

# DRAFT MINUTE OF THE STATUTORY HALF-YEARLY MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL HELD ON SATURDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 10.30AM IN PARLIAMENT HALL, SOUTH STREET, ST ANDREWS

The Chancellor, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem CH CBE KC FRSE, was in the chair and welcomed 41 members to the meeting.

## 1. Minute of the last ordinary half-yearly meeting of the General Council held on 17 June 2023

The minute of the meeting was agreed upon as a correct record. (See [General Council Minutes](#)). There were no matters arising.

## 2. Report by the Convener of the Business Committee – Wendy Russell

The Business Committee Convener's report covered the period since the last General Council meeting in June. The Committee had met earlier in November. The minutes from the May meeting are available on the [General Council Minutes](#) webpage.

In recent months, the Committee had been reviewing its constitutional responsibilities, including those set out in the Ordinances. Updates had been made to relevant procedures following best practice to ensure that the Committee was able to meet its formal responsibilities under Ordinance, and the University had been informed of these. A review of the efficiency and purpose of the Business Committee is underway, five years after the previous review. It is expected that this will be completed early in 2024.

The Committee had, over the last year, conducted market research to ascertain the level of support amongst General Council members for an initiative to build a gown library for use by current and new students. The response rate had been underwhelming, although the data received was generally favourable. As a result, the Committee has halted progress with the project at this time.

The Business Committee had recently made a donation to the University in support of the

St Andrews Forest. Recognising this as a long-term initiative, the Convener suggested that General Council members may also wish to consider supporting the initiative.

The Convener reminded members that if they ever have questions beyond meetings, they can make contact with the Business Committee via the Alumni Relations Office – through email, telephone or in writing.

The Committee was delighted that Professor Ineke De Moortel had agreed to speak to the meeting on the topic of Sustainable St Andrews – one of the five strategic themes of the University's strategy - as sustainability is an ever-present obligation for us all as citizens of the world. This would provide an opportunity to focus on just what that means and how the commitment to be a global leader in this area manifests itself in small- to very large-scale ways.

The Convener thanked all staff who are involved in organising and participating in General Council meetings and who provide ongoing support to the Business Committee throughout the year. Thanking Elaine Cartwright for her support of the Business Committee over 20 years, she

presented her with flowers and said she hoped that she would attend future meetings, following her retirement at the end of the year.

*The Chancellor thanked the Convener for her report and work with the Committee and invited questions from the floor. There being no questions, he then called upon the Principal and Vice-Chancellor to give the University address.*

### **3. University Address – Professor Dame Sally Mapstone DBE FRSE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor**

The Principal began by reporting on the University attaining a historic double first, ranking top in both *The Times* and *The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2024* and *The Guardian University Guide 2024*, published in September, commenting that this is a remarkable moment in the University's history as no other university other than those of Oxbridge has ever topped those principal UK rankings in the same year.

The core of the University address was an update on current activities under the pillars of the University Strategy for 2022 - 2027, including the new Business School and the New College which will house it, and cutting-edge research and outreach initiatives in the areas of digital technology, entrepreneurship and sustainability. The Principal also provided an update on the recently launched People's Strategy, designed to attract and retain talented people with a broad range of backgrounds.

The Principal's University Address to the General Council can be read in full on the [General Council Minutes](#) webpage.

*The Chancellor thanked the Principal for her Address and, before inviting questions from the floor, he asked her about the current sponsorship of the St Andrews Prize for the Environment.*

The Principal confirmed that Conoco Phillips had sponsored the St Andrews Prize for the first 19-20 years of its inception, before concluding its activities in the UK. The University has been engaged in fundraising for the Prize to be able to continue to offer it at the same level as previously and it is now substantially funded by private donations from alumni and supporters of the University. Funding for the St Andrews Prize has not only continued, but the range of activities associated with it has been extended and it has been given more publicity.

