McMaster University

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO RECOMMEND A PRESIDENT

The Committee to Recommend a President, established in January 2019 in accordance with the terms of the McMaster University Act, 1976 and the By-laws of the University Senate and Board of Governors, consisted of ten people, five named by the Senate and five by the Board.

Mr. Paul Douglas  
Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors (Chair), Board appointment

Dr. Maureen MacDonald  
Professor and Dean, Faculty of Science (Vice-Chair), Senate appointment

Ms Anita Acai  
PhD candidate, Faculty of Science, Senate appointment

Ms Leah Allan  
Lab Safety Specialist, Board appointment

Dr. Nancy Doubleday  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Director, Water Without Borders, Senate appointment

Dr. Carlos Filipe  
Professor, Faculty of Engineering and Chair, Department of Chemical Engineering, Board appointment

Mr. Tevin Heath  
Undergraduate Student, Faculty of Science, Senate appointment

Mr. Bradley Merkel  
Chair, Board of Governors, Board appointment

Dr. Gerry Wright  
Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences and Director, Michael DeGroote Institute for Infectious Disease Research, Senate appointment

The Secretary of the Board of Governors, Ms Andrea Thyret-Kidd, served as Secretary of the Committee and Dr. Arig al Shaibah, Associate Vice-President, Equity and Inclusion, was appointed as a consultant. The Committee was assisted in its work by Mr. Nick Chambers and Ms Jessa Chupik from the executive search firm Boyden.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the contributions of Mr. Andrew Colgoni and Ms Rebecca Jamieson. Both members were active throughout the process but resigned for reasons external to the Committee’s work. Mr. Colgoni was replaced by Ms Leah Allan as a Board appointed member but due to the lateness in the process of Ms. Jamieson’s resignation she was not replaced.
Background

Once formally constituted by the Board of Governors and Senate, the Committee to Recommend a President began its work on February 1, 2019. The Committee elected Mr. Paul Douglas, Chair of the Board of Governors at the time, as Committee Chair. Dr. Maureen MacDonald, Dean, Faculty of Science, was elected as Vice-Chair. Over the course of its first meeting the Committee discussed planning and details to map out its work over the coming months. Members agreed that confidentiality would be vital to the success of the selection process and signed confidentiality agreements to preserve this commitment.

Members of the Committee strongly agreed on the importance of equity and inclusion throughout the process. The appointment of Dr. al Shaibah as a consultant was made to ensure equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) were prominent considerations in all aspects of the Committee’s work. The Committee met on February 20, 2019 to undertake EDI training and to learn about best practices and inclusive excellence in search processes.

To support the Committee in its work a request for proposal was issued for an executive search firm. After reviewing several submissions and interviewing a number of excellent firms, the Committee selected Boyden Executive Search. Boyden impressed the Committee with its deep understanding of higher education, including knowledge of and experience with McMaster University, national and international reach, and commitment to EDI. Mr. Nick Chambers and Ms Jessa Chupik from Boyden were engaged and began their work supporting the Committee to Recommend a President.

Consultation and Engagement

In order to develop an effective executive profile, one that accurately reflected leadership attributes, emerging themes, personal characteristics, and selection criteria, the Committee sought to undertake an ambitious program of wide-ranging consultations. These consultations were meant to provide the committee with connections to all stakeholders with a lens to informing both the executive profile and the interview and selection process. The consultation plan was developed to ensure that all campus groups, including students, staff, and faculty, as well as external stakeholders had an opportunity to engage in a meaningful way. The consultations began with two town halls seeking to engage students, faculty and staff in a meaningful conversation about the needs of McMaster University. Dr. Maureen MacDonald led these events which provided members of the Committee with the opportunity to ask questions and receive valuable feedback. In addition to the meetings and town halls, an email address was created to offer members of both the McMaster and the external community an opportunity to provide feedback. In early May, the campus community was invited to complete a survey to share views and input on the process.

Following the town hall meetings, members of the Committee, together with the team from Boyden, met with faculty and academic administrators from each of the University’s Faculties. Consultation sessions and interviews were also held with individuals and groups from across
campus, including Provost’s Council, Vice-Presidents, Deans, Associate Vice-Presidents, President’s Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community, Co-Chairs of TMG Committee, Co-Chair of the Indigenous Education Council, President of the McMaster Students Union, current and past presidents of the McMaster Alumni Association, and President of the McMaster University Faculty Association. The Chair of the Committee also engaged in outreach with past Board Chairs and Chancellors, leaders within the City of Hamilton, and friends of the University. The committee was very pleased with the thoughtful and comprehensive nature of the feedback received and with the consistency of the themes that arose. Those themes included a sustained commitment to excellence, student focus, research intensity, community engagement, and recognition of the core value of integrity in all that we do. We also heard an aspiration to enhance the global impact of McMaster University, while maintaining, supporting and celebrating our values and traditions.

As an additional way to gain insight into the role of the President and Vice-Chancellor, the Committee met with Dr. Patrick Deane, as well as a number of past Presidents of research intensive universities. These meetings helped the Committee gain important perspective into the complex and multifaceted role of a university president.

