



Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

APPENDIX 21.2 – COURT EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2019

Summary

The Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance (2017) states that universities are expected to review the effectiveness of their governing bodies on an annual basis.

The 2019 Court Effectiveness Review was conducted by means of: (1) an online survey comprising Likert scale questions and opportunities for members to provide free text comments, and (2) a session facilitated on 7 February 2019 (day 2 of the annual Court Away Days) by Professor Graham Caie, Convener of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Responses to the online survey were received from 17 out of 22 eligible members of Court, which represents a response rate of 77%. Responses to the Likert scale questions are set out in the Appendix to this paper.

Findings

Responses from the online survey showed that a significant majority of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the elements necessary for effective governance identified in the questionnaire were in place. The review did however identify a number of areas where there were contrasting views, and where enhancement to a process or to information provided to members of the Court and its committees were suggested as beneficial. Questions that elicited particular comments or suggestions are set out below – the full list of questions and %ages is set out in the Appendix.

- Q2 94% of survey respondents agreed that *Court discharged effectively its responsibilities for ensuring that the University Strategic Plan was delivered*, although it was commented that there was not always sufficient time available for discussing strategic issues. It was suggested that Court should discuss a specific strategic topic at each meeting.
- Q4 76% of survey respondents agreed that *Court discharged effectively its responsibility and accountability for assuring the quality of the University's educational provision*. Through discussion at the facilitated session, members queried whether receipt of Senate minutes and reports alone was sufficient. It was suggested that additional measures might be required to better understand educational provision, other than through KPIs, such as NSS and ELIR results. The role of the Senate in terms of educational oversight was also recognised however.
- Q6 88% of survey respondents agreed that *the Committees of Court operated in an effective manner, and within the powers delegated to them by the Court*. It was queried whether there could be opportunities for members to observe meetings of Court committees; and whether it was possible to contextualize the work of each committee on annual basis.
- Q8 65% of survey respondents agreed that *they received an appropriate induction and ongoing professional development opportunities*. Members commented that there was scope for improvement in relation to the ongoing development of members, and a specific suggestion was made in relation to the hosting of a session on understanding university finance and funding. Development might also include members sharing with each other the work of committees of the Court. It was suggested that members would welcome the opportunity to attend court committees

as observers. It would be useful also to have a session at the Away Day on the work of Court Committees.

- Q12 77% of survey respondents agreed that *the lay members represented an appropriate mix of expertise, experience and background*. In discussing membership, there was recognition of the current requirement for property and accounting expertise on the Court. There was recognition too that, while it was important that lay membership of Court included a proportion drawn from the business sector, it was important too that public and third sectors were represented, particularly given the values of QMU, and its particular portfolio of programmes. External expertise drawn from higher education was also identified as important. It was suggested that Committee Conveners were particularly well placed to identify skills requirements, as well as members' development needs. It was suggested that while gender equality on the board had been achieved some time ago, more work was required in terms of other protected characteristics. The Nominations Committee continued to promote opportunities to reflect this need. Generally, it was suggested that the executive could draw upon of the experience and talents of Court members to a greater extent.
- Q15 77% of survey respondents agreed that *the organisation of meetings allowed them to make an effective contribution*. A number of members commented on the pressure on the agenda in terms of business, and the resulting squeeze on time to discuss matters in depth and to allow for a fuller exchange of differing views. While it was important that meetings did not extend well beyond the three hours set aside for discussion, it was important that key items were given sufficient time on the agenda for a full and wide ranging discussion, to encourage all members who wish to contribute to have the space and time to do so. The effectiveness of the Chair in ensuring all views were heard was commended specifically by one member.
- Q16 94% of survey respondents agreed that *there was appropriate interaction between Court members and Senior Management in meetings*. At the facilitated session, it was commented that greater sensitivity might have been shown to members of the executive during periods of difficult discussions.
- Q17 77% of survey respondents agreed that *the agenda for meetings of the Court provided an appropriate balance for discussion of strategic and operational issues*. A couple of members suggested that the Agenda was rather too dominated by matters of finance and that, consequently, other issues felt peripheral. Conversely, one member suggested that more time could be spent discussing matters of strategic importance, such as the financial situation and the City Deal.