*The Chancellor proceeded to invite questions from the floor.*

In response to a question about what the future holds for St Andrews following the recent student satisfaction and league table success, the Principal said that while at one level this is about 'ever to excel', it is incredibly important that the University does not lose its intrinsic identity. St Andrews is known for its high quality, curated student experience and research-led teaching. The league tables in which the University excels are very much built on a methodology that looks at, for example, the National Student Survey, and it is absolutely crucial that the University maintains that identity. Numbers are also important – there is no intention to exceed 10,000 students. The University is bringing numbers back down after the pandemic blip and the intention is to remain small and distinguished, while extending its digital offering and bringing that high quality experience into the online environment.

The Principal felt that it was inevitable that the higher education and teaching environment would change in the next ten years, with a mixture of the traditional, very popular undergraduate four-year degree and universities having to also offer more short, modular and online courses for people who need to reskill and upskill as they come in and out of the world of work. The Principal felt that the University could bring a lot of creativity to that space at the same time as its traditional offering. However, to continue to be able to offer an experience of that nature, the UK and Scottish Governments would have to solve the funding conundrum for universities, otherwise the quality of the experience St Andrews is so proud of will be diluted and diminished. As President of Universities UK, a key mission for the Principal at the moment is to get an active, applied and meaningful conversation going both with the current governments and also with the opposition in the UK and Scotland so that they understand the issue and see the advantage of investing in higher education because of the wonderful economic return that it gives and the importance that it offers to our culture and our society.

The next question was asked by a current parent who wondered why students and parents had received no University communications about a recent stabbing incident in St Andrews. The Principal explained that the incident took place in a local kebab shop, was drugs-related and had absolutely no connection to the University whatsoever. The Principal had taken the executive decision, in the circumstances, to avoid creating more alarm by drawing attention to the incident and to ensure instead that, at a local level, the University offered reassurance and comfort to any students who may be concerned about it. St Andrews remains a very safe space for students.

*There being no further questions, the Chancellor moved to the next item on the agenda and invited Professor Ineke De Moortel, Master of the United College, to give her presentation on 'Sustainability in Higher Education: Strategies, Challenges and Impacts'.*

#### **4. Presentation by Professor Ineke De Moortel, Master of the United College, on 'Sustainable St Andrews: Strategies, Challenges and Impacts'.**

Professor De Moortel thanked the General Council for the opportunity to talk about Sustainable St Andrews. Acknowledging that on a crisp and somewhat chilly November morning in St Andrews the climate crisis may seem like a far-off idea, she pointed to the increasingly frequent occurrence of events like Storm Babet which remind us all that the climate crisis is not just a global problem, it has very tangible local consequences and impacts.

Sustainable St Andrews is a key theme or pillar of the University Strategy. In her presentation, Professor De Moortel talked about the challenges but also provided examples of where the University is making an impact.

Sustainable St Andrews is not new. The University has been focusing on the impact of the climate crisis in different ways for a long time. St Andrews has the first interdisciplinary undergraduate programme in Sustainable Development, and all students when they matriculate take a short course, developed under the leadership of some St Andrews students, called Training in Environmental and Sustainable Action (TESA). There are new and existing research strengths and clusters of excellence, including the Scottish Oceans Institute and The St Andrews Prize for the Environment which was launched in 1998 and is therefore older than the vast majority of our undergraduate students. But there are also more recent initiatives, such as the Centre for Energy

Ethics, led out of the Department of Social Anthropology. The University has invested in the Eden Campus Biomass and District Heating System, reaching more than a quarter of all buildings. There is now also a hub for hydrogen power and a smart grid testbed at the Eden campus and, in 2022, a solar farm supported by batteries was opened to enhance green energy provision. These are just a few examples demonstrating the University's long-term commitment to sustainability and to the climate crisis.

A lot of organisations have some kind of environment team. However, this was recognised as no longer being sufficient because of the scale and nature of the climate crisis – it requires everyone to engage. This recognition led to Sustainable St Andrews as a strategic theme or pillar within the refreshed University Strategy for 2022 - 2027. St Andrews has now established central leadership and an institution-wide strategy, which means that there will be points of engagement and influence across all Schools and Units. Each theme or pillar has its strategic lead and Professor De Moortel as Master of the United College and Derek Watson as Quaestor & Factor co-lead Sustainable St Andrews to ensure that this challenge informs every aspect of the University's operations. Focusing on Sustainability as a strategic theme allows outcomes to be driven through defining clear objectives accompanied by an action plan for delivery. This in turn allows progress to be measured through decisions, influencing and developing policies, but also investment.

