The University Court is asked to:

- **RECOMMEND TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES** a review of the Statutes in relation to Court over the course of the next year with a view to bringing proposed changes via the Board of Trustees to Court for approval in December 2023. In summary, the review would look at better aligning the mechanisms of Court with its purpose, in order to support and improve member engagement.

**Constitutional Context**

In accordance with the University Charter, sections 7.2 and 7.3, “Statutes shall define the constitution of the Court and regulate (...) all other matters relative to the Court which it may be thought are proper to be so regulated. Subject to the Charter and Statutes, the Court may determine all matters relating to the appointment and election of its members and their respective periods or terms of office and all other matters relating to the constitution of the Court (...) Statutes provided for by Article 7.3 above shall be made or amended by the Board of Trustees only with the consent of the Court”

Statute 7 currently regulates how business can be submitted “Any member of Court wishing to bring forward any business at a meeting shall give the Secretary written notice of it not less than twenty days before the day appointed for the meeting provided that such business shall not be included on the agenda unless no fewer than nine other members of Court have indicated their support either by signing the notice or writing to the Secretary indicating their support for the business to be discussed.”

**Supporting Information**

1. **Summary of issue raised by the Court Member (the Request)**

The Governance team received the Request below from Chris Burns on 11 November 2022. Mr Burns is a Category 1 member of Court (representing the Alumni Association).

“University Statutes require that written notice of any business to be raised at Court by a member of Court must be submitted to the Secretary at least 20 days prior to the Court annual meeting, and must be supported by another 9 members of Court.

The Registrar and Secretary has also advised that any questions submitted in advance must be submitted not less than 10 days prior to the Court annual meeting, although this is apparently not a requirement of the Statutes. Papers for the meeting are made available to members not less than 7 days before the meeting, as prescribed by the Statutes.

It is therefore possible that members do not see the papers (which might include the first sight of the annual report and financial statements for the year ended at the previous 31 July) until the deadlines for submission of business and questions have expired. For example, the year end 31 July 2021 annual report was signed
off by the auditors on 25 November 2021, and Court papers made available on that day, only 8 days before the Court meeting on 3 December 2012.

Furthermore, in the absence of a list of members’ emails being available, or a facility to communicate between members, it is very difficult for an individual member to find contact details of another nine members to generate support for a business submission.

To make it easier for members to be well-informed of current issues and thus to enable them to submit business and/or questions in advance that are better focused on those issues, I propose that:

1. The Statutes should be amended so that papers for Court meetings, including the annual report and financial statements, are made available to members in advance, by at last one week, of the deadlines for submission of business and questions. This can be achieved either by bringing forward the time for making papers available (might be difficult given need for auditor sign-off of accounts) or changing the deadlines for business/question submission.

2. The University, which has access to members’ contact details, should create a mechanism whereby a member’s proposed Court business can be circulated by the University, on the member’s behalf, to Court members with a view to obtaining the necessary support for the business to go forward to Court.

Chris Burns
Elected Court member

Response from the University

The purpose of University Court is to serve as a bridge between the wider community and the University. It provides a source of ideas, influence and support from the wider community to assist the University in pursuit of its mission. The membership of Court is extended to a wide range of people who have a common interest in furthering the development of the University. It is therefore extremely important that Court Members are provided with opportunities to engage with each other and with the University not just annually at the formal meeting, but at any point during the academic year, and the University very much encourages this.

We agree that the wording in the Court Statutes do not perhaps provide enough flexibility for Court members to engage in the way that we would like them to, and we note that when we undertook the constitutional reform work in 2020/21, we did not at that time include a review of the Court Statutes (this was because they were only last scrutinised in 2019 as part of the Court Reform project). We have liaised with Mr Burns informally and agreed to add this item to the agenda, noting, however, that Statutes are subject to the approval of Board, Court and the Privy Council.

However, in our view, this issue relates only to members raising “Business” at Court, not questions. In practice, we continue to accept questions past the deadline, and members are aware of their opportunity to raise questions at the meeting. The Court Standing Orders also provide for the ability to answer questions outside the meeting if there are more questions posed than time allowed. The deadline for questions in advance is a practical one, to enable as many questions as possible to be answered in advance of the meeting, maximising time at the meeting.

Given the above, the University proposes the following approach:

- That Court recommends to the Board of Trustees, a review of the Statutes relating to Court over the course of the next year. We would bring any proposed changes via the Board of Trustees to Court for approval in 2023.

- In summary, the review would look at better aligning the mechanisms of Court with its purpose and identifying how best to enhance communications from, between and to Court members in order to support more flexible and transparent member engagement.

The review would include some light touch consultation with Court members across a sufficiently wide sample of the constituency. Other challenges that would be considered as part of the review would include the availability of papers, and data sharing.