

The changing face of governance – academic assurance

Podcast transcript

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Key

- + **Colette Fletcher:** CF (host)
- + **John Rushforth:** JR
- + **Alex Bols:** AB
- + **Rowan Fisher:** RF

Transcript

CF: Hello, everyone. I'm Colette Fletcher. I'm the head of consulting and governance at Advance HE. Welcome to the advance HE podcast celebrating 20 years of governance in higher education. Um, as part of our celebrations, we are doing a series of podcasts discussing key topics in governance and higher education. And today we are talking about academic assurance. And I am joined by three people who know all about academic assurance and are particularly interested in it. And I'm going to ask each of them to introduce themselves in turn if I start with you, please, John.

JR: Hi, I'm John Rushforth. I'm executive secretary of the Committee for University Chairs, and I guess my interest in academic assurance comes from the fact that I deal with lots of chairs over a period of time, and it's one of the key issues that keeps coming up, as in terms of what's the board's role in terms of assurance, what should they be expecting, and how can they get to grips with the complexities and delights of academic governance and assurance?

CF: Fantastic. Thank you. Alex.

AB: Hello, everybody. My name is Alex Bols. I'm the deputy chief exec at GuildHE representing smaller and specialist universities and colleges. And I'm also recently just joined my third university board. So have sort of seen this from from both sides. And I suppose my particular interest in this sprung from some work that you've been doing jointly with University of UK, looking at academic standards and quality and therefore sort of looking at it through my gov'nor lens. What is the role of the governing body in relation to seeking that assurance? So that's probably where my interest came from.

CF: Super. Thank you. And Rowan please.

RF: Thanks, Claire. Um, I'm Rowan Fisher, um, head of student experience and skills policy at Universities UK. Um, and like Alex, have been involved in a number of years in a series of collaborative work looking at academic assurance through through the lens of sort of degree standards, I guess my, my sort of general reflection about my, my interest in this topic is everything in higher education is getting a lot more complicated. So institutions have always

been asked to do more things. And I think part of this, part of the sort of core focus has to be in maintaining a focus on that academic side, I guess the sort of product of, you know, the qualifications that, um, institutions are producing. So I'm very interested in making sure institutions can keep that focus, um, on that assurance.

CF: Excellent. Well, thank you all very much for joining us today. I wanted to kick things off with, um, a fairly fundamental question, really, um, which is what is the difference between academic governance and academic assurance in your view?

JR: Okay, I'll kick off since I mentioned it. And for me, academic governance is about. Taking the sorts of academic decisions that lead to quality and standards and, you know, things like teaching sort of approaches and so on. Assurance is getting assurance. It's losing the title. Um, that the various bodies charged with it typically are a senate or an academic board are doing their job properly. So it's not the role of lay members of council or academic or academic, uh, governing body or the of the governing body to actually manage the academic process. But they do need assurance that it's being done properly and that standards are being maintained and quality, if possible, is being enhanced.

CF: Sorry, Rowan. Go on.

RF: No, it's just going to echo those points that John made. And for me, I guess the academic assurance there's something active that governors are being asked to do to be able to receive that assurance. So that might be things like, um, reviewing minutes from other committees, for example, it might be assessing progress against KPIs or targets. Um, where there's the actual academic governance process is more the sort of structures in place that facilitate that. So that's how I see the distinction.

CF: Thank you. And Alex, asking you to put your governor hat on for a second. Do you think that that distinction is always clear within institutions?

