

**MINUTE OF THE STATUTORY HALF-YEARLY MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2013 at 18:30 IN PARLIAMENT HALL, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS**

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor Louise Richardson, FRSE, was in the Chair and welcomed 54 members to the meeting. The Chancellor's apologies were noted.

1. Minute of the last Ordinary Half-Yearly General Council Meeting held on 29 June 2013

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. General Council Review

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor directed members to the Review Group paper printed in the Billet. The paper reported that there were seven points of agreement, relating to the importance of the statutory functions of the General Council and how these functions were performed. However there was no consensus on the following two points. Firstly should the primary channel for distribution of information from Court to the General Council be the elected Assessors or the Business Committee, and secondly, should the responsibility for gathering the views of the General Council be the Assessors or the General Council Business Committee.

The Principal reiterated comments from earlier meetings that the University Court had a responsibility to enhance the efficiency and husband the resources of all aspects of the University. The Court was also conscious of the requirement to adapt processes to the changing times and to take advantage of technological developments. This had led to Court and Senate Efficiency Reviews, which in turn had resulted in a reduction in the number of Court and Senate Committees and associated procedures. There was also an ongoing review of the governance of the Students' Association.

The Principal provided members with information about the composition of the University Court and the General Council Business Committee. Court had a membership of 24, including the Rector, Principal and Deputy Principal, eight lay members, student members and a number of Assessors including Senate Assessors, General Council Assessors, Fife Council Assessor, and others. These Assessors were elected or appointed by their constituents and then served as trustees of the University. In this way the General Council Assessors performed in the same way as, for example, the Senate Assessors, bringing the perspectives of their constituents to Court and advancing the best interests of the University. The Business Committee comprised 18 members including the Principal, the Chancellor's Assessor, two General Council Assessors elected by the General Council, two co-opted alumni Court members and 12 ordinary members also elected by the General Council. The Principal recorded her thanks to the individuals who had served on the Business Committee and reiterated that it was appreciated that members served on the Committee with the best interests of the University in mind and seeking only to help the institution. However there was a view that this committee was an unduly large and costly mechanism and the University, as a publicly funded body, had to look closely at how it applied its resources. It was disappointing to note the number of resignations (five in the past two years), the low attendance at Business Committee meetings (average of 57%) and the small turnout out in elections. The level of contact with the Business Committee from Council members was also low with only four items of business received from members for discussion at the General Council meetings since 2000 and none of these issues came through the Business Committee. These factors suggested that there could be better ways of engaging with the General Council membership and had led to the decision that Court would cease funding the Business Committee. Statistics were presented relating to the high number of members opening the Assessors' e-bulletins which demonstrated the interest among Council members in receiving news in this format (over 6,000 members opened each e-bulletin compared to 100 or so who opened the email about the General Council meeting).

The Principal reported that the University had a very active alumni body which was important to the success of the institution. Over the last year c. 5,000 alumni had attended around 150 alumni events and an estimated 15,000 alumni independently contacted the Development Office on an annual basis (this figure did not include the daily emails and letters received by the Principal, and Schools and Units around

the University). Many of these alumni offered their time and support for a range of initiatives. This desire to provide direct help was welcomed by the University and demonstrated how alumni, staff and students could work together to mutual advantage through activities such as careers mentoring programmes and supporting town/gown events and initiatives.

The Principal opened the subject of the Review to the floor.

Mr Graham Wynd, one of the Review Group's Business Committee members, restated the background to the Review by outlining the five statutory duties of the General Council (conducting Chancellor and General Council Assessors' elections, reviewing new Ordinances and Resolutions, holding biannual General Council meetings and making representations to and from the University and the General Council membership). Mr Wynd commented that in some cases these representations might include challenging the University Executive and, in the view of ordinary elected members on the Business Committee, it was difficult to see how the independence of the General Council could be preserved if representation was left entirely to the two General Council Assessors. The ordinary elected members did not believe there was duplication between the Business Committee and the Development Office. However Mr Wynd commented that the ordinary elected members were in agreement that the Business Committee had not worked perfectly and it needed to improve, which is why they had set up their own review in 2008 which was still in progress.

There was a discussion about the cost of administering the General Council and whether or not the University Court would reconsider its decision about funding the Business Committee. The Clerk confirmed the figure was calculated at c. £41k to service the Business Committee. This figure included an allowance for the Clerk's time, a contribution to the cost of database staff and infrastructure as well as the cost of administrative staff, senior University personnel to attend and report at Business Committee meetings and the cost of running the annual elections. In response to questions from the floor, the Principal confirmed that support of the statutory functions of the General Council was not being withdrawn and there was no attempt to change these statutory functions.

