University of Glasgow – General Council Half-Yearly Meeting (by Zoom)

30 January 2024

**1. Introduction and Welcome**

The Chancellor, Dame Katherine Grainger, opened the meeting and welcomed members to the first General Council Half Yearly meeting of 2024.

**2. Minutes and Matters Arising**

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved; the meeting was quorate.

**3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

**4. Report by the Senior Vice Principal/Deputy Vice Chancellor; Frank Coton**

FC provided an overview of University business since the last General Council meeting in June 2023.

Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher Education

The University was awarded the Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher Education in recognition of the range and impact of the projects undertaken at the Centre for Robert Burns Studies, chiefly Editing and Curating Burns for the 21st century. The prize is the highest national Honour awarded in UK further and higher education and is granted every two years. It was given in acknowledgement of the Centre for Robert Burns Studies excellent research and innovative approaches to learning and teaching, extensive and diverse knowledge exchange activities and partnerships with culture and heritage institutions. The efforts have revolutionised scholarly and popular understanding of Robert Burns life and works and in turn increased the cultural and economic value of Robert Burns nationally and internationally.

Together Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The University launched a Together Against Gender-Based Violence campaign on 25 November to raise awareness and signpost support available from the University for those who have experienced GBV. It builds on existing student activism to address GBV, encourages awareness of the importance of consent, and addresses issues of sexual violence within student populations.
The campaign was developed by the same team at the University responsible for the Together Against Racism campaign which received The Herald’s Diversity Campaign of the Year Award in October. To mark the campaign, the University teamed up with Glasgow based artist and illustrator, Molly Harkinson, who produced a powerful art installation on the ground floor of the James McCune Smith Building which has been very well received by the student body.

University Performance – Rankings

FC provided an update on the University on global and UK rankings.

* QS World University Rankings: 76th in the world (up 5 places from last year)
* QS Europe Rankings: 14th in Europe
* The Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide: 12th in the UK and named as Scottish University of the Year
* The Guardian University Guide: 13th in the UK
* THE World University Rankings 2024: 87th out of 194 institutions. 10th in the UK, 2nd in Scotland, 10th amongst Russell Group institutions.
* THE World University Rankings by Subject 2023: Ranks in the world top 100 in six out of 11 subject areas, with Law rising into the top 50 worldwide.

University Performance – Leiden Ranking

FC noted that the University is increasingly looking at how to understand the underlying performance of the institution beyond league tables. The Leiden Ranking is an annual global university ranking exclusively based on bibliometric indicators compiled by the Centre for Science and Technology Studies at Leiden University over a three year period. The University has had a marked improvement in its 2018-2021 performance in the Leiden Ranking.

For 2018-2021 UofG was ranked:

* 14th in UK for number of papers published
* 8th in UK for number of papers in the top 1% most cited in their field
* 2nd in UK for proportion of papers (2.4%) that are in the top 1% most cited in their field.

The results of the Leiden Ranking indicate that the underlying quality of research, as judged by our peers, is progressively moving forward.

Health Innovation Hub

Construction on the new Health Innovation Hub has commenced and the work is due for completion in Summer 2025. It will be home to commercial businesses as well as the University of Glasgow-led Living Laboratory for Precision Medicine. This brings the University together with industry in a way that hasn’t been possible yet due to constraints in the existing campus. It was noted that the long-term plan is to develop more opportunities of this nature not only in the innovation industry but also on the University campus.

IT Developments

The University’s Network Infrastructure Improvement Programme is currently in a pilot rollout phase on the Gilmorehill Campus. The core network has been fundamentally redesigned and a number of pilot areas in the University have started to use the new network.

Adam Smith Business School/PGT Hub

The Adam Smith Business School/PGT Hub which was formally opened in December by Cecilia Rouse, former adviser to the Biden administration and the new Director of the Brookings Institute in the US. The project is not absolutely complete as there is work ongoing internally in the building on the top floor which is expected to be complete in May/June. This is a major addition to the campus infrastructure and is proving to deliver benefits to the Business School.

University Performance – Financial & Innovation

The Scottish Government announced the budget for financial year 24/25 in December indicating £28.5m of cuts to the university teaching grant. The university is awaiting further detail on how this will be translated in to the higher education landscape. It was noted that there is a risk that the scale to the sector as a whole could be larger than £28.5m.

There is also considerable uncertainty in the international student markets. There was a shortfall in international students in academic session 23/24. This was a fairly consistent trend across the full higher education landscape and follows successive years where the University of Glasgow has exceeded international student intake expectations. The University continues to maintain strong levels of interest from home students and international students to study. Applications for academic session 24/25 are looking healthy and this is underpinned by a strong financial position. The University is undertaking extensive modelling on potential future scenarios in terms of student numbers and how Scottish Government cuts might manifest. The University remains optimistic about the prospects for the coming years and noted that the careful husbandry of university resources over the last 4/5 years has put the University in a strong financial position as they enter what is likely to be a challenging period for the full sector.

The University has had particular success in the Levelling up Innovation Accelerator programme. It was noted that the University is engaging with the process for the Glasgow City Region (GCR) Investment Zone which will see GCR able to access £160m from the UK Government for projects which can demonstrate economic impact.

International Student Recruitment

It was reported that new measures introduced by the Home Office are having an impact on the UK’s reputation in international student markets. From 1st January 2024, international students travelling to the UK are no longer able to bring dependents on their student visa unless they are studying on a Postgraduate Research programme. Whilst the composition of the international student population at the University of Glasgow is not particularly vulnerable to this change, such legislative changes can send an unwelcoming message to the international student body. This UK legislative change coincides with Australia and Canada increasing international student recruitment efforts which is resulting in some UK institutions facing a sharp decrease in the number of international students. The current market demand for the University of Glasgow remains broadly in line with last year and the University is introducing a range of measures to strengthen the market share.

FC referred to a recent Sunday Times article which looked at a number of aspects of international student recruitment, particularly relating to International Pathway Colleges and the role of agents. It was noted that the motivations for the article are heavily rooted in a narrative that Russell Group universities in particular are restricting the intake of domestic students while recruiting an increased number of international students. FC reported that there are a number of factual inaccuracies in the data utilised in the article to support this claim and Universities UK and a number of individual institutions are considering legal action. One inaccuracy was cited as a reference to a reduction in home students in England in the decade prior to the pandemic. It was noted that there had actually been an increase in the number of home students within England during this period but this was masked by a decline in EU students who were being measured in the same way as home students.

FC refuted the claim that Pathway Colleges provide an easy route to University. It was noted that the University of Glasgow does have an International Pathway College. However, the University sets and controls the entry standard at the end of the pathway period and this is consistent with any other student being admitted to the University. It was further noted that the University provides a number of pathway routes for Widening Access from the domestic market. For applicants living in Scotland, the University operates a system of contextualised admissions which means all circumstances faced by individual applicants which may have prevented them from meeting our standard entry requirements are considered and adjusted offers of entry are made accordingly.

It was noted that agents are used globally by every international University. The University of Glasgow agents are vetted and provided with regular training and visited regularly. The Government has recently announced that they are going to investigate the use of agents and how they behave for UK Higher Education institutions. The University will cooperate in full with this investigation. FC noted that the University is very aware of the possibility of abuse and have terminated relationships with agents in the past but offered reassurance that the University works very hard to maintain standards across all entry routes.

Industrial Relations

The committee heard that there has been recent industrial action related to pay and pensions. There has been a significant changes in the USS pension position following revaluation. As a result, employee contribution rates have reduced from 9.8% to 6.1% from 1st January 2024. Additionally, the benefit accrual rate increased from 1/85 to 1/75 and there was an additional retrospective benefits boosts between 2022 and 2024. Finally, the employer contribution also reduced from 21.6% to 14.5%.

It was noted that pay continues to be a challenging issue. The sector is about to enter negotiations on the 2024/2025 pay offer when some campus unions still have a mandate for action over last year’s settlement. The ability of the sector to increase pay is being eroded by challenging financial landscape.

Conflict Support for Staff and Students

The University is working hard to ensure that members of our community are supported as much as possible following the very distressing events and escalation of conflict in the Middle East. The University has called for the immediate release of all hostages and a humanitarian ceasefire to allow aid to reach those who are suffering. The University has been engaging with Israeli and Palestinian students and colleagues, and continuing to engage with relevant student groups to offer help and assistance.

The University also continues to support staff and students affected by the War in Ukraine. Additional hardship funds have been made available for students who have been directly affected by the war in Ukraine. The University is actively exploring with partner Universities in Europe, and with organisations such as the Council-for-At-Risk-Academics (CARA), what they can do to support Ukrainian students and academics. The University continues to make representations to the UK Government to support Ukrainian refugees wishing to come to the UK.

XPrize

The University of Glasgow has been selected as the new European hub of XPrize. XPrize harnesses philanthropic funding to offer a range of prizes to inspire groups around the world to achieve breakthroughs that will accelerate an abundant and equitable future for all. The ARC will become home to XPrize Europe (UK) and will be dedicated to supporting research and innovation that address major global issues. This is the first manifestation of XPrize outside of the USA and will give the opportunity for the academic community in the University to engage with innovators from outside the University.

Lord Kelvin Bicentenary

In June 2024, the University will be commemorating the Bicentenary of Lord Kelvin and a number of activities are planned throughout the year to celebrate the life and works of Lord Kelvin.

1. **General Council Business Committee Election**

The live vote opened for two new members of the General Council Business Committee. It was noted that a total of 14 candidates are standing for election. The result of the election will be confirmed under point 8.

1. **Report by the Convenor of the General Council Business Committee; Cameron Marshall**

CM noted that he was delighted to be elected and ratified as the Convenor of the General Council Business committee in summer 2023.