AB: Certainly not at governing bodies, I think. Well, it's whether it's clear to everyone is is a good question. So, yes. What do I think that academic governance is. Well, we throw we throw around terms like institutional autonomy like academic freedom and talk about the importance of those key principles in being a fundamental underpinning of the excellence of the UK higher education sector, but probably actually at the global higher education sector. So essentially, that is academics who are deeply embedded in the quality processes, deeply understanding the subject, knowing what quality looks like in their in their subject and having responsibility for that. And so that, I suppose, is the academic governance side and ensuring that the internal processes within the institution are supported through academic peers making judgements about that. But then I suppose because institutions have become ever more complex, that corporate governance that sort of sits. Don't want to say on top of. But the the university has an important corporate governance structure that needs to have oversight of all of the activity of the institution and assuring itself that all of the activities are happening and are happening, happening. Well, but I suppose that distinction between academic governance and academic assurance can sometimes either become blurred, or people may not necessarily understand the importance of those distinctions.

JR: I think as well, just adding to what Alex has said. There's also a confusion or a tension, maybe even between Alex's corporate governance and academic governance. And I think because we're living in a much more complex world, the the historic lookback where there was the academic purity over there, and there was the messy, grubby sort of money and property stuff over here that has disappeared, has to disappear, because you can't think of academic delivery without thinking about the digital environment that the learning spaces environment, the people that are involved. So the two have to interact in some sort of way. And I think that that's still being worked through in some institutions.

CF: That's a really interesting point, John. So what mechanisms do institutions use to kind of bring corporate and academic governance and assurance together?

JR: Well, from from the ones I've seen and ones I know. Uh, it varies to a degree. It varies from there being very close connections between, um, academic board and the governing body. So one institution I know sends one lay member and one staff member to each academic board, um, each governing body member, as part of their induction, gets to experience the delights of academic board and maybe gets to observe one of the key committees or whatever. And there's a good briefing and there's a complete, um, map of all the different sources of assurance that the individual member can, can get. Other institutions don't do much more, frankly, than the minutes of of Senate go to council. They read them and there may be a report from the VC about what's happened. And it's much more limited. So it varies tremendously across the piece.

AB: It is fascinating sort of sitting on governing bodies that, as John mentioned in in the previous point around sort of it almost feels as though there has historically been that sort of divide between sort of the governing body and the academic governance within the institution that if you think about what is the core activity of universities actually sort of teaching, learning, research, are such fundamental activities that the governing body can't just simply sort of step back and sort of remove all responsibility for that, but actually thinking about the types of activities that the governing body does in terms of setting the strategy of the organization in terms of, uh, things like sort of setting the risk appetite for, uh, for the, for the board. There are a whole series of ways there where there is sort of quite clear, uh. I suppose, sort of setting the framework and the parameters for what the organization does, but then having that assurance of how it happens. And so John then mentioned the academic governance processes within the institutions of the various committee structures and so on. So whether that's through, uh, senate, academic Board, through the various subcommittees of that, that's where it feels like sort of the the governing body has that oversight of everything that needs to assure itself that what is happening is happening and, and that they are and that they are gaining the kind of assurance that they as, uh, overall responsible, uh, need to have in that context.

JR: I think you are seeing some emerging strands where things are seen as joint responsibilities, which I'm quite interested, particularly in the space of EDI type activity, which is seen to span up both the academic realm and the corporate realm. Some some

joint committees that might look at sustainability, because if you think of sustainability, it affects the whole academic offer, the operations and everything. So joint committees can also be a way that these things can come together on particular topics, typically that flow from the strategy of the things that are important to the institution.

RF: Alex, you mentioned the, um, that sort of monitoring of risk. And I think for me, I see that as being a really important role of, um, governance and academic assurance, particularly, I guess, at the moment. Well, if we look back a couple of years and all the sort of change that took place in Covid around, um, you know, academic standards, introduction of no detriment policies, safety net policies, you know, the transformation of teaching and learning that took place overnight, how the how how governance was able to scrutinise, but also allow for those changes to take place within a sort of a risk framework is really important. And then looking to the future, thinking about, you know, generative AI and, um, the sort of what's down the track in terms of some of those external pressures. I think those are some of those big sort of strategic questions that, yes, you know, governors aren't going to be there on, on, on the ground, sort of, you know, in, in every, um, lecture theatre and, you know, sort of standing behind the shoulder of academics as a mark can work. But I think they do need to get a hand, a grip on some of those wider strategic changes so they can ask the right questions in those meetings and, and sort of future proof the system in the future.

