, we received the fantastic news that *The Guardian University Guide 2023* has ranked us as number one in the UK. This is now the second time that we have ranked ahead of Oxford and Cambridge in a UK ranking, something no other university has ever achieved. In fact, *The Guardian* has updated the traditional UK reference to 'Oxbridge' and coined a new term 'Stoxbridge' to describe what it says may be the new world order in UK university rankings. This achievement amply demonstrates the level of excellence at which we are currently operating.

I updated you in July with news of a reorganisation within the Principal's Office, my senior leadership team. Since then there have been further developments within the team, and a few further changes. We were pleased to welcome Professor Catherine O'Leary who has been appointed as Assistant Vice-Principal, Dean of Arts and Divinity, having taken over responsibility for this position from Professor Paul Hibbert at the start of September. Additionally, the Deputy Principal and Master of the United College, Professor Lorna Milne, will step down in January 2023. As many

of you know, Lorna has been an incredibly successful Master and I, and very many others, will miss her humour, vision, and wise counsel. Lorna will be taking a period of research leave when she demits office next year, and she has our every good wish for her return to purely scholarly pursuits.

Following Lorna's departure, her dual roles of Deputy Principal and Master will be taken on by colleagues from the Principal's Office. Professor Brad Mackay, currently Vice-Principal (International Strategy and External Relations) and Senior Vice-Principal, will serve as Deputy Principal. Professor Ineke de Moortel, currently Assistant Vice-Principal Dean of Science, will become Master of the United College. Professor MacKay and Professor de Moortel are two incredibly capable professionals, so it is a great pleasure to work with them closely as part of my senior leadership team.

As I mentioned earlier, whilst the new Academic Year has begun in a pre-pandemic way, continued turbulence in economic and political arenas, both at home and abroad, makes these unsettled times indeed. It appears that the 'new normal' will be characterised by surprises and uncertainties. However, it is in times such as these where St Andrews can provide vital leadership. We have the competency to engage and influence better outcomes, we also have the resilience to lead on the adaptations that will be needed. I will now share examples of how we are engaging with this work under the Strategy's pillars.

World-leading St Andrews

World-leading St Andrews expresses our commitment to strengthening our international excellence and impact. One of the key ways in which we accomplish this is through our partnerships with leading international institutions. As a recent example of this: on 10 and 11 October, we hosted a delegation led by my opposite number, Rector Michael Hoch, from one of our key partners – the University of Bonn in Germany. The visit provided an opportunity to plan teaching and research collaboration opportunities as well as an ambitious and novel plan for joint appointments, and further deepened this vital link with one of our most important European partners.

'World-leading' for St Andrews means offering solidarity to our international partners and friends during difficult times. As I mentioned in my last update, St Andrews has been supporting students and staff impacted by the war in Ukraine, and further to this, it was our pleasure to host Lesia Vasylenko in St Andrews on 7 October. Lesia is a Ukrainian lawyer and politician who sent a message to our community in advance of our demonstration of solidarity with Ukraine in March 2022, and the Ukrainian flag was flown in her honour during her visit. The twinning partnership with Ostroh Academy, a leading research university in Ukraine, is also progressing well.

As a further sign of our solidarity with our international colleagues, over 300 students and staff took part in a vigil for Iran on 13 October in order to demonstrate our community's support for women, students, and protesters facing violence and oppression in that country. St Andrews was the first university in the UK to respond to the Iranian crisis in this way, and we have been contacted by several UK universities since asking for guidance on how we brought students and staff together for this important solidarity event.

We must match world-leading talent with world-leading facilities and resources, and it is in that context that I want again to acknowledge the New College project. Demolition work is now well underway on the old Madras College site and, following an exhaustive interview process, we are in the final stages of appointing an architect and design team who we are confident can realise our ambitions for this building – to transform how we inspire, teach, and train our students in the social sciences. In fundraising terms, we have already raised £12 million towards our goal for this project of £100m from supporters who want to join us on this exciting journey, prior even to the architecture plans being commissioned.