University Governance and the General Council

An overview of University governance was presented in relation to the General Council. The committee heard that the University operates a tripartite system of governance which was set up in the 1800’s and has since been amended several times. It was noted that the three pillars of university governance are the University Court, the University Senate and the General Council. The Court is the University’s governing body and is the legal persona of the University; the Senate is the senior academic body of the University and is responsible for academic standards and research; and the General Council gives a voice to the views of graduates and academics on the regulation and wellbeing of the University.

The General Council works through a Standing Committee called the General Council Business Committee. This Business Committee elects two General Council Assessors to the University Court and also elects the Chancellor of the University. It was noted that the General Council is a consultative structure and is entitled to make recommendations to the University Court. CM advised that the role of the convenor is to ensure that useful conversation takes place and noted that the committee is working very well and the Principal and the Senior Management Group regularly attend to update members on the business of the University.

The Reverend Stuart Dougall MacQuarrie

CM paid tribute to the Reverend Stuart Dougall MacQuarrie who died on 27 November after a short illness. Stuart was widely known and regarded by the University community and touched the lives of many as the former chaplain of the University of Glasgow. The committee heard that Stuart was a remarkable individual and was open to people of all faiths and no faith. He supported many members of the university community in his own gentle and subtle ways.

The committee heard that Reverend MacQuarrie had an affinity to the University and was CM’s immediate predecessor as convenor to the General Council from 2020-2023. There has been a number of queries from General Council members about the possibility of a memorial service for Stuart. The family have confirmed that Reverend MacQuarrie hadexpressedbefore his death that he did not want any memorial service in his name or honour. The University will respect the wishes of the family. It has been agreed that a bursary fund for care-experience and estranged students will be named in Stuart’s honour. The Stuart MacQuarrie Bursaries for Care-Experienced & Estranged Students will be awarded in 2024/25. The bursaries will specifically help students who have no family support to complete their studies. This support will allow care-experienced and students estranged from their families can overcome the barriers they face and fully achieve their potential. Anyone wishing to make a donation to the bursary fund can do so via the [Giving to Glasgow webpage](https://www.gla.ac.uk/connect/supportus/).

Student Welfare

Student welfare remains a priority for the University. An implementation group is reviewing the recommendations from the recent Student Wellbeing Framework Review and determining how best to progress the recommendations. The Business Committee will continue to seek information on the gradual implementation of this framework.

Following the shortage of student accommodation for September 2022 entry, the Business Committee was pleased to note that the University sourced additional nominated places via private accommodation providers for September 2023 entry. It was noted that the University is aware of the challenges with student accommodation and CM noted that it was gratifying to see the efforts being made by the University to mitigate against this.

Finance

CM noted that it is impressive to see how sharp the University is when it comes to financial management. Recent updates to the Business Committee have provided the distinct impression that the University Court has a very honest and rigorous set of discussions relating to finances and reacts quickly to flow of the information. This good management has put the University in a strong financial position.

University Campus

It was reported that the recent transformation to the University campus is remarkable. The opening of the James McCune Smith Learning Hub combined with traffic calming measures have transformed University Avenue. Furthermore, after the return of the land used at the Western Infirmary site, the University has expanded west-wards towards Byres Road and this has allowed creation of St Mungo Square which features a number of new buildings including the Clarice Pears building, the Advanced Research Centre (ARC) and the new Adam Smith Business School. CM noted that whilst physical facilities don’t guarantee an exceptional student experience, they do contribute enormously to it. CM highlighted that the University has significantly developed under the leadership of the principal, Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, with the support of a huge group of staff and alumni, which is most welcome.

Higher Education Funding

Following the update on higher education funding by FC under point 4 in these minutes, CM encouraged General Council members to continue to advocate the necessity of funding universities, noting the benefit they bring to any nation.

Fundraising

The University of Glasgow held its first-ever Giving Day on 5 and 6 October 2023. The goal was to raise £100,000, which was significantly exceeded. It is hoped that this activity will start to become a more regular feature. The General Council Business Committee has expressed a desire to help support alumni engage with the University and to give back to an institution which is important to so many.

Closing remarks

To conclude, CM noted that the University continues to be very open and constructive in meeting and sharing information with the General Council Business Committee. Challenges do arise, but on behalf of the Business Committee, CM reported that the University of Glasgow is prospering and the most appropriate plans and behaviours continue to be in place to extend that prosperity.

1. **Election Results**

The online election closed. The newly elected members of the General Council Business Committee were confirmed as Andre de Almeida (BSc 1998) and Roderick Forsyth Neilson (MBChB 1985, MPhil 2002).

The Chancellor congratulated the newly elected members and expressed thanks to everyone who put their name forward.

1. **Any other business**

The Chancellor, Dame Katherine Grainger, expressed thanks to everyone who contributed to the online election and for the continued support of the General Council.

No other business was reported.

1. **Date of next meeting**

General Council Business Committee: 9th April 2024
General Council Half Yearly Meeting: 16th July 2024