

Lancaster University Council Governance Effectiveness Review

In January 2022, Council commissioned a review of governance effectiveness in line with CUC Higher Education Code of Governance requirements to *'conduct a regular, full and robust review of governance effectiveness with some degree of independent input'*. A Steering Group was established, chaired by the Deputy Pro-Chancellor, Professor Ella Ritchie, to oversee the implementation of the review on Council's behalf and AdvanceHE commissioned as its preferred External Reviewer and it to undertake the review. The review team was led by John Rushforth (author of the CUC Higher Education Code of Governance Code). A key objective of the review was to enable Council to focus on its continued development: explore its effectiveness, identify any areas for strengthening practices and to improve the agility and resilience of governance.

The AdvanceHE Review Report was considered by Council at its meeting in January 2023, a point at which a number of new members had recently joined it and is now working through an action plan to implement the recommendations. Shared below is the Executive Summary from the AdvanceHE Report and a summary of the recommendations to be taken forward by the Council.

AdvanceHE Executive Summary

Governance arrangements at Lancaster have supported the University over a period of development, growth and success. The challenge now for the University is to consider those arrangements and see how best to build on them to face a new set of challenges with changed expectations and circumstances both at home and abroad in the light of the Covid pandemic, increased financial pressures with an expectation of reduced Government support and new opportunities through technological change and the University's strategy beyond 2026.

The current arrangements rely on mutual respect and appreciation between the Executive and the Council. The Executive makes significant efforts to be open and provide the Council with a wealth of information; in return, much is delegated and entrusted to the Executive. There is an impressive Council with a clear commitment to the University and a desire to make the quality of the University more widely recognised.

Part of the challenge is to enable all members of its very talented Council to contribute more to the development and promotion of the University.

We think there are opportunities to develop a greater understanding of the respective roles of the Council, the Senate and the Executive, to review the Committee structure and clarify how the Council can continue to contribute to the strategic development of the University.

Although improvements have been made, further opportunities exist to enable a more comprehensive student and staff voice.

The Advance HE team is grateful for the support and input of everyone at the University who contributed to the Review, the steering group members, and the support of the governance team.

John Rushforth
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December 2022

Review Recommendations Council will seek to implement

Council has accepted the following Review recommendations and is now considering how to take them forward.

- The University continues to explore innovative ways of developing diversity and specifically explores the possibility of using a Board Apprenticeship scheme.
- Consideration is given to adopting a more systematic approach to member development interviews and development opportunities.
- Discussions are held with student representatives to establish the most effective way to support them in developing their contribution to Council debates. The Council should also consider how more opportunities for it to hear from a wider range of students might be provided.
- The Council confirms that engagement with staff and Trade Unions are matters for the Executive and reflects on how it can get assurance that this is being appropriately managed.
- As part of its approach to external communications, the Council members should be provided with key messages suitable for external audiences.
- The University reviews and updates its committee structure, roles and responsibilities and specifically considers:
 - standing down the Redundancy Committee;
 - how assurance is provided concerning progress against the University's strategic plans and ambitions for People and Culture and Engagement.
- The University reviews existing guidance given to authors of papers to produce effective summaries of all papers for discussion.
- Guidance on the inclusion of comparative data, where relevant, should be provided to authors of papers.
- Future and regular reports on Teaching quality should incorporate comparative data and consistently give an explicit opinion on compliance with OfS conditions of registration.
- Consideration should be given to how Council develops a better understanding of the role and operation of the Senate among Council members and makes better use of the Senate-appointed members in developing lay members' understanding of academic quality matters.
- The meeting evaluation approach is reviewed.

March 2023