

University of Glasgow
General Council
Half-yearly Meeting (By Zoom)
31st January 2023

1. Introduction and Welcome

The Chancellor opened the meeting and welcomed members to the first General Council Half Yearly meeting of 2023.

2. Minutes and Actions Arising

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved; the meeting was quorate. There were no matters arising.

3. Principal's Address

Prof. Frank Coton (Senior Vice Principal and Deputy Vice Chancellor) thanked members for joining and provided an update on behalf of the Principal.

Adam Smith Tercentenary

Prof Coton updated members on the series of national and international events celebrating the Adam Smith tercentenary. Prof Coton drew particular attention to the commemorative events running between 5th and 10th June 2023 – Adam Smith tercentenary week – which is being delivered with partners including the Adam Smith Global Foundation and Panmure House. The events are designed to celebrate the life and works of Adam Smith, and to provide the opportunity to consider his ideas and enduring relevance in the 21st century.

Understanding Racism, Transforming University Cultures

Prof Coton informed members of progress made following the launch of the University's 'Together Against Racism' campaign on 31st October 2022. The campaign forms part of the University's action plan following its publication of the 'Understanding Racism, Transforming University Cultures' (URTUC) report in February 2021. Prof Coton detailed some of the actions that the University has undertaken following the report, including anti-racism training programmes for over 1,000 colleagues across the University, setting targets to increase representation for UK Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues in the workplace, the successful introduction of the University's first cohort of James McCune Smith scholars, and the development of a Community of Practice centred on decolonising the curriculum.

University Rankings Performance

Council members noted the pleasing results in the recent Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, in which the University rose four places to 82nd. Six subjects ranked in the top 100 in the world, with Clinical and Health Studies ranked in the top 50, Arts and Humanities rising 13 places to 67th, Education ranked at 73rd, Life Sciences moving to 88th, with both Law and Psychology also ranked in the top 100. The University's strong performance in the Guardian University Guide (11th in the UK), the THE Impact Rankings, entering at 19th in the world, and the 2023 QS

Sustainability Rankings, where the University was ranked 13th in the world and 2nd in the UK, were also praised by members.

Financial Performance

Prof Coton provided members with an overview of the University's recent financial performance, referencing a strengthening of its financial position during the 2021-22 financial year. The University's operating surplus increased year-on-year by £20m to £142.3m, with increases in both research grants and contract income, and tuition fees. Prof Coton noted that the University's performance in the current financial year continued to be strong, although the University is seeking to mitigate the impact of external pressures including inflation, energy costs and other factors on its longer-term cash generation.

Student Accommodation

The Council were updated as to the range of measures introduced by the University to mitigate pressures on the availability of student accommodation, resulting from a contraction in the private rental market. The University's zero growth commitment, together with securing a further 1,400 additional accommodation spaces over the next five years, was expected to ease some of the challenges faced by its students.

Campus Investment – Estates and IT

Progress made on the campus redevelopment was discussed; the Clarice Pears building was now open for staff in the School of Health and Wellbeing. The new Adam Smith Building, housing the Adam Smith Business School and PGT Hub, is expected to open in September 2023 with teaching spaces designed specifically to support PGT teaching for the first time on campus.

Prof Coton highlighted the commencement of large-scale projects to develop University IT capability; projects include the replacement of the University's core network, and upgrading of the University's server infrastructure with increased cloud service utilisation where appropriate. Further investments in the University's research computing and 'end-user' devices are being delivered by a recently augmented Information Services directorate.

Prof Coton was thanked for his presentation, and was asked about plans for the space that ASBS will vacate upon entering its new building. Prof Coton confirmed that the School of Education were scheduled to move into the vacated space, with the longer term use of the St Andrews building still under discussion. The current Adam Smith Building, housing the School of Social and Political Sciences, was recognised as having poor access for students and staff, and that the capital plan was evolving to align with the University's longer term priorities in consideration of the wider economic situation.

4. Convenor of Court address

Dr David Duncan provided a summary of University Court business on behalf of Ms Elizabeth Passey, Convenor of Court, who was also in attendance.

Court Membership

Dr Duncan thanked 3 new members for joining University Court in 2022; Stuart Hoggan, Dr Christine Middlemiss and Shan Saba. A search and subsequent election for a new Convenor of Court would be held in the coming months, with the current convenor's term coming to an end in July 2024. The September away-day for Court focused on the context in which the University is currently operating,

particularly the geo-political environment and economic pressures such as funding for teaching, industrial conflict, inflation, international risks including the war in Ukraine, and changes in legislation with the potential to affect existing international relationships and partnerships.

Financial Statements

The University Court approved the University's financial statements in November 2022, and noted the delivery of the Ross Report which included recommendations on improving the University's provision with regards to handling sexual harassment. Dr Duncan confirmed that the University had accepted the reports and its recommendations in full. Dr Duncan thanked members of the University Court for continuing to hold the University executive to account, and for its support in making and approving major decisions relating to the strategic direction of the University.

International Markets

Council members thanked Dr Duncan for his Court Report, and enquired as to the future financial risk relating to large populations of students hailing from single international markets. Dr Duncan recognised that while the University has deep relationships with some international markets, members were assured that this did not lead to displacement of Scottish ('Home') undergraduate students, with strong representation from Home, UK and International students at postgraduate level – on both taught and research programmes. Dr Duncan recognised that the strong recruitment of international students had significantly contributed to the financial performance of the University, and that the University was slightly below the Russell Group median with regards to students from its largest market. It was noted that the University was working to strengthen existing relationships with its largest market, whilst considering how to diversify its tuition fee income streams in future years. Scenario planning exercises had been carried out to model the impact of major changes in demand for the University's taught programmes, and it was confirmed that the University retains cash holdings to provide a 'buffer' in the event of a major shock to the market.

BM asked whether students from particular markets, specifically Hong Kong, were being disaffected by the wider geopolitical climate. Dr Duncan noted that he wasn't aware of any specific tensions relating to this cohort of students, and emphasised the strong relationship the University has with Hong Kong, with the Principal scheduled to travel to Hong Kong later this year in support of their education system.

5. Report from the General Council Business Committee

Emeritus Professor Peter Holmes provided an update from the General Council Business Committee (GCBC) meeting in October 2022, referencing the University's strong financial position, pressures on teaching spaces and the use of neighbourhood buildings to accommodate teaching, progress made on the campus redevelopment, pay and pensions discussions with the University's trade unions, and the University's excellent performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), improving from 33rd to 14th over the last three REF cycles. The GCBC welcomed the University's efforts to improve the supply of student accommodation, and the success of recent DAO events was recognised, including the fundraising campaign for Ukraine, raising £110k in one week. Heartfelt thanks were given to Stuart Macquarrie for his service to the University as Convenor of the General Council Business Committee.

6. Close of Meeting

In closing the meeting, Dr Duncan thanked all for participating. The General Council added best wishes to Stuart Macquarrie and thanked him for his support of the General Council and General Council Business Committee over recent years.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next General Council Half Yearly meeting will take place on 27th June 2023 via Zoom.