

Senate Assessors (seven in number) are elected by Senate from different areas of the university so as to maintain a broad balance of disciplines. The term of office is from August of the year of appointment and lasts until the July of the fourth year.

Court Meetings

Senate Assessors represent the interests of Senate at Court and are expected to attend Senate and Court meetings. The Court papers will be sent on the Friday before the following Wednesday. Court Meeting and it is traditional for the Senate Assessors (hereafter 'SAs') to meet before Court meetings to discuss the agenda and other matters in the Court papers. It is important to decide in advance which items the SAs wish to have 'starred', as there will be no opportunity to discuss this item otherwise.

Committees of Court

SAs sit on the major committees of Court, such as Human Resources, Finance, Education, Health, Safety and Environment, Estates Planning and Strategy Committee, Information Strategy, External Relations, Chaplaincy, Library, etc., and on the many sub-committees.

The ad hoc committees set up by Court also have SAs as members.

SAs convene or are members of a number of the sub-committees such as the Court Appeal Panel, Amenities, Library, Chaplaincy, Academic-Related Staff, Student Support & Development Committees, etc. With these they will receive help from the clerk of the committee. In the course of the year there will be a number of working parties created by Court or its committees and most of these will have an SA member; in recent times these have been groups which examine and redefine the university policy on items such as promotion, discipline, harassment, disability and grievances.

Training

SAs are expected to attend a number of training courses in areas such as promotion, equal opportunities, appointments, dignity at work and study, and student conduct procedures, etc.

Human Resources

a) Promotions

Most of SAs' time is spent on HR issues. SAs play a crucial role, for example, in the annual promotions round. Two SAs sit on all College Promotions committees and later all SAs sit on the Academic Committees of Review for Professors, Readers, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers and those staff applying for discretionary points and increments. All SAs are on the Committee on Personal Professorships in November and the Board of Review for all posts in February. In this way it is hoped to maintain consistency of policy and judgement across the University. Two SAs will also be on the Secretarial and Clerical Annual Review. The promotion process involves much reading of applications and will take up a considerable amount of SAs' time from October to January.

b) Appointments

An SA generally chairs all appointing committees for new academic and academic-related posts. Training is provided for this important activity. The SAs as a group will initially be contacted by HR by e-mail and asked to chair a specific appointing committee. The Head of School should then contact the SA with dates for the shortlisting meeting, presentations (if any) and interviewing meeting. Heads of School have clear instructions concerning the procedure, but from experience SAs may have to ensure that proper procedures are followed and that they are present at the shortlisting meeting. For example, it is important to check that the job specifications are met by all those to be interviewed and that the timetable for references and interview is realistic. It is not necessary to attend the

presentations before the interviews, but it is helpful to do so. At the interview the SA will chair the committee, discuss the procedure with the committee and go over the specifications. It is then normal to ask members on which aspect of the post they will concentrate their questions, so that no major part of the job is omitted. In this pre-interview discussion the SA should also outline the procedures to be followed during the post-interview session. These are:

- a) It is normal to begin with a brief 'scoring' of candidates on a 1 to 3 score with 1 = unappointable, 2= appointable, but with reservations, and 3 = definitely appointable;
- b) The report from the Head of School or equivalent on the school's reaction to the presentations will then be given. This along with the letters of reference will act as supplementary information.
- c) A general discussion about the candidates.

The SA will welcome the candidates, put them at their ease and introduce the committee. The SA will normally begin the questions with a brief survey of the candidate's career, asking specific questions that might arise, such as 'when will the PhD be completed?'. S/he will then call on members of the committee to ask questions. The SA must be vigilant in case any questions are asked which could be considered discriminatory. After this procedure the SA will ask if the candidate has any questions. If there is no HR member present, the SA should check the degree certificates that the candidate has brought.

An SA will also sit on professorial appointing committees, which are usually chaired by the Principal or a Vice-Principal. During the year the Principal will also ask the advice of the SAs concerning the promotion of staff outwith the official promotion period. This normally occurs with retention cases - when academics are offered a post elsewhere - and in the experience of SAs these are becoming more frequent. The current SAs feel that this should not be perceived as a 'fast-track' method of being promoted and discretion has to be exercised in making a decision.

c) Heads of Schools and Heads of College

At least one SA will sit on appointing committees for Heads of School. The relevant Head of College will normally start proceedings and a committee comprising the Head of College and an SA will interview candidates and then make a recommendation to Court. In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to persuade colleagues to take this responsibility, so it may be necessary for the Head of College and SA to talk to the school and individuals. In other cases there is more than one candidate and a ballot may be held.

An SA and a lay member of Court will also be members of committees to appoint Heads of College.

Other duties

One of the SAs will be asked to write the Court Column in the University Newsletter.

The SAs traditionally have selected one of their number to act as spokesperson or the point of contact for colleagues who wish to contact the SAs. The Secretary of Court, for example, may approach this SA and ask if s/he will help find an SA for a specific task.

Finally...

There is a perception that SAs act as 'watchdogs' who ensure that the University management acts in the best interests of the members of Senate. They are amongst the few elected members of the academic community to have a major influence on university affairs.

It should be noted that there are multifarious advantages to being an SA: one can wear 'foggings' on one's academic dress, one is invited to a number of university functions, but above all the SA gets to

know - for better or worse - the workings of the University and the personnel in a wide range of academic schools and administrative departments.

Good luck!

Professor Graham D Caie