

UNIVERSITY COURT INDEPENDENT MEMBER APPLICANT INFORMATION PACK

Governance Office, Abertay University

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Welcome to Abertay University

[Abertay University](#) is a modern and friendly university in the heart of Dundee, Scotland, with a strong focus on teaching and preparing our graduates for the world of work. This is combined with excellence in research and knowledge exchange. 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 aim to be:

Inclusive and People-centred- equality of opportunity and inclusion are embedded in our ethos. We welcome staff and students from diverse communities and aim to put people at the heart of all we do.

Excellent and Innovative- we strive for excellence in all we do, aiming to provide a high-quality environment for our staff and students to flourish, where innovation is encouraged and improvement is enabled.

Professional and Collaborative- we collaborate with others, both internally across our teams and externally with partners in order to support our professional practice and our community to thrive. Customer service is key in all of our interactions.

Caring and Respectful- it's important to us that we treat everyone with kindness and mutual respect.



We're proud to be the:

- Top Modern University in Scotland for Student Satisfaction (NSS 2024)
- Top 10 in the UK for Student Experience (Daily Mail Guide 2024)
- Top 3 in the UK for Research Intensity among Modern Universities (CUG 2024)

Having forged a reputation as one of the UK's leading tech universities, we're best known for our expertise in video games education and our degrees in this field have been ranked among the top in Europe for the last seven years. From Mental Health Nursing to Civil Engineering, or Business Analytics to Ethical Hacking, our [academic faculties](#) offer degrees that prepare our students for employment and, in most cases, offer real-world work experience alongside their studies. We pride ourselves on offering an inclusive, friendly and welcoming environment for our students and staff alongside first rate teaching and excellent student experience.

Abertay has a compact city centre campus right in the heart of Dundee. Our buildings blend the modern with the historic, with the Edwardian Old College giving a taste of the past.



The Role

The University is now seeking to recruit new independent Court members to ensure the continued successful delivery of the University's priorities and objectives, the setting of its strategic direction and commitment to its values and mission

The person specification below sets out the key skills and experience we think are required for the role, but we are looking for new members to complement the existing membership and bring diversity of thinking and skills to Court, particularly as we seek to implement our new [strategic plan](#) (further information is provided later in the pack).

The Person

Members of the governing body should have a keen interest in, and empathy for, Higher Education, and be willing to commit their time and expertise to helping the University deliver on its significant ambitions. Interest would be particularly welcome at this time from individuals with skills and experience in relation to finance, health and safety, sustainability and equality diversity and inclusion or change management.

The Court recognises the strengths that diversity brings, both to our governing body and our university, and is committed to ensuring that its composition is reflective of the perspectives and experiences of our staff and students, who bring their diverse and intersectional lived experience of religion, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability to work or study with them each day.

Applications are therefore encouraged from candidates who can identify with these lived experiences and the challenges and barriers faced by marginalised communities.

Key Attributes

Personal Competencies

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

Expertise and Skills

The following areas of expertise and skills would bring particular value to Court and the role of an independent member:

- Demonstrable 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.
- 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.



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 10 and 12 days per year, plus personal preparation time, to effectively fulfil the duties.

The successful candidate will be able to:

- Join Court as a full member and prepare for, attend and participate in five meetings of Court per year: these currently take place between September and June on a Wednesday afternoon from 14:00 for about 3 hours, preceded from noon by visits to meet staff and students and lunch with University senior officers. However, there may also be a need to meet and decide matters between meetings, on an *ad hoc* basis.

- Attend the annual Court Conference, which may be a 'strategy day' or 'away day'.
- Join one of Court's standing Committees, which meet between two and four times per year depending on the Committee, with additional meetings called if required. Meetings are held as a mix of in-person, online and hybrid.
- Participate in graduation ceremonies (currently held on one day in early July and one day in late November).
- Attend occasional events, dinners, lectures, attendance at Senate (the senior academic body of the University to observe proceedings) etc.
- Complete a Court induction process upon appointment, and subsequently participate in ongoing development activities, including performance reviews.

Conduct

All Court Members are expected to sign up to the [Code of Conduct for Members of Court](#) on appointment and to confirm that they are not disqualified from acting as a Charity Trustee in accordance with the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and as set out in the guidance from the Office from the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

Court members are expected to disclose any real or potential conflicts of interest they may have. Please highlight in your application if there are any likely conflicts, so that we can explore during the recruitment process whether these would be manageable if you were appointed.

Period of Appointment

The appointment is for three years from **1 August 2025** with the possibility of two further three-year periods of office.

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.



Application Process

The closing date for applications is **12:00 on Wednesday 23 April 2025**

To apply, please submit the following by email to the Governance Office at governance@abertay.ac.uk.

- A comprehensive CV
- Covering letter setting out your interest in the role and details of how you match the required criteria.

Interviews

The Governance & Nominations Committee will review applications, and shortlisted applicants will be invited for interview on **Thursday 8 May 2025**.

Further Information

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

University Court

The University Court is the Governing Body of the University. Its powers are set out in the University's constitutional document ([Abertay University of Dundee \(Scotland\) Order of Council 2019](#)). Court is made up of a maximum of 25 members, including independent members, ex-officio members, staff, trade union and student members. Court is responsible for effective governance of the institution and agrees the strategic plan and budgets. The University Court: Statement of Primary Responsibilities is provided in Annex A of this pack.

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, Vice-Principal and University Secretary, Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services, and Director of People and Organisational Development) along with a wider Senior Management Team. The Principal and the Senior Management Team are responsible for delivering the strategic objectives and managing the University's finances.

Further information on the University Court and the roles within Court including the General Descriptor for Members of Court, (also available as Annex B) and brief biographies of individual members of Court are available on [Court section of the University's website](#).

Our Strategic Plan

During 2025 we will be refreshing our strategic plan, and the new plan will guide development of the University for the next five years and beyond, and Court will play a key role in that process. The current strategic plan is supported by a range of sub-strategies:

- Civic Engagement strategy
- Digital strategy
- Estate strategy
- Financial strategy
- International strategy
- Learning Enhancement strategy
- People strategy
- Sustainable Development strategy
- Research and Knowledge Exchange strategy

Further information on the [Strategic Plan 2020-25](#) is available on our webpages.

University Court Statement of Primary Responsibilities**Annex A**

This Statement of Primary Responsibilities is based on the CUC Guide for Members of Higher Education Governing Bodies in the UK: Governance Code of Practice (2009). It is consistent with The Abertay University (Scotland) Order of Council 2019.

The primary responsibilities of Court, as the governing body of the University, are:

1. To approve the mission and strategic vision of the University, long-term academic and business plans and key performance indicators (KPIs); to ensure that these meet the interests of stakeholders; and to ensure that there are opportunities for Court to provide strategic input in the development of key strategies and long-term plans such that their approval can be considered by Court without conflict of interest.
2. To appoint a Principal & Vice-Chancellor as chief executive, and to put in place suitable arrangements for monitoring their performance.
3. To appoint a secretary to Court and to ensure that, if the person appointed has managerial responsibilities in the University, there is an appropriate separation in the lines of accountability.
4. To delegate authority to the Principal & Vice-Chancellor of the University, as chief executive, for the academic, corporate, financial, estate and personnel management of the University; and to establish and keep under regular review the policies, procedures and limits within such management functions as shall be undertaken by and under the authority of the Principal.
5. To ensure the establishment and monitoring of systems of control and accountability, including financial and operational controls and risk assessment, and procedures for handling internal grievances and 'whistleblowing' complaints and for managing conflicts of interest.
6. To ensure that processes are in place to monitor and evaluate the performance and effectiveness of the University against the plans and approved key performance indicators, which should be – where possible and appropriate – benchmarked against other comparable institutions.
7. To establish processes to monitor and evaluate the performance and effectiveness of Court itself.
8. To conduct its business in accordance with best practice in higher education corporate governance and with the principles of public life drawn up by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.
9. To safeguard the good name and values of the University.

10. To be the employing authority for all staff in the University and to approve a human resources strategy.
11. To ensure that non-discriminatory systems are in place to provide equality and diversity of opportunity for staff and students.
12. To be the principal financial and business authority of the University, to ensure that proper books of account are kept, to approve the annual budget and financial statements, and to have overall responsibility for the University's assets, property and estate.
13. To be the University's legal authority and, as such, to ensure that systems are in place for meeting all the University's legal obligations, including those arising from contracts and other legal commitments made in the University's name.
14. To make such provision as it thinks fit for the general welfare of students, in consultation with Senate.
15. To act as trustee for any property, legacy, endowment, bequest or gift in support of the work and welfare of the University.
16. To ensure that the University's constitution is followed at all times and that appropriate advice is available to enable this to happen.
17. Court shall approve and keep under review a scheme of delegated authority to the Principal and other senior and committees.

General Role Descriptor for Court Members

Annex B

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 11/3/2025]

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 10 and up to 12 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.

² See paragraph 26 of the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance 2023

