

General Council

Half-yearly meeting

Tuesday, 21 January 2020

Minutes of the General Council Half-yearly meeting held in the Senate Room on 21 January 2020

1. Introduction and Welcome

The Chancellor, Professor Sir Kenneth Calman, welcomed those present to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2019 were approved.

3. Appointment of Chancellor

The Chancellor had intimated that he would be retiring from the Chancellorship in June 2020. Nominations would shortly be sought for the appointment of Sir Kenneth's successor. An election would be arranged in the event that there was more than one nomination.

4. Principal's Address

The Principal, Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, provided an address on the University's progress.

The Principal updated the meeting on the University's position in league table rankings. League tables were not ideal indicators of true quality. While the University had slipped in the THE rankings, it had improved in the QS league table. However, the University was firmly located in the UK's top 20 institutions and there had been very strong showings recently from individual subject areas. It was noted that German and Chinese universities were making increasing progress in international rankings.

The Principal summarised the University's financial position. In the recent period until the early 2000s, the University had often returned deficits. However, since then there had been increasing recognition of the need to invest in infrastructure for research and teaching through improvements in IT, buildings and other facilities. The operating surpluses achieved in recent years had contributed to the University's ability to invest and thereby compete in globalised higher education.

There was good progress with the projects to develop the campus. There had been a delay to construction of the James McCune Smith Learning and Teaching Hub (JMSH) through the requirement to retrofit a sprinkler system, but completion of the building was again proceeding well. The JMSH would provide excellent facilities for technology-enhanced teaching and learning, 1200 study spaces and much-needed teaching spaces.

The outline structure of the Research Hub was also nearing completion. It was hoped to hold the topping-out ceremony in spring 2020 and overall completion in 2021. The building would house 600 staff and research students. Underlying the project was the intention to facilitate interdisciplinary research and break down subject silos. This had been approached through consideration of the University's research 'beacons'. There were five such thematic areas:-

Creative Economies and Cultural Transformation brought together disciplines including creative and cultural policy, law, digital humanities and immersive technologies to have a significant impact on the creative economy of Glasgow and beyond.

The objective of work in Digital Chemistry was to enable molecules, compounds and materials to be autonomously discovered, synthesised and manufactured from code. This beacon brought together expertise from chemistry, computing science and engineering. The purpose of this research was to transform the production of pharmaceuticals.

International Development involved natural scientists, veterinary and medical scientists, engineers, educators and social scientists engaged in poverty reduction in the global south.

Quantum and Nanotechnology brought together researchers from engineering and science. Collaborating with health, energy and security sectors, this initiative was intended to further enhance the University's leading position in research in quantum imaging and sensors.

Technology Touching Life involved researchers in medicine, engineering and chemistry to focus on health care innovations such as drug discovery, regenerative medicines and stem cell technologies.

A further building project was the Clarice Pears Building, on University Place. This would house the Health and Well-being Research Institute which was currently spread across 13 different locations. Key financial support had been provided by the Pears Foundation; the Medical Research Council was also involved. Other public health research in the UK was located in London. This project would further underline the University's status in this area.

The University Court had also approved the construction of a building to house the Adam Smith Business School and form a hub for postgraduate taught students. It was intended that the hub would assist students in settling in and integrating. Their work on University Avenue to introduce further safety measures was also progressing well and was due for completion at the same time as the JMSH. Recladding and internal refurbishment of the Boyd-Orr Building were likely to proceed.

Very good results were being achieved in research excellence. The Principal paid tribute to Professor Miles Padgett, who has stepped down as Vice-Principal for Research, but would continue as lead for the development of research culture. There were a number of new initiatives including the Glasgow Crucible and associated scholarships and fellowships which would foster researcher development.

Turning to the coming year, the Principal reported that work was well advanced in developing the new University Strategy. The new plan was scheduled to be completed by June. A new Learning and Teaching Strategy was also being developed in parallel, led by Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching, Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith. Consultation was still underway, but it was expected that the new University strategy would include a focus on research collaboration, sustainability, widening access, IT infrastructure and on developing the relationships with the range of communities with which the University interacted.

