

General Council Half Yearly Meeting 27th June 2015

Minute of General Council Half Yearly Meeting held 27th June 2015, Lecture Theatre 2, Boyd Orr Building, University of Glasgow

Item

1 Introduction and Welcome

The Chancellor, Sir Kenneth Calman, welcomed and thanked those present. He noted the positive past year for the University, with the end of the Academic Year approaching, before introducing the panel – Amber Higgins, Clerk to the General Council (GC), Professor Anton Muscatelli, Principal, and John Marsh, Convenor of the General Council Business Committee (GCBC).

2 Minutes of meeting of 31st January 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2015 were approved.

3 Report of Convenor of the General Council Business Committee

Convenor, John Marsh, thanked the Chancellor for his introduction and welcome to his first meeting as the Convenor of the General Council Business Committee

The Convenor reported to the General Council the deaths of two Business Committee members Andy Buchanan and David Anderson. Andy Buchanan had been a member of the Business Committee for many years and graduated in 1968 in Engineering. David Anderson had also been on the Committee for a number of years and then was a General Council Assessor on the University Court in July 2008. David rapidly became a very valued member of Court and the HR Committee of which he became the Convenor on 2010. They will both be sadly missed.

The Convenor reported that the Business Committee had held two meetings since the last Half Yearly meeting in January, with again much of the Business Committee's time taken up discussing the proposed Draft Ordinance 207. A Working Group had prepared a Report on behalf of the GCBC and submitted it to Court following a vote by members of the Business Committee. The Report had included a summary of the comments received from General Council members and from GCBC members.

The Convenor reported that the main objection was the proposal to reduce the number of GC Assessors from 5 to 2. It was also noted that the Convenor of the GCBC and another Business Committee member had been invited to speak to the Court Working Group where a possible process that would allow GC Assessors to be more involved in the appointment of Co-opted Court members was discussed.

The Convenor stated that the University had submitted the Draft Ordinance to the Privy Council in February and that a separate submission had been made directly to the Privy Council by the Business Committee and individuals. The final decision would not be known for some time.

The Convenor stated that the Business Committee had also submitted a response to the Scottish Government Consultation on the Higher Education Governance Bill. The main conclusions were that the consultation did not receive overwhelming support for the proposals put forward and there was a clear difference in opinion between key stake holders. The Bill had recently been published and the GCBC would be considering its position in the coming weeks.

It had been agreed that a Working Group from the GCBC would look at the General Council Standing Orders with a view to preparing a revised document for approval by the GC in January 2016.

The Convenor highlighted that there had been much discussion about how best to communicate with GC members. Currently the principal method was through Avenue

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magazine with limited use emails, social media and e-newsletters. It was important to recognise that members do not wish to be bombarded with messages and that there must be an interesting message/new to be reported. Further discussions with the Development and Alumni Office will be taken forward.

The Convenor finished his report by saying that the Business Committee had made good progress under the previous Convenorship in moving from being perhaps dormant organisation, to one which takes an active interest in the well-being of the University and seeks to make the University aware of the opinions of its graduates and academics who comprise the General Council. This process however has been impeded by the protracted process of the governance changes implied by the draft Ordinance and the external influences affecting this. In any process of change, there will inevitably be a conflict of interest between the interested parties, who are likely to feel that a necessary component is being unnecessarily blocked, to the detriment of all.

The Convenor reported that he had been encouraged by the very constructive relationship that Edinburgh University had with its General Council and Business Committee, and that it was his aim as Convenor to work with the University to develop a similar process whereby the experience, genuine interests and concern for the University held by members can be made available to the University, to its benefit, without duplicating its own expertise and oversight of Court.

The Chancellor thanked the Convenor for his report and thanked all the GCBC members for all their hardwork on behalf of the General Council.

A GC member present questioned if the GCBC had opposed the reduction in the number of General Council Assessors on Court. The Convenor of the GCBC reported that they had strongly opposed the reduction in the numbers assessors.

5 Principal's Address and Questions

The Principal thanked all present for their attendance, and explained that his report would outline progress over the last year, focussing on:

- The new University strategy – Inspiring People Changing the World;
- Scottish Government – Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill.

Inspiring People – Changing the World: the Principal reported that the University was in the final stages of approving its new strategy. The University was one of the world's great research-intensive universities and over the last few years it had made great strides in its performance. The new strategic plan sets out the ambition to build on the current strong academic and financial position to become even better. At the heart of the strategy is the university staff and giving them the support, development, infrastructure and environment to further the University's ambition.

Since 2010 the University had made significant progress on 20 KPI's with 16 targets being met but there was still room for improvement such as research and the student experience. There were a number of outcomes from the consultation and these have been implemented in the new strategy. The Vision is to have a world class, world changing university to enable this to happen the University needs to continue to bring together and create a world-class environment for learning and research which empowers staff and student alike to discover and share knowledge that can change the world.

There are three broad themes to the strategy

- 1) People – focusing on staff, students and internationalisation
- 2) Place – develop an inspiring and transformative campus with research and teaching as key areas. Streamline policies, processes and systems.
- 3) Purpose – discover and share knowledge that can change the world.

A number of Primary and Secondary KPI's have been set with targets for 2020 to assess the University's progress and performance. These will lead into a number of work streams :

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- 1) Empowering People – through engagement, inspiring leadership and transforming culture
- 2) Focus – maintaining a broad base, refinement of teaching and research portfolios and greater alignment of strategy and resources
- 3) Agility – streamline policy, oversight and processes, eliminate burdensome bureaucracy and map administrative support to staff and student needs.

The Principal thanked all the staff of the university for their positive engagement with the new strategy and for their hardwork and dedication over the last academic year.

Scottish Government – Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill: the Principal explained that the University would review the recently drafted Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill and consider its response.

The Chancellor thanked the Principal for his report and welcomed the positive news delivered in his report which showed that the University continued to grow and move forward, before inviting comments.

A GC member raised a query about the level of assessment and feedback and if there were plans to improve student satisfaction in this area. The Principal commented that in many cases the University was meeting the expectations of students but some areas still needed improvement. It was also noted that some students didn't recognise what feedback was and that informal feedback was the most difficult to recognise and record.

A GC member raised a query about the building work ongoing. It was explained that the building work was the District Heating Scheme project which was going to involve laying in the region of five and a half kilometres of new pipework across the University campus (both sides of University Avenue) over the next seven months or so.

This was to replace the old system, which was more than fifty years old. In some cases, the new network will also help facilitate high voltage and IT cables to improve campus services. The work was currently on time and on budget.

A GC member asked about widening access and the future of the Centre for Open studies. The Principal reported that the Centre for Open Studies had recently been reviewed by Court and Senate due to the need to reduce the operating deficit for the Centre. The current offering of programmes had been reviewed and some programmes would discount. The University however was fully committed to community education and would continue to offer programmes to maximise the benefits to the whole community whilst ensuring value for money.

A GC member raised concerns about the lack of acknowledgement by Court on the views of the General Council members with regards to Draft Ordinance 207. The Convenor of Court stated that he would convey the concerns raised by GC members to Court.

The Chancellor drew this section to a close and thanked the Principal for his presentation.

6 AOCB

The Chancellor thanked all those present and informed the meeting that the next meeting would take place on Saturday 30 January 2016 with further details available on the General Council Webpages.

The Chancellor closed the meeting by thanking all present for their attendance.