JR: Yeah. And I think that that's a really good example where. Boards can actually bring an add value to that, those sorts of academic discussions, because they can come from other sectors and they can talk about their experiences. This is what AI is doing to to us. This is how we are tackling that. And that then adds to a richer mix and hopefully you get to better decisions.

CF: Alex, did you want to come in on that?

AB: I suppose I was going to sort of follow Rowan's point around sort of the starting point that both of us had in terms of our initial engagement with this topic came, I suppose, from the significant political pressure that there has been in recent years around. Particularly around some questions around grade inflation, but a whole series of issues around quality and standards where there's been such political interest. That is therefore meant that it is probably increasing up the risk registers of institutions. And so both the impact on the potential or potential impact on the reputation of an institution is such that the governing body needs to have needs to ensure that they, as autonomous institutions, are able to provide that assurance that they are tackling these issues. Because in a sense, I suppose it's quite easy for for Rowan and I as sector level organisations, to be able to make the case that at a sector wide level, we have a whole series of processes to protect uh, academic standards and, uh, tackle grade inflation. But in practice, because institutions are their own, uh, autonomous bodies with their own autonomous governing bodies, actually, so much of this responsibility sits within the individual institution, and therefore, that role and responsibility of the governing body becomes ever more important. And so particularly. Well, certainly in England, where there is a regulator which is ever more interested in what goes on within institutions and ensuring that the governing bodies responsible for that are.

Therefore, the governing body has got ever more involved and needs have ever more assurance that they are able to answer the questions in relation to these kind of questions.

CF: Mm. So the attitudes in the sector, I think, towards academic assurance have been changing over the last few years or so. Um, John, do you see evidence of, um, chair's interest and focus on academic assurance changing?

JR: Yes and no. Um, I think there's always been I think I've mentioned it in my opening remarks about this uncertainty about actually what their role was and the sort of trying to get to graphs to were they supposed to be involved, or should they step back and let the academics get on with it? So that's that's been a constant all the time that I've been working with chairs. I think what's changed over the last few years is and it's very much what Alex was talking about, the perceived increased risk coming from regulation. Um, and particularly, I think, the changing emphasis of regulation. So whereas before, I think chairs could take some comfort from the knowledge that she had come in and looked at their systems and processes and that they'd got a tick in the box and there weren't too much problems, I think they're now. Much more sensitive to what's going on because the regulator, in terms of office in England, is much more interested in data and outcomes. So good processes are not necessarily a defence. So governors have got to look more at the outcomes being achieved and understand why. It's also further complicated because we've now got two regulators looking at quality because yes, in England again, office is looking at um, the standard uh degrees. But we've also got Ofsted looking at apprenticeships and that's coming with a very different lens with different expectations of governors. So governors are expected at an Ofsted inspection to be able to be highly engaged and answer questions on behalf of the governing body. So it has changed.

AB: The external expectations have changed, particularly as John mentioned, in terms of both the regulator, but also I suppose that's been reflected in the CUC guidance where, uh, it talks about the governing bodies have to actively seeking assurances that academic governance is robust and effective and in a sense that that word actively feels. It's an interesting word that it feels as though it's more than just sitting back and, uh, receiving minutes from senator, academic board and so on. That might have previously happened. And so I suppose there has been that shift in recent years of, uh, governing bodies, not necessarily, uh, or wondering how they're able to both get the, uh, the skills, information, the data, but also ensuring that they have the right people around the table to actually be able to, uh, question some of these issues. So if I think about some of the work that we've been doing, we've been doing on the national level, actually the kind of information that governing bodies are provided through things like degree outcome statements, where you're able at an institution level, to look at how, uh, your attainment profile has changed over a five year period, that a governing body is then able to look and see. Have there been significant changes? What is the reason for that? And so I suppose ensuring that the people around the governing body table both have the, uh, the understanding to be able to ask the questions, but also to be able to understand what information is being put in front of them, what the answers are to those questions. That feels as though we've been on quite a.

