Report of the Senate Effectiveness Review Group

1. Introduction

Senate is asked to approve the 14 principles and discuss and endorse the potential solutions and actions set out under each heading below.

Principle 1

Senate has responsibility for the academic quality and standards of the University, including teaching (apprentice to PGR) and research.

Principle 2

Senate must provide robust and effective scrutiny and challenge of academic quality and standards in order to provide the assurances required by Council.

Possible solutions

Internal arrangements for Senate to receive and provide assurances about academic standards and quality must be robust and effective. Senate has agreed to establish a new Senate Academic Assurance Committee (SAAC) to raise issues and to provide advice and assistance to support Senate in discharging its responsibility to ensure effective academic oversight of quality and standards and to provide assurance to Council.

Proposed immediate action(s)

The work of the SAAC will support the work of the new Council and Senate sub-group that will meet annually before Council to discuss the annual report from Senate on academic assurance and the Chair of SAAC will be a member of the joint sub-group.

Further work will take place to make the practical arrangements necessary to set up SAAC, draft an annual cycle of business and agree the most appropriate sequencing of meetings, in liaison with existing Senate committees and professional services departments. This work will include ensuring that the purpose and remit of SAAC is clear and understood.

2. Information and Transparency:

Principle 3

Senate must consider and report on the contents of academic quality and standards-related material, including the continuous improvement of the student experience, before it is provided to Council.

Principle 4

Senate should receive information in a way that enables scrutiny and challenge to inform the assurances provided to Council.

Principle 5

Senate must be consulted during the development of policy and strategy initiatives that affect academic quality and standards.

Possible solutions

Reporting should be prospective as well as retrospective and take into account the annual cycle of committee business. Committees should similarly consider when and how they might engage Senate during the development of a given project or initiative within those business cycles.

Reporting should consider information from a range of available sources and feature appropriate analysis to highlight any issues/concerns/good practice to Senate. Taken as a whole, reporting to Senate should cover those matters highlighted by the joint Council and Senate Task and Finish Group on Academic Standards and Quality. The new SAAC should consider the type and availability of information it wishes to receive, with regard to the proposed SAAC Terms of Reference.

Where matters have been delegated for decision by a Senate committee, or where a committee makes recommendations to Senate, Senate should be actively engaged and empowered to contribute to the development of the particular matter. In addition, reporting of matters to Senate should cover both the decision or recommendation made and the reasons for it (including alternative options considered and discounted), and highlight any specific issues or concerns in such a way as to enable an informed discussion and where necessary a decision at Senate itself.

Proposed immediate action(s)

The agenda and papers should make clear which items of business require particular attention, for example dividing the agenda into sections A, for decision; B, for discussion, and C, for information, as should Senate's committees, and considering the routine use of standardised executive summaries and annotated agendas, as used by Council and a number of Council committees.

The volume of papers can be reduced, e.g. by circulating 'for information' papers such as Council committee reports following the meeting of Council at which they are approved and discussing with the new President & Vice-Chancellor the contents of their written report. Individual papers should be as short and concise as possible, being clear as to action required. Committee secretaries will be engaged and supported in achieving this through more detailed general guidance, and training, including specific information about reporting, and through the use of more regular network events, which were introduced during 2017/18.

3. **Governance Structure:**

Principle 6

The processes and procedures guiding the flow of information through the governance and corporate structures should be clear, comprehensible and understood.

Principle 7

Senate and its committees must operate in accordance with the University's Charter, Statutes and Regulations, within clear terms of reference, delegated authorities and lines of reporting.

Principle 8

Senate representatives on Committees should be members of Senate as far as practical.

Principle 9

The chairs of Senate committees and other groups or individuals otherwise operating under delegated Senate authority are responsible for ensuring matters within their scope are considered by Senate in a timely way.