Based on the consultations that were undertaken, the Committee was able to identify a number of important areas of focus for the next President and Vice-Chancellor, including:

- Commitment to enhancing the student experience at both the undergraduate and graduate level
- Leadership of a fundraising campaign
- Build on McMaster’s culture of collaboration and collegiality
- Be a champion for research intensification
- Provide principled and visionary leadership
- Strive for greater equity, diversity and inclusion and Indigenization
- Drive teaching and learning innovation and excellence
- Build on successes in community engagement
- Support, define and fund internationalization
- Communicate effectively with a wide range of audiences

Using the information received, the Committee developed an executive profile that highlighted important leadership attributes required in the next President and Vice-Chancellor. Throughout its work, the Committee continuously heard about the value of collegiality at McMaster and the importance of a leader with strong values and a demonstrated commitment and understanding of the student experience. Members sought to ensure that these features were considered prominently throughout its work, including the recruitment and selection process.

During its discussions, the Committee agreed that the next President would need to be a respected leader and scholar who would drive academic and research excellence, and focus on
enhancing the student experience, community engagement, experiential education, and global impact. Such a leader would also have to undertake this work in ways that align with McMaster’s values, of inclusivity, collegiality, interdisciplinarity and engagement with faculty, students, and staff. Members identified that this will require a person who values respect, integrity, and collaboration and yet is ambitious and keen to develop, focus and lead our senior team.

Recruitment and Selection

The Committee approved the final version of the executive profile at its meeting in early June, 2019. This profile was then shared with the University community using the website developed for the committee work and the profile was used by Boyden in its work leading an international search. An advertisement strategy was developed to ensure broad communication of the position, including promotion in a way that would enhance McMaster’s reputation and profile and also reach candidates from equity seeking groups. Some of the advertising venues included University Affairs, Globe & Mail, the Economist, CAUT, Chronicle of Higher Education, Senior Women Academic Administrators of Canada, Times Higher Education, and Insight into Diversity.

The Committee met over the summer months to review cover letters, CVs, and candidate statements for the long list of candidates for the position and to determine those to be invited for an interview. The Committee was very pleased with the number, quality and diversity of the applicants and continually undertook conversations to ensure EDI was considered when reviewing the materials. Following careful consideration, seven candidates were selected for first round interviews with the Committee. The interview process was standardized for all candidates and the questions were developed from the candidates brief with key criteria that had been informed by the broad consultation. Questions focused on areas related to research, teaching, student experience and engagement, EDI, vision, management style, fundraising, as well as other areas that are important for determining a candidate’s skills and abilities.

As contained in the McMaster University Act, the Committee is required to report to Senate within nine-months of the date on which the Senate named its five members. In advance of this deadline, the Committee provided an update to Senate on September 11 and requested an extension to continue its work until December 31, 2019, which was granted.

Following first round interviews, the Committee had extensive discussion and ultimately agreed to ask three candidates to a second interview. These interviews were used to ask more specific and in-depth questions about their ability to undertake the role of President and Vice-Chancellor. Throughout the process, the Committee had heard about the importance of team building and collegiality and believed that at this stage, it would be helpful to seek the views of McMaster’s Vice-Presidents. Members considered the matter and agreed that it was most appropriate to invite those who were not currently in acting roles. The Committee invited each of the second-round interview candidates to a meeting with the Dean and Vice-President (Health Sciences), Vice-President (University Advancement), Vice-President (Administration), and Chair of the Board of Governors. The meetings were not used to solicit recommendations
about candidates, but as an opportunity for the candidates to gather additional information and to discuss the exciting and unique attributes of McMaster University. The Chair of the Board of Governors conveyed the feedback from the meetings to the Committee.

The Committee met during the week following second round interviews to deliberate about the finalist candidates. The Committee assessed candidates against the executive profile and considered all of the available feedback and materials for each candidate. Members took great care in making a final recommendation and were committed to engaging in meaningful conversations about the decision. During this process there were in-depth discussions about areas that were identified as most important to McMaster and the campus community. After extensive deliberation, the Committee unanimously agreed that Dr. David Farrar would make an outstanding President and Vice-Chancellor.

The Committee is pleased to report the following recommendation:

**That the Committee to Recommend a President recommends that Dr. David Farrar be appointed President and Vice-Chancellor of McMaster University for a 5-year term, effective July 1, 2020.**

**Dr. David Farrar**

Dr. Farrar’s career at McMaster began in November 2017 when he was appointed Provost and Vice-President (Academic). Since July 1, 2019, David has been the University’s Acting President and Vice-Chancellor. Prior to joining McMaster, Dr. Farrar had an impressive career as a senior administrator and leader at two of Canada’s top universities. At the University of British Columbia he held roles including Interim President, Provost and Vice-President (Academic), and Vice-President (Finance). During his career at the University of Toronto, he served as Deputy Provost, Vice-Provost, Students, and Chair of the Department of Chemistry.

In addition to his experience in leadership positions, Dr. Farrar has been deeply involved in teaching and research as an academic. His scholarly career includes numerous grants, 80 articles published in refereed journals, 2 book chapters, and 5 patents.

The Selection Committee was very impressed with Dr. Farrar’s experience, understanding, and commitment to research and teaching, as well as his bold vision for the future and understanding of and engagement with student affairs. Throughout the process, David demonstrated his deep knowledge of McMaster and the challenges and opportunities that are facing the University at this time in its history. He brings to the role a leadership style that is focused on values, collegiality and collaboration. Through extensive consultations and outreach, the Committee worked hard to understand what would be required for the success of McMaster’s next President and Vice-Chancellor. When compared against the executive profile, members identified the breadth and depth of Dr. Farrar’s considerable experience and
leadership skills and were in agreement that he is the right person to lead McMaster and to continue to build on the University’s success.