

University of Edinburgh

Information for prospective candidates for the role of the Professional Services Staff Member on University Court

University Court

The University Court is the University's governing body and the roles and responsibilities of Court are broadly focused on strategy, taking the final decisions on matters of fundamental concern to the University and effective corporate governance. Court's Statement of Primary Responsibilities sets this out in more detail:

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/GaSP/Governance/Court/CourtsResponsibilities.pdf>.

Much of the detail of the Court's work is dealt with through a number of committees, including Policy and Resources Committee, Audit and Risk Committee, Remuneration Committee and Nominations Committee. Court recognises a clear distinction between its responsibilities for governance of the University (for example in setting broad strategic policy, approving plans intended to achieve strategic objectives, ensuring that the University's key processes and procedures are sound; and monitoring the University's overall performance) and the Principal's responsibilities for management of the University, which in practice are shared with senior colleagues, notably members of the University Executive.

The Senatus Academicus is the supreme academic body and has responsibility for superintending and regulating teaching and discipline at the University. It also has the power to promote research. Specific duties of the Senate include the approval of the conferment of degrees by the University and approval of the conferment of emeritus status on retiring professors of the University. The Senate reports regularly to the University Court. In turn, it receives regular reports from the University Court and each of the four Senate Committees.

The membership of the Court, which totals 23, is drawn from a range of internal and external sources. It is fundamental to the successful operation of the Court and discharge of its responsibilities that members nominated or elected by particular constituencies should act independently as members of a corporate body, and not as if delegated by the group they represent.

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 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. 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 five times a year on Monday, with two additional seminars held around the beginning and the middle of each academic year. Court 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.

Committee and other work

Members may be expected to serve on Court Committees. Members' particular expertise and experience are taken into account by Nominations Committee in deciding which committees they are asked to join. Members may also be asked from time-to-time to serve on short-term ad hoc groups set up for specific purposes.

Further Information

In common with nearly all higher education institutions, this is a voluntary unremunerated role, but the University is willing to meet reasonable expenses incurred by members in connection with their membership of the Court.

Prospective candidates should further note that as a member of Court, the Professional Services Staff Member, on election, will require to acknowledge that they are familiar with the University's approved Code of Conduct and understand their obligations under it specifically including the requirements: to declare areas of potential conflicts of interest; confirm that they are able to comply with the general duties of a Trustee of a charity in accordance with the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and that they are not disqualified from acting as a Trustee by virtue of a disqualification listed within the Act.

If the individual holding the office of Professional Services Staff Member should leave employment at the University for whatever reason, their office as Professional Services Staff Member will end.

The period of office of the Professional Services Staff Member runs from 1 August 2024 for a period of four years.

Further information about University Court and the role of the Professional Services Staff Member is available from Dan Wedgwood, Head of Court Services: Court@ed.ac.uk