

Academic Staff Member Election 2022

Tobias Kelly

I love working at Edinburgh and have always been inspired and humbled by our colleagues. I am deeply concerned though that the principles of the public university are currently being undermined. If elected to the Court I would seek to put colleagues, students and academic integrity at the heart of University decision making.

I have taught here for the past sixteen years and before that I was an undergraduate student at the University in the mid-1990s. I am currently Professor of Political and Legal Anthropology in the School of Social and Political Science. In my time, I have worked across many roles: tutoring, convening large first year undergraduate courses, supervising PhDs, leading research projects, working as Head of Subject Area, Director of the Undergraduate School, and Co-Director of Research, as well as sitting on more working groups and committees across the University than I care to remember. I have been fortunate to collaborate with and learn from academics, professional service colleagues and students from across the University. There is so much to cherish in the University, particularly amongst those working directly with students, carrying out research or engaging with wider society. During this time I have learned that the University is at its best when it gives people the space to carry out the teaching and research that they are so committed to.

I have also seen many of the pressures that are placed on colleagues, including overwork, entrenched forms of inequality, and centrally managed 'change' initiatives that have little apparent awareness of the real problems that we face or how to solve them. Pay and conditions are being eroded, Early Career Academic face increasing challenges, and there is little room for career development within professional services. All too often financial and 'real estate' ambitions seem to have become ends in themselves, rather than ways to support great teaching and research, or to improve the working lives of staff. Trust in the senior management of the University and the morale of colleagues is at an all-time low. I have always been a great supporter of this institution, but feel we have now reached a critical juncture.

The University Court is the central space where the strategic goals of the University are set and the performance of Senior Leadership is monitored. On the Court, I would bring a perspective that understands the complex relationship between teaching and research, and the pressures faced by those on the ground. Through critical but constructive engagement, I will prioritise transparency, working conditions, and promoting an approach that allows colleagues to carry out that teaching and research that they are so good at. My aim is to support a thriving university that foregrounds staff and student wellbeing, academic principles, and the ideal of the University as a public good.