Journey in recent years of upskilling governing bodies, and both in terms of the people and the information, and a whole series of processes to ensure that governing bodies are better able to understand what's put in front of them and to interrogate it.

CF: Yes. And I think we see those political drivers that you were talking about playing out in Scotland as well, where there's been a change in the regulatory requirements in terms of academic governance reviews becoming a key part of the expectations, and we're yet to see how that's going to play out in Wales, as the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research gets, gets fully embedded early next year. Okay. So what what do we think are the current hot topics in the world of academic assurance? What is it that's keeping you up at night? And I might go to Alex first with his governor hat on.

AB: In a sense, I suppose the starting point that we mentioned was around sort of the political imperatives of questions like grade inflation, uh, awarding gaps and those kind of issues where there is significant regulatory risk. But in practice, I suppose, thinking about, uh, some of the institutions where I've been on the governing body and actually now reflected by, uh, both, uh, uh, political and regulatory interests is actually the area of franchise and collaborative provision, because that feels like it's an area where because it is the institutions awards being delivered by another partner, there is that sort of one step removal in terms of how the institution is able to get that assurance that the processes are happening in sort of the the same robust processes that you would expect to see within your own institution. And. I suppose as a starting point that always feels a little bit more risky, but also, I suppose, given some of the. Some of the financial risks that there are in the sector at the moment anyway. I would expect that some institutions risk appetite is probably a little bit higher in some of the partnerships that they go into than it might be at other times. And so in a sense, there are more related to that than there might otherwise be. And so therefore, how is this governing body risks having oversight of that, of that due diligence process in terms of establishing the the partnership, what are the monitoring processes to ensure that that is continuing to happen and so on. And and what is that information gap? What is that information that is flowing through the academic governance processes through to the governing body itself?

RF: Just to echo Alex's point, it's clearly a hot topic because that's the one that came to my mind, which is this oversight over partnerships. And I think this can be applied both to domestic partnerships but also to international partnerships. And I guess the the question for governing bodies is them having a really clear expectation about, I guess, a the remit of their role. So when, when they join as a governor, you know, what is the scope of their role and how are they getting that the information points and how are the committees feeding through a, through the sort of, I guess, the primary institution, but b through other partner institutions? And is that always as effective and consistent as it could be? So certainly think into the future. That's going to be an area of increased focus for a lot of providers, given some of the sort of risks, um, in this space.

JR: I think for me, we've already touched on a couple of the hot topics such as, the impact of the OfS quality inspection regime because we've seen them publish the reports and particularly the ones where they've identified concerns looking, you know, a lot of institutions are looking at what's being said and trying to think, how does that apply to us, and what assurances might we have to give to our governing body that we're not falling into the problems as far as OfS is concerned. The burden issue with different regulators, we've touched on, I think, 2 or 3 other issues that continue to be there. One is around a continued desire from governing bodies to understand and remedy, where possible, attainment gaps between different classes of or different groups of students. There's a lot of anxiety about certain elements of that. I think as well, the political dynamic about low value courses and an explanation of what value means in the institution. Um, and in particular, I think that's then linked to the hot topic across everything, which is about long term sustainability of the institution. I think some institutions are linking that into academic assurance and are saying, are we? If we're going to be long term sustainable, we've got to have an academic portfolio that's fit for purpose and we've got to have an outstanding academic reputation. All of that hangs together as part of our long term survival.

RF: Just an extension of that point, John, around the sort of long term sustainability, I guess, of institutions. I guess the flip side of that is do governors have proper sight and scrutiny over the effectiveness of things like student protection plans and, you know, those sort of mitigations and backup plans should things go wrong? Um, for the institution. What are the backup plans related to academic assurance in terms of, you know, teach out arrangements? Are those conversations taking place?