Possible solutions

Senate, its committees and all relevant University staff need to be clear about the delegated authorities under which they operate and what their responsibilities are as a consequence. The flow of information through the governance and corporate structures should be clear and understood in order to ensure that information is submitted to and/or received by the appropriate person or body at the appropriate time.

Committee secretaries and all relevant staff should work with the University Secretary to facilitate and ensure the flow of business and information to Senate.

The appropriateness of the extent of delegations from Senate to other committees and individuals, and how these are exercised in practice, could be reviewed.

Proposed immediate action(s)

As a new scrutiny committee, SAAC is to raise issues and to provide advice and assistance to support Senate in discharging its responsibility to ensure effective academic assurance and to provide assurance to Council. SAAC will have the power to obtain information, raise questions and make recommendations, but will not have decision making powers. It will not become involved in detailed operational matters

Committee chairs and secretaries and other individuals and groups otherwise undertaking responsibilities delegated by Senate, should be reminded of the nature of their delegated powers, duties and reporting requirements under the University Regulations.

The terms of reference of Committees of Senate will be reviewed to ensure they are clear and consistent with the University Regulations.

4. **Size and Composition:**

Principle 10

The size of Senate, and the number of members in attendance at a Senate meeting, should be appropriate to its purpose.

Principle 11

The composition of Senate should reflect the diversity of the University's academic community.

Possible solutions

SERG takes the view that while the overall size of Senate's membership is too large, the number of attendees at meetings is appropriate. It may be necessary to consider reducing the total size of Senate but increasing rates of member attendance and participation.

Review, and if necessary revise, the composition of Senate to ensure that it is 'fit for purpose' and can discharge its responsibilities efficiently and effectively.

Proposed immediate action(s)

Continue to monitor levels of attendance overall and within the individual categories of membership, and the level of member participation in meetings.

There were 18 nominations for the 37 vacancies for members elected from Grade 8+ academic, teaching, research and professional staff.

The University Secretary as Returning Officer will recommend they are 'elected' unopposed.

Senate could endorse their being elected and for all members in the elected category to be allowed to see out their current term of office in the event that Senate ultimately decides to revise its size and composition.

Senate will be asked to provide its views on a range of options for addressing issues around membership, including the balance of academic/professional and ex-officio/elected, seniority and discipline to inform future recommendations (see 'Next Steps').

5. **Engagement:**

Principle 12

Senate should be empowered to actively engage in the decision-making process. .

Principle 13

Members of Senate must exercise independence in taking decisions on behalf of the University as a whole, rather than act as representatives of a particular constituency.

Principle 14

The role of Senate and that of individual members should be clear and more widely understood.

Possible solutions

The agenda and format of meetings of Senate should facilitate debate and encourage contributions.

Meetings could start with one or two strategic items, suggested by Senate itself or one of its sub-committees, for discussion and debate.

Individual table discussions could be used as part of wider debate.

Senate could establish dedicated Working Groups or Task and Finish Groups to consider specific issues raised by Senate or one of its committees.

"Independence" would be consistent with Council where members are expected to act independently regardless of their being lay, executive, staff or student whilst ensuring a full range of views and knowledge. The same should be true of Senate committees.

Proposed immediate action(s)

The purpose of and process for submitting written questions in advance of meetings should be clarified.

A formal induction programme should be established for new members and be made available to all current members of Senate.

An 'induction' event for new members of Senate will be held at the beginning of each academic year prior to the circulation of papers for the first (October) meeting of Senate that year.

Information on the Senate webpages will be reviewed and refreshed.

6. Next Steps

A number of actions can be effected immediately and be in place in time for the start of 2018/19, e.g. induction, papers.

The University Secretary will make the practical arrangements for the new SAAC to commence work in 2018/19.