The transformative impact of philanthropy within our capital projects was particularly underlined during a visit to St Andrews by Lord Laidlaw of Rothiemay on 28 and 29 September. During his visit, Lord Laidlaw toured the Music Centre, which carries his name, for the first time and, while there, enjoyed a concert given by our talented student performers. He also had the opportunity to meet with the Laidlaw Scholars at the Music Centre and hear first-hand about the impact his support has made on their lives.

Our staff and students continue to live up to the 'world-leading' theme within the University Strategy. Andrew Peacock, Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic History at the School of History, and Kathryn Rudy, Professor in the School of Art History, were elected as Fellows of the British Academy. These appointments entitle Professor Peacock and Professor Rudy to the honorific title, Bishop Wardlaw Professor, and they will both be formally appointed as such during next week's graduation ceremonies.

We are incredibly proud of the extensive events and speaker series we host here at the University, and view these public events as yet another way of expressing our commitment to being world-leading in thought and action. We recently inaugurated a new lecture series, named in honour of the much-missed giant of intellectual history Donald Winch. The inaugural Winch Lecture was held on 11 October and was delivered by Stefan Collini FBA, leading literary critic and Emeritus Professor of Intellectual History and English Literature at the University of Cambridge.

Our students have fully returned to their activities both in and outside of the classroom, and Saint Sport continue to do an excellent job keeping our community fit and healthy. Amongst many sporting achievements, Saints Golf performance scholar Megan Ashley will join the Scottish Golf Ladies High Performance squad for the 2022-2023 season. And, of course, no account of our successes or student life this semester is complete without recognising our victory in the Scottish Varsity men's rugby match. Our team brought the trophy home after winning 24–14 at Peffermill Playing Fields, Edinburgh, on 24 September.

Some of you may be aware that the University has been consulting our students, staff, and local community closely on the future of the old 400-metre running track at University Park. The current track is over 25 years old and well beyond its accepted lifespan. It was closed following a health and safety inspection earlier this year after it developed a number of holes and damage to its surface.

Industry experts have confirmed that it is not possible to patch or repair the track to acceptable safety standards. The terms of the original Synthetic Sports grant, which helped fund the installation of the track in 1996, expired seven years ago. It is also not possible to replace the track in situ as its proximity to a busy rugby and football pitch mean increased collision risks when track and pitch are in use simultaneously.

We have, however, listened very closely to concerns about the loss of a facility which, it has been claimed, was used casually by many people, and has been especially important to women for whom it offered a safe, well lit place to run in the evenings.

In response, and subject to planning approval from Fife Council, we will be funding and installing a 500-metre, floodlit, all-weather running trail at University Park. This will be free to use for students, staff and members of our local community. We also stand ready to work with Fife Council and Scottish Athletics, the bodies with primary responsibility and specific budget for public sports facilities in Fife, to advocate for a fit for purpose track and field facility in North East Fife offering all year-round access that best serves the community.

With attainments of the sorts I have been mentioning, it is no surprise that St Andrews continues to be a highly desirable place to study. This is reflected in the September 2022 entry cycle which has again gone well, with our overall student population for 2022-23 sitting at roughly the same as we accommodated last year – circa 10,500 students. As mentioned during my last address, that's an unexpectedly large cohort above our long-term goal of 10,000 students, caused by SQA and A Level results that continue to be atypical in light of the issues caused by the pandemic. A student intake strategy over the next five years will reduce that population to 10,000 and, at the beginning of this semester, we worked hard to address the concerns expressed by some of our students about the lack of private sector accommodation in St Andrews,

an issue impacting many universities in the UK. We moved early to take a dedicated student residence in Dundee when the private sector trends became evident earlier this year, and we are lobbying at local and national government level to influence the policies which are acting on the supply of private sector housing.