There were a couple of suggestions around the management of the meeting agenda, so as to allow more equitable allocation of time to a range of subjects. Allowance for discussion of a strategic topic at each meeting was suggested by a couple of members, and the need to effect a balance between matters of strategy and of accountability was suggested by another member.

- Q18 77% of survey respondents agreed that *Court Papers gave an appropriate level of detail and identified clearly what action was required of members*. In terms of paperwork, there was a suggestion that the cover sheets to papers could be utilized more effectively to assist members in their understanding of the issue being discussed, and the action required of members. There were differing views expressed in terms of the balance between quality of paperwork, and what was identified by one member as the opportunity costs of producing detailed, albeit high quality, documents. Repetition of items was identified by one member as reducing the impact of papers, as was the need for greater clarity on decisions and actions arising from Court discussion. One member provided detailed comments on a revised format for papers, with papers drafted with clear sections, with clarity on authorship and the action being required of members. It was suggested by one member that it would be helpful were unconfirmed minutes of the Court

meeting circulated to members quickly after the meeting, rather than with the papers for the next meeting, as has been the practice.

Q23 65% of survey respondents agreed that *the Chair provided effective leadership and management of Court business*. During the facilitated session, members discussed the rationale for individuals being in attendance at meetings, and noted that the Chair was eligible to attend meetings of the committees of Court.

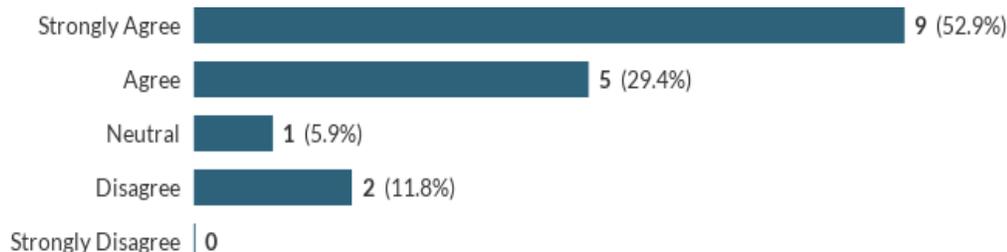
Recommended Actions arising from the Review

On the basis of the review outcomes, a number of enhancements are suggested to current practice. If approved, actions will be put in place with effect from June 2019.

1. In line with previous practice, 'ring- fenced' time will be set aside for strategic presentations at meetings of the Court. Moving the starting time back to 3.00 pm was intended to provide for this, but this has proved difficult, in part due to the particular focus of meetings during 2017/18.
2. Members are invited to consider whether they would also wish time set aside before each meeting for a development/training session on a subject identified by members. This might include a visit to an academic or support department. If agreed, a calendar of relevant training and development events will be developed and distributed to members, to include internal and external training and development opportunities.
3. Members will be provided with the schedule of all committee dates (in addition to Court dates) and will be proactively reminded that they are welcome to attend meetings of the Senate.
4. Members of the standing committees of Court will be provided with the committee terms of reference and membership at the first meeting of the relevant committee each academic year. To contextualise the work of Court committees, Court might receive short presentations from Committee chairs with accompanying question and answer sessions. The timing of such presentations could be incorporated into the Away Days, or be part of the pre-meeting development opportunities.
5. Members joining Court standing committees will receive an induction from the Committee convener and secretary.
6. In planning lay member recruitment, and appointment to Committees of the Court, the Nominations Committee should consult committee conveners on particular gaps in expertise, experience and background. Members are asked to note that the Nominations Committee has agreed that members complete a self-assessment of their experience and skills to ensure that the skills matrix fairly represents the balance of skills and experience of current members.
7. Court minutes will be circulated more promptly. Unconfirmed minutes will be issued no later than 21 days following the meeting, A template paper cover sheet will be developed to ensure a standardised approach to the layout of papers.
8. Members will be reminded that the Vice-chair of Court has the specific role of 'Intermediary' and is a source of advice and support to any member with concerns about any aspect of their experience as a member of the Court,.

