

What it's like to be a Senate Assessor on Court

The role of Senate Assessor can be fulfilling and frustrating. The University Court is the governing body of the University, which contributes to the development of strategy and oversees management and University finances. The Senate Assessor is part of a powerful inner circle of around 35 people, including Court, the Senior Management Group and Heads of Service, who effectively run the University. Being an Assessor therefore means taking on significant responsibility. The Principal is a member of Court, although Vice Principals are not. One sees them on a regular basis, and this can initially seem quite daunting. However, in my experience, members of SMG and others on Court are friendly and treat the views of SAs with respect.

The duties of the Senate Assessor fall into two broad categories, those directly related to Court, and those related to one's position in Senate. One is expected to attend five Court meetings a year and to contribute to one or two Court committees, each also meeting five times a year. There are also annual Court Strategy, Induction and Risk Analysis meetings, although these are not obligatory. The time commitment is roughly one day for each Court meeting (including Strategy) and half a day for each committee meeting, plus another half day or so before each meeting to read the papers. The main Court committees are Human Resources, Finance and Estates, with either two or three SAs on each.

Senate Assessors participate in Promotions Panels and Reward and Recognition panels (usually one of each), are the members of Periodic Subject Review panels (usually one per year), sit on appointment panels for Heads of School and above (perhaps one a year), and may sit on another committee, such as the Library Committee or Educational Policy and Strategy Committee. Overall, the time commitment is likely to be an additional five or so days, not counting the time to read papers in advance. Senate Assessors often say that these duties (especially PSRs) are the most rewarding part of the job, because they give one the opportunity to meet staff from other parts of the University and to see how they work.

The Court-based duties of an SA are also worthwhile. At present, Senate Assessors represent almost 30% of Court, which suggests significant influence. The title of Senate Assessor causes a lot of confusion, because they are most definitely **not** intended to act as representatives of Senate. All members of Court are required to make decisions which are in the best interests of the University, and not of any particular constituency. Nonetheless, it is to be expected that Senate Assessors will draw upon their academic experience in defining those interests, just as Lay Members drew on their own experience in human resources, finance, management, and higher education from elsewhere. Senate Assessors do not act as a unified block, although their joint interests often provide a bond. They also go out on occasional social occasions, which are to be recommended!

It is important to realise that Court is rarely an initiating body. It receives reports from members of Senior Management Group and Heads of Service, and is in a position to ask hard questions if there are difficulties. It is especially concerned to make sure that the University balances its books and meets identified strategic targets. One's influence is therefore one of guidance and adjustment, and not of fundamental change.

This is a very rewarding time to be a member of Court, providing an inside track on discussions about the development of the Western Infirmary site, and the Gilmorehill campus more generally. The work of the HR, Finance and Estates committees go to the heart of

University business, and have the potential to affect the working lives of every member of staff. It is not an easy job, but it is very worthwhile, and I can recommend it wholeheartedly.

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