

Professional Services Staff Member Election 2024

Sarah McAllister

Against the age of the University, our time in the institution is relatively short. However, we should prioritise our student and staff experience to leave a legacy for the next generation of staff. We will not be able to make a difference for our students or staff if we do not feel valued, recognised and rewarded. I am seeking re-election as there is more work to be done in the role, particularly, in relation to the staff experience at the University of Edinburgh, ensuring it remains at the forefront of the Court agenda as our governing body.

Strategic projects are vital for our institution to respond to the uncertain landscape of higher education; however, we must learn from recent experience in relation to resourcing and implementation. Since being elected in April 2020, in the midst of the Covid Pandemic, I have worked with fellow elected members to develop a collective voice especially within the shadow of People and Money (P&M). We came together as elected members to insist Court acknowledge and discuss the pain and work to find solutions. My engagement and scrutiny continues and resulted in the publication of the external review of P&M in December 2023.

The University has been pushed in recent years in ways we could not predict or plan, and we must use these experiences to reflect and become resilient in the face of a challenging future. Part of this is continuing to scrutinise, question and ensure accountability in our governing bodies' decision making. Our institutional staff surveys tell us staff are feeling fatigued through system changes, high workloads, the Covid Pandemic, changing student expectations, and most recently, the marking and assessment boycott. I want to continue to push for tangible actions as an outcome of the surveys to ensure staff feel heard and changes are made. This has included the approval of the Grade Scale Review as a starting point for recognition.

In my 19 years at the University, I have held a number of roles that allow me to engage with professional services at all grades across schools, colleges and services at all levels. And I bring those reflections to each Court meeting. I fully engage in the role and attend all Court meetings and sit on two Court sub committees. I have also developed good working relationships with our internal and external members of Court to extend the understanding of the experience of our professional services staff.

Since joining the University of Edinburgh in 2005, I have progressed my leadership career in various roles, in Schools and in Professional Services, including Postgraduate Administrator in Public Health Sciences (2005-2009), Teaching Organisation Manager in the School of Chemistry (2008-2009 secondment), Teaching Organisation Manager and subsequently Head of Student Services in the School of GeoSciences (2009-2017), Head of Operations and Projects, and Assistant Director, in the Institute of Academic Development (2018-2019), and Head of Student Support Operations in Registry Services which includes responsibility for Fees, Scholarships, Student Immigration and Extensions and Special Circumstances (2019-present).