The University also looked forward to the COP26 United Nations Climate Change Conference, due to take place in Glasgow in November. The opportunity would be taken to showcase the University's contribution to climate change, with parallel conferences hosted by schools and research institutes, some in collaboration with sister universities.

The Principal expected that the financial settlement for higher education would be difficult. The Scottish Government were also still to decide what fees would be charged for EU students entering Scottish universities in 2021. A further factor was the approach to research funding being taken by the new UK government, which was less bureaucratic, but based less on established baselines.

Following Brexit, the Principal affirmed that the University would seek to remain closely associated with the EU through Universities UK and the Russell Group and other vehicles. The University needed to respond strongly to Brexit. A particular concern was the visa system that would apply to staff and students from the EU.

In response to a query, the Principal expressed the hope that the UK would retain associate membership of the Erasmus student mobility schemes following Brexit. The University would continue to fund five-year programmes in modern languages which involved students spending a year in Europe. New ways would also need to be found to support other disciplines, notably law, where up to 50% of honours students spent time studying abroad. It was hoped that a scheme would be established by the UK Government.

Asked about the University's response to the climate emergency, the Principal noted that the University was taking advantage of its position to show leadership and members were referred to the recently approved Sustainability Strategy¹, which contained ambitious performance indicators including a route towards carbon neutrality that would be monitored by the Senior Management Group and University Court. The Sustainability Strategy also included the initiative to establish a Centre for Sustainable Solutions. The Strategy also recognised the leading role that students were taking globally in addressing the climate emergency and sought to support our own student body in this. The University was working closely also with the Students' Representative Council in its approach to the COP26 conference. The embedding of sustainability in the curriculum was also a key focus.

The Principal was thanked for his presentation on the University's progress.

5. Report of the Convener of the General Council Business Committee

The Convener of the General Council Business Committee, Reverend Stuart McQuarrie, provided a report from the Business Committee.

During 2019, the General Council Business Committee (GCBC) had met on 26th February, 7th May, 4th July, 17th September and 12th November. The agenda of the meetings had included presentations, updates and reports from University Management/University Court, Alumni Relations and Convenor's Business/Reports. From time to time the GCBC was asked to consider other matters such as Draft Ordinances. At the meeting in February the Convenor had invited members of GCBC to submit a brief paper of 150 words on their own thoughts and aspirations for GCBC. Following receipt and circulation of these, it had been agreed at the May meeting to establish a sub committee to

¹ Please see <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/sustainability/climatechangestrategy/>

review with the Development and Alumni Office (DAO) the comments received and to consider how these might be better aligned with the University aims and strategy.

The meeting in May received presentations from Glasgow University Union, Queen Margaret Union and the Glasgow University Sports Association. These, together with a previous presentation by the Students' Representative Council, had been helpful in enabling members to understand issues and concerns around student life today.

The meeting in July had discussed issues around the History of Slavery Report produced by the University and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the University and the University of the West Indies. Members had been invited to the opening of the exhibition telling of the University's links with the history of slavery and the unveiling of the commemorative plaque. Members of GCBC had been saddened to learn of the decision by the Chancellor to retire in 2020.

The September meeting considered a proposal to consider how the remaining 10 spaces of the quincentenary gates might be used to celebrate the diversity of the University. The Chief Operating Officer had reported on the Campus Development Plan, Research Excellence Framework arrangements and the development of the University Strategy 2020-25.

The meeting in November had been held in the University Library Talk Lab. The main business was a report from the Principal on matters affecting the University which included an update on the development of the new University Strategy, and a report on Development and Alumni activities, the meeting had been followed by an informative visit to the DAO call centre. Members had been able to see and engage with students making calls to alumni seeking support for today's students and projects such as the Campus Development.

In response to a query regarding the role the General Council should fill in the University, Reverend McQuarrie explained that he saw the Council's role as providing a critically important channel allowing alumni to contribute positively to the University. Reflection by the Business Committee was increasingly focused on how alumni could support the University's work, notably, in respect of the career development of students. Reverend McQuarrie considered that the Council was at a turning point in this regard and he hoped that this approach would continue to strengthen in coming years.

