

## **Academic Staff Member Election 2020**

### **Shereen Benjamin**

I'm a Senior Lecturer in Primary Education at the Moray House School of Education and Sport (MHSES), and I've been employed at the University of Edinburgh for nearly 15 years. During that time I've served in a number of School and College leadership positions, including most recently as CHASS Associate Dean for Quality Assurance (until December 2019). I have wide knowledge of cross-University issues through participation in committees and working groups, and through leading and participating in internal teaching reviews (TPRs and PPRs) in a number of Schools. I've also contributed to the development of teaching at the University, for example through leading sessions on the Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice, and I've led or championed initiatives such as the mainstreaming adjustments project. I would therefore bring to the role of Academic Staff Member a broad knowledge of the University's work and priorities.

I have a particular interest in the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work: I successfully led the MHSES Athena Swan bronze submission and was invited to speak at the Advance HE awards ceremony because of the strength of our application. Involvement in Athena Swan in and beyond the University has further broadened my understanding of this core priority, and would enable me to bring the EDI perspective in relation to both staff and students to Court.

I'm an active UCU member and UCU representative: I was one of the team involved in negotiating the 2019 collective agreement on employment of guaranteed hours and fixed-term teaching staff, and I've represented many individual members with work-related difficulties. I've also been elected by peers to represent them in various fora, most recently serving as a staff representative on the interview panel for the new Head of MHSES. I believe this indicates I have the trust of colleagues to elicit and represent their views fairly and without fear or favour, something I would bring to the role of Academic Staff Member.

There are a number of matters cutting across student and staff experience on which I would be particularly keen to represent an academic staff perspective on Court: these include the size and shape of the University, staff workloads, casualisation of teaching and research, and democratisation of decision-making, all of which impact on the University's academic community. Additionally, one of my pressing concerns at the moment is academic freedom. I believe the current context presents challenges to academic freedom which the University needs to meet robustly and courageously: if elected to Court I would aim to raise this vital issue and seek ways forward.

Finally, some additional skills and dispositions I would bring to the role include attention to detail, persistence in fact-finding and problem-solving, and integrity and courage when it comes to speaking up in challenging or potentially intimidating situations. I have always sought to be an active contributor and a good University citizen, and I would make the most of any opportunity to serve as a member of the University's governing body.