

**Public Affairs Standing Committee Meeting held on Thursday 8 May 2025**  
**Online via Teams**

**Present:** Professor Alice Brown (Convener of PASC)  
Ms Candice Donnelly  
Mr Devin Scobie  
Dr William Duncan (Secretary of the General Council)  
Mr Gordon Cairns (Convener of the Business Committee)  
Dr Bruce Nelson (Vice Convener of the Business Committee)  
Ms Alison McNulty (Assistant Secretary of the General Council)

**1. Welcome and apologies**

The Convener welcomed committee members to a closed meeting to discuss the agenda items that it had not been possible to cover at the last meeting of PASC on 8 April.

Apologies from Arron Ashton.

**2. Minutes from the meeting held on 8 April 2025**

The minutes were approved.

**3. Matters arising from the meeting held on 8 April 2025**

Item 2: Presentation from Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact

- AB asked members to consider how PASC should proactively follow-up aspects of the presentation given by Gemma regarding the new Community Plan.  
WD suggested that reference should be made to this in the context of the report from PASC at the upcoming HYM in June;
- WD expressed concerns about the timing and adequacy of resource allocation and noted the changes in the University's budgeting process, emphasising the need for clarity by mid-June;
- AB agreed, highlighting the importance of maintaining a positive public image and community relations and to avoid duplication of effort with PASC's proposed workplan regarding "town and gown" relations which should complement the University's activity;
- DS and CD remarked on the necessity of staying optimistic about resource predictions, despite potential financial constraints.

Item 5: Proposal to produce short videos

- WD gave an update on the current arrangements for making short and engaging videos with the purpose of raising an awareness of the GC without the need for researching a lot of written material;
- Sanctus Media who are involved in livestreaming GC events, have been commissioned to develop the first video which will provide an overview of the role of the GC;
- The second video will focus on the work of the BC and its standing committees and will be produced by David Lee Media. The expected completion date is end June;
- Noted that David Lee (DL), a former editor of the Scotsman, had previously worked with DS who was not involved in any recruitment decision;

- WD and AM had a recent planning meeting with DL who stressed the importance of aligning videos 1 and 2 to avoid any duplication and mismatch of messaging and said that he would like to liaise with the script writer involved with the first video;
- Video 2 will include the Convener of the BC and the conveners of CSC, ISC and PASC with the aim of encouraging GC members to stand for election to the BC. Emphasise that it is the BC of the GC and *not* an executive committee of the University that they will be joining; the expected time commitment involved requiring attendance and participation at meetings, and that the position is pro bono where any expenses are not reimbursed;
- WD said that payment for the first 2 videos will come out of the GC budget for this financial year;
- Possibility of working closely with D & A on the production of a third video, which will concentrate on the GC Prince Philip Scholarship Fund, as i) they are involved in other scholarships, noting that the GC scholarship should be viewed as complementary to these; and ii) there are issues relating to GDPR and consent if GC scholars are asked to feature in the video;
- DS suggested also involving the EUSA sabbatical officers.

#### **4. Future Events**

##### Usher Institute on 22 May 2025

- WD reported that 160 people have now registered to attend;
- Registrations and organisation for the event are being handled by the dedicated events team based at Usher, led by Rebecca Whitefield;
- The event will be recorded but not livestreamed to avoid late cancellations and limit no-shows;
- Although a drinks reception and buffet supper will be included, this has not been advertised to ensure that delegates are attending because they are interested in the event and not because free refreshments are offered;
- Leader of City of Edinburgh Council, Jane Meagher was unable to attend due to another engagement but will be invited to the formal opening event at the Usher Institute in the morning of 26 June, along with other councillors and members of the Business Committee.

##### Half-Yearly Meeting Saturday 14 June 2025

- The statutory meeting will be held in the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute (ECCI) at 10.30am and will include a 5-minute report from each of the conveners of CSC, ISC and PASC as well as the usual report from the Business Committee given by the Convener.