The further development of outstanding areas within the original scope of this review, upon which Senate is being asked to give its opinion, will be the subject of a consultation paper. This will be informed by discussions and responses given on 20 June and circulated to Senate, its Committees, and more widely within the University to gather views and gauge support for any emergent or proposed changes, with a view to bringing the results and any recommendations to Senate at the start of 2018/19. The SERG proposes to send its consultation paper in draft to John Rushforth, Executive Secretary of the Committee of University Chairs, for external advice and review, prior to circulation in the University.

7. Summary of Recommendations

It is recommended that Senate:

- approve the 14 principles set out above,

- endorse the proposed immediate actions,

- agree to the development and sharing of a consultation paper, overseen by the current SERG, with a view to Senate considering any further recommendations in October 2018.

Terms of Reference for a Senate Academic Assurance Committee

The role of Academic Assurance Committee is to assure Senate regarding the maintenance of academic quality and standards in learning and teaching and in research, and the enhancement of the quality of the student experience. To achieve this the Committee will:

1. Receive reports and scrutinise all matters related to academic quality and standards, within the University on behalf of the Senate, including for example:
   - assuring the academic quality of research and innovation;
   - assuring the academic standards and quality of teaching and learning;
   - assuring the academic quality of the student experience;
   - 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 matters required by statute and regulations related to academic standards and quality.

2. Interrogate reports or information in order to provide Senate with assurance on academic quality and standards for all students including Apprentices, Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research students, throughout the student journey from application and admission to graduation and destination. This includes provision delivered through collaborative partnerships, for example, sub-contracted or validated provision in the UK or an international partner overseas.

3. Identify any issues and potential actions required and advise or make recommendations to Senate or Committees of Senate accordingly regarding:
   - the revision of policies;
   - processes;
   - provision of information and analysis;
   - action plans to ensure and enhance quality or to assure Senate, set standards or enhance the quality of the provision. This includes the adequacy and effectiveness of relevant University processes.

4. Satisfy Senate that the University is meeting the expectations of the designated bodies quality code (QAA) or to make recommendations or give advice as required.

5. Devise a draft annual report for Senate to consider and adopt for submission to Council with a view to providing assurance on academic standards and quality, and how they contribute to the University's mission and to regulatory requirements. The annual report should provide appropriate information and analysis, in line with requests from Council, and be in a form that permits Council to consider and test that academic governance is adequate and effective.

Membership

June Senate to be given options to consider regarding the Chair and wider membership.

The Review Group have given a steer that the Chair should be a non-executive academic member of Senate. Options for how a Chair could be chosen:
1. The President and Vice-Chancellor, as Chair of Senate, decides.

2. The Senate Nominations Committee propose to Senate, for Senate approval.
3. Senate elects.

The underlying principles are:
- that members have the appropriate skills and experience to allow the committee to fulfil its role, bearing in mind the terms of reference, the role of faculties, and external factors, e.g. the new UK Quality Code

- The membership should mirror the roles involved in quality assurance across the institution and include a mix of members of Senate, Faculty staff and Professional Services staff. Membership would include a member from each of the Faculties.

- The Committee would operate on the principle that the role of members is to represent Senate, as opposed to representing their local constituency.

- Six members of Senate elected by Senate
- One current, or former, Head of an academic Department
- One current, or former, Faculty Director of Learning & Teaching
- One current, or former, Faculty Director of Research & Innovation
- Three student representatives nominated by the Student's Union (with the aim of ensuring representation across UG, PGT and PGR)
- One Professional Services staff member who is a current or former member of Senate

Operating Principles

- The Committee would work across all faculties, departments and professional services as it saw fit.

- The Committee would not have decision making powers but will have the power to obtain, scrutinise and challenge information, and to give assurance, give advice or make recommendations to Senate on academic quality.

- The Committee should not normally need to commission work or papers, but would have access to existing materials, papers and data prepared for other relevant committees or groups, either by or from professional services, faculties and departments as appropriate. It could also identify and highlight any gaps in existing materials, papers and data that may limit its or Senate's ability to provide assurance and to recommend how this may be addressed.