



**Abertay
University**

University Court Independent Court Member Applicant Information Pack

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Abertay University

Abertay University is a modern, pioneering, and ambitious university with around 4,000 students. We have a strong and evolutionary tradition of preparing students for the industries and jobs of the modern world. Abertay has made its mark with high-quality, well-directed teaching and research which, in turn, provides a stimulating and enriching experience for our students.

With roots going back to 1888, Abertay has always responded to the needs of industry, supplying a pipeline of graduate talent to work, lead and innovate across a wide range of sectors. We also work closely with industry, supporting local and national companies to innovate and grow through a range of practical research collaborations across a broad range of subjects including a focus in cybersecurity through our Abertay Cyber Quarter, and a range of food industry collaborations.



Having forged a reputation as one of the UK's leading tech universities, we are best known for our expertise in computer games education and our degrees in this field are consistently ranked number one in Europe by the prestigious Princeton Review. We are one of the partners in the new UK government-funded virtual production research centre to be located in Dundee.

From Mental Health Nursing to Civil Engineering, and Criminology to Ethical Hacking, our three academic schools offer programmes that prepare our students for employment and, in most cases, offer real-world work experience alongside their studies. Our Bell Street Ventures Student Enterprise Centre is supported by Santander Universities and provides a supportive environment for our students to undertake enterprise and innovative first-stage commercial activity.

We pride ourselves on offering an inclusive, friendly and welcoming environment for our students and staff alongside first-rate teaching and excellent student experience. We're proud of our excellent scores in the National Student Survey, ranking in the 2023 survey as the top modern university in Scotland for overall student satisfaction and inside the UK top ten for satisfaction with teaching.

The quality of our research was recognised in the UK Funding Council's most recent review of University research (REF 2021) with the proportion of our research which is classed as 'internationally excellent' or 'world-leading' having increased by 23% since the preceding review – the biggest climb of any Scottish university (both pre and post 1992), according to our analysis.

Our Strategic Plan

Our current strategic plan is for 2020-2025 and guides the development of the University over the five years and beyond. It includes a focus on digital, building on our expertise in computer games, cyber security and computer science in order to put digital technology at the heart of all that we do. The plan also includes a focus on academic collaboration, particularly internationally, and our new International and Partnerships Strategy supports this. During 2023, we also launched our new Civic Engagement Strategy, Estates Strategy and Sustainable Development Strategy.

Further information on the [Strategic plan](#) is available on our webpages.

Management & Governance

The University Court is the Governing Body of the University. Its powers are set out in the University's constitutional document, which is "[Abertay University of Dundee \(Scotland\) Order of Council 2019](#)", which also defined the nine categories of membership shown below. Court is made up of a maximum of 25 members, including independent members, ex-officio members, staff, trade union and student members. Independent members remain an absolute majority.

[Brief biographies of individual members of Court](#) are available on our webpages.

Court meets at least five times each year.

Category

- (a) the Chair of Court, being the person appointed by the University Court to the position of senior lay member by virtue of section 8 of the 2016 Act,
- (b) the Principal,
- (c) one or two Vice-Principals*, appointed by being nominated by the Principal,
- (d) two persons appointed by being elected by the staff of the University from among their own number,
- (e) one person appointed by being nominated by a trade union from among the academic staff of the University who are members of a branch of a trade union that has a connection with the University, in accordance with section 10(2) of the 2016 Act,
- (f) one person appointed by being nominated by a trade union from among the support staff of the University who are members of a branch of a trade union that has a connection with the University, in accordance with section 10(2) of the 2016 Act,
- (g) two persons appointed by being nominated by the students' association of the University from among the students of the University,
- (h) one person appointed by being nominated by the Senate from among its members,
- (i) 10 to 14 other persons appointed by the University from time to time, in accordance with its rules and procedures, with the aim of the membership having the skills and experience that the University Court determines to be relevant, and who may not be members of staff or students of the University.

* unless Secretary to Court

Further information on the roles within University Court is available in the [Court Documents](#) section of our webpages, including the General Descriptor for Members of Court, which is also available as [Annex A](#) of this pack.

The University Court has statutory responsibility for the governance of the University and is the employer of its staff. Day-to-day management is delegated by the Court to the Principal & Vice Chancellor, Professor Liz Bacon, who is currently assisted by the Executive Group (Deputy-Principal & Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Vice-Principal (Strategy & Governance) and University Secretary, the Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services, and the Director of People and Organisation Development) along with a wider Senior Management Team comprising six Deans and two other Directors of Service.

The University Court is responsible for effective governance of the institution and agrees the strategic plan and budgets. The Principal and the Senior Management Team are responsible for delivering the strategic objectives and managing the University's finances.

For more information on the management structure of the University, please visit the [University's website](#).



The Role

We are seeking to recruit a new independent Court member who can contribute to the work of the Court over the next 3 years. The person specification below sets out the key skills and experience we think is required for the role, but we are looking for a new member, who can complement the existing membership and bring diversity of thinking and skills to Court, particularly as we seek to implement our new strategies.

Person Specification

Personal Competencies

Essential

- Strong interpersonal and communication skills, including the ability to establish good working relationships with other members of Court, the Principal and other members of the University Executive.
- Commitment to higher education and empathy with the purpose, principles and objectives of the University.
- Diplomacy, including the ability to manage conflict in a constructive manner.
- Networking, influencing and advocacy, including the ability to represent the University to a range of stakeholders (including students, staff, local community)
- Ability to contribute to decision-making processes that ensure objectives are achieved and standards are maintained.
- Commitment to equality and diversity.

Desirable

- Good understanding of business principles and risk management.
- Good understanding of the current political environment in Scotland and the UK.

Knowledge and Experience

Essential

- Leadership experience in the private, public and/or third sector.
- Knowledge and expertise in matters relevant to the successful operation of a complex organisation.
- Experience of leading strategic change successfully.

Desirable

- Understanding of how post-school education is provided in Scotland.
- Expertise in an area relevant to the responsibilities of Court.
- Understanding of the principles of good governance in the context of higher education.

In order to obtain an appropriate balance of skills among Court Members, having a legal background would be particularly advantageous at this time.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The University is committed to equality and diversity, and we are particularly keen to receive applications from those that are currently under-represented on Court - women; people who are disabled; and people from ethnic minorities.

Terms of Appointment

Expenses

The Independent Court Member role is not remunerated, but individuals are entitled to all travelling and incidental expenses (including, for example, childcare costs) incurred in the course of University business. Directors and Officers Liability Insurance is in place.

Period of Appointment

The appointment is for three years from **1 January 2024** with the possibility of two further three-year periods of office.

Time Commitment

This is an important role, requiring time commitment and flexibility, given that the actual time spent on the role can be unpredictable. It is estimated that Independent Court Members will need to devote between 12 and 15 days per year, plus personal preparation time, to effectively fulfil the duties.

Typically, Court Members are required to prepare for, travel to and participate in the following meetings and events per year:

- Five meetings of Court per annum: these currently take place between September and June on a Wednesday afternoon from 14:00 for about 3 hours, preceded from about noon by visits to meet staff and students and lunch with senior officers and members of Senate.
- Court Conference once a year, which may be an 'away day'.
- Four meetings of a Court Committee – this could be in person or online.
- Participation in graduation ceremonies (currently held on one day in early July and one day in late November).
- Occasional events, dinners, lectures, attendance at Senate (the senior academic body of the University to observe proceedings) etc.

Application Process

The closing date for applications is **12:00 on Friday 20 October 2023**.

To apply, please submit a comprehensive CV along with completed covering letter setting out your interest in the role and details of how you match the required criteria to governance@abertay.ac.uk

Interviews

The Governance & Nominations Committee will review applications and invite shortlisted applicants for interview in late November.

Further Information

For a confidential discussion about the role, please contact Caroline Summers (Vice-Principal (Strategy & Governance) and University Secretary) by emailing c.summers@abertay.ac.uk



COURT MEMBERS: GENERAL ROLE DESCRIPTOR

Introduction

Court Members may be:

- a) employees or students of the University who become members of Court either through their named role (Principal, Deputy Principal, Vice-Principal, Students' Association President and Vice-President), through election from amongst academic staff or support staff or nomination by Senate or the trade unions.
- b) independent lay people who have applied and been appointed by Court itself.

Once appointed, all members are charity trustees as the University is a registered educational charitable body.

This role descriptor is published on the University's website so that it is accessible to potential electors of Court Members.

Role of the Court Member

The main general role of a Court Member is, *inter alia*, to assist Court in performing its statutory functions. Court is collectively responsible for the proper conduct of the University's public business, for strategic vision, monitoring effectiveness and performance of the University, approving financial, estate and human resource strategies, ensuring equality and diversity, being the legal and employing authority and ensuring the good name and values of the University.

The general duty of Court Members as charity trustees¹ is to act in the interests of the charity (i.e. the University).

- Court Members must operate in a manner consistent with the charity's purpose.
- Court Members must act with care and diligence.
- Court Members must manage any conflict of interest between the charity and any person or organisation who appoints trustees.

¹ [taken from the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator website – accessed 17/3/2023]

Specific Duties, Personal Responsibilities and Standards

1. Standards

- a) All Court Members are responsible for ensuring that they conduct themselves in accordance with accepted standards of behaviour in public life, embracing selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- b) All Court Members must provide an up-to-date Register of the Interests and shall make a full and timely personal disclosure of any actual or perceived conflict of interest.

2. Business of the University

- a) Court Members, if not also a member of the Executive Group, should endeavour to establish a constructive and supportive but challenging working relationship with the senior officers of the University, recognising the proper separation between governance and executive management, and avoiding involvement in the day-to-day executive management of the University.
- b) Court members are strongly encouraged to engage appropriately in the life of the University so that they develop a full and rounded understanding of the University's activities.
- c) Court Members are expected to sit on and, after a period of time, to potentially chair at least one of the following committees of Court: the Audit & Risk Committee, Chair's Committee, Finance & Corporate Performance Committee, Governance & Nominations Committee, People, Health & Equality Committee and the Remuneration Committee. Training and support will be provided if required.

3. Personal

- a) Court Members will have a strong personal commitment to Higher Education and the values, aims and objectives of the University.
- b) Court Members will, at all times, act fairly and impartially in the interests of the University as a whole, using independent judgement and maintaining confidentiality as appropriate.
- c) Court Members appointed or elected by a particular constituency, or otherwise drawn from a particular sector or community, must not act as if delegated by that

particular constituency²

- d) Court Members are expected to attend all meetings of Court and of committees of which they are a member, or give timely apologies if absence is unavoidable. [It is estimated that Court Members will need to devote at least 12 and up to 15 days per year to effectively fulfil the duties].
- e) Court Members are expected to attend induction/training events organised by the University or other appropriate bodies (such as Advance HE) as required.
- f) In order to ensure that Court operates effectively and their performance in the role, Court Members are expected to meet annually with the Chair on a one-to-one basis to discuss their performance in the role.
- g) Court Members are expected to share their view of the effectiveness of the Court and the effectiveness of the Chair *via* the Court Intermediary.

Note

Court has previously approved and published specific role descriptors for the roles of Chair, Vice- Chair, Intermediary, the Principal & Vice-Chancellor and Secretary to Court.

There is also a person specification for independent lay members of Court, which is adaptable to take account of particular skills and experience as determined to be required from time to time when Court is seeking new lay members.

Approved by Court April 2023

² See paragraph 22 of the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance 2017



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