

Executive Summary of Business for Council

Title:

Council Effectiveness Review

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Strategic context:

Governance

Summary:

The attached report presents the findings and recommendations from AdvanceHE's review of governance effectiveness under a scope approved by Council in February 2024. The review process was overseen by a Council Task and Finish Group, Chaired by Claire Brownlie, Pro-Chancellor, which has met three times during the review, including most recently to discuss the draft report. The report concludes that governance at the University is "highly effective" and has been on upward trajectory in recent years.

The report makes 11 recommendations where effectiveness could be further enhanced and the Task and Finish Group has welcomed the focus on further improvement, notwithstanding the positive overall conclusion of the review team.

Essential reading:

Section 2 – Executive Summary and Annex 1 – Summary of recommendations

Risk analysis:

Ineffective governance jeopardises the University's ability to deliver on its strategic and charitable objectives and carries additional legal, regulatory and reputational risks. Specific risks associated with areas of the report's findings and recommendations are discussed in the main text of the report.

Resource implications:

Responding to the recommendations will incur additional administrative time and further Council/Task and Finish group discussion time. The report offers comment on the current capacity of the Governance Team.

Stakeholder Impact and Engagement:

The findings of the review will provide assurance to University stakeholders that institutional governance and decision making processes are effective but that the University adopts an approach of continuous improvement.

Information Classification:

The final agreed report will be Public.

FoI & Data Protection implications:

N/A

Equality and diversity implications:

The review specifically considered the University's approach to EDI governance and the diversity of Council itself.

Charity law implications:

Council effectiveness is important from the perspective of Council members satisfying their duties as charitable trustees.

Consultation:

Consultation with members and other key University stakeholders was undertaken throughout the review process. The progress of the review, emergent findings and draft report were all considered at three separate meetings of the Council task and Finish group established to oversee the review.

Future actions:

The University Secretary and Head of Governance will draft an action plan in response to the recommendations, informed by Council's discussions and the views of the Task and Finish group. The draft plan will be presented to Council at its October 2024 meeting for discussion and agreement.

Subject to Council approval, the existing task and Finish group will support and monitor the implementation of agreed actions and facilitate periodic updates to Council.

The AdvanceHE report will be published on the University webpages.

Effective date of introduction:

N/A

Recommendation:

Council is asked to discuss and comment on the report and individual recommendations.

Council is also asked to approve the existing Council Task and Finish Group continuing to operate to support the implementation of agreed actions in response to the report and monitoring of the same.



Governance Effectiveness Review

University of Sheffield

—

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Advance HE was commissioned by University of Sheffield to review the effectiveness of its governance and to prepare this report. It is intended solely for use by the Council of University of Sheffield and is not to be relied upon by any third party, notwithstanding that it may be made available in the public domain, or disclosed to other third parties.

Although every effort has been made to ensure this report is as comprehensive as possible, its accuracy is limited to the instructions, information and documentation received from University of Sheffield and we make no representations, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that the content in the report is accurate outside of this scope.

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1. Introduction

The University of Sheffield is a world leading, research intensive university with a clear commitment to civic engagement. There is an over-arching strategy which runs from 2020 to 2027 which states the university's vision to "deliver life enhancing research, innovation and education that not only transforms the lives of our graduates, but shapes the world we live in" which is underpinned by 4 pillars; research, innovation, education and one university.

Following its last review of governance in 2020-21, the university commissioned Advance HE to undertake a review of governance effectiveness, in line with expectations from the Office for Students (OfS) and the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) Higher Education Code of Governance and sought to ensure it had a broad focus, but with the following areas considered of particular relevance:

- + **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** (the Council's own composition and related processes, legal and regulatory responsibilities (including the implications of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and the extent of Council oversight and engagement)

- + **Council Culture**

- + **Academic Governance**

- + **Risk Management**

- + **Council Committees** (e.g. number, remit, size and composition).

And seeking to ensure the review:

- + was **holistic, forward looking, developmental** and supports the University to deliver its strategic ambitions, and is contextualised within its own vision, strategic goals, purpose, culture and values to deliver continued future success.

- + **brings insights from recent practice in the HE sector and beyond to approaching governance**, bringing to bear our knowledge of ESG (Environmental, Social Governance), the current economic and political climate, horizon scanning and the use of benchmarking with relevant organisations, and our sector work on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.

- + examines **how the University's governance culture and ethos supports ethical behaviour and equal, diverse and inclusive practices**; and related to this, the commitment to and understanding of embedding equality and diversity of the Council. We will draw on direct experiences and insights and our sector-leading Board Diversity & Inclusion Toolkit.

- + explores and **evaluates the relationships between the Council, its Committees and their interaction with the Executive Team**, and how these contribute to the overall effectiveness of governance.

- + considers the **size, structure, terms of reference and composition of the Council and its Committees**, and the approach to management of relationships between Council and its committees in practice.
- + looks at **Council recruitment and diversity**, including recruