

**MINUTE OF THE STATUTORY HALF-YEARLY MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL  
HELD ON SATURDAY 27 JUNE 2015 at 10.30am IN PARLIAMENT HALL, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS**

The Chancellor of the University, the Rt Hon Sir Menzies Campbell CH CBE QC, was in the Chair and welcomed 53 members to the meeting.

**1. Minute of the last Ordinary Half-Yearly General Council Meeting held on 21 November 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. Appointment of Registrar and Clerk to the General Council**

The Chancellor intimated that the University Court's Governance & Nominations Committee had agreed upon the nomination of Mr Alastair Merrill, Vice-Principal (Governance and Planning), as Registrar and Clerk to the General Council. This recommendation was endorsed by the members.

**3. Election of members to serve on the Business Committee from 1 July 2015**

The Registrar and Clerk reported that the General Council was seeking to elect seven of its members to serve on the Business Committee of the General Council from 1 July 2015. Voting was carried out online from mid-May to mid-June and by postal ballot on request. Ten candidates stood for election (the full list of nominees was reported in the meeting billet). 958 members voted online (1.5% of the electorate). No postal ballots were submitted. The full results were available at the end of the meeting, on the General Council web page and on request from the Alumni Relations Office.

The following members were elected to serve for four years from 1 July 2015:

- Ross M Allan, BSc (Hons) Physics-Electronics 1992, MLitt International Business 2014.
- Annette Ashton-Redlin, MA (Hons) Psychology 1976.
- Alistair Galloway, BSc (Hons) Biochemistry 2001.
- D Graham Wynd, BSc Applied Science 1966.
- Annabel I Philips, MA (Hons) International Relations and Modern History 2011
- James Wallace, BSc (Hons) Statistics 1976

The following member was elected to serve for one year from 1 July 2015:

- Roger T Knox, BSc Applied Mathematics and Pure Mathematics 1964

The Chancellor offered his congratulations to the newly elected members.

**4a. Business Committee Report**

The Convener, Mr Graham Wynd, opened his remarks by congratulating the new members on their election to the Business Committee. He commented that it was encouraging to see nominees spanning many graduation years and from a wide geographic area. This group of new members would bring the committee back to full numbers. Members were invited to note the minutes of the Business Committee meetings held on 10 January and 16 May 2015 which were printed in the Billet and outlined recent activity and discussions. The discussions focused on five new aims of the Business Committee: (i) to fulfil its remit to be effective it must be driven by real issues of relevance to the University; (ii) to ensure committee members were better informed; (iii) to explore specific avenues where they could add value to the University [*to this effect members had undertaken to research areas of University work and policies and to speak with the General Council Assessors to gain better insight into current issues. Areas identified where support could be provided were internships and the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill which would be covered later in the agenda by the Vice-Principal (Governance)*]; (iv) to introduce technology to engage with members beyond the physical meetings and (v) to make changes to the election standing orders to ensure continuity and avoid long-term vacancies (*this was covered later in the meeting under item 4c*).

Mr Wynd also reported that he had attended a meeting of the other ancient universities General Council Conveners and Clerks which was useful in sharing experiences and learning from others with the same issues. Mr Wynd agreed to discuss the request for more information on nominees to be available at the time of the election at a future Business Committee meeting.

#### **4b. Business Committee Membership**

Mr Wynd referred members to the Billet where the current membership was published. He thanked his fellow committee members for their contributions and support over the last year, especially with more meetings and fewer members to handle business. He also expressed his thanks to Lyndsay Lauder (*resigned from the Business Committee in March 2015*) and Fiona Laing (*term of office came to an end June 2015*) for their contribution to the work of the Business Committee and the General Council more broadly over the years. A final word of thanks was given to the Development Office for the ongoing support provided by its staff, including ensuring the smooth running of the election process.

Finally, on behalf of his fellow committee members, Mr Wynd congratulated Professor Richardson on her appointment to the post of Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, remarking on the steady rise of the University's standing during her time leading St Andrews.

The Chancellor thanked Mr Wynd for this report and Business Committee membership update.

#### **4c. Proposals to amend the electoral rules in the Standing Orders**

Mr Wynd introduced proposals to amend the Business Committee electoral rules. Mr Wynd confirmed that proposals, which were outlined in the Billet, had been discussed with the Registrar and Clerk. In comparing these with the University Ordinance, the Registrar and Clerk was content that this was a sensible way forward.

These proposals were prompted by the move from holding Business Committee elections every year to every two years resulting in a risk of there being insufficient candidates for the number of vacancies and the possibility of unfilled vacancies. The proposals sought to address these risks by providing the power to co-opt members to fill vacancies and also to permit members to stand for two successive terms.

