



The role of the academic board

Open University Validation Partnerships

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The role of the Academic Board (or equivalent)

This section should be read in conjunction with Principle 1 of the principles of validation: independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic governance. Partners may also find the [Committee of University Chairs \(CUC\) Code of Higher Education Governance](#), useful to draw upon when establishing the role of the Academic Board and how it functions with other Institutional governance arrangements. The Code sets expectations for accountability, financial sustainability and institutional leadership. Although the Code applies to England, Northern Ireland and Wales, the Code supports governing bodies to lead effectively in an increasingly complex environment—while safeguarding institutional autonomy.

The academic board is the academic body of an institution. It has the power to lay down proper procedures for instructions, research and examination and to regulate and promote the academic life of the institution. The academic board plays a crucial role in the governance and academic oversight of higher education. It acts as a central body, ensuring the academic integrity and excellence of the institution and supporting its mission and strategic goals. By fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment, the board helps to create a thriving academic community.

The role of the academic board is to approve academic policies, oversee academic standards and quality of the academic activity, and authorise the institution's awards. The board should also have oversight of the university's academic strategy and alignment with the (partner's) overall strategic plan, as well as ensuring compliance with external regulatory bodies and quality

assurance standards. The board may also receive regular reports from sub-committees and task groups as necessary.

The academic board should meet regularly through the academic year. It is responsible for providing assurance to the senior leadership team and the board of governors that a partner is effective in terms of academic governance arrangements, the student experience, and setting and maintaining standards.

The parameters in which the academic board operates should be enshrined in its constitution and terms of reference (which should stipulate such matters as quoracy, circulation of papers and frequency of meetings, minute taker etc.)

Best practice involves the academic board conducting a review of the board's effectiveness and governance arrangements on an annual basis.

Governance and strategic oversight

- **Academic strategy:** The academic board considers, approves, and keeps the institution's academic strategy under review, aligning it with the university's strategic plan and monitoring progress against academic objectives.
- **Policy and procedures:** It has strategic oversight of academic and student-related policies and procedures, ensuring they meet regulatory requirements and support the institution's goals.

Quality assurance and standards

- **Programme approval and review:** The board approves, regulates, and periodically reviews the scope and content of taught and research degree

programmes, diplomas, certificates, and component courses. This ensures that academic offerings meet high standards of quality and relevance.

- **Award authorisation:** It authorises the award of academic qualifications to students who have fulfilled the necessary conditions.
- **Examiners and assessment:** The board monitors the appointment, removal, and suspension of examiners, maintaining an overview of the quality of academic programmes.

Academic and research

- **Research promotion:** The academic board monitors and promotes research activities, including securing research grants and supporting the work of the institution's research centres.
- **Freedom of speech:** It ensures the institution's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech, regularly reviewing related policies and practices.

Communication and collaboration

- **Internal communication:** The board facilitates communication within the institution, ensuring that academic policies and decisions are effectively communicated to all stakeholders.
- **External relationships:** It oversees the institution's responses to external regulatory bodies, quality assurance agencies, and professional bodies, ensuring compliance and fostering positive relationships.

Student experience and outcomes

- **Student policies:** The board determines policies related to student admissions, progression, and withdrawal, ensuring that these processes are fair and transparent.
- **Quality enhancement:** It is committed to maintaining and enhancing the quality of the student experience, ensuring that academic provision meets the needs and expectations of students.

Student progression

- **Reviewing progression policies:** Setting and reviewing policies related to student progression to ensure they are fair and transparent.
- **Monitoring progression rates:** Analysing data on student progression rates to identify any issues and implement improvements.
- **Approving progression decisions:** Making decisions on whether students can progress to the next stage of their studies based on their academic performance.

Student complaints and appeals

- **Academic appeals:** Reviewing appeals related to academic decisions, such as grades, progression, and awards. The board ensures that appeals are handled fairly and in accordance with institutional policies.
- **Complaints:** Addressing specific concerns about the provision of courses or related academic services. The board ensures that complaints are investigated thoroughly and resolved appropriately.

- **Policy development:** Developing and maintaining policies for handling complaints and appeals, ensuring they are accessible and transparent for all students.

Additional areas of focus for each meeting

- **Curriculum development:** Regularly reviewing and updating the curriculum to ensure it meets current academic and industry standards.
- **Student wellbeing and safety:** Overseeing any risks to student wellbeing and safety, ensuring a supportive and secure learning environment.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Promoting diversity and inclusion within the academic community, ensuring equal opportunities for all students and staff.
- **Technology and innovation:** Exploring and integrating new technologies and innovative practices to enhance teaching, learning, and research.