Diverse St Andrews

Our next theme, Diverse St Andrews, speaks to how we will foster an inclusive, diverse culture within our University community. It continues to underpin every area of our operation, and our work is starting to see results with 26.8% of our student population now declaring themselves to be of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic origin compared with 24.3% last year.

Our new Vice-Principal for People and Diversity, Dr Rebekah Widdowfield, is currently bringing the skills and background to deliver our bold ambitions within this stream of work, including the University's applications for the Race Equality Charter and to achieve silver Athena Swan status, evidence-based initiatives working to advance race and gender equality within higher education.

I continue to lead on gender equality through my sponsorship of the Elizabeth Garrett Mentoring Programme, which has now commenced its sixth cycle supporting the development of female academic leaders at our University. And with around half of the Principal's Office senior team now women, these efforts to foster female excellence are clearly having an impact.

Colleagues in the University's Development office will also soon launch our new Kaleidoscope Alumni Network, which celebrates the ethnic and cultural diversity of St Andrews alumni around the world. The opening event of this Network will be held in the Laidlaw Music Centre from 10am on Monday 28 November, an event to which you are all welcome to attend. If you would like to find out more about the launch programme of events or about the network, Dr Catherine Dunford, our Alumni Relations and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Engagement Coordinator, is with us today and would be happy to talk to you after the meeting.

Entrepreneurial St Andrews

Entrepreneurial St Andrews aims to promote an entrepreneurial culture across the whole University and looks to apply our world-leading research to solve key societal challenges. On 3 October, at the start of this year's Enterprise Week, I officially opened the Entrepreneurship Centre at the Eden Campus. The Centre provides the tools, contacts, and confidence to enable students, staff and indeed the wider community to explore the full entrepreneurial journey, realise commercial potential and develop

successful, scalable and sustainable business start-ups and spin-outs. Their skills have already been demonstrated by the successful graduation of just under 130 students and staff since the Centre first opened its doors in September 2021.

On 8 September, Dr Gosia Mitka, the Associate Dean Education (Arts and Divinity), and Dr Shruti Narayanswamy, our Entrepreneurial Education Developer at the Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development, won prizes at the 2022 National Enterprise Educator Awards, organised by Enterprise Educators UK, which recognise excellence within enterprise and entrepreneurship education in UK higher and further education. Dr Gosia Mitka won in the 'Pioneer in Enterprise Education' category and Dr Shruti Narayanswamy won the 'Rising Star in Enterprise Education' category.

In August, the Royal Academy of Engineering awarded one of its five prestigious Young Engineer of the Year prizes to Dr Robert Hammond, Lecturer in Infection and Global Health at the School of Medicine, in recognition of his work on a tool which rapidly identifies which antibiotics are effective against infections. Robert's work has led to the formation of a spin-out company which aims to transform care and potentially change the course of antimicrobial resistance by reducing the use of inappropriate antibiotics.

We were also delighted to see one of our University spin-out companies named the overall winner of Converge Challenge, Scotland's leading company creation programme for the university sector. Professor Rebecca Goss was named the overall winner for her biotech start-up X-Genix, taking home £69,000 in equity-free cash and in-kind business support. Lightwater Sensors, another University spin-out company led by Dr Ross Gillanders from the School of Physics and Astronomy, was also successful in reaching the final of Converge Challenge.

Sustainable St Andrews

The activities at the Eden Campus are highly relevant for our new theme of Sustainable St Andrews - a new theme but one where we are drawing on a firm base of meaningful activity. As many of you are aware, the University's vision is to be net zero by 2035, ten years ahead of the Scottish Government's own net zero ambitions. We aim to do this both through practical changes within our Estate, such as our new solar array which opened in May 2022, and by also contributing to the vital research necessary to tackle the climate emergency. Our new Dry Lab facility, a centre for advanced materials chemistry in use in battery technologies, will also open within the next few months on the Eden Campus. This will be the only publicly available facility of its kind in Scotland.

