

Academic Governance and Assurance – role of the board of governors

Reflective questions

Demonstrating robust academic governance and assurance processes is a core part of maintaining confidence in the sector. The political and regulatory interest in quality and standards means that these issues are likely to be rising up your risk register.

We have developed a series of questions that are not intended to suggest a required approach but we hope will support you to self-examine your practice and consider what is most appropriate for your institution and your context. Depending on your institution and context you may want to reflect on these questions with a group of governors and those responsible for academic governance and governance officials.

Universities and higher education providers have different structures and names of committees. We use academic board to mean the highest internal academic committee which might be called senate in some institutions. We use the term board of governors to refer to the governing body that is also called council or board of directors.

Board recruitment

- + Do you recruit independent board of governors members with academic/quality expertise?
- + Does your board of governors recruitment skills matrix include academic expertise?

Induction and training

- + Does your induction for new governors specifically cover academic and quality assurance issues?
 - + Does your induction for new governors provide clear information about which bodies are responsible for different aspects of academic governance and assurance and who is ultimately accountable – for example do you have an assurance map, schemes of delegation or an overview of various government and regulatory expectations on providers?
 - + Is there support available to board members to interpret and really understand the data sets they are given access to?
 - + Are new governors given an academic mentor such as a Dean or Head of School?
 - + Do you have an induction for new members of academic board and does this include information about the board of governors and their role in academic assurance?
 - + Does your ongoing training for governors incorporate periodic sessions on quality and standards?
-

Academic Board/Board of Governors relationship

- + What information does the board of governors receive from academic board and is the effectiveness of this information considered?
- + Does your Academic Board nominate someone to the Board of Governors? Does this role include reference to considering academic assurance?
- + Are there arrangements in place for independent members to observe meetings of Academic Board and vice versa at appropriate frequencies?
- + Do your academic board and board of governors hold occasional joint meetings to discuss key academic issues? If yes is there a clear purpose for these meetings?
- + How do you engage student governors on questions of academic experience and assurance?

Board processes

- + Do your board of governors terms of reference incorporate academic assurance?
 - + Does the board of governors consider elements of academic strategy or educational character of the institution as part of the strategic plan discussions?
 - + Are academic risks included on your institutional risk register?
 - + Does your board have an agreed framework to consider risk appetite and key risks and does it consider academic risks such as collaborative provision, international partnerships etc?
 - + How does your board of governors identify and consider risks within collaborative provision, are joint meetings between governing bodies hosted?
 - + How does your board of governors manage its approach to managing academic risks and is this done through a board committee such as the Audit and Risk Committee?
 - + How does your board of governors assure itself on academic issues – do you have specific processes such as deep dive reviews, a lead board member, or board committee or other processes?
 - + Does your board of governors review survey members' understanding and ability to provide robust support and challenge on academic issues?
-

Data and information

- + Does your board of governors receive papers on quality issues on an annual basis including information such as NSS data, external examiner report, key information from PSRB reports, other data including continuation, completion and Graduate Outcomes and mapping compliance with national regulatory frameworks?
- + Does the board of governors receive comparative information for the performance of similar institutions on quality issues?
- + How does the board of governors actively engage staff and student perspectives as part of their assurance?
- + Are there regular board of governors away day discussions on academic and quality issues?
- + Does the board of governors consider the interrelationship with academic assurance and other questions such as financial investment, talent management, graduate skills requirements and research investment?
- + Is the board of governors updated on wider national and international questions of quality and standards as well as broader issues such as the future needs of the economy?

Impact

- + How does the board of governors monitor academic elements within the strategic plan?
- + Does the board of governors approve and receive monitoring reports regarding education and research strategies?
- + Does the board of governors reflect on the impact of its interventions on academic assurance?

External assurance

- + How does your board of governors use external assurance as part of its discussions?
- + Would relevant independent members of the board be confident speaking to external regulators or inspectors about their processes and levels of assurance?
- + Does your annual report include a board statement on their level of assurance on academic quality and standards?

About our partners

Universities UK

At Universities UK, we harness the power of the UK's universities and create the conditions for them to thrive. We are the collective voice of 142 universities, bringing them together to pursue a common cause: Thriving universities, serving society.

This mission forms the core of our strategic plan which runs to 2030 and sets out our ambitions for the sector. We will use our unique role to ensure our universities can transform the lives of more individuals, drive greater growth and create flourishing places through the knowledge and skills they generate, and be globally competitive centres of research making ground-breaking discoveries. We will help them achieve more by securing sustainable funding, and building pride in our universities.

GuildHE

GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education, championing distinction and diversity in the sector. Our 60 members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions, representing over 150,000 students. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; education; business and law, theology, the built environment; health and sports. We run a Governing Body Clerks network for our members and host an annual session for vice chancellors and principals alongside governing body chairs and clerks.

Committee of University Chairs

The CUC works with the UK Higher Education sector and stakeholders to support the advancement of education, governance excellence and the effective stewardship of HE Institution stakeholder funds. We bring together governing body Chairs to share information, experience and advice on university governance issues in a supportive environment and work with both members and sector bodies to develop their working knowledge and skills through development programmes and publications.



Contact us

All enquiries:

Email: communications@advance-he.ac.uk

Website: www.advance-he.ac.uk

Advance HE helps HE and research be the best they can be by unlocking the potential of their people.

We are a member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. We are experts in higher education with a particular focus on enhancing teaching and learning, effective governance, leadership development and tackling inequalities through our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work.

Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address inequalities, promote inclusion and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector.

We deliver our support through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys and research, providing strategic change and consultancy services and through membership (including accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, knowledge and resources).

Advance HE is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Company limited by guarantee registered in Ireland no. 703150. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946. Registered Office: Advance HE, Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR, United Kingdom.

© 2023 Advance HE. All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Advance HE. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the copyright owner. Such permission will normally be granted for non-commercial, educational purposes provided that due acknowledgement is given. The Advance HE logo should not be used without our permission.

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the Marketing and Communications Team at Advance HE:

communications@advance-he.ac.uk