The Convener of the Business Committee was thanked for his report.

6. Results of the Election of Members of the General Council Business Committee

Following a vote by members present, the General Council resolved to elect Professor Jonathan Thomas Cavanagh, Professor of Psychiatry at the University, and Dr Cameron Graham Marshall, retired former research scientist and pharmaceutical executive, as members of the General Council Business Committee. Both would serve on the Business Committee with immediate effect until January 2024. Professor Cavanagh and Dr Marshall were congratulated on their election.

7. Ms Amber Higgins

Members joined with the Chancellor in expressing the gratitude of the General Council for the support it had received from Ms Amber Higgins, who had recently stepped down following seven years as Clerk to the General Council. Members expressed their good wishes for Ms Higgins's future work at the University.

8. The DUNK Project

The Chancellor welcomed to the meeting Ms Stella Dobson and Ms Ruth Dolan, who were University undergraduates involved in the DUNK Project.

Ms Dobson and Ms Dolan explained that DUNK was an NGO based in Accra, Ghana. The charity worked with children and young adults in Jamestown and Nima - two of the most disadvantaged communities in Accra. DUNK aimed to nurture young people, providing them with basketball tuition, life-skills training and academic support. Ms Dobson and Ms Dolan had become involved with DUNK through their involvement in basketball at the University.

DUNK had been founded by Mohammed Tahir, a gifted Ghanaian basketball player. He had started by using basketball as a vehicle for the development of children and women to become change influencers in their communities. The project provided free sports equipment and 350 children now participated. There were now eight DUNK basketball teams, including two for women. The latter point was especially noteworthy: opportunities for women in Ghana lagged even those for males. For many children, DUNK offered their sole opportunity to play in a safe and clean environment. The project sought to augment support for children in ways that schools could not afford to do. It also tracked the progress of the children involved and to date, 53 had won scholarships at the University of Ghana. DUNK was also working at present to convert waste ground into football pitches primarily for women.

Ms Dobson and Ms Dolan had become involved with DUNK out of the desire to contribute to community development. DUNK also provided a great opportunity for the University's basketball clubs. Working with the impressive people who supported DUNK had been extremely inspiring experiences. The University Women's Basketball Club was engaged in fundraising and other supporting activities. It was hoped to be able to extend DUNK involvement to other University sports clubs and societies.

Ms Dobson and Ms Dolan noted that the relationship between the University and DUNK was mutually beneficial. With three male colleagues, they had had the opportunity to spend time coaching children in Ghana. More widely, support activity in the University was able to generate financial and other resources and to provide a pool of skilled potential volunteers and networking opportunities for DUNK. At the same time, DUNK provided Glasgow students invaluable opportunities to experience travel and working abroad. It provided hands-on internships in a number of locations.

In addition, DUNK provided a model for community projects based in Glasgow and the improvement of opportunities for local children. 12 University students were presently involved in basketball coaching for a total of 185 children at Govan High School and its eight feeder primary schools. A basketball tournament for children had been hosted in the Stevenson Building in January. This had partly been aimed at interesting the children concerned in the University and higher education.

Ms Dolan identified ways the University could become further involved in DUNK: through helping University basketball to implement a sustainable volunteer partnership; by directly funding individual projects; and also by supporting the hosting of a visit by Mohammed Tahir to Glasgow, where he would have the opportunity to speak to member of the University about community change through sport.

In discussion, Ms Dobson confirmed that there were marked similarities between the lives of children in Accra and in Govan, in that, sadly, the environments where they were growing up did

little to foster aspiration. It was very much hoped that children from both places could be brought together through exchange activity.

Ms Dobson and Ms Dolan were warmly congratulated on their support for DUNK and its ambitions and thanked for their inspiring presentation. Members wished them and DUNK all success.

Note: further information on the work of DUNK can be found at:

<https://www.dunkgrassroots.org/>

9. Date of next meeting

Note: subsequent to the meeting, it was decided that the next half-yearly meeting would be held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 2 June 2020.