The final of the St Andrews Prize for the Environment was held on 22 November, taking place in person for the first time since 2019. This year's winner of the US\$100,000 prize was *Misión Tiburón*, a community-based project to protect and restore blue carbon sinks in the Hammerhead Shark Sanctuary in Costa Rica. *Misión Tiburón* was selected by a global panel of experts representing conservation, sustainable development, engineering, economics, and the University of St Andrews.

Thanks to the generosity of our alumni community, and the wider circle of supporters and benefactors, the University has now assumed full responsibility for the funding and the running of the Prize. We heard about the impact this Prize can have directly from the 2021 winner of the Prize – Snowchange Cooperative – a network of indigenous and local traditional communities working on cultural, environmental and science issues in northern Finland. The Cooperative was represented at the event by their President, Tero Mustonen, who delivered an update on the progress that the US\$100,000 prize had allowed them to achieve. He noted that the funds had contributed to the acquisition of 108 hectares of preserved and recovering forest area habitats in the North Boreal region, which ties in perfectly with our activities within the St Andrews Forest initiative. In fact, some of the trees in that ancient forest are around 600 years old, making them as old as our University.

Digital St Andrews

Finally, we complete our suite of themes with Digital St Andrews, which aims to create the digital identity, culture, and capacity to enable us to seize the opportunities which digital transformation can bring to our activities and ways of thinking.

We are currently investing heavily in digital education and will soon launch a suite of innovative digital-only programmes, including an MSc in Data Science from the School of Computer Science, and an MSc in Data Literacy for Social and Environmental Justice from the School of Geography and Sustainable Development. These programmes will be flexible, personalised and highly customisable for the needs of our students by way of a focus on adaptive learning. They are not just intended to transform our digital reach and impact, but will also act as a leading revenue stream for the University and become yet another way that St Andrews graduates stand out from the crowd in terms of employability.

We are also making use of experiences gained during the pandemic to enhance our approach to teaching and assessment, with many schools finding innovative digital and non-digital ways of designing assessments. Professor Clare Peddie will speak to this topic in more depth following my remarks.

Social Responsibility

As you can appreciate, there is plenty activity taking place within the five pillars of the University Strategy. However, the Strategy continues to be underscored by a commitment to social responsibility. This is something that is particularly relevant during the challenging times in which we find ourselves. On 4 November, I issued a joint message in partnership with the St Andrews Students' Association President Juan Pablo Rodríguez, and Students' Association Director of Wellbeing and Equality Emma Craig, to outline a package of measures designed to ameliorate the effects of the cost of living crisis on our community. These measures include discounting all bus travel for St Andrews students and staff across central Scotland by 75%. This pioneering move will of course help our staff and students with the cost of living, as well as also discouraging car use in town, reducing our carbon footprint and helping us to reach our aims within the Sustainable St Andrews pillar of the Strategy.

Other initiatives include providing discounts on food within the University's cafés, a boost to the amount of money available in this year's student discretionary funds to over £1.5 million, and specific financial support for postgraduate students. A £500 cost of living payment was also made to all core salaried staff in September and we are taking steps to ensure that all University buildings are open to those students and staff who may need communal warm spaces. The University is proud to be taking steps to support our community during these challenging times, and we know it is our duty to work together for the common good.

Before I finish my remarks today, I would like to mention a few upcoming events that we hope you will consider joining. For those who might be in London on Wednesday 7 December, we will be hosting our annual London Alumni Carol Service in St Columba's Church in Pont Street, and the St Andrews Alumni Carol Service will take place the following week on Wednesday 14 December in St Salvator's Chapel.

Looking further ahead you may want to mark your calendars for 16 to 18 June 2023 when the next General Council meeting will coincide with the Alumni Weekend. This weekend will include a range of events and activities for our alumni, particularly noting our friendly golf tournament, The Arnold Palmer Invitational, as well as the After Many Days Reunion Weekend.

Thank you all so much for your attention today. I am, as ever, happy to respond to any questions or comments.