

**MINUTE OF THE STATUTORY HALF-YEARLY MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL  
HELD ON FRIDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2014 AT 18:00 IN  
THE LAWRENCE LEVY STUDIO THEATRE, THE BYRE THEATRE,  
ABBAY STREET, ST ANDREWS**

The Chancellor's Assessor, Sir Ewan Brown CBE FRSE, was in the Chair and welcomed 46 members to the Byre Theatre for the meeting. Apologies were noted from the Chancellor, Principal and Vice-Chancellor and Acting Vice-Principal (Governance).

**1. Minute of the last Ordinary Half-Yearly General Council Meeting held on 28 June 2014**

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. Business Committee Report**

Mr Graham Wynd presented the Business Committee report which included an update on the changes to the Committee membership since the General Council meeting in June. Mr Ken Cochran has taken up the position of General Council Assessor and the Acting Convener, Mrs Jane Watkinson, completed her term of office in June. The ordinary members elected Mr Wynd and Mr Alan Frith to the positions of Convener and Vice-Convener respectively and Mr Frith was also confirmed as the Convener of the Ordinances and Resolutions Sub-Committee. Full details of the current membership were listed in the billet.

On the subject of membership Mr Wynd reported that due to the uncertainties over the future of the Business Committee there had been no Committee election in 2014. This meant that there was no replacement for the three members who had stepped down when their terms expired in June 2014 and this, together with one resignation, resulted in the Committee currently comprising eight elected members, rather than the usual twelve. The Committee would consider what changes were needed to the General Council Standing Orders to ensure that, in future, it could operate with a full complement of members and also make sure that Committee members had appropriate skills and experience, as well as being representative of the breadth of General Council members. It was likely that a small sub-committee would be established to develop a proposal to be put before the Council meeting in June 2015.

Mr Wynd set the Committee's recent activities in the context of the outcome of the review of the Business Committee which had taken place over the last 18 months. Details of the new framework were printed in the billet and included a reduction in the University's secretarial and administrative support of the Committee and also the requirement that members bear their own travel and subsistence expenses. Mr Wynd reported that the Committee had found a new way of working round these changes and was re-establishing itself with a new sense of purpose. The Committee had met twice since the last Council Meeting including an informal meeting in August. The principal outcomes of the initial meeting were: (i) the need for all meetings (including General Council Meetings), to be driven by issues that were relevant to the University in order for the Council to fulfil its governance remit, (ii) Committee members needed to be better informed about University strategy, policies and issues; and (iii) the Committee had to make discernible progress within the next year.

The first full meeting of the Business Committee took place on 18 October and a draft minute of that meeting outlining the key discussions was recorded in the billet. Members noted a correction to item 14b, first paragraph, third line, the word "Assessors" should be inserted after "General Council". From the report Mr Wynd highlighted that each Committee member had agreed to research and report on a portfolio of interests, mostly aligned with their own knowledge and expertise including financial matters, graduates' career destinations, admission and access statistics. There would also be a review into whether Council members could help provide internship opportunities for students. Other topics under discussion were improving participation of members in Council meetings, using technology to take proceedings to a wider audience, and how to attract more members to meetings in St Andrews. Discussions were also ongoing about the timing of both General Council and Business Committee meetings with a view to synchronising the two with each other and with Court meetings. Initial plans were to hold four Committee meetings per year, including perhaps virtual meetings, to advance business more quickly. The issue of how to improve Committee communication with Council members was under discussion including using technology, especially social media. It was intended that the

leaders of each initiative would prepare a paper and report on these topics at the next Committee meeting. Mr Wynd would update the Council in June 2015.

Mr Wynd concluded by expressing his gratitude to his fellow elected members for their willingness to take on Committee responsibilities and while there was still a way to go the Committee had made an encouraging start in its new guise. Mr Wynd invited members to engage with this evening's speakers and ask questions. In addition if members had questions outside of the meeting they should make contact with the Committee via the Alumni Relations Office.

Comments and questions from the floor included a word of congratulations to Mr Wynd on the progress the Business Committee had made to date and the appropriate size of the committee. Mr Wynd confirmed that the composition and size of the committee would be reviewed in the future.

The Chancellor's Assessor thanked Mr Wynd for the comprehensive update and asked members to note the report and that many of the topics outlined would be revisited at the next Council meeting in June 2015.

### **3. Appointment of Registrar and Clerk to the General Council**

The Chancellor's Assessor intimated that the post of Registrar and Clerk would continue to be held with the post of Vice-Principal (Governance). Alastair Merrill had been appointed to the Vice-Principal (Governance) to replace Professor Nic Beech and would take up his post in February 2015. Mr Merrill had almost 30 years' experience working in a wide range of public sector, international, diplomatic and operational settings to deliver business change, strategy development and sound commercial governance.

Professor Ron Piper was currently undertaking the role of Acting Registrar and Clerk to the General Council as part of his role as Acting Vice-Principal (Governance).

### **4. Presentation by Dr Michael Downes Director of Music and Artistic Director of the Byre Theatre**

Dr Downes reported on a busy few months since the re-opening in August as he addressed the meeting. Dr Downes outlined the new arrangements for the Byre Theatre and highlighted that the main challenge for the Byre team would be to weave together the three strands of theatre (student, community and professional) to attract audiences and provide a strong artistic programme.

Dr Downes outlined the community origins of the Byre theatre and emphasised that community engagement continued to be vital to the future success of the venue. Local groups were already committed to supporting the Byre, including the St Andrews Play Club and the St Andrews Music Club, and it was important that the Byre remained part of the community. In terms of student use and engagement, the Byre would complement the existing facilities in the Barron Theatre and also the performing spaces in the redeveloped Students' Association building. It would also play a central role in the *On the Rocks* arts festival (currently the largest student-run arts festival in Scotland and second in the UK). Dr Downes believed that these improved student drama facilities would take student productions to new heights. The Byre would be an important resource for professional theatre in Scotland, playing a vital role in the cultural life of Scotland once again. The professional theatre would focus on new writing working with notable playwrights in the School of English. There were ongoing discussions with professional groups, although a programme of professional shows would take longer to set up.

In terms of teaching, the Byre would not be used as regular student lecture space. However, Academic Schools would use the facilities, including the School of English (which was developing a Master of Fine Arts course 'Writing for Performance' to be launched in 2015 and based in the Byre) and the Department of Film Studies (drawing on their expertise to host film festivals and develop a programme of film and drama). In addition, other less obvious partnerships were being explored with Schools, such as Physics & Astronomy, who were interested in using the space to bring their subject to life through performances. With thanks to a generous donation, a Steinway piano had been purchased which would allow the venue to be used as a music venue when appropriate. It was hoped that the Music Centre would take advantage of the intimacy provided by the Byre for smaller groups and chamber music performances. Dr Downes stressed this usage would not take away from the focus on the facility being used primarily for theatre productions and related activities.

Dr Downes closed his remarks by thanking the Byre team, headed up by Stephen Sinclair, General Manager who, as former Head of Operations at the Byre, brought a wealth of experience to the role. Dr Downes encouraged members to support the programme of events and to use the facilities including the new café.

Questions from the floor included a query about the background to the Lawrence Levy Studio Theatre; plans for *Live in HD* performances at the Byre; ongoing plans for a new Music Centre; the financial arrangements; and how the Byre would be deemed a success.

The Chancellor's Assessor thanked Dr Downes for an interesting update and expressed his best wishes to Dr Downes and the Byre team for the future.

### **5. University Address by Mr Derek Watson, Quaestor and Factor**

The Quaestor and Factor, Mr Derek Watson, provided an update on current activities and challenges facing the University. Mr Watson informed members that the results of the latest Research Exercise, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), would be known on 19 December. This had dominated the agenda in recent years and led to a significant growth in academic staff and associated resources. Funding levels were currently strained but there were pockets of strong performance and there had been areas of significant investment across the University. Recent examples of this investment could be seen in the creation of the Martyrs Kirk Research Library and Reading Room, as well as the investment in world class science facilities which in some cases did not exist anywhere else in the UK. The need to offer well-funded PhDs was of continued importance and the University was striving to provide appropriate levels of scholarship support to attract the best postgraduates.

In terms of teaching, the University would continue not to compromise on quality and therefore entrance grades remained high. There had been a growth in home numbers (funded by the Scottish Government) and a significant focus on widening access. The University faced the challenge of competitive forces outside of Scotland especially from England and overseas. The international market was expanding in Asia, South America and in the Indian subcontinent with a growing focus on quality of teaching and facilities. The postgraduate teaching market was contracting. An Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) would be carried out in early 2015 which would require a huge investment of time and resources.

The University's reputation continued to be strong with recent awards to academics at the pinnacle of their research including Professors Halliwell and Naismith who were recognised with FBA and FRS fellowships respectively. The Scottish Referendum vote had encouraged a strong internal and public debate, with leading figures from the campaign taking part in debates at the University along with lively staff and student engagement. The University continued to perform well in league tables and was back on top of the National Student Survey as well as being ranked around the top 100 in World League tables and in certain tables with an Arts focus the University achieved a top 50 ranking. In terms of UK League Tables St Andrews consistently featured in the top five.

Mr Watson also addressed the financial challenges facing the University and focused on the need for financial sustainability. The University's surplus showed that margins remained very tight at around 1 to 2 % of turnover. In terms of income, around 22% came from the Scottish Government with the rest coming from research, other student fees and other areas of University business, for example, residences. The challenge remained that most of the income sources would not grow with inflation, and generally speaking, research funding was contracting. The main area of expenditure was salaries and there was a challenge in terms of ensuring the University's staffing complement was proactively shaped and managed to lower the percentage of income spent on pay. There were also pressures beyond the control of the University in terms of pension provisions although action short of a strike had recently been suspended.

In terms of other challenges, Mr Watson highlighted political uncertainty, including an upcoming General Election, Scottish Elections in 2016 and a possible referendum on the EU in the relatively near future. In addition there were growing demands on facilities, IT and University estate. There was also a need for more philanthropy to support University initiatives. Mr Watson reflected on the challenges relating to utilities, price inflation and energy utilisation which continued due to rising costs outstripping projected income growth. The University had plans to use the Guardbridge site to improve power

efficiencies and to aid the progress to the University becoming carbon neutral, as well as the development of a wind farm and ensuring new and refurbished buildings reached the highest standards of energy efficiency.

Questions from members included topics such as staff costs; the University's people strategy and performance management policies; gender mix in the University's senior management; the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary fundraising campaign; success in the league tables; comparisons between St Andrews and Edinburgh and economies of scale; student accommodation; effect of the Scottish Referendum vote; and commercialisation of research.

The Chancellor's Assessor thanked Mr Watson for outlining the range of recent activities, achievements and the ongoing challenges facing the University as well as addressing the many questions from members.

#### **6. Any other competent business**

The Chancellor's Assessor closed the meeting by thanking the speakers for their contributions and the General Council members for their attendance and their questions and comments.

Sir Ewan Brown CBE FRSE  
The Chancellor's Assessor