

Professor Petra Wend, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Queen Margaret University – Profile



Tell us who are you and where you're from.

I come from a working class family and my parents left school before they were 18. However, due to an inspirational primary school teacher who convinced my parents that I should aim higher I was sent to secondary school and made it into university. I see myself as a European because, although being German, I have lived abroad in other European countries for most of my life.

What do you think are your business strengths and weaknesses?

My 'business' is universities. Our strengths are being major contributors to a country's economy, directly and indirectly, and transforming people's lives through education and high impact research. Our weaknesses are reduced public funding and having to satisfy a range of stakeholders with very different demands, thereby not always making everybody happy.

What was the defining moment on your career path that has got you where you are now?

There were a number of defining moments along my journey. These were:

1. Learning five foreign languages and consequently having my eyes opened to different countries and cultures
2. Moving into different countries and learning that other countries can do things differently and sometimes more

successfully

3. Meeting influential people: the primary school teacher who got me into secondary school; my art teacher in secondary school who took me and some other students to art galleries in her free time, thereby igniting my passion for art
4. Working with my many wonderful colleagues at different universities who inspired me to always try to 'make things better'.

How do you spend your spare time?

I have very little spare time, but in my holidays I like to paint (I have painted Queen Margaret University and the paintings were made into postcards which I am selling for student bursaries). At the weekend I try and watch football (I have an Arsenal season ticket). Otherwise I try and keep fit.

Do you think you achieve a good work/life balance?

It depends what you define as work. I spend virtually every evening during the week on activities related to work but as I enjoy socialising it does not always feel like work. I still need to learn to work less at weekends and leave my laptop alone for longer periods.

What makes Edinburgh the best location for you to live and/or work?

After having lived in London, I find Edinburgh very refreshing. I love to be able to walk virtually everywhere and I find the people from Edinburgh, and from Scotland, extremely welcoming.

What is your special area of Edinburgh, or special place in Edinburgh and why?

My flat on the fifth floor on the corner of the Royal Mile and North Bridge. Every day I enjoy the views over Princes Gardens

to the Forth and the mountains beyond.

What would you consider the pinnacle of your career?

Nearly everyday can give me a 'high' and a normal day can feel like the pinnacle of my career as there are often special moments, be it a particular enthusiastic and positive email from a grateful student or the signing of a major contract.

If you have a mentor then could you tell us who that is and about your relationship?

I have had a series of official and unofficial mentors, ranging from my PhD supervisor at the University of Leeds to a Vice Chancellor at another university before I became Principal. Their valuable advice and friendship have been extremely useful and life shaping for me.

Describe your typical day for us.

There is no typical day. This is what I love about my job. Every day is different. I will always have a number of meetings, but those can be meetings with my colleagues or meetings with other businesses. I might give welcome talks to new students or hand out long service awards. I might concentrate on the latest budget figures or walk around the campus, talking to staff and students. I might travel to India or Singapore, presiding over graduation ceremonies of our students there or I might chair Universities Scotland's Learning and Teaching Committee back in Scotland. Being a member or a Convener of a number of Scottish and UK wide Boards, I enjoy being able to shape national and local agendas. The only thing that every day has in common is that I seem to be extremely busy all day often until late at night. Every day I encounter new challenges, but for me these are all opportunities to be seized.

Best job advice you ever received?

“Before you react to something that irritates or worries you,
first sleep on it.”