

## **The University of Edinburgh**

### **Membership of the University Court**

#### **Introduction**

The University of Edinburgh is Scotland's leading research intensive University, and with some 27,000 students is one of the largest higher education institutions in Scotland. It has a long history and an international profile, and reputation. It is a registered charity.

Institutions of higher education in the UK are complex organisations. Each is characterised by a distinctive ethos, is autonomous, and is responsible for the management and direction of its own affairs. The University Court is the University's governing body. Its role and composition are derived from the provisions of the Universities (Scotland) Acts (1858 – 1966). The Court is the legal persona of the University; it is the employer of all University staff, who number just over 8,000, and the owner of all the University's assets (which are valued at some £1 billion). It is responsible for the safeguarding of those assets, including the University's extensive estate, and ensuring proper financial control arrangements and accounting for the University's annual expenditure, which approaches £600m per annum: much of this expenditure is derived from public funds. The Court is also responsible for ensuring effective audit and risk management arrangements, and for the University's compliance with all relevant legislation and regulations, including health and safety of staff and students.

The Court is collectively responsible for overseeing the University's activities, determining its future direction and fostering an environment in which the institutional mission is achieved and the potential of all learners is maximised. This responsibility includes considering and approving the University's strategic plan, which sets the academic aims and objectives and identifies the financial, physical and staffing strategies necessary to achieve them. The Court takes all final decisions on matters of fundamental concern to the institution. The Court is required to regularly monitor its own effectiveness and the performance of the University, its planned strategies and operational targets.

The Court is composed of 22 internal and external members:

- The Rector: elected by staff and students for a 3 year period; members of the electorate are not eligible to stand for office
- The Principal
- One assessor nominated by the Chancellor
- Four assessors elected by the Senatus: at least one of whom must be of professorial status and one non-professorial
- Three assessors elected by the General Council
- An assessor nominated by the City of Edinburgh Council
- An assessor elected by the non-teaching staff from amongst their number
- Two fully matriculated students nominated by the Students' Representative Council
- Up to eight Co-opted members: at least one of whom must be male and one must be female

The internal members are staff and students of the University. Some of the external members are appointed by specific bodies, but eight are appointed by the Court itself and are referred to as the eight Co-opted members.

The University wishes to ensure that individuals elected or appointed to Court are sympathetic to its mission of teaching and research and to the culture which exists in successful higher education institutions.

Members need to recognise and understand the distinction between executive management of the University (responsibility for which rests with the University's senior managers) and the role of Court in providing high-level strategic oversight and ensuring that adequate control and monitoring arrangements exist to ensure that management is exercising proper stewardship and working towards agreed strategic objectives.

The Court seeks to display best practice in regard to equal opportunities.

#### The University's expectations of members

Individual members and the Court collectively should at all times conduct themselves in accordance with accepted high standards of behaviour in public life, which embrace selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. All members should exercise their responsibilities in the interests of the University as a whole rather than as a representative of any constituency or other interest group. The Court maintains and makes publicly available a register of interests of its members.

The Court is entrusted with funds, both public and private, and therefore has a particular duty to observe the highest standards of corporate governance. This includes ensuring and demonstrating integrity and objectivity in the transaction of business, and wherever possible following a policy of openness and transparency in the dissemination of its decisions.

The University expects all members of the Court to be willing to develop an understanding of the University and its teaching and research mission, and of its internal structure and culture. Alongside this, there needs to be a willingness to develop some understanding of the University's relationships with relevant external agencies and of the Scottish higher education system. The University endeavours to provide members with opportunities to develop these understandings.

External members in particular are asked to bring their expertise and experience to bear on the Court's work both generally and in regard to its consideration of specific matters. The University greatly values the wide range of experience that all members can bring to the Court's work. It is hoped that all members will question intelligently, debate constructively, challenge rigorously and decide dispassionately, and listen sensitively to the views of others, inside and outside meetings of the governing body.

Members are expected to respect the confidentiality of Court business on those occasions when this is necessary. Decisions on the need for confidentiality are taken in the context of the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act.

The Court currently meets six times a year on Monday afternoons, with two additional seminars held at the beginning and the middle of each academic year. The Court's committees normally meet between three and six times a year on various days of the week. It is assumed that members will attend the majority if not all, meetings, but the University does recognise that on occasion for health or other reasons this will not be possible. The University does however expect all members to be committed and willing to engage with the work of Court and the University.

Court members are invited to attend a number of University ceremonial events and some social events throughout the year. They are very welcome at these events, but the University recognises that other commitments may limit members' ability to accept all such invitations.

In common with nearly all higher education institutions, there is no remuneration directly associated with membership of Court, but the University is willing to meet reasonable expenses incurred by members in connection with their membership of the Court.

Members of Court are formally trustees of the University in its capacity as a charity; members will therefore be asked to confirm that they are not disqualified from serving as a trustee under the Charities and Trustee Investments Act (Scotland) 2005. On becoming a member of Court a Disclosure Scotland check will be undertaken in order to comply with the terms of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 by which the University is deemed to be a children's charity.

#### Committee and other work

Members will be expected to serve on a number of Court Committees (normally around two committees at any one time but may be more). Members' particular expertise and experience are taken into account by the University in deciding on which committees they are asked to join. However, the membership of some of the Court Committees requires the appointment of a Lay member (Chancellor's Assessor, General Council Assessors, City of Edinburgh Assessor and Co-opted members of Court are deemed to be Lay members) or it may be more specific and state the requirement for there to be a General Council Assessor or a Senate Assessor on that Committee. There are also ex officio appointments which mainly involve the appointed Vice-Convener of Court, the Convener of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Principal or other senior members of the University. Members may also be asked from time-to-time to serve on short-term ad hoc groups set up for specific purposes: this can include steering groups for major capital projects and tribunals set up under the University's staff discipline arrangements.

#### Required expertise and experience

Court members should be able to make constructive contributions to ensure that Court fulfils its responsibilities as set out above. Staff and student members of Court bring particular knowledge on many aspects of the University and there should be an overall balance of skills and experience among Court members sufficient to enable the Court to meet its primary responsibilities and to ensure stakeholder confidence. The main specific areas of expertise which the Court tries to ensure are covered by its Co-opted membership are:-

*Senior management and/or board membership of large business or commercial organisations*

*Senior management and/or board membership of large, publicly-financed organisations*

*Educational administration (e.g. in an education authority)*

*The teaching profession (particularly secondary or further education)*

*Financial expertise*

*Political expertise*

*Legal expertise*

*Property and estate management expertise*

*Management of research (other than in a university)*

*Experience of another type of higher education institution*

*Active concern for the City of Edinburgh and its institutions*

*Current or recent Funding Council, Research Council or Medical Charity experience*

*Previous successful experience as a lay governor of a public institution*

It is highly desirable that all members of Court add to the range of skills and experience available. In that respect the above list is particularly relevant to all lay members of Court.

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