#### **Action:-**

***Conveners have been asked to supply initial drafts of their reports to be sent in advance to the GC office. These will be shared with David Lee so that he can prepare a framework script for the production of General Council video no. 2 which will focus on the work of the General Council committees.***

##### "In Conversation" Event on Tuesday 7 October 2025

- This event will be held in St. Cecilia's Hall from 6pm and will feature a conversation with Joanna Cherry and Lord Wallace – a former Deputy First Minister - about their reflections during their time as students at the University, and will be hosted by the Rector, Simon Fanshawe;
- There was a discussion around shaping a clear narrative surrounding the event to avoid misinterpretation related to sensitive topics like trans rights;
- Simon and Joanna, who have been prominent in related debates, were chosen not for their views on certain topics but for other reasons;
- Members emphasised the need to clarify the reasons for choosing the speakers and the event's purpose as a dialogue about their experiences at the University in the 1970s and 1980s to prevent external narratives from framing it in an undesirable light;
- Emphasised that this is not a platform for the speakers to discuss other issues;
- The strategy suggested involves proactively defining the theme of the event and explicitly stating its focus and aims to avoid misunderstandings or hijacking of the event;
- DS suggested preparing a flyer explaining the event's theme, format and boundaries of discussion which was seen as important in managing audience expectations and directing the event's focus;
- There is a need for pre-meeting briefings to ensure the speakers fully understand and follow the intended format;
- This preparation aims to ensure discussions remain on topic and any potentially controversial subjects are handled accurately and respectfully;
- Discussed additional practicalities such as the venue capacity limits (the Concert Hall seats 160 but the Laigh room reserved for catering has space for only 75 so there is a need to restrict bookings to 100-120) and potential security issues to prevent groups from monopolising the event or creating disruption;
- Suggested inviting the University Secretary and the Principal and/or Provost who could give the Vote of Thanks, and the Leader and other City of Edinburgh councillors;
- Ensure the evening is badged as a General Council event and not a University led event;
- Discussed the most appropriate way of managing a post-event 'thank you' dinner for the speakers;
- Proposed using the Canopy restaurant within EFI, which is open until 10pm and payment for the dinner could be made internally using University financial codes.

***Action:-***

***DS will contact the speakers to ask if they are available for dinner after the event finishes.***

**Christmas Reception – Tuesday 9 December 2025**

- The Informatics Forum has been reserved for this annual event, which will begin at 5.15pm;
- Attendance from the choir still to be confirmed [Post-meeting – Choir have now confirmed but fee has increased from £220 previously asked for];

- AB requested that the Leader of City of Edinburgh Council, Jane Meagher and other councillors should receive an invitation.

**Action:-**

***Members of PASC should contact the GC office with any other suggestions of whom to invite.***

Half-Yearly Meeting – Saturday 14 February 2026

- Suggestions for the after-lunch speaker include Professor Shannon Vallor, Ballie Gifford Chair in the Ethics of Data and Artificial Intelligence at the Edinburgh Futures Institute, and notable alumni (Kaye Adams, Laura Kuenssberg and Emma Simpson were mentioned) who could be invited to give an inspiring talk about their successful career since graduating.

**Action:-**

***The committee were asked to explore ideas for potential speakers and contact the GC office with any proposals.***

**Discussion**

- There was appetite to put on more “showcasing” events, particularly as there was a significant reduction in the costs associated with *Billet* and recent events have attracted a lot of interest, and WD said that the successful arrangements for the Usher Event, led by the dedicated events team based at the Usher Institute, had provided a useful formula for planning and organising future events at the other Colleges;
- BN proposed the following topics:
- **Student Experience** – suggested inviting e.g., Colm Harmon, VP Students, Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary Students, ACE and EUSA sabbatical officers
- **Community Relations** – suggested inviting colleagues from key areas involved e.g., Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact, EUSA sabbatical officers, and the Edinburgh Students’ Charities Association;
- AB said that inviting students was a good suggestion;
- GC mentioned sport as a current topical theme and potentially inviting celebrity names among the sporting community alumni to take part, e.g., Dame Katherine Grainger.

**5. Workplan for 2025-26**

- A key priority is to develop the “town and gown” relationship following the recent meeting AB and WD had with Cllr Jane Meagher and proposed inviting City of Edinburgh councillors and other key stakeholders to future GC events;
- A proposed survey of local GC members - in conjunction with D & A - was discussed and considered a good idea in principle but, due to resourcing implications, it was agreed to pause this initiative until a future time deemed more appropriate;
- This will be raised at the next meeting of PASC on 26 May with Chris Cox, Vice-Principal Philanthropy and Executive Director of Development and Alumni;
- GC budget will also be considered at the next meeting and how finances can be repurposed in a way that improves opportunities for engagement with alumni;

- Other areas for discussion at the next meeting will include updates to i) the University's response regarding ethical investments and ii) the Race Review.

**6. Any other business**

None.

**7. Date of next meeting**

Monday 26 May 2025, 4.30pm, online via Teams.