

SECRETARIES GROUP OF UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND

ADDITIONAL SUBMISSION TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW PANEL

Office of Rector

Governance arrangements in the four ancient Scottish universities are distinct from the rest of Scotland, and unique within the UK, in that a Rector, elected by the matriculated students of the university (and staff in the case of the University of Edinburgh) for a period of three years, chairs the University Court, the supreme decision-making body of the university.

The role of the chairman of the university Court is central to setting the institutional agenda and promoting its strategic aims. The individuals elected to serve in this capacity must be able to do so proficiently and in the best interests of a multiplicity of interested constituencies, including staff and students and, above all, the institution as a whole. The current position is, therefore, too haphazard to ensure that these crucial aims are met.

We have taken advice on this matter from the four ancient universities and noted that all university Courts now have permanent student representation. We consider the Rector is a valuable asset to Court, and therefore should be retained, to act, as originally envisaged, as a spokesperson for students. However, we believe that the office of Rector should no longer be linked automatically to the chairmanship of the University Court. We believe that the chairman of Court should more properly be elected by all members, and we agree with the National Committee that this should be for a period of no longer than three years, renewable for three years. If satisfying the criteria for eligibility, the Rector could, of course, stand for election to the position of chairman.

Recommendation

We recommend to the four Scottish ancient universities and to the Government that the office of Rector should no longer be linked to the chairmanship of the University Court, and that the appropriate legislation should be enacted to support this change in institutional governance.

National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
Report of the Scottish Committee
Chapter 5 Paragraphs 5.13 – 5.15