History of the General Councils

The General Councils of the four Ancient Universities (Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews) in Scotland were set up under the Universities (Scotland) Act 1858. The General Council of the University of Edinburgh was constituted in 1858, and its constitution and functions have been defined and altered by subsequent Universities (Scotland) Acts and Representation of the People (Scotland) Acts.

The General Council elects the Chancellor of the University, and three General Council Assessors on the University Court. According to the Act of 1858, ‘it shall be competent’ to the Council ‘to take into their consideration all questions affecting the well-being and prosperity of the University and to make representations from time to time on such questions to the University Court, who shall consider the same, and return to the council their deliverance thereon’. By the 1966 Act, the Council has power to consider draft Ordinances and Resolutions; it also receives an Annual Report of the work and activities of the University, which is delivered by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor at the February Half-Yearly Meeting, and an audited financial statement. Two Statutory Half-Yearly Meetings of the General Council are held annually (in February and June), and the Business Committee with the assistance of its Standing Committees deals with matters arising in the interim.

Membership of the General Council comprises:

- The graduates of the University
- The members of the University Court
- The Professors
- The Readers and Lecturers of at least one year's standing
- The former members of the Court, and the former Professors and retired Readers and Lecturers (who have held office for at least three years) and who have elected to remain members of the General Council.

The number of registered members at July 2013 was 179,614.