Effective Governance

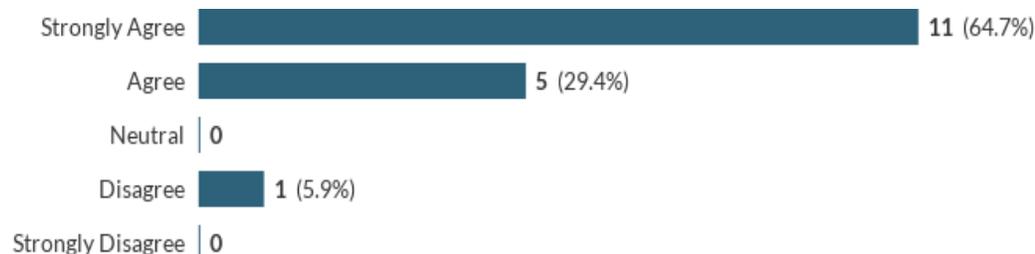
1. The Court has meaningful opportunity to provide strategic input to the University Strategic Plan.



2. The Court discharges effectively its responsibilities for ensuring that the University Strategic Plan is delivered.

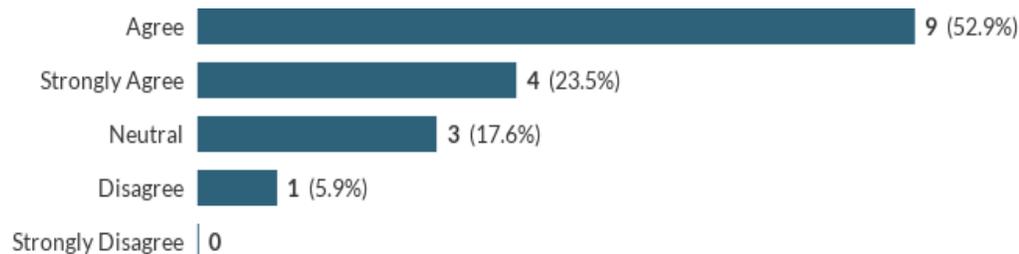


3. The Court acts in accordance with best governance practice as represented by the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance (the 'Code').

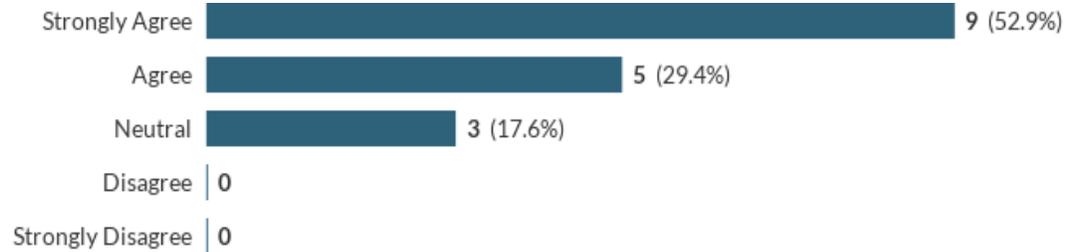


4. The Court discharges effectively its responsibility and accountability for:

4.1 Assuring the quality of the University's educational provision



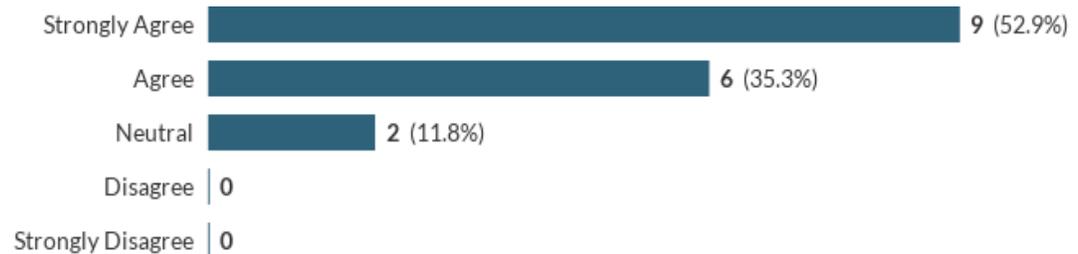
4.2 Ensuring the financial health of the University and its adherence to the funding requirements specified by the Scottish Funding Council.



4.3 Ensuring the University maintains systems of control and accountability, including financial controls and the assessment of risk.