CF: I think that's a very interesting point, Rowan. And one of the things that I think advance he sees in its reviews is there is sometimes a question mark about where issues of student well-being and welfare sit in the context of academic governance and academic assurance, and whether they are handled by the same committees or whether there are separate committees focusing on those issues. And if it's the latter, where are those brought back together?

AB: Clearly the academic assurance happens through a number of different mechanisms. So clearly there is the academic, internal academic governance processes, so that internal assurance. There's also a lot of external information as well. And so clearly there's all the information that you get from external examiners, from the SRBs you mentioned. You didn't mention that, I suppose implicitly, the point about sort of where some of the student welfare issues can go wrong is particularly or can become out of some of the complaints and appeals that go through the OIA or other national ombudsman organisation. But that ability, therefore, for those bits of information to be drawn together and go to the governing body. And so to have that more overarching discussion around okay, well here, here is our annual complaints report. Here are some of the themes coming out of that. Here is the annual quality report that draws together the National Student Survey, that draws together the information service from other external bodies, which could now include the the QAA and their elective quality review and a whole series of other, uh, bodies that feels like there are

triangulation of information can be quite a valuable way of having oversight and getting the assurances that the governing body needs.

JR: I think Alex is right that triangulation can be incredibly useful. The challenge that some institutions struggle with, though, is there is this wealth of information, but typically it's written for people immersed in the quality profession or the academic offering. And it needs actually to be translated into understandable language so that lay members can actually, because I bow down in respect to the quality of professionals ability to turn anything into an acronym. Um, it just is amazing how often I get governors say, well, I do read it, I've read it all, but I don't really understand what it says. And I need to spend time. They need they need to spend time. So I think there is a challenge to think about audience when we're producing some of these reports.

AB: Absolutely. And part of that, I think, is how we both induct and train all members of the governing body to have that understanding of the quality issues, but also in the same way that we have a finance expert or an audit expert or a state's expert on the governing body actually having that external academic expert who is then able to sort of drill in and is immersed in some of those issues and is able to ask the kind of questions and sort of tease out some of the challenges in relation to this is something that I think increasing numbers of governing bodies are looking at as part of their skills matrix. So actually, how do they ensure that the governing body has a balanced set of skills across the different members? I think is an important thing that a number of institutions are now looking at.

CF: That's a very helpful tip. And actually, when you think about both the volume and complexity of the information that governors are expected to be able to synthesize and triangulate, you can understand why this can sometimes feel like a very overwhelming ask, and particularly of of governors who are from outside of an HE environment. What advice would you have for those governors who are really struggling to get a grip on academic assurance?

RF: Just to check in here, I think. I guess the key question for me is what does getting a grip mean? And is there a shared understanding of what the that governor and that member of the board or counsel's responsibility actually is? Um, so I think that's that's probably where, where the, the conversation starts in terms of making sure they're aware of what's going on in other committees and how that how that's how that relates to them. Because I can imagine it being quite overwhelming, because there is so much you could potentially engage with as a governor and potentially feel like it's your responsibility. So I think the focus for most new governors would be about having a clear understanding of what their role is and what their role isn't.

AB: And in the sense that it was an interesting point that you assumed it was new governors. So I suppose my first question would be, is it a new governor who therefore might need to have some additional, uh, elements within their induction or training? Or is it something that is more widely felt across the governing body more generally, and therefore, are there wider, uh, training gaps or information gaps that need to be filled? I suppose the

thing that really struck me earlier in the year when we ran, uh, across the four organizations around the table today, we ran a series of roundtables. And one of the things that really sort of struck me when, uh, looking at academic governance processes, i.e. internal processes going on within institutions, it was it sounded like an incredibly robust set of processes where, for example, as a department, you're able to look at attainment of students over a period of time. At the faculty level, you're able to look at comparing the outcomes of students in different departments and sort of see, for example, are there more firsts in, uh, law as opposed to nursing, and are some of those questions or indeed at the institution level, being able to do, uh, deep dives into particular issues and be able to explore that in more detail. But I think. The extent to which all of those processes are known and understood by the governing body or members of the Governing Body, that there may well be an information gap there. So are there things like a governor, uh, academic governance assurance map for governing bodies so that they're able to sort of see all the internal processes by which they're able to, uh, get that assurance or to receive some level of assurance that they can then work out where they want more information. So I suppose part of it is actually sort of having that explanation and understanding of what already happens within the institution, and therefore where they might want to focus their attention in a bit more detail.

