



Frequently Asked Questions about becoming a lay member of Council

1. Background

19 of the 32 members of University Council are 'lay' members which means that they are external to the University. The other 13 members are staff (academic and support staff) and students. The role of lay members of Council 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. Who sits on University Council?

The membership of the University Council is prescribed by our Statutes. The total number of members is 32, with the majority (19) being lay (external) members. Other members are the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellors, six elected staff members and three of the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers. The Chair is a lay member of Council.

Members usually serve for three-year terms, up to a maximum of nine years.

4. What role/responsibilities do Council members have?

First and foremost, members are expected to play their part in ensuring that the necessary business of the Council 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 as opportunity arises.

An important point to note is that Council members (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 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 Council Members**" is available on the website: www.bristol.ac.uk/governanceopportunities/council/lay.html

5. What are the benefits of becoming a member of the University Council?

Being a member of Council 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 members do not receive remuneration but the University pays travelling and other expenses incurred by Council 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?

Council and Council Committees

The likely overall time commitment required of members is **15-20 days per year** (or more if members wish to join several committees). This includes attending and preparing for Council meetings and Council/University events and as we encourage all Council members to sit on at least one Council Committee, this 15-20 day total also includes preparing for and attending 3-4 committee meetings per year too.

Typically, Council meets between 5 and 7 times per year, with each meeting lasting from a half to a full day, depending on the amount and nature of business to be covered. Meetings usually start at 9am and finish no later than 4pm. Council meetings are arranged for Fridays wherever possible but Council Away Days often take place on a Thursday (immediately preceding the Council meeting day). Lunch and refreshments are provided.

Council and other committee papers are sent out one week before each meeting and it is expected that members will have read the papers in advance of the meeting and be prepared to voice their opinions. You should allow approx. ½ to 1 day per meeting to prepare and to do any appropriate background reading.

Other events/commitments

Other expectations of Council members include attendance at the annual meeting of Court (a single day AGM-style meeting in early December each year) and at least one of the University's graduation ceremonies each year.

Further information about Court and Council committees can be found in the "**Roles and Responsibilities of Lay Council Members**" document which is available on the website: www.bristol.ac.uk/governanceopportunities/council/lay.html

Invitations to University Events

Our Council members are regularly invited to a diverse range of interesting University and community events. These informal gatherings provide a valuable opportunity for Council members to see the University 'in action' and to meet with staff and students. Whilst attending such events is of course optional, they do provide insights and information which are integral to effective governance.

8. How do I apply?

Please contact the Secretariat to request an application form or download it from the website (www.bristol.ac.uk/governanceopportunities/council/lay.html). Please complete and send this together with a completed Diversity Monitoring form and copy of your CV to the address stated 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 are appointed by Court, usually in December, on the recommendation of the Nominations Committee of Court. Shortlisted applicants will be those whose skills and experience most closely reflect the criteria set out in the person specification.

The Clerk to Council 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 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 Council members will receive a full induction, including:

- Council Member Resource Pack – a role description, Council Code of Practice, copies of the University's key strategies, the CUC Guide for members of UK HEI Governing Bodies, and other key corporate documents;
- An introductory session with the Clerk to outline Council protocols and procedures, meeting etiquette etc.;
- Briefings from the Chair of Council, the Vice-Chancellor, Treasurer, Finance Director and other members of the executive team;
- A briefing from the Director of Legal Services outlining, amongst other things, your legal responsibilities as a Council member and Trustee;
- A handover discussion with outgoing Council members;
- Mentoring opportunities with other Council members (staff and/or lay Council members);
- An annual review meeting with the Chair or Vice-Chair of Council;
- Opportunities to attend governor development training with the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.