



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

University
Secretary's
Office.

The Council, 16 April 2018

Report of the Council and Senate Task and Finish Group – Academic Standards and Quality

Author: Dr Jonathan Nicholls

Action: Council is invited to approve the recommendations set out in section 5 of the report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Group was established by Council in October 2017 in the context of:
 - enhanced HEFCE requirements involving the provision by governing bodies of annual assurance in respect of the student academic experience and outcomes and the standard of awards, which extend a previous requirement such that governing bodies now need to provide (as opposed to only receive) such assurance;
 - the need for the University to comply with the new regulatory framework associated with the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, which establishes the Office for Students as the regulator for the sector and includes in its powers assessing/making arrangements for the assessment of quality and standards;
 - a recommendation arising from the last Council Effectiveness Review concerning the effectiveness of the interface between Council and academic governance;
 - the instigation of a separate Senate effectiveness review.
- 1.2 Council approved the following terms of reference for the Group:
 - to review what the Council currently receives, whether from Senate or elsewhere;
 - to establish the requirements for the Council and Senate in both giving and receiving assurances in relation to academic standards and quality;
 - to assess the needs of Council members in discharging their responsibilities in this area.
- 1.3 Details of the Group's membership are provided in Appendix 1.
- 1.4 A separate group was established by the Senate in December 2017 to review the effectiveness of Senate. This effectiveness review has a broad remit including over the structure, composition and engagement of Senate in pursuance of its role and functions. One of the strands of the Senate Effectiveness Review will examine the robustness of the academic assurance that Senate provides to Council. It is envisaged that this review will be informed by outcomes from the Council and Senate Task and Finish Group, and connectivity between the two groups is achieved by means of cross membership. The Senate Effectiveness Review Group's interim report to Senate is available in the Council Reading Room, and the Group plans to present its final report to Senate in June 2018.

2. Working assumptions

- 2.1 **The role of Senate in ensuring academic standards and quality should be recognised by Council and preserved:** While Council will be required to consider the evidence for the assurances it receives on academic quality and standards from the Senate and to assure itself and the OfS of its satisfaction in this regard, the Council should continue to respect the different roles of Senate and Council and the competence of each in its own domain. Council should continue to delegate to Senate the responsibility for setting, maintaining and improving academic standards and quality and to the Faculties for ensuring quality and standards are delivered.
- 2.2 **Regulatory compliance will be necessary but not sufficient to ensure standards:** The University is responsible for its academic quality and standards. This will be covered by new Regulatory requirements set out by the OfS, and the QAA as its designated quality body through a new Quality Code, as set out in OfS guidance. However, regulatory reporting is likely to be only one aspect of the maintenance and enhancement of academic and quality and standards, which the University will want to consider in satisfying itself in relation to its own provision. Some core items will need to be reviewed by Senate and reported to Council in relation to for example the REF, TEF and KEF but these alone are unlikely to encompass the whole of Senate's view of academic quality and standards.
- 2.3 **Senate should decide what it should see and review both for itself and to assure Council:** If Council determines what Senate should see and review to have oversight of academic quality and standards, or determines it should also review similar evidence, then Senate's responsibility is diminished. Senate should seek to satisfy Council that it has the necessary arrangements in place sufficient to assure Council, and allow Council to interrogate the basis of the assurances given. The Council will have the right to inform the Senate that it is unable to provide assurance on the evidence that the Senate provides. In such circumstances, the Senate will need to reconsider that evidence and what is subsequently reported to the Council.

3. Framework for the Council and Senate review

The Council and Senate Task and Finish Group focused on the assurance Council needs on academic governance, specifically to ensure:

- there is a genuine, well understood, and shared commitment by Council, the Senate, the academic community, and the executive to ensure effective academic governance;
- the Senate is committed to reviewing its own effectiveness and is committed to continuous improvement;
- the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of Senate and its committees are clearly defined and understood;
- the Council has an effective relationship with the Senate;
- the Senate delivers a comprehensive and comprehensible annual report to the Council.

4. Review of current arrangements

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group noted that Council does see a range of material from which it might draw assurance on academic quality and standards and the adequacy thereof, including updates on the Risk Register, KPIs, the P&VC's report, and that in this regard it currently sees more than the Senate. Senate's regular report to Council is from the meetings of Senate and these are noted, usually as Category C business. Council received an annual report on quality and standards from the relevant Professional Services department (then LeTS), but this did not come to Council from

the Senate.