JR: I guess my advice would be it depends on the learning style of the individual person we're talking about. Um, there's a lot of material out there that they can go and read, uh, modesty for fans and highlighting the product that these three organizations have recently published. But it's still very good, and it's available free from a website near you. Um. But not all people engage with with textual material like that. So I always encourage people to start probably with the registrar of the institution or the person that holds that role and supports the governing body for a conversation. Then that that conversation could then go off and lead to another conversation with, say, the head of learning and the PVC learning and teaching and talk to people that actually do it. Ask to see if you can go and observe a meeting of academic board, because most institutions won't want an observer. Um, and lastly, I think I would talk to students about their experience of academic governance and quality and standards and how all that impacts on them. And so if once you've read the material, talk to the academics, talk to the students, and if you can get hold of any external reports, have a read of those, you're probably going to have a reasonably fair idea of what's going on.

CF: Thank you. Some really good tips there. And I'm not as modest as John, so I will just signpost people to the reflective questions on academic assurance that were developed by CUC, GuildHE, UUK and Advance HE earlier this year. They are available on the advanced HSG website under the Academic Assurance Project. If people do want to review them, um, and we do hope that they are very helpful to everyone. So, um. We've talked about some of the things that can go wrong. We've talked about some tips that people might want to reflect on. There's no one size fits all to academic assurance, because so much is dependent on the external regulatory environment and the particular context of individual institutions. But are we aware of any, any areas or institutions who are doing this particularly well?

JR: I doubt that I could point to any institution that is doing every aspect of it well. I think we can probably point to bits and pieces that individuals do well. So I've just been. Talking to New Buckinghamshire University, who've done some interesting work mapping out sources of assurance, particularly almost to cover the point we've just been talking about, so that they can explain and educate lay members into all the different sources of assurance that they can have, and they update that on a yearly cycle. Um, and we will write that up as a case study so others can see how it's done. That's one good example that I know of, but others will have come across others.

AB: And in a sense, I suppose it's using things like the reflective questions that were recently were just reference, taking that opportunity to reflect on your processes within your institution and constantly, or using that as a way of reflecting on how effective your processes are. And certainly I know that. I spoke a couple months ago at one university board meeting. I've got another, uh, scheduled, uh, for beginning of next year. And that one's actually going to be a joint meeting of the governing body and the academic board to talk about academic governance. And so I suppose. What I would hope is that the increasing focus that we as organizations have been highlighting the importance of academic governance and assurance will actually ensure that more institutions are beginning to ask these questions. I suppose going back to my earlier point around the importance of the autonomy of institutions, if we as institutions are going to continue to maintain our autonomy from government, from regulators and so on. Part of that is our responsibility to demonstrate that we are tackling some of the hard questions, and we know what's going on, and that the way in which we are. Have academic governance processes and the assurance, the assurance that we are doing what we're doing effectively, that I think is the strongest defense against any encroachments on our autonomy.

RF: Just to add to that, and I think particularly in England, the focus from the regulator on outputs and outcomes rather than how governing bodies are structured and you know, what needs to go. I think it actually gives institutions quite a lot of freedom to start asking some of those big questions about how they innovate and how they design a system that actually best meets their needs. And that will mean different things for different institutions, depending on their size and depending on where they identify risks. But I actually think there isn't that much coming from the regulator in terms of prescriptive things. I know you must organize your governance in this way and that way. So I think there's a space here in the sector for innovation to take place where providers can identify that.