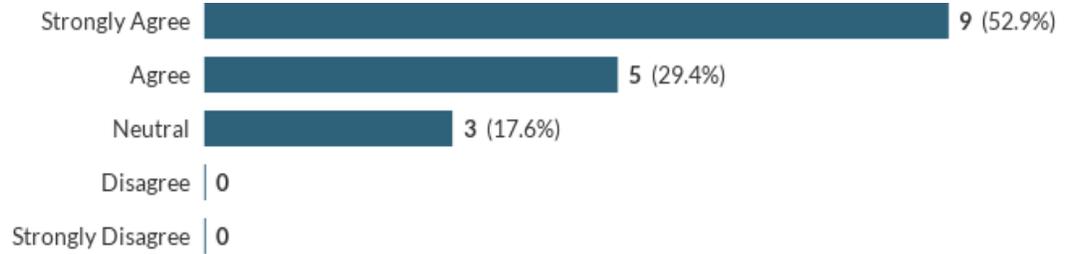
5. The Court actively measures and monitors institutional performance, including through the use of agreed KPIs which are both realistic and challenging.



6. The Committees of Court operate in an effective manner, and within the powers delegated to them by the Court.

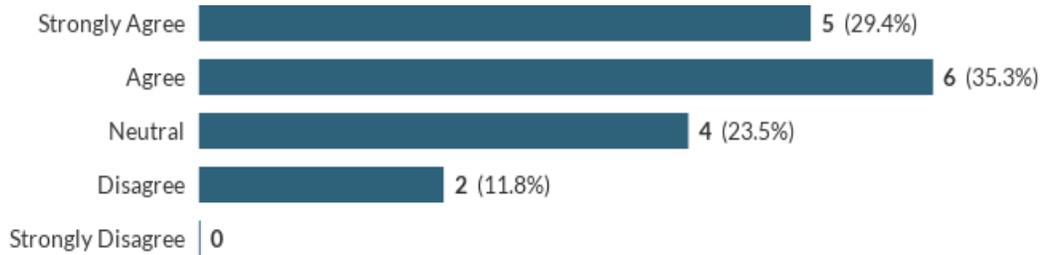


7. There is clarity of roles between the Court and the Senior Executive of the University.

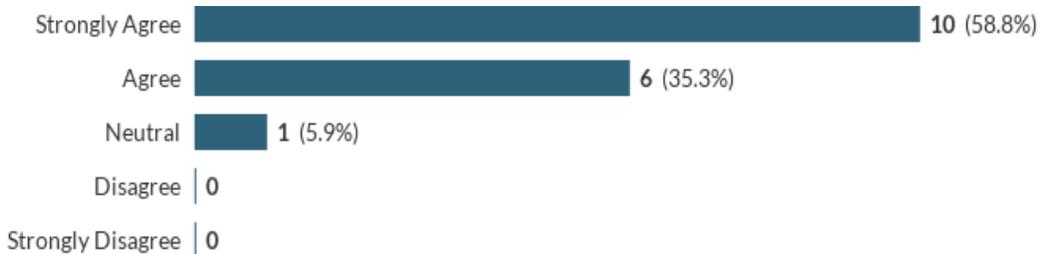


Support to Court members

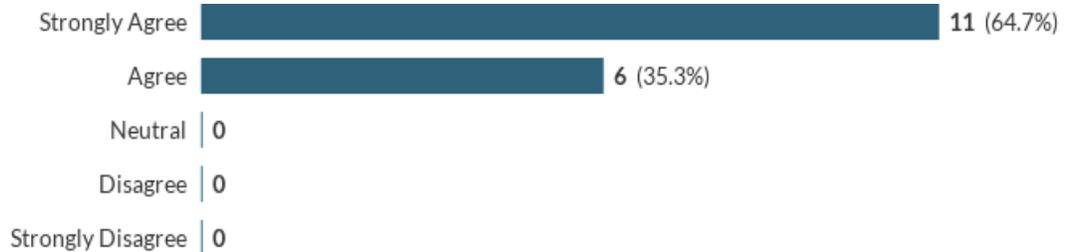
8. I receive appropriate induction and ongoing professional development opportunities and support to help me fulfil my role.