- 4.2 Many of these materials, including the LeTS annual report, went directly to Council without first being considered by Quality and Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Learning and Teaching Committee or the Senate.
- 4.3 If this regime were to continue, there is a serious risk that the distinct roles of the Senate and the Council in academic governance will be distorted and compromised with an inappropriate onus being placed on the Council to set, maintain and approve academic quality and standards.
- 4.4 The use of Audit Committee in this area as a primary body for assurance on academic quality and standards to Council is not appropriate. Audit Committee can and should look at the effectiveness of the systems Senate has in place and report on whether they are working as Council and Senate intended.
- 4.5 The Task and Finish Group considered how Council would deal with reports on academic quality and standards. Council would need to feel equipped to interrogate any report and provide the necessary assurance.
- 4.6 The Task and Finish Group reviewed the existing provisions for Council member induction and ongoing development as these relate to members' knowledge and understanding of learning and teaching and the broader academic life of the University. The Group also noted the recent introduction of pre-Council briefing sessions (which provide an opportunity for more extended presentation and discussion of specific topics outside formal business meetings) and the Council Newsletter, issued four times a year (which has explicitly sought to incorporate academic matters in its coverage). The Group agreed that scope exists to refresh and enliven the relationship between Council, its members and the wider University, and makes proposals for additional activities.
- 4.7 The Task and Finish Group also considered the materials recently published by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, following a project undertaken on behalf of the funding bodies of England, Northern Ireland and Wales, which reviewed approaches to academic governance across a range of institutions. These materials include general guidance and a series of case studies.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The Council and Senate Task and Finish Group has consulted on its possible recommendations, including with the University Executive Board. It now recommends that:
 - (a) It is in the remit of the Senate Effectiveness Review to:
 - consider what Senate should delegate to its committees or to the Faculties, and assure Council it has a clear system of delegated authority with appropriate reporting mechanisms,
 - determine what Senate should receive by way of report and information, and assure Council that this will allow Senate to understand and oversee academic quality and standards,
 - ensure that Senate is in a position to report to Council at least annually in a way that permits Council to consider and scrutinise what it receives and, inter alia, provide the necessary assurances to the OfS.
 - (b) Council agree that it should annually receive a report approved by the Senate on which it can rely to provide assurance that academic quality and standards are being maintained and enhanced. Senate should decide how this report is presented to Council, for example, whether by the chair of Senate (the President & Vice-Chancellor), by the Vice-Presidents for Education and for Research & Innovation (as

the chairs of Learning & Teaching Committee and Research & Innovation Committee respectively), or by the chair of Quality & Scrutiny Sub-Committee, or some combination of the same.

- (c) Council ask that the report from Senate have a minimum content covering how Senate is:
- ensuring the quality of research, including but not limited to the REF;
 - developing and enhancing the standards and quality of teaching and learning, including but not limited to the TEF;
 - ensuring the quality of the student experience, and how that is measured, including but not limited to the NSS;
 - ensuring the quality and effectiveness of knowledge transfer, and how that is measured, including but not limited to the KEF;
 - monitoring information on student complaints and appeals that relate to academic standards and quality;
 - providing oversight of assessments of quality and standards by external regulators and professional accrediting bodies;
 - reviewing any others matters required by the OfS related to academic standards and quality.

It is important that the report from Senate is not limited only to regulatory matters. The above is not an exhaustive list and it is for Senate to determine how the requested information is presented and what additional material is provided, including elements that are TUoS mission/values specific, for example in relation to graduate attributes.

- (d) A small sub-group of the Council and Senate meet annually in advance of the Council meeting that will receive the report from the Senate to review the assurances to be given and consider what matters if any should be specifically raised with Council. Membership of this group might include, but not be restricted to, the Vice-Presidents for Education and for Research & Innovation (as the chairs of Learning & Teaching Committee and Research & Innovation Committee respectively), the chair of Senate's new academic quality and standards committee, the Director of Academic Services and two Council members (one external and one of whom is also a member of Senate).
- (e) Council members more broadly develop their knowledge and understanding – collective and individual – of academic matters. This could be achieved by for example the proposed pairing of Vice-Presidents of Faculty with an external member of Council, by Council receiving presentations from each Faculty on a timetable to be agreed and by meeting the student sabbatical officers or student ambassadors at least annually in an informal setting.

Council and Senate Task and Finish Group – Academic Standards and Quality

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2. To establish the requirements for the Council and Senate in both giving and receiving assurances in relation to academic standards and quality.
3. To assess the needs of Council members in discharging their responsibilities in this area.

Membership:

<i>Chair (a lay member of Council):</i>	Dr Jonathan Nicholls
<i>A lay member of Council:</i>	Tony Wray
<i>Vice-President for Education:</i>	Professor Wyn Morgan
<i>Chair of the Senate Effectiveness Review:</i>	Professor Lorraine Maltby ¹
<i>Chair of the Quality & Scrutiny Sub-Committee:</i>	Professor Alistair Warren ²
<i>A member of Senate:</i>	Professor Mary Vincent
<i>The Education Officer, Students' Union</i>	Stuart McMillan

In attendance:

<i>The University Secretary:</i>	Dr Tony Strike
<i>A representative of Academic Programmes and Student Engagement:</i>	Sarah Hague

<i>Secretary</i>	Sue Stephens
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¹ Also Deputy Vice-President for Research & Innovation and a member of Senate and Council.

² Also a member of Senate.