AB: And I think during sort of the talk we've been doing this morning, we've identified various different things that institutions are doing. So, for example, I think there was reference made to government, independent government governors observing academic board and observing Senate. But actually so that can be a two way process. So is there an opportunity for Senate to observe the governing body as well. So there is greater understanding of the roles of both bodies. There have been a number of institutions that have looked at developing academic committees of thought, looking at various elements

around student experience, quality and so on. And, uh, let's say they've worked a greater or lesser extent in different institutions. Uh, but that opportunity to, uh, ensure that governors are cited on some of these issues can work in, in some institutions, the opportunity to do deep dives into particular, uh, issues where uh, governing body or indeed, uh, academic board have concerns is an incredibly valuable way of getting that assurance. So in a sense, there are lots of different processes that institutions are looking at. I suppose fundamentally, it's around ensuring that you have the right people, with the right skills, with the right information around the, uh, governing body table that are therefore able to, uh, get the right kind of assurance and then able to, uh, project that externally, that actually that that is happening and it's working well.

CF: That's great. Thank you. And as John says, we've um, we're writing up some case studies at the moment about, um, examples of particularly innovative or exciting practice that we've, we've seen out in the sector. You will be able to access those, access those from the project, uh, page on the advanced website. In addition, if you have, um, particular case studies yourself that you want to share, you can get in touch with us via that website. And we will get those written up and circulated more widely as well. Thank you, all of you, for your time. I've got one final question just for final thoughts and reflections, and it's about where you see the direction of academic assurance going in the future. What what do you think are going to be the next the next big things that we're talking about over, over the coming years?

AB: I think if the past few years have shown us anything, it's that this issue isn't going away. But actually there are going to be increasing issues, both political and regulatory, looking at various elements of quality, of standards, of equality that are so important to the bodies that fund and regulate the higher education sector, that we therefore need to be able to demonstrate that we know what we're doing.

RF: Just just to add to that, I think institutions where increasingly, from a governance point of view, have to turn their hand to, um, scrutinising different types of provision that their institution is offering as well. So, yes, the undergraduate full time model may be the dominant mode of study. For most institutions that often. But actually, you know, if there's lots of institutions that are thinking about increased modular provision through the development of HQs, degree apprenticeships and the relationship there with Ofsted. So if institutions are going to have to have a much broader understanding of the whole range of qualifications that their institution is offering, and making sure that there's a focus on all of those different areas. So I think lots of spinning plates in the future, I imagine.

JR: I think institutions are going to have to stay agile, because I think there's nothing to indicate that the environment won't keep changing. Um. I think it will be very interesting to see how institutions respond to the offer of a different type of assurance. So SCPs have just launched, um, a buy in service to have a, you know, you you can commission them to come in and give you specific assurance, a bit like an external audit firm might do to your financial systems. See how that impacts. Financial pressures will continue to provide challenges to institutions to sustain quality. And and they're going to be some difficult decisions coming up,

I think, in for for governing bodies to make a quality assurance will be part of that decision making process. And I guess the the thing that just worries me is, is with that changing environment and the complexity we're talking about, we're going to have to be very careful. We don't get some unintended consequences. So an emphasis on data and outcomes is fine so long as you understand the data. So the easiest way to get higher, higher outputs and higher qualities is to recruit better students with all the implications that that's got for diminishing widening participation and so on. So we they're going to be some tricky challenges coming down the track I think for governing bodies. But I've got no doubt they will continue to apply themselves diligently because all my dealings with governing bodies, they always care about their their institution and the sector want to make a difference and want to see their institution thrive.

CF: And at the end of the day, that's what we all want to see. Um, thank you so much to John, Alex and Rowan for joining me in this discussion this morning about academic assurance in true podcast style. Thank you also to Alistair for all the help with the editing and thank you for listening. Goodbye.



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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).

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