



## Frequently Asked Questions about becoming a lay member of a Council Committee

### 1. Background

The role of lay members of Council Committees is similar to that of non-executive directors of companies. They bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to discussions and they provide an important balance of support and challenge.

### 2. What is University Council?

Council is the governing body of the University. It approves the policy and sets the strategy of the University (in consultation with Senate on academic matters), and ensures that the Vice-Chancellor and University officers further that policy. Council nominates the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellors and Treasurer for appointment by Court, and appoints the Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellors after consultation with Senate.

Council enters into contracts on behalf of the University, including contracts of employment. It reviews and promotes the teaching and research of the University and supervises Senate. Council awards honorary degrees on the recommendation of Senate, and recommends to Court the award of honorary fellowships.

Council manages all the University's financial and other affairs, makes investments, and sells, buys and leases property. It may borrow money and mortgage University property. Council sets the University's borrowing limits and reports them each year to Court.

### 3. What do Council Committees do and what are their roles/responsibilities?

Council's work is underpinned by a structure of committees, which undertake much of the specific and detailed analysis of key University strategy before making recommendations to Council.

Lay membership of Council Committees run from 1 January each year, while academic memberships run from 1 August in each year. The Chair of Council, the Vice-Chancellor and the Treasurer may receive all committee papers and attend any committee meeting.

All strategies and policies developed by University staff should first be vetted by the University Planning and Resources Committee, then the relevant Council committee(s) and finally, the Council for formal approval.

All committees will monitor the strategic performance indicators (SPIs) delegated to them by Council. Where necessary, committees will propose action resulting from such monitoring and/or amendments to the SPIs.

All committees are expected to consider risks which are appropriate to their area of activity, including, for example, risks to reputation, ethical risks and risks arising from the international dimension. Similarly, all committees are expected to monitor value for money issues appropriate to their area of activity.

All committees are expected to consider issues related to diversity, either within the context of the equality risk assessment process or by incorporating the potential to promote equality

into their policy recommendations where appropriate. Where committees are considering policy issues which have implications for equality and diversity, the Equality & Diversity Committee should be consulted.

#### **4. What role/responsibilities do Council Committee members have?**

First and foremost, members are expected to play their part in ensuring that the necessary business of the Council Committee is carried out efficiently, effectively, and in a manner appropriate for the proper conduct of public business. They are expected to make rational and constructive contributions to debate and to make their knowledge and expertise available to the Council Committee as opportunity arises.

An important point to note is that lay members of Council C(governors) may be *representative of the particular constituencies* from which they are drawn, but they *do not represent those constituencies*. In practice this means that board members have a **corporate responsibility** to the Council and its Committees and to the institution which overrides any representational role that they may be perceived to have.

A more detailed **description of the 'Roles and Responsibilities of lay members of Council Committees** is available on the website:

[www.bristol.ac.uk/governanceopportunities/committees/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/governanceopportunities/committees/)

#### **5. What are the benefits of becoming a member of a Council Committee?**

Being a member of a Council Committee is a very challenging and rewarding role. The benefits include opportunities to:

- contribute to and shape the University's decision-making and strategic planning;
- develop new skills and strengthen existing skills;
- work with people from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds and to enhance teamwork and communication skills;
- gain a deeper understanding of the key issues facing the University of Bristol and the UK Higher Education sector;
- develop an understanding of, and experience in, key business areas such as financial and strategic planning, risk management and performance monitoring.

#### **6. Will I receive any remuneration or reimbursement?**

Council Committee members do not receive remuneration but the University pays travelling and other expenses incurred by Council Committee members, including reasonable travel and subsistence, parking, accommodation, child care costs, and other reasonable incidentals such as telephone calls, stationery, printing, and email costs.

#### **7. How much time would I be expected to commit?**

The likely overall time commitment required of members is **5-7 days per year**.

Typically, each Committee meets once per term for approximately three hours. There would be an expectation that members will have read the papers in advance of the meeting and they should allow up to half a day for preparation time. Refreshments are provided. Currently, the governance structure provides for lay membership on the following Council Committees:

- Audit
- Estates
- Ethics of Research
- Finance
- Personnel and Health & Safety

Depending upon members' areas of expertise and interest, there may be opportunities to participate in *ad hoc* advisory or working groups.

#### **8. How do I apply?**

Please download an application form at:

[www.bristol.ac.uk/governanceopportunities/committees](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/governanceopportunities/committees). Please complete the application form and send this together with a Diversity Monitoring form and a copy of your CV to the address detailed on the application form and in time for any stated deadline.

#### **9. Will I be asked to attend an interview?**

Yes, all shortlisted candidates are invited to attend an interview with a small panel. The interview will take about an hour and it provides a two-way opportunity for the panel and for the candidate to consider the candidate's suitability for the role.

#### **10. What is the appointment process/timescales?**

Lay members of Council committees are appointed by the Membership Appointments Group which will make recommendations to University Council.

The Committee Secretary will confirm members' appointments in writing shortly after formal approval has been given. The letter will set out the approved term of office and other key information that a new member will require.

Lay members of Council Committees are appointed for three-year terms of office, and may stand for re-appointment for a maximum of two additional three-year terms, in accordance with the University Statutes and recognised good practice across the sector.

#### **11. What support/training will I receive?**

All new lay members of Council Committees will receive a local induction organised by the Secretary to the Committee.