

## **Benny Higgins – Candidate Statement**

Education is perhaps the most powerful instrument available to us to make our society better and fairer. And the great institutions such as The University of Edinburgh have a central role in delivering academic excellence in teaching and in research, alongside a commitment to broad access that enables students from all backgrounds to find refuge and opportunity in education. In addition to maintaining a foundation of good governance and resilience, the Court must pursue a framework and practice that holds the executive leadership accountable for delivery of the right outcomes. An outcome that is paramount is that the experience of being a student is of the highest standard. To do this, every voice must be heard. But that is not enough. Listening and acting must transcend simply listening. These are difficult times, but the right people with the right attitude in leadership roles can, as ever, achieve so much for the greater good.

My career has spanned a series of senior executive and chairing roles. In the context of The University of Edinburgh it has been relevant insofar as it has demanded leadership of large bodies of colleagues in confronting significant challenges whilst protecting and developing reputation domestically and internationally. I led the integration of NatWest and RBS retail banking which involved 40,000 people, and led the creation of Tesco Bank from scratch to become a bank with 5,000 colleagues and 8m customers.

Strategy formulation has been central to all of my roles, but was informed hugely when I was appointed to lead the activity for Tesco plc around the world. It is crucial that organisations are relentless in their desire to support an inclusive and diverse environment. It is something that has always mattered to me, and it was most visibly illustrated when I oversaw the emergence of an LGBTQ+ network at Tesco Group from a standing start to the largest such network in Europe.

My chairing roles in recent years have allowed me to contribute to elements of our society that I care about passionately. Through chairing The National Galleries of Scotland, The Edinburgh International Festival Fringe Society, and Sistema Scotland, I have had the precious opportunity to do what I can for the arts, freedom of expression, and young people in disadvantaged communities. Like education, we must never underestimate the transformative power of culture.

I arrived at the University of Glasgow almost 48 years ago as a 17 year old fresher. I was from a Glasgow housing estate. I chose the subjects that I was relatively strong on, and chose what I thought was a good university that would allow me to stay at home. I was a fish out of water. Hard work and determination resulted in a good degree and the chance to represent Scottish Universities at football. It would be an honour and a privilege to deploy the skills and lessons learned since then, in defeat and in victory, to contribute to the future success of this fine university and its community.