The objectives of Sustainable St Andrews are to: accelerate the transition by incorporating sustainability into the University's vision and therefore taking it into account in everything we do; support our whole community and help them through education and training to make informed decisions; challenge and support academic and professional colleagues to make a distinct contribution wherever they can; develop a living, but local lab, which can be implemented globally to demonstrate outcomes delivered by connecting research, education and, very importantly, the local community; and, as a leader in the higher education landscape, to influence the context externally through policy development.

In terms of the governance structure that underpins Sustainable St Andrews, the Master and the Quaestor & Factor chair a leadership group to which two other committees report, one an Academic Network and the other a Delivery Team, to ensure that all Schools and Units are involved. They are supported by the Environmental Sustainability Board, chaired by Professor Sir Ian Boyd, who formed an advisory group to ensure that we are all sufficiently challenged and stay on the route towards Net Zero 2035.

Acknowledging that thinking about the carbon footprint of a complex and globally connected organisation such as the University of St Andrews can seem like an overwhelming challenge, Professor De Moortel explained that this has been split into solvable problems so that everybody can recognise where they can make a contribution: travel, procurement, construction and aspects related to energy and our estate. Each of these then divides further into even smaller chunks. This allows every member of the St Andrews community to recognise and find where they can make a contribution and enables the University to identify where investment and behavioural change in the way it operates is needed to address this challenge. A link to the webpage where the University's [Annual Sustainability Report](#) is published was provided.

Referring to a graph showing data on various aspects of carbon emissions, starting from 2015,

Professor De Moortel explained that even although there is a predicted decline in our carbon footprint, mostly through environmental impacts, changes in technology and in green energy, there is still a gap between that decline and what the University believes it can achieve realistically through residual carbon offsetting. This is where the key focus of the Sustainable St Andrews strategy will lie, in determining where demand reduction will be needed in the way the University operates and makes choices.

Professor De Moortel concluded by reporting on where changes are being made and having an impact. Work is taking place across operations in research, learning and teaching, students and the local community, operational adaptation and our estate energy and environment. Research on sustainability is being advanced in a globally connected way and the University is also looking at how research can be done in a more sustainable way. Similarly, in learning and teaching the University is looking to extend the sustainability content of its curriculum, preparing students for careers which will increasingly have a focus on the environment and on the climate crisis, but also addressing the environmental impact of the way in which the curriculum is delivered.

There are a lot of student initiatives. Students are very engaged, as would be expected from this generation. The University is working on building their awareness of their own impact on the environment and building sustainability connections nationally and internationally. In terms of operational adaptation, the University's strategic commitments are being extended and it is transitioning to a sustainable University culture through delivering training data but also importantly through accountability on sustainability. Recognising the size of its estate, the University is building more and more sustainably and adapting its estate to withstand the future challenges that the climate will no doubt bring. Waste is being driven down towards achieving zero waste landfill and renewable energy is increasingly being used.

The Colin Vincent Centre for Battery Technology at the Eden Campus will provide a hub for world-leading work on the production of commercial-scale batteries, but will also be a showcase for research on new battery chemistries at St Andrews. The Centre for Blue Carbon has been launched under the leadership of Professor Bill Austin. The Centre will focus on emerging ecosystems in a rapidly changing and warming Arctic, but also on a pan-European study of carbon sequestration in Blue Carbon Ecosystem.

The recently launched St Andrews Centre for Critical Sustainabilities, led out of the School of Geography and Sustainable Development and with a large number of international partners, will focus on critical and rigorous methods of questioning knowledge on sustainabilities and also recognise the multiple perspectives on, and responses to, sustainability.

The Global EU-LAC Museums Project, coordinated by the School of Art History, champions the role of community museums in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, with a strong focus on helping young people to address the climate change.