A number of questions were raised from the floor, primarily in relation to the co-option of members if an elected member stood down shortly after election and relating to the length of time a co-opted member could serve in this capacity before the next election point. A discussion took place about these issues.

It was noted that the only issue on which a contrary view to the proposals outlined by the Business Committee was expressed by some members was the co-option element. However, due to the threat of unintended consequences to other elements of the proposals resulting from making a change to the co-option proposal, it was agreed that the Business Committee and the Registrar and Clerk would give consideration to the points raised by the members. The revised proposals would be submitted to the General Council Meeting on 28 November 2015 when one vote could be taken on the package of proposed changes.

In the meantime, members were invited to send comments in writing to the Convener of the Business Committee at least 14 days in advance of the next General Council meeting on 28 November 2015.

#### **5. University Address by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson, FRSE**

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson, provided an update on the state of the University. In summary, the University's rankings, student numbers and the quality of these students were higher than ever. The endowment was larger than ever and the University continued to attract the best researchers from around the world. A number of exciting initiatives were under way, both locally and globally, which would transform the University's research as well as strengthen the links with the community and with industry. The University's Senior Management team was fully engaged in implementing a strategic plan which would enable the University to maintain and improve our position relative to our peers.

However, the University continued to operate under conditions of considerable financial uncertainty, with constraints on public finances and challenges relating to government priorities, the tuition fee system, and matters relating to pensions, national insurance contributions and negotiated pay raises. The University's performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) did not translate into the anticipated research excellence funding.

In terms of the rankings, the University continued to rank highly (3<sup>rd</sup> in the UK in the *Guardian University Guide*, *The Times Good University Guide*, and the *Sunday Times University Guide* - the latter ranked St Andrews as the Scottish University of the Year for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row). The National Student Satisfaction Survey ranked the University as joint 1<sup>st</sup> in the UK. In the international rankings, the University was ranked 1st in Scotland, 45th in the world in the Leiden World Scientific ranking, 111<sup>th</sup> in *The Times Higher World Rankings* and 88<sup>th</sup> in the *QS World Rankings* with Philosophy ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in the world. In all of these rankings St Andrews was comfortably in the top 1% of universities globally, notwithstanding the serious financial constraints under which it operated.

The Principal outlined a number of recent projects which highlighted the University's reputation as being at the leading edge of research and innovation. Researchers continued to work collaboratively with colleagues all over the world, including a World Health Organization study across 44 countries, a research project into tuberculosis with a ground-breaking clinical trial across 50 study sites around the world and, earlier in 2015, the first ever twinned conferences were held in Princeton and St Andrews bringing English law and literature experts together.

In terms of the St Andrews student body, this year saw the largest intake ever of Scottish students, while the University's peer institutions experienced a decline. The University also had its largest number of students from deprived backgrounds. The Principal outlined how alumni and friends played an important role in supporting this, with 88 students currently holding St Andrews Wardlaw Scholarships funded by £9M in donations received to support these students and the previous 140 recipients since 2004.

A number of projects have been completed across the University estate. The Martyrs Kirk Research Library received a commendation at the Scottish Civic Trust 2015 My Place Award for enhancing the townscape of St Andrews and the renovated St Salvator's Quadrangle was opened in April. Both projects were fully funded by the generous philanthropy of alumni and friends. In May, the Cabinet Secretary for Education opened the UK's most advanced ultra-low vibration laboratory and cleanroom in the North Haugh. Other projects were well under way with the Students' Association Building redevelopment due for completion later in 2015 and the upgrading of the University sports facilities, which would include a new eight-court sports hall and an extension to the current building benefitting both the University and the local community. Other estate projects were ongoing, including the provision of 324 additional bed spaces at Fife Park and the development of two private halls of residence which should alleviate some of the pressure on student housing. The Byre Theatre was now back up and running and, through the Guardbridge biomass project and a six-turbine wind farm at Kenly, the University was seeking to realise its ambition of becoming the first UK University to be carbon neutral. The 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations came to an end earlier in the academic year, although the fundraising campaign continued with over half the £100m target secured. The final event of the celebration was the annual Service of Thanksgiving in Westminster in December. This was preceded by one of the highlights of the Campaign, the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Benefit Gala, held in the Metropolitan Museum in New York in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Funds raised were shared between the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Scholarship Fund, the Ultra-Low Vibration Laboratory in the School of Physics & Astronomy, the Sports Centre redevelopment and the endowed Lectureship in American Literature.