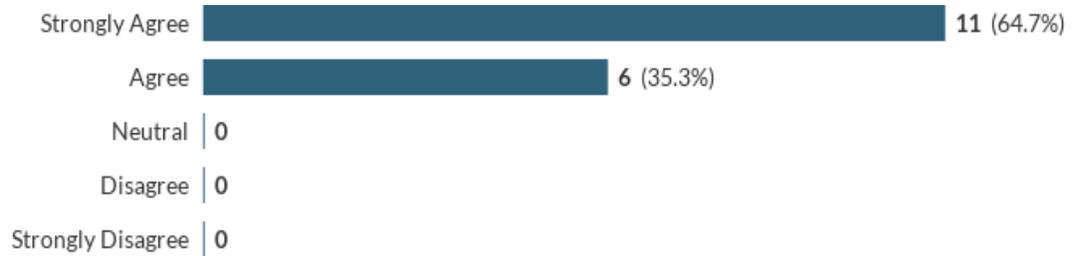
9. I receive appropriate guidance on matters of corporate governance and changes in QM's regulatory environment.



10. I understand the Primary Responsibilities of the Court and my role in contributing to the oversight of those primary responsibilities.

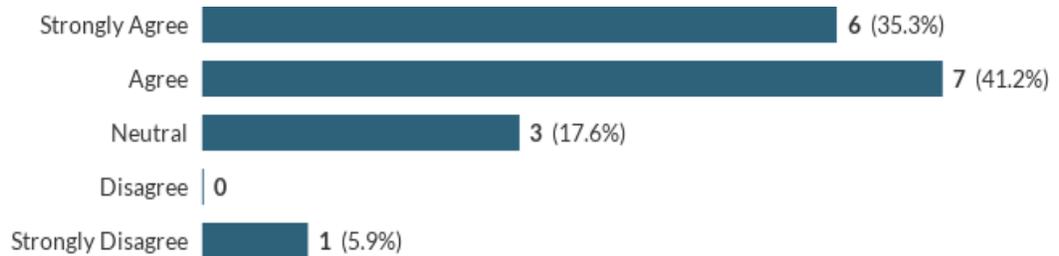


11. I can access information and seek support from the Secretary and other officers.

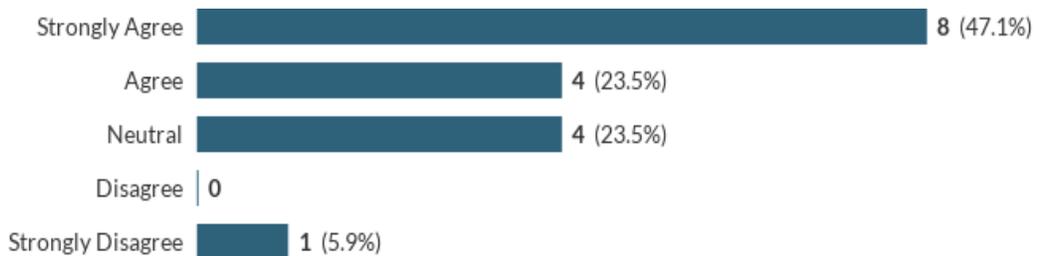


Court diversity

12. The lay members represent an appropriate mix of expertise, experience and background.

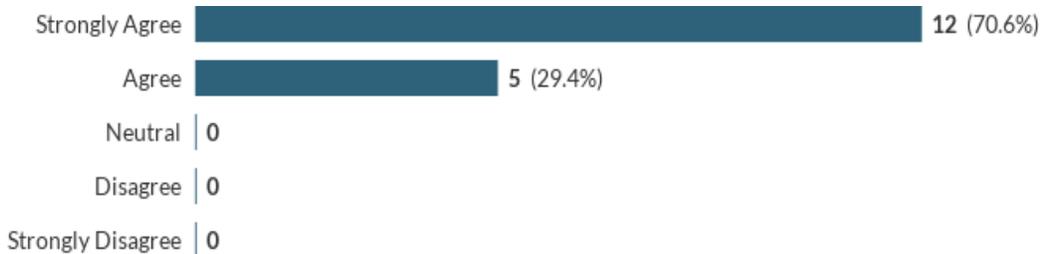


13. I am satisfied that my skills and expertise are used when appropriate.

