**University of Glasgow**

**General Council**

**Minutes of the virtual meeting of the General Council convened on 23 June at 1800 hours. The meeting was chaired by Baroness Katherine Grainger, with c.85 members in attendance.**

**Panel:** Baroness Katherine Grainger (Chancellor), Dr Cameron Marshall (Chair of GCBC), Gregor Caldow (Executive Director of Finance), Dr David Duncan (COO and University Secretary), Gavin Stewart (Convener of Court), Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli (Principal)

**Support:** Lee McClure (Clerk to the General Council), Emily Howie (Head of Alumni and Supporter Engagement/Registrar of General Council)

**1. Welcome**

The Chair, Baroness Grainger, welcomed the panel and General Council members to the meeting. In addition to the small panel of presenters and participating Council members, two colleagues were on hand to manage and facilitate the webinar platform.

**2. Minute of the last meeting held on 28 January 2025**

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 28 January 2025 were approved.

**3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

**4. Report from the Executive Director of Finance**

Mr Caldow provided the General Council with a comprehensive briefing on the University’s financial performance and outlook, emphasising both sector-wide pressures and the University’s relative strength. He reported that the wider UK higher education sector continued to face significant headwinds, including:

* Increased employment costs (e.g., national insurance changes)
* A softening international student market, linked to visa policy shifts and geopolitical trends
* A multi-year decline in public funding

While acknowledging these challenges, Mr Caldow affirmed that the University of Glasgow was in a robust financial position. He credited this to prudent fiscal management and a well-established financial framework, which included a disciplined approach to budgeting and surplus targets. He stressed that the University remained focused on sustainability, ensuring that annual operations would generate sufficient cash to fund reinvestment and maintain prudent cash reserves.

Mr Caldow shared comparative financial data for the Russell Group and the Scottish university sector. The University’s financial position in 2024 was in the mid-range of the Russell Group but was expected to strengthen in 2025, which would potentially move the University further up relative to peers, many of whom face more acute financial pressures. Mr Caldow outlined groupings within the Russell Group - institutions growing or maintaining surpluses; those with declining surpluses; and those already in or approaching deficit - underscoring the uneven impact of economic stressors. In addition, he highlighted the distinction between accounting surplus and cash from operations, the latter being a more telling indicator of institutional financial health. Notably, while some institutions, such as Edinburgh, showed positive surplus figures, they generated negative operational cash flows - a situation Glasgow was avoiding. The General Council noted that in Scotland, the University continued to lead in terms of underlying surplus and operational stability, although Mr Caldow acknowledged that the scale and complexity of institutions across the Scottish sector vary considerably.

Audit and governance were briefly mentioned in the context of maintaining financial rigour, with reference to the University’s internal audit function and its role in supporting oversight.

Mr Caldow reiterated that the University’s strong financial footing continued to enable targeted investment across both infrastructure and its core academic mission. Ongoing system upgrades span finance, timetabling, student records, and automation, while substantial funding had also been directed towards campus asset management in alignment with the University’s Glasgow Green sustainability strategy. In addition, two major capital projects were underway: the Keystone Building on the Western Infirmary site, and the Church Street Development - a planned joint venture combining student accommodation with innovation space to support long-term institutional growth.

Mr Caldow concluded by reiterating the University’s commitment to sound financial stewardship and its capacity to withstand sector shocks - positioning the University to avoid the difficulties currently faced by some peer institutions.

In response to a question regarding the alignment of University investments with student values, Mr Caldow confirmed that the University had published a Responsible Investment Policy, guided by ethical, social, and environmental considerations. Oversight was provided by a dedicated Investment Advisory Committee, which met quarterly and receives detailed reports from the University’s investment managers to ensure adherence to the policy.

Mr Caldow was thanked for his presentation.

**5. Report from the Chief Operating Officer and University Secretary**

Dr David Duncan, Chief Operating Officer and University Secretary, reported that the University was in the process of developing its next 10-year strategy, which would be finalised once the new Principal took office in the autumn. The strategy would focus on core academic activities, learning and teaching, and research and innovation and highlighted the University's commitment to being an outward-looking and growing institution, maintaining its values and being a positive force for change within Glasgow and globally.

The General Council noted the University's strong global reputation and that it remained within the World Top 100 in key rankings such as the QS and Times Higher Education rankings. While UK league tables showed mixed results, the University was holding its own both domestically and internationally.

In addition, the University's efforts to enhance student life on campus through investments in wellbeing, inclusion, and development opportunities continued. Seven million had been invested in 14 different projects over the past two years, working closely with the Student Representative Council (SRC), Student Unions, and the Sports Association. There remained a commitment to inclusivity and to build a sense of belonging for all students. Dr Duncan highlighted various initiatives taken forward, including the University of Sanctuary status, work in Malawi, and projects addressing homelessness and substance abuse.

Finally, Members noted this year’s successful commemoration event with honorary graduates, and all were encouraged to visit the new Peace Bench on campus, symbolising the University's commitment to peace and inclusivity.

**6. Report from the Convener of Court**

The Convener of Court briefed Members on the University Court’s structure and remit, highlighting the importance of robust governance and the Court's role in overseeing the University's resources and strategic direction.

Mr Stewart outlined the Court’s structure, key roles, and business, highlighting recent decisions including the approval of the Keystone Building, a review of the investment policy, and the appointment of the new Principal. He asked Members to note the independent governance review undertaken during the year and the resulting enhancements underway.

Members noted Court’s priorities for the coming year, which would include developing the strategic plan, upholding the financial framework, and supporting the incoming Principal. The significance of financial resilience and long-term institutional health was once more underscored. In addition, Members were asked to note the election process for various positions on Court, the planned development of the Church Street frontage and the University’s upcoming 575th anniversary celebrations in 2026.

During questioning, the Principal reported how the University was evolving its strategy in response to AI adoption in student recruitment, particularly for international applicants and also highlighted recent AI briefings, current use of bots for managing inquiries, and ongoing engagement with global edtech firms to improve applicant matching and recruitment efficiency.

The Convener of Court was thanked for his presentation.

**7. Report from the General Council Business Committee**

Dr Cameron Marshall expressed his gratitude to the Principal, on his final General Council meeting, for his outstanding leadership and significant contributions to the University. He reported on the General Council Business Committee’s role in stakeholder engagement and its active interest over the past six months in key areas, notably the University’s financial sustainability and student wellbeing.

The panelists recognised increasing concerns about anti-trans sentiment in the UK and reaffirmed the University’s commitment to inclusion, highlighting ongoing consultation and practical support - such as maintaining inclusive facilities and articulating clear institutional values. The Principal underscored the role of established structures, including the Equality and Diversity Strategy Committee and dedicated LGBT+ champions who maintain close engagement with staff and students.

In response to a query about volunteering, it was confirmed that students and staff remained actively involved. Initiatives like 'Mind Your Mate' and the staff mental health first aider programme continued to play a vital role in peer support and mental health awareness across campus.

**8. Any Other Business**

Baroness Grainger responded to a pre-submitted question concerning in-person history examinations, noting that the matter had been considered by the Senate and that further discussions would take place.

No other items of additional business were raised.

Baroness Grainger concluded the Half Yearly meeting by thanking attendees for their participation and reaffirming her appreciation to the Principal for his outstanding service and leadership.

**9. Date and time of next meeting**

The dates for the General Council meetings in January and June 2026 would be confirmed in due course.