The Principal closed her remarks by thanking the 1 in 12 alumni who contributed to the University, ranking it as the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest in the UK for alumni participation rate (7.9%) and 13<sup>th</sup> for total numbers of donors in the past year. The Principal called upon the alumni body to continue to invest in the University, to ensure that future generations of students could experience the opportunities afforded by attending this unique and extraordinary institution.

The Chancellor thanked the Principal for outlining the activities, events, achievements and indeed challenges facing the University.

## **6. Presentation by the Vice-Principal (Governance and Planning), Mr Alastair Merrill**

The Chancellor invited Mr Alastair Merrill, Vice-Principal (Governance and Planning), to speak on the topic of the proposed Scottish Higher Education Governance Bill. Mr Merrill took members through the genesis of the bill, starting with the von Prondzynski Review of Governance of Scottish Universities (2012) and the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance (July 2013). In November 2014, a consultation paper was issued implementing some of the key aspects of the earlier review.

The consultation included proposals in these six areas: transfer of the role of the Privy Council; new definition of Academic Freedom; retitling of Principal as Chief Executive Officer; greater transparency in selection of Chairs of Court – elections; composition of membership of governing bodies – “fully representative”; composition of academic

board – “fully representative” and relating to the board being able to “function efficiently”. There were 125 responses with general questions about the evidence to support the need for the changes proposed in the consultation. It was felt that time should be given to allow the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance to bed in and for its impact to be evaluated. A further area of opposition concerned attempts to impose a “one-size- fits- all” approach to the governance of HEIs.

The Bill was introduced to Parliament on 17 June and the policy outcomes were: “transparent and inclusive participation in HE governance”, “a framework that is modern, inclusive and accountable”, and “embed[ding] a level of consistency across the institutions”. Proposals were dropped on the Scottish alternative to the Privy Council, academic boards as final arbiter on academic matters and the retitling of Principals. The provisions would come into force four years after Royal Assent (2020).

Mr Merrill talked in detail about the key areas in the provisions and the potential implications of these changes specifically in relation to: the regulations around the appointment of Chairs of Court; proposals on membership of governing bodies; proposals on composition of academic boards; new definition of Academic Freedom, with other elements hidden in the detail. There was also a risk of unintended consequences.

In summary, the new legislation would enable the Scottish Government to exercise greater control over the composition and governance of all higher education institutions in Scotland, including St Andrews. The new legislation would also enforce greater consistency among institutions and thereby reduce their ability to adopt individual strategies. It risked burdening universities and the public purse with extra regulation and bureaucracy that would stifle enterprise and jeopardise the positive contribution that universities, such as St Andrews, make to the economy. Scottish universities and their General Councils have strongly opposed these proposals and The Royal Society of Edinburgh and other bodies were critical.

The next stages of the Bill were outlined during which the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Culture committee would issue a call for evidence and summon witnesses. The Scottish Parliament would debate the general principles and, at the second stage, the parliamentary committee would consider and dispose of amendments. The third stage would involve a meeting of whole Parliament with further amendments and a debate on passing the Bill. The final stage would be Royal Assent following which the provisions would come into force over a four-year period.

General Council Members asked a number of questions relating to the Bill and the current composition of Court and the Academic Council. Members were invited to submit responses under the Bill’s Call for Evidence to the Scottish Parliament on an individual basis and/or as part of a group such as the Business Committee. The deadline for responses was 4 September 2015.

The Chancellor thanked Mr Merrill for his exhaustive analysis of the Bill and for highlighting the key points.

## **7. Any other competent business**

The Chancellor called upon the Registrar and Clerk to intimate a written motion submitted by Dr David H Reid, MB ChB 1956, relating to the University’s academic calendar and the observance of the Easter holidays. Dr Reid spoke to his motion and sought support for the University to make Good Friday a non-teaching day. The Very Rev Dr Ian Bradley provided information about and the context for the range of actions the University takes to recognise Easter and other religious festivals. This included the right of any student of any denomination to make a request to be excluded from class to celebrate religious holidays. The Chancellor concluded the matter by stating that, while the General Council had no locus to change the University’s academic regulations, expressions of opinion could be made by the members. He invited members to show their support for or against the motion by a show of hands. The members overwhelmingly supported the University’s current provisions.

The Chancellor closed the meeting by thanking the Principal and the Vice-Principal (Governance) for their presentations and the General Council members for their contributions to the meeting.

*The Rt Hon Sir Menzies Campbell CH CBE QC*  
*Chancellor*