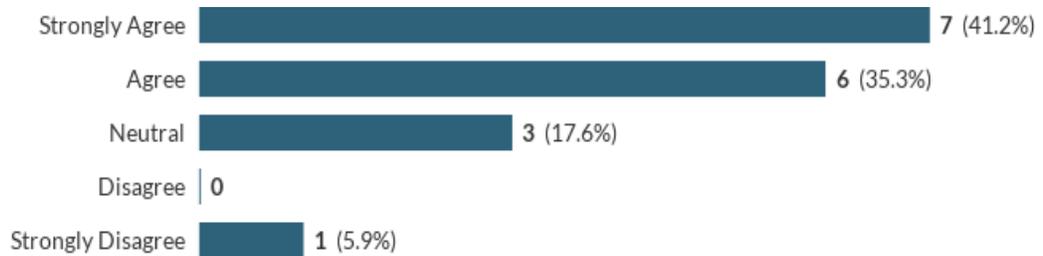


Management and conduct of Court business

14. Members have full and open access to the Chair, Secretary and Senior Management for information or advice when required.



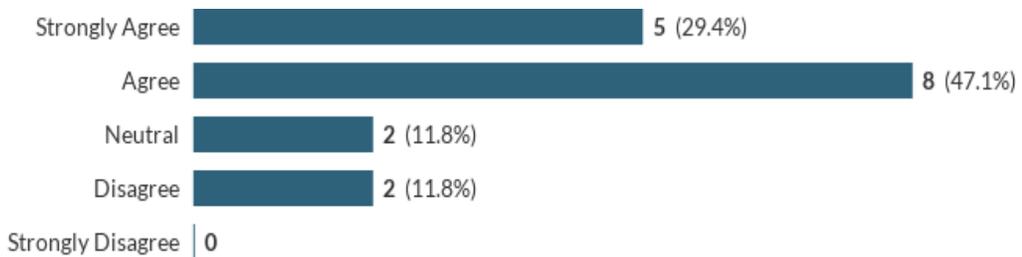
15. The organisation of meetings allows me to make an effective contribution.



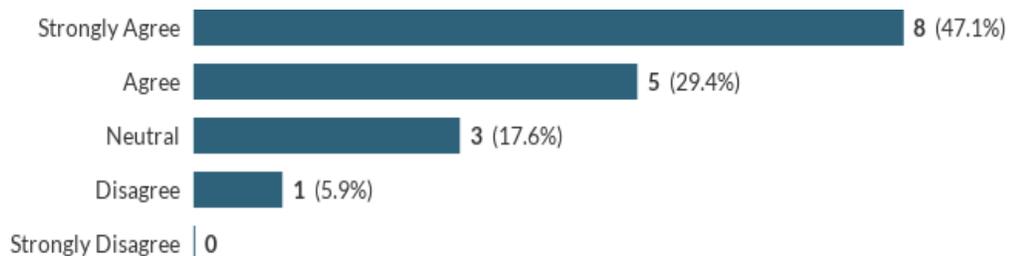
16. There is appropriate interaction between Court members and Senior Management in meetings.



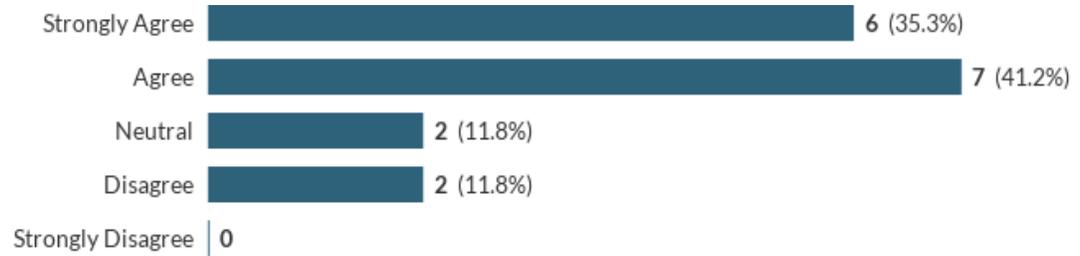
17. The agenda for meetings of the Court provides an appropriate balance for discussion of strategic and operational issues.



