

Governance Effectiveness Project: Academic Governance

Dissemination Event

Date: Thursday 25th May
09:30-11:00

 **AdvanceHE**

CUC
Committee of University Chairs

 **Universities
UK**

 **GuildHE**
Institution and Diversity
in Higher Education

Sector Partner Commitment



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Universities UK

- + Increased need for governors to understand and effectively receive evidence-based assurance about “student outcomes” in England as a requirement from the OfS, but increasingly in other UK Nations as part of their regulatory requirements.
- + Increased political interest surrounding academic quality in higher education and ensuring value for money, governing bodies need to seek assurances that academic governance is effective.
- + Opportunity to convene sector to explore and disseminate best practices in academic governance within the wider higher education sector.

Roundtable Findings

- + 3 roundtables held in March 2023
 1. Governance Professionals
 2. Memembrs of Senate and Student Representatives
 3. Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Audit and Risk
- + Between 20-30 participants in each roundtable. Institutions were only able to send one representative to each roundtable.
- + Range of provider types attended from research intensive universities, post 92 teaching focussed providers and small and specialist or independent providers
- + Each roundtable was asked to consider 3 scenarios in small breakout rooms

Roundtable 1: Governance professionals

1. Your Board/ Council regularly receives reports from senate regarding degree outcomes across the institution, you have several board members who are not from academic backgrounds and struggle with the reports. How would you ensure that governors can effectively seek academic assurance?
2. You have a specific course that is not meeting it's student outcomes thresholds for employability and is at risk of facing investigation. How would you prepare for this and are there any contextual reasons?
3. How should a governing body devolve academic assurance? Where should it be active and where should it delegate?

Roundtable 2: Senate and Student Representatives

1. The percentage of 1sts and 2:1's being awarded in Nursing is far lower than that in the Law Faculty. How would you approach this discussion and ensure this is resolved?
2. You are presented with data which shows a large attainment gap in students achieving a 1st or 2:1 for students who are black or minority ethnic, have a declared disability and are from first in family in higher education. Where do you view your responsibility to closing attainment gaps and how would you respond?
3. Senate has a far larger number of academic or professional service voices on than student representatives, who have many more year experience. How would you ensure Senate hears effective student voice from student members of senate and across multiple courses?

Roundtable 3: Chairs and Deputy's of Audit and Risk

1. The percentage of 1sts and 2:1's being awarded in Nursing is far lower than that in the Law Faculty. How would you approach this discussion and ensure this is resolved?
2. How should a governing body devolve academic assurance? Where should it be active and where should it delegate?
3. You are presented with data which shows a large attainment gap in students achieving a 1st or 2:1 for students who are black or minority ethnic, have a declared disability and are from first in family in higher education. Where do you view your responsibility to closing attainment gaps and how would you respond?

Emerging Themes

- + Increasing focus from governing bodies on academic governance and assurance with a view on student outcomes
 - + Academic governance can be process driven rather than strategic and aligning with student outcomes
 - + Academic assurance has been formalised in corporate governance structures
 - + In England Senate and Audit and Risk Committees are receiving documents mapping documents set against Student Outcomes ongoing conditions of registration – traffic light systems to identify areas of risk
 - + Senates in larger institutions are often larger and have surface level discussions where as smaller providers can have more in depth discussions – academic governance committee structure is important to support this

Emerging Themes

- + Council and Senates (or equivalent) are interacting more beyond the annual report
 - + Clarity between roles of each body so as not to cause tensions
 - + Joint annual meetings or joint briefing sessions on key policy issues
 - + Some institutions establishing joint board and senate academic assurance committees
 - + Council members attending senate as observers –some HEIs rotate members while others have a regular observer in order to seek assurance
 - + Not all senates see external data on benchmarking and require time to undertake deep dives for courses that may be at risk
 - + Documents and papers that are produced for Senate and Council need to be tailored to the audience - assurance vs effective scrutiny is a shared sector challenge

Emerging Themes

- + Audit and Risk Committee is important and playing an increasing role in ensuring effective structures and mechanisms in place
 - + Committee members often from financial or corporate governance backgrounds, academics believe they can lack necessary skillset
 - + Should audit and risk committees seek to have members with academic backgrounds?
 - + Audit and risk are not there to be experts – instead to look at controls – audit committees are not experts in lots of areas of activity – IT, marketing, estates sometimes
 - + Mixture of Audit and Risk seeking internal reviews of academic governance and those seeking external assurance

Emerging Themes

- + Governors require a broader range of knowledge over functions of the university and experiences to seek assurance
 - + Unreasonable to expect governors to be experts in all areas
 - + Governors need to have ability and confidence to question – culture of the Board important
 - + Governors lack time that can be required based on increasing requirements for academic governance and assurance
 - + Board/Council -Often reliant on ex academic/University leader to provide academic assurance – some Chairs and VCs don't want more ex HE/academic members

Emerging Themes

- + Governors from non-HE backgrounds, corporate or charity leadership and governance, struggle with understanding academic governance and academics often don't understand corporate governance – *Cultural issue*
 - + Internal training sessions are being offered to governing body in seeking academic assurance
 - + Training videos being used for bite size learning
 - + Breakfast or twilight briefings
 - + Not all governors are going to be experts in academic assurance, but there is a need for a level of understanding and collective competency for the governing body.

Emerging Themes

- + Student Governors are a key link between academic and corporate governance
 - + often required to do a lot of heavy lifting on student outcomes and experience
 - + Students can be viewed as being able to get away with asking questions that other members of senate or governors may not be able to because of their “inexperience”
 - + Creates extra pressure on student representatives and concerns whether a small number of student scan be representative of whole student body
 - + Student representatives are not always clear on what is expected of them in various roles in academic governance – investment in training and specific support

Panel Session

Reflecting on Roundtable Findings



Jim Irving
Chief Student Officer
and University
Secretary,
Solent University
Southampton.



Beth Garrett
President,
Northampton
Students' Union



Dr Simon Meacher
Head of Executive
and Governance
Office,
Newcastle University



Victoria Holbrook
Assistant Director
Consulting,
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Insight,
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Future of Academic Governance and Assurance



John Rushforth
Executive Secretary,
Committee of University
Chairs

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