

Draft Scottish Code of Good HE Governance – The role of Rector and Vice-Convener of Court at Edinburgh University

The Court of the University of Edinburgh considered the draft Scottish Code of Good HE Governance at its meeting on 13 May 2013 and generally welcomed the document as a good basis for a further review of the University's governance systems and processes.

In the light of the discussion at the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee on 7 May 2013 on the role of Rector in the Ancient Universities of Scotland we thought it might be helpful to clarify the evidence on how the roles of Rector and Vice-Convener of Court operate at Edinburgh University as it has been our experience that these different roles can work well together.

A Rector, nominated and elected every three years by staff and students of the University, presides over meetings of our governing body, the University Court. The position of Rector and election arrangements are governed by the Universities (Scotland) Acts and Ordinances approved by the Privy Council. The Vice-Convener is elected from among and by all members of Court in accordance with an agreed process (confirmed when a vacancy arises) and it is the Vice-Convener who presides over meetings of Court in the absence of the Rector. It is also this elected Vice-Convener who acts de facto as the 'Chairperson of the University' and who ensures good governance arrangements liaising closely with the Principal in taking forward strategic matters and acting as Convener on Court Committees (principally Finance and General Purposes Committee, Remuneration Committee and Nominations Committee).

It should be noted that going forward Co-opted members of Court (current practice would be for one of this group to be elected Vice-Convener of Court) are appointed as a result of an open transparent recruitment process managed by the Nominations Committee. The majority of other Court members are elected to Court (General Council Assessors, Senate Assessors and Non-Teaching Staff Assessor) or appointed by a third party, often as a result of the outcome of an election albeit not specifically for the position on Court (student representatives and Edinburgh Council Assessor).

The process of appointing a Vice-Convener of Court by election from members of Court who have been either elected themselves or appointed by an open and transparent process would appear to be compliant with the guidelines of the draft Code.

The University has found this current approach to be satisfactory and appropriate to the needs of the University with the separate roles of the Rector and Vice-Convener clearly understood. The draft code risks causing some confusion in this respect – largely through the use of the generic term 'chair' - and we welcome the fact that this will be reviewed before a final draft is developed. We would be very happy to contribute further information on the respective roles of Rector and Vice-Convener if that would be helpful.