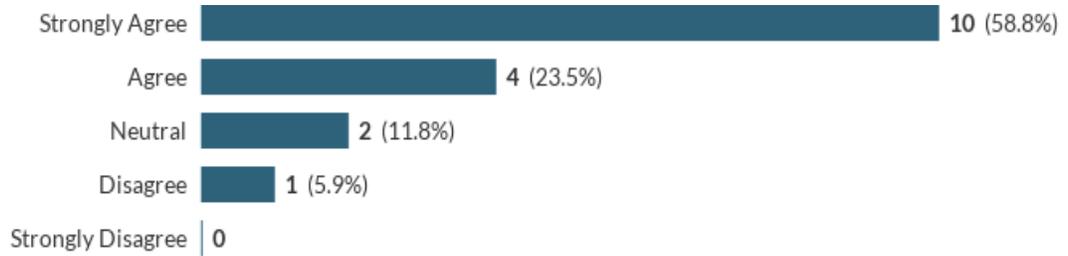
18. Court Papers give an appropriate level of detail and identify clearly what action is required of members.



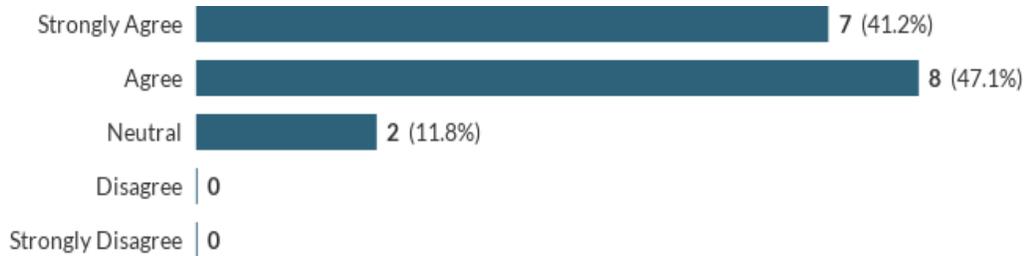
19. Discussions produce clear decisions, which are implemented and reported back to the Court.



20. I feel able to express my opinions openly.

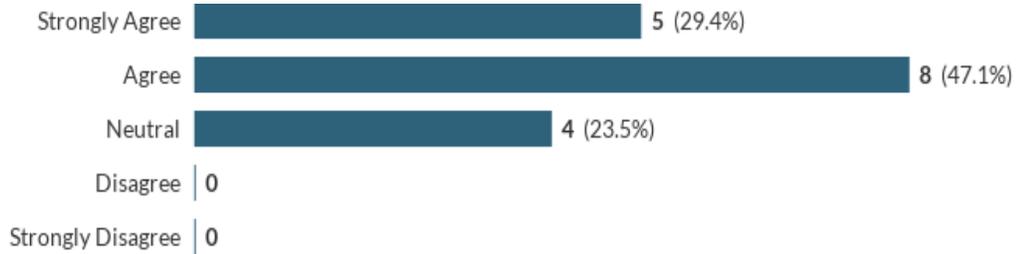


21. The frequency, timing and duration of Court meetings is appropriate.

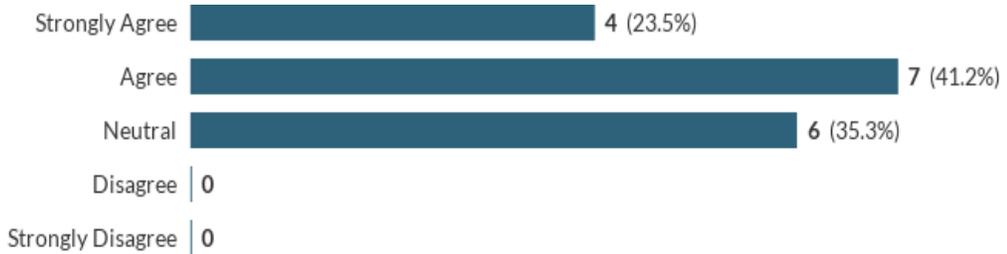


The Chair

22. The Chair ensures the efficient conduct of Court Meetings.



23. The Chair provides effective leadership and management of Court business.



24. There is an effective relationship between the Chair and the Senior team of the University.