Various other initiatives include greening the curriculum. All modules are being mapped against the UN Sustainable Development Goals and, to celebrate the achievements of its academics and students, the University has created a prize for new modules from all academic fields that help students learn about sustainability. This year, the Golden Dandelion Prize was awarded to the School of Classics for a module that enables students to explore environmental disasters under the

Roman Empire to gain insights that can be applied to today's climate crisis. The University is also engaged at a national level on the production of QAA sector guidance for introducing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across the curriculum for all UK universities.

To support local biodiversity, the University is rewilding parts of its campus, while The Green Guide offers practical advice for students on how to live more sustainably. Finally, the University's Sustainable Investment Policy reflects an important choice that has been made to no longer invest in fossil fuels, but actively invest in initiatives that champion and support sustainability.

Professor De Moortel concluded by saying that she hoped her short presentation had given some insight into how the University is addressing the climate challenge, both strategically and operationally.

*The Chancellor thanked Professor De Moortel for her presentation and invited questions from the floor.*

In response to a request for elaboration of the strategy for offsetting carbon footprint, Professor De Moortel referred back to the St Andrews Forest initiative and explained that, despite its name, it is not just about trees but covers all forms of nature-based offsetting – both existing and potential future forms e.g. research into the role of peat and research being carried by the Centre for Blue Carbon into the role that oceans can play as an offsetting potential. She acknowledged that identifying where research is still required and the development of policies and national frameworks around offsetting will also be very important.

Another question concerned the possibility of the University engaging with the St Andrews Rail Link initiative. In reply, Professor De Moortel commented that the Principal is in regular contact with politicians locally and nationally and reminded members of the bus initiative the University has implemented to support staff in making a choice towards public transport. She also mentioned research by St Andrews academics into hydrogen-powered transport as a form of clean energy.

In reply to a concern about academic inertia, while Professor De Moortel did not feel that this particularly applied at St Andrews, she suggested that inertia should also be looked at in terms of the behavioural changes that are needed and this is where she believes that the Arts and Social Sciences have a very important role to play. This can no longer be a problem that can be opted into – everyone in all Schools and Units, all students, all academic colleagues and everyone in the local community need to be engaged.

Another question was in relation to whether the University's strategy, and specifically its emphasis on sustainability and the inclusion of that in the curriculum, may be influencing students in choosing to apply to St Andrews. Professor De Moortel confirmed that the University is seeing an increase in demand, both at undergraduate and at Masters level, for courses linked to sustainability and sustainable development. The University will respond to that by giving its academics the opportunity to develop new modules, recognising their work through small initiatives like the Golden Dandelion Award, but also in terms of possible short courses, online courses and new Masters courses, as well as opportunities for joint honours degrees so that sustainable development education and training can take place alongside other subjects.

Professor De Moortel was then asked how the University is dealing with climate anxiety amongst

students and staff as, although this is a driver of change, it is also a dangerous one. In reply she said that one of the ways is to provide them with the information and training to know what they can do to change things. She emphasised that students are part of absolutely everything the University is doing around sustainability and they are not only involved, but they often lead and are the University's biggest challengers to take action.

A final question concerned St Andrews' advocacy role in wider society. Professor De Moortel referenced St Andrews Net Zero 2035 in her reply, pointing out that St Andrews is a decade ahead of the Scottish Government in this. This demonstrates how, as a global and leading university, St Andrews can do this ahead of everybody else and show how it can be done. The University can also educate a new generation of young people who will increasingly find themselves in careers focused on the climate and sustainability and give them the training and also the transferable skills they need to have an impact.

*There being no further questions the Chancellor thanked Professor De Moortel and moved to the next item on the agenda.*

## **5. Any Other Competent Business**

*There being no other competent business, the Chancellor brought the formal part of the meeting to a close, pausing to congratulate Elaine Cartwright, Alumni Relations Manager, on her imminent retirement from the University after 37 years of service and to thank her with flowers and champagne for her support of the General Council over the last 20 years of her service. Then, thanking members for their presence, he invited them to rise for the Benediction.*

**Alastair Merrill**

**Registrar and Clerk to the General Council**