

Linda M. Duncan election statement

I am very happy to have been invited to stand for election as Chair of the Lay Court at Edinburgh Napier University.

In 2023, I was pleased to become a Lay member at Edinburgh Napier University. I grew up in the northeast of Scotland and graduated from Napier many years ago, so the University has always been close to my heart.

The current environment in Higher Education in Scotland is extremely challenging and the University will need strong leadership and an active Lay Court to support students, staff and other stakeholders at this difficult time. Grant income from the Scottish Government has been declining, both in real terms and because of the lower number of Scottish students coming into Higher Education and fewer transitioning from Further Education into Higher Education. The number of International Students has declined due to international and global events and UK visa restrictions. In the meantime, our costs such as pay, non-pay and student accommodation goes up each year with inflation. We have already taken some actions, for example introducing three trimesters, further developing our Transnational provision, expanding global online and setting up the Pathway College. We are working on more innovation to secure a sustainable future for the University. We aim to invest where we need to and make changes as required to protect and enhance our reputation for the very high quality of education that we provide.

I currently Chair the Finance and Property Committee at Napier and so I have seen first-hand the impact that the current financial environment has had on the University. I have got to know the Senior Leadership Team well and I believe this experience has given me a very sound understanding of how the University is managed and forms a strong basis from which to become Chair of Court. The role of the Committee is to monitor the income coming into the University and oversee how this money is spent - staff costs, learning resources, technology to improve the student experience, investment in our buildings, facilities and sports grounds. We assess and approve individual business cases for these.

What can you expect of me as chair of the Lay Court?

The role of the Lay Court is to set and approve the mission and strategy for the University, to steer it away from unmanageable risks and provide advice and support to help it overcome challenges and enable it to succeed. We are accountable for the success of the University to all our stakeholders – students, staff, external partners, regulators and funders.

In the current environment, it is more important than ever that we have an experienced Lay Court who can ensure that good governance is in place and that its reputation is protected externally. The Court needs to have the skills to support and constructively

challenge the new Principal as she develops and realises her long-term vision for the University.

Over my career, I have developed significant experience of helping organisations to develop strategy and create short and long-term plans to achieve their mission. I have advised on good governance and risk management at a wide range of companies, from FTSE 100 to new start-ups. My early career focused on regularity and value for money auditing at publicly funded organisations and charities. I have led teams and chaired committees facing similar financial challenges and transformations. I believe I have the experience needed to steer us through this next difficult period.

The Lay Court has had a diverse membership over the years, but many experienced members have recently retired at the end of their term, and I believe it is necessary to bring in people with new skills and backgrounds, increase our stakeholder engagement and representation on the Court, and encourage each member in their ambassadorial role externally. This will lead to a strong, informed Court going forwards.

I am committed to enhancing access for students – developing innovative partnerships to deliver our courses so that students can study with Napier whatever their background or circumstances.

A great student experience is critical to ensuring that students can stay with us through to graduation - accommodation, gym and sports facilities, study areas are all important. Student well-being and health has been a major focus over the last few years and the benefits of this are becoming clear – we need to continue to develop and enhance this work for the benefit of our students.

Research and Innovation has been a major development area for Napier over the last few years, with income from this area growing and more opportunities arising every day. We need to continue to expand our knowledge partnerships, target key areas of research and maintain a clear focus on our Research Excellence Framework submissions to build long term sustainable funding for this work.

Our environmental and sustainability strategy is well developed, but more needs to be done. A key challenge for the University in the current financial climate is affordability, so we will prioritise actions that give us the biggest environmental and sustainability benefit for the money we have available to invest.

Technological advances will transform how we deliver professional services over the next 5-10 years, we need to understand how this will impact the University, what investments we need to make, both digitally and in facilities to continue to deliver services effectively in the

My background

It has been many years since my own graduation from Napier in 1984, with an Accountancy degree. Ahead of its time, my degree afforded me maximum exemptions from the accounting professional examinations, and I rapidly qualified while working with KPMG.

In the last 40 years, I have worked in leadership roles in strategy, audit, and consulting at PwC and KPMG in London. I have also experienced life as an entrepreneur at a start up in the US technology sector, led major transformation projects as a Finance Director in the US, and become a Trustee and Board Member of many Charities and Government Agencies in the UK.

I have over 20 years of experience of Board and Trustee membership, including Chair of the Audit Committee at the Metropolitan Police in London and Vice Chair at the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

I moved back to Edinburgh in 2018 to be closer to family and friends. I am currently Vice-Chair at Medical Research Scotland which funds post graduate studies at Scottish Universities, and I am a recent Trustee of Blackwood Care and Housing in Edinburgh which provides specialist housing and support for people with disabilities to enable them to live independently.

During my career, I have experienced many challenging times, many financial issues and transformational changes. Equally there have been many opportunities to lead, to invest, be brave and take step changes forwards. I believe this experience could bring great value to the role of Chair of the Lay Court at Edinburgh Napier University and I would be honoured if you would give me the opportunity by voting for me in this election.