

Academic Assurance Mapping

John Rushforth, Executive Secretary of the CUC with the kind assistance of Ellie Smith, University Secretary and Clerk to the Council and Dr Emma Tomsett, University Secretariat Manager and Senate Secretary

Buckinghamshire New University

Background

Previously, the University provided academic assurance to its Council in December after the University had finished its annual monitoring process. This took the form of a joint Senate and Council meeting to consider the outcomes of that process.

However, following evaluation and feedback from members, it was considered that these reports were not demonstrating to Council the full range of assurance evidence on academic quality that was available across the University.

So, the University decided to cease the joint meetings and instead to map out and explain all of the available academic assurance sources. This, coupled with a scheduled programme of 'deep dives' into each academic School aimed to provide Council with a fuller understanding of the academic work of the University.

An initial mapping was prepared and shared with the Council, whose response was positive. Soon after, the Higher Education Policy Institute (July 2022) published 'Why University Governors should do more to protect academic quality', suggesting ways governors could receive assurance. This included some reflective questions, which were then integrated into the assurance map.

The Map

The Map is written to explain to a lay governor where they can take assurance on maintaining and enhancing quality. The format sets out what good practice is, derived from the HEPI publication, OfS, and CUC guidance and then describes the current BNU practice.

For example (extract):

HEPI suggestions	Current BNU practice
Degree Outcome Statement – annual consideration of student attainment, including: + What has happened + What has changed + Why it has changed	The Council (term 3) receives and approves the Degree Outcome Statement, revised and updated annually. A paper summarising changes and the reasons for these accompany this. Council receives the minutes of the Education Committee and Senate, which demonstrate that the Degree Outcome Statement has been discussed fully and agreed upon via the Education Committee and Senate before presentation to the Council.

It then sets out a timeline and what Council Committees and the Council receive.

For example (extract):

Timeline	Council Committees receive	Council receives
Term 1 (November / December)	Audit Committee receives and tests: + Completed Internal Audit reports and follow-up + Strategic Risk Register / Annual Risk Report + OfS Compliance Monitoring The Audit Committee (November 2021) received an Internal Audit report on OfS Compliance. This audit included a review of the University's compliance with the B conditions of registration and gave an overall Audit Opinion of 'satisfactory' The Strategic Risk Register includes specific risks, including mitigation, in relation to: (2) Student Recruitment (3) Teaching & Learning Outcomes (5) Academic Standards (6) Partnerships (7) Research & Enterprise Activity The OfS Compliance Monitoring provides UET's view on the compliance status of the University against each of the ongoing conditions of registration, together with the evidence sources on which this is based.	Minutes of Audit Committee Report from the Audit Committee to the Council and VC, including assurances on the required audit opinions

The complete Council Paper is [here](#).

This is not developing new processes or information but taking half a day or so to clearly lay out all the processes used, what the outputs are and who and when they are received.

The map has been well received by governors and is seen as useful. For example, at a recent Ofsted inspection, the University could demonstrate to the Ofsted team that governors were very aware of how the University worked and how the systems of academic quality and standards were monitored across the University. The Ofsted inspectors commented on how engaged and knowledgeable the Council members were around governance of quality.

Future Development

The next stage of development will be to take the mapping down to a more granular level, perhaps to School, subject, or level to align with / reflect the OfS B Conditions of Registration for Quality. The University is also considering including action being taken on areas that might not be meeting quality thresholds or where improvement is possible.

Ultimately, the University Secretary wants to move away from retrospective data and develop a monitoring process using real-time data. The hope is that this will be considered at each Senate meeting and reported to the Council at its next meeting.

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 it's 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.

© 2024 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