Mrs Jane Watkinson referred to a paper from the ordinary elected members which had been circulated at the start of meeting. The paper reiterated the Committee members' concerns about the withdrawal of funding for the Business Committee and the need for an independent voice for the General Council members to ensure the statutory functions of the Council could be adequately fulfilled in the absence of a Business Committee or a suitable alternative. If the Business Committee funding issue could not be reversed, the paper proposed the formation of a smaller supported business advisory group, to act on behalf of the General Council in the overseeing of the election of the Chancellor and Assessors, the scrutiny of draft Ordinances and Resolutions, the arrangement of the two annual meetings, and receipt of comments and questions from the membership. The paper requested that the General Council, through its Business Committee, would seek to present to Court its case for the retention of a supported advisory group to manage its affairs.

Mr Nigel Christie, one of the two General Council Assessors to the University Court on the Review Group, addressed members, providing further background to the Review as outlined in the Review paper.

Mr Christie reiterated that it was important to draw a distinction between the statutory functions and the communication function. The Review Group members were in agreement about the statutory functions and that these would not be amended. The Group also agreed that the communications mandate of the General Council was probably the most important function that the General Council performed, or should be performing, and the half-yearly plenary meetings were primarily to provide a vehicle for fulfilling this mandate. It therefore followed that the effectiveness of the General Council was closely related to the effectiveness of its communication. The Assessors wished to embrace the effective use of modern communications technology, avoid duplication and consolidate the flow of information from the University to graduates and the wider alumni body in an acceptable format for the recipients. Improving the communication with graduates would help to ensure that the General Council met the needs of their primary constituency i.e. the 40,000+ General Council members.

Mr Christie concluded by confirming as others had reported that there was disagreement around the role and future of the Business Committee and about whether the primary channel for the distribution of information about the University (particularly in relation to issues arising at Court) with the General Council membership should be the elected Assessors (e.g. through the recently introduced e-bulletins and other initiatives) or should it be through the elected and *ex-officio* members of the Business Committee. In the same vein, should the primary agents for the collection of views from the General Council membership be the General Council Assessors or should it be the Business Committee?

Members discussed this issue at length raising further points about the importance of representation of General Council members; how the University Court lay members are identified; return on the University's investment in terms of General Council and Business Committee activities; willingness of members to use their skills and professional experience to benefit the University; and appreciation by the University of the time and effort given by the Business Committee members.

Finally, the Vice-Principal (Governance) addressed members and summed up the position. It was noted that the question of what was the most appropriate channel for communication to and from General Council members remained unresolved. Moving onto the structure of the Business Committee and taking into account the suggestion in the paper prepared by the ordinary elected members of the Business Committee that a smaller advisory group be formed, the Vice-Principal proposed that the existing three-member Sub-Committee on Ordinances and Resolutions should be reconstituted. The proposal was that this Group would have the remit of (i) commenting on University Ordinances and Resolutions, (ii) liaising with the Registrar and Clerk on arrangements for General Council and Chancellor elections and (iii) making recommendations to the General Council and University Court concerning venues and dates for the twice-yearly statutory meetings of General Council. It was proposed that the three members of this group, which could be called the General Council Business Advisory Group, would be nominated at the June General Council meeting each year.

The Acting Convener of the Business Committee did not believe that it was possible to take a decision on this proposal without further consideration outside of this meeting. There was no further discussion about the proposal and no formal motions were presented to members. The matter would continue to be considered and discussed.

It was noted that the two motions carried forward from the June General Council meeting had been withdrawn before this meeting.

3a. Business Committee Report

The Acting Convener, Mrs Jane Watkinson, invited members to note the full report of the Business Committee meeting held on 19 October 2013, which was printed in the Billet. In particular Mrs Watkinson highlighted that the Sub-Committee on Ordinances and Resolution had received Resolution 2013 No.1 (creation of a new undergraduate Honours degree pathway in the School of Biology) and Resolution 2013 No.2 (creation of a number of new Chairs). The Sub-Committee had no comments.

3b. The subject of Business Committee resources had been discussed under the Review heading.

3c. Membership 2013-2014

The Acting Convener asked members to note the membership of the Business Committee which was printed in the Billet, noting the resignation of Mr Kevin Grainger in September 2013.

4. General Council Assessor Election Intimation

The Clerk intimated that Mr Ewan Brown would demit office as General Council Assessor to University Court on 31 July 2014. Members were asked to note that nomination forms for the resulting vacancy would be available from 2 December, to be returned not later than 31 January 2014. In the event of there being more than one nomination an election would be held by an online ballot in March 2014. Provision would be made for members to vote by post on request to the General Council Office. Further details would be intimated to General Council Members in early 2014.

5. Appointment of Registrar and Clerk to the General Council

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor intimated that the University Court's Governance & Nominations Committee had agreed upon the nomination of Mr Des McSweeney, Vice-Principal (External Relations), as Registrar to the General Council, following the recent retirement of Mr Stephen Magee. The intention was for the Registrar position to be henceforth held with the office of Clerk to the General Council, as permitted by Ordinance No.96 ('General Council: Membership, Registration and Meetings') and for these positions to be held *ex officio* with the role of Vice-Principal (External Relations). There were no objections or comments from the members and this recommendation was therefore endorsed.

6. University Address by Professor Peter Clark, Vice-Principal

The Vice-Principal, Professor Peter Clark reported that the University had enjoyed a remarkable year with one of the highlights being the 600th Anniversary Academic celebrations in September. Honorary degrees were awarded to 17 of the greatest minds of this generation including Sir Tim Berners-Lee, Dr Jane Goodall, Professor Mary Beard and former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The standing of the University and the importance of this milestone was further demonstrated by the 67th Secretary of State of the USA, Hilary Clinton, giving the Graduation Address in front of her fellow distinguished honorees, eminent academics from across the world, University staff and students.

Moving onto academic research, Professor Clark reported that the University had completed the submission to the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). This return included 83% of academic staff which highlighted the international standard of research being undertaken at St Andrews. In 2008 the University was ranked fourteenth in the overall standings (up from nineteenth in 2001). The new REF system looked at the concept of 'impact' and only research of international significance would be funded. Although the University was as strong as it had ever been the changes to the research assessment and the consequent funding presented a serious challenge. The University's strength was its ability to undertake interdisciplinary work more effectively due to its small size and flexibility and if St Andrews concentrated on its core business it would continue to be successful.

The student population remained steady at around 7,500 undergraduate and postgraduate students (39% home, 28% rest of UK and 33% overseas). There were 834 postgraduate research students (below 11%). One of the University's key aims was to move into the top 50 universities in the world and to do this the number of PGR students would have to grow to 20% of the total student body. In terms of growing PhD students it was essential that the University's strategy for beyond the 600th Anniversary took into account the fine balance between the intimacy provided by working in a relatively small academic community and matching larger institutions operating on a far larger scale.

Professor Clark concluded by reiterating that there were challenges ahead to maintain the institution's competitiveness and to compete with the growth of universities, particularly in Asia and in the sciences. However, the University has never been in such a strong position to meet the various demands with a dedicated staff, committed students and an engaged alumni body.

Questions from members covered topics including the development of online courses (*Schools of Divinity and International Relations already offer some online courses but this type of teaching was carefully managed and would only be offered where appropriate*) and the effect on the University's reputation of the publicity surrounding Raison Weekend (*Raison Weekend is not a University event but a review would be held and action taken as required*).

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor thanked the Vice-Principal for outlining the changes to the REF exercise and for taking questions from the members.

7. Understanding Terrorism: The Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence.

Professor Richard English, Wardlaw Professor of Politics in the School of International Relations and Director of the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (HCSTPV), provided an insight into the research and activities undertaken by staff and students in HCSTPV. He also posed a number of challenging

questions about terrorism in the modern world and how states and societies respond to terrorists and terrorist activity.

Professor English provided background to the Centre, established in 1994 and the oldest university centre for the study of terrorism in Europe and one of the oldest in the world. The Centre had an interdisciplinary approach with scholars from the fields of history, psychology, literature, theology, philosophy, sociology, as well as politics. There are eight permanent staff, three administrators, a number of teaching fellows and 25 PhD students. The aim of the Centre is to pioneer internationally significant research on terrorism and to provide life-changing teaching for undergraduates and postgraduates. The culture in the Centre is to stimulate debate and to challenge and influence people from the policy world.

Postgraduate students in the Centre are working on a number of interesting projects including how the ideas of separation and nationalism in Scotland and Wales has tended to be non-violent compared to the same issues in Northern Ireland. Another research project is looking at the IRA and comparing and contrasting it with street gang style violence in Chicago. The research undertaken by staff and students has the potential for practical implications by developing fruitful working relationships between academics, politicians and policy makers.

Professor English finished his presentation by encouraging members to engage with the research undertaken in HCSTPV. Information about public lectures and seminars are promoted on the Centre's website and he would be delighted to hear from graduates interested in courses, events and research projects.

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor thanked Professor English for taking the time to speak to the General Council about the research and teaching undertaken by HCSTPV.

8. Any other competent business

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor closed the meeting by thanking the speakers for their contributions and the General Council members for their attendance and participation. A wine and canapé reception was held following the meeting.

*Professor Louise Richardson FRSE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor*