



# Independent Court Member

## Applicant Information December 2017



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## 1. Introduction

Abertay University is seeking to appoint new independent members of its governing body, the University Court, and is looking for individuals with experience of senior leadership roles in private, public or third-sector organisations, who has a strong personal interest in, and commitment to, higher education.

Abertay University is a dynamic and forward-looking university based in Dundee, delivering excellence across a range of academic disciplines and with a strong record of supporting the educational achievement of students from all backgrounds.

The University values and promotes equality and diversity for staff and students and for University Court. Applications are particularly invited from women, people with disabilities and members of minority ethnic groups.

## 2. About Abertay University

Abertay University is a modern, pioneering and ambitious university with almost 4,000 students and income of about £34 million per year with a strong tradition of preparing students for the industries and jobs of the modern world. Today, this innovative approach is clearly visible in the University's programme provision which ranges from forensic, sport and food sciences to biotechnology, cybersecurity and computer games. For the latter, Abertay is renowned internationally.

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. We are the leading modern university in Scotland for 'research intensity' and best for student satisfaction. This is central to our long-term plan to embed a research-led culture throughout the institution.

### **Teaching and Learning**

Our approach to curriculum reform - aimed at transforming the student experience and unlocking potential - creates a dynamic learning environment, which led to our shortlisting for the Times Higher Education University of the Year Award in 2016.

Our Teaching & Learning Enhancement strategy has three main objectives:

- Reforming our curriculum to revolutionise the delivery and design of programmes which will advance students' knowledge; enhance students' preparedness for post-graduation and the world of work; and recognises and facilitates different modes of learner journey.
- Incentivising students' performance through an integrated approach to all aspects of assessment (formative, summative and recording achievement) with a focus on programme-level learning outcomes, joint Honours/GPA degree classification and implementation of the Higher Education Achievement Report.
- Raising the status of teaching in the institution in terms of leadership, professional recognition, reward and development.

### **Research and Knowledge Exchange**

Abertay University is a compact, focused institution, which enables us to work effectively both within and across traditional research boundaries. The Abertay University Research and Knowledge Exchange strategy, R-LINCS (Research-Led Innovation Nodes for Contemporary Society), bridges conventional boundaries between research disciplines to devise innovative approaches to address societal challenges. R-LINCS is structured into four themes: *Creative Industries, Environment, Security, and Society*.

These themes address key local, national and international priorities, building on our existing areas of expertise and on our industry-facing heritage. Our ambitious long-term plan to build capacity and drive interdisciplinary research and innovation is being stimulated by a strategy framework and internal investment. Research underpins both our teaching and engagement with industry and society more generally. Abertay has a rapidly developing research culture, and submitted 30% more staff, and more Units of Assessment, for the Research Excellence Framework 2014 compared to RAE 2008.

Further information on teaching & learning and research at Abertay is available at:

<https://www.abertay.ac.uk/discover/work-here/working-at-abertay/learning-development/tle/>

<http://www.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref2014/>

### University Strategy

Abertay is committed to being an excellent university, equal to the best in Scotland and making our own unique contribution to society. The values and principles that guide the activities of Abertay are seen in our strategic plan for the period 2015-2020: available at <http://abertay.ac.uk/media/Strategic%20Plan%202015%20for%20web.pdf>

Abertay University has achieved the Athena Swan Bronze Award, recognising the University's achievements in respect of gender equality. The University is also proud to hold the Race Equality Charter Mark Bronze Award for our ongoing commitment and active steps to improving race equality for our staff and students; the only Scottish university to hold this award. Abertay University holds a Gold Award for Healthy Working Lives, a Silver Award for the Armed Forces Covenant; and is recognised as a Cycle Friendly Employer.

## 3. The Role of Court

The University Court is the governing body of the University. The composition, functions and powers of Court are set out in the University of Abertay Dundee (Scotland) Order of Council 1994. Under the Order, the objects of the University are to provide education, undertake and carry out research, make suitable and adequate provision for such activities, and conduct the affairs of the University in ways that promote its objects.

Since the University is a Charity, Court is also responsible for ensuring that Court exercises efficient and effective use of the resources of the University for the furtherance of its charitable purposes, maintains its long-term financial viability, and safeguards its assets, and that proper mechanisms exist to ensure financial control and for the prevention of fraud.

The University is committed to exhibiting good practice in all aspects of corporate governance. As the Governing Body of the University, Court is responsible for the system of internal control, which includes internal audit; delegation of responsibilities within a regulatory framework; and reviewing its own effectiveness. The system is designed to fulfil the responsibilities related to accountability, transparency and value for money inherent in good corporate governance practice. It emphasises the effective management of risk, using well thought-out and controlled risk-taking, leading to improved delivery of the University's objects, proper regard for organisational development, and ensuring the institution's long-term sustainability.

Court currently comprises lay (independent) members, *ex officio* members and staff members, with a maximum membership of 25 people. Lay members have '*experience of industrial, commercial or employment matters or the practice of any profession*', include at least one person having experience in each of local government and the provision of education and remain an absolute majority. Of the maximum 25 members, up to 18 are lay members, 4 are *ex officio* (Principal, 2 Vice-Principals and the President of the Students' Association) and 3 are elected by and from among Senate, academic staff and support staff. Court membership will be revised in

the near future to take into account the requirements of the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016.

Under its Governing Order, Court is required to meet at least three times per year, but usually meets five times per year. The agendas and papers for Court and its committees are published and available to staff and students of the University. Approved Court minutes are published on the University's website. The Committees of Court are:

- Audit Committee
- Chair's Committee
- Finance & Corporate Performance Committee
- Governance & Nominations Committee
- People, Health & Equality Committee
- Remuneration Committee

Further information about Court and its current members can be found at

<https://www.abertay.ac.uk/discover/the-university/governance-and-management/university-court/>

#### 4. Independent Court Member: Role Description

Independent Court Members are neither employees nor students of the University, and are appointed by the Court itself - forming a majority of members on Court (compared with the staff members and student members). Once appointed, all members are charity trustees as the University is a registered educational charitable body.

The main purpose of the role of Court Member is, *inter alia*, to assist Court in performing its statutory functions. Court is the University's legal authority and collectively it is 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 employing authority and ensuring the good name and values of the University.

##### **Specific Duties and Responsibilities**

###### 1. Standards

- a) All 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 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) Independent Court members, through the Chair, should endeavor to establish a constructive and supportive but challenging working relationship with the senior managers 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) Independent Court members will sit on at least one or more 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.

###### 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 member 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 are expected to attend all meetings of which they are a member, or give timely apologies if absence is unavoidable.
- d) Court members will attend induction/training events organised by the University or other appropriate bodies such as the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education as required.
- e) Court members will meet at least once per year with the Chair on a one-to-one basis to discuss their performance in the role.
- f) Court members will share their view of the effectiveness of the Court and the effectiveness of the as Chair *via* the Court Intermediary.

## 5. Independent Court Member: Person Specification

### Personal Competencies

#### *Essential*

- Excellent 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 (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.

## 6. Appointment Details

### 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 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 Lay Members will need to devote at least 10 and up to 15 days per year to fulfil effectively 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 October and June on a Wednesday afternoon from 2.00 pm for about 2 hours, preceded from about noon by visits to meet staff and students and lunch with senior managers and members of Senate.
- Five meetings of a Court Committee.
- 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.

## 7. Application Process

### Enquiries

For a confidential discussion regarding the role, please contact Donogh O'Brien or Lauren Neil, at Aspen People, on 0141 212 7555.

### Making your application

To apply, please send a completed application form detailing, with examples and evidence, how you meet the criteria in the Person Specification and outlining the contribution you would make to the University, **by Friday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018** to Aspen People via the link [here](#)

### Interviews

The Governance & Nominations Committee will review applications and invite shortlisted applicants for interview during the week commencing 12 February 2018.

**Committed to Equal Opportunities**

**The University of Abertay Dundee is a Scottish Registered Charity, No: SC016040**