



Role Description: University Court Member – General Council Assessor 2025

Role of the University Court

The Court is the governing body and legal persona of the University of Edinburgh. It is composed of twenty-three members both internal and external to the University.¹ The position of General Council Assessor counts among the external members of Court, as it may not be held by a member of staff or a student of the University. The three General Council Assessors are drawn from the University's alumni and also serve as members of the General Council Business Committee.

The Court is the employer of all University staff and the owner of all the University's assets (which are valued at £2.6 billion). It is responsible for the safeguarding of those assets, including the University's extensive estate, ensuring proper financial control arrangements and accounting for the University's turnover of approximately £1.4 billion per annum, which includes significant public funding. The Court is also responsible for ensuring effective audit and risk oversight arrangements and for the University's compliance with all relevant legislation and regulations, including health and safety of staff and students. The University is an educational charity and the Court members are its trustees with the responsibilities this entails.

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

Responsibilities of members

Court members collectively provide high-level strategic oversight and ensure that adequate control and monitoring arrangements exist to support management in exercising proper stewardship and working towards agreed strategic objectives. This work is distinct from the executive management of the University, responsibility for which rests with the University's senior managers.

External members are asked to bring their expertise and experience to bear on this work. The University greatly values the wide range of experience brought by all members to Court business. It is hoped that all members will question intelligently, debate constructively, challenge rigorously and decide dispassionately, having listened sensitively to the views of others, inside and outside meetings of the governing body.

The Court is entrusted with funds, both public and private, and has a particular duty to observe the highest standards of corporate governance. This includes ensuring

¹ For the full list of Court members, please see: <https://governance-strategic-planning.ed.ac.uk/governance/university-court/membership-of-court>

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.

Court members are expected to develop an understanding of the University, its teaching, research and innovation missions and internal structure and culture. In addition, members are expected to be willing to develop some understanding of the University's relationships with relevant external agencies and of the Scottish and UK higher education systems. The University endeavours to provide members with opportunities to develop this understanding.

Court Committee responsibilities

Members will also be expected to serve on Court Committees. Members' particular expertise and experience are taken into account by the University 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.

Please see the following webpage for details of the various Court Committees as well as further information on the University Court:

<https://governance-strategic-planning.ed.ac.uk/governance/university-committees/court-committees>

General Council Business Committee

General Council Assessors are also *ex officio* members of the General Council Business Committee. The General Council meets twice yearly and between these meetings delegates the running of the General Council to a Business Committee. This meets 5 times per year, usually on a Thursday at 5.15pm, with meetings normally lasting about 90 minutes. Meeting dates are scheduled in advance for the academic year, closely following the pattern of Court meetings. There is a standing agenda item to allow the Assessors to report orally to the Business Committee on the open items considered at the Court meeting (but not on closed items, which are confidential). Much of the work of the Business Committee is done through its Standing Committees. The other members of the Business Committee serve on the Standing Committees, but in recognition of the time commitment involved in serving on Court, its Committees and the Business Committee, Assessors do not become members of the Standing Committees. They are, however, encouraged to participate in the discussion at Business Committee meetings.

Further information about the General Council and the responsibilities of its Business Committee can be found on its [webpages](#).

Period of Appointment

Appointment will be made for a period to 31 July 2028, subject to satisfactory appraisal. Appointees will be eligible for consideration for reappointment for a further term of up to 4 years, subject to satisfactory appraisal.

Remuneration

In common with most higher education institutions, there is no remuneration directly associated with membership of Court but the University will meet reasonable expenses incurred in connection with membership of the Court or activities on behalf of the University including meeting child and other dependent care costs.

Time commitment

The Court currently meets five times a year, usually on Monday afternoons, with two additional seminars held at the beginning and the middle of each academic year. It is expected that all members will endeavour to attend all Court meetings in person. Court's Committees normally meet between three and five times a year on various days of the week. The General Council Business Committee meets 5 times a year. As there are three Assessors, it is not necessary for all three to attend every Business Committee meeting, but the expectation is that each will attend the majority of meetings. Online participation is possible when in-person attendance is not practicable. The University expects 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.

Person Specification

The University is committed to promoting all aspects of equality and diversity and welcomes applications from all sectors of the community.

Experience

Essential:

- Professional experience and knowledge in matters relevant to the successful operation of a large complex organisation.

Knowledge, Skills and Competencies

Essential:

- Understanding of financial processes, including an understanding of budgetary processes;
- Ability to interpret information, debate constructively and rigorously challenge;
- Awareness of probity issues and commitment to high standards of integrity, transparency and impartiality;
- Ability to communicate effectively at senior level and explain issues and decisions both orally and in writing;
- Skills of networking, influencing and advocacy;

- Understanding of strategic planning processes;
- Empathy with the values and vision of the University of Edinburgh.

Personal Attributes

Members of Court will have a strong personal commitment to higher education and have empathy with the values, aims and objectives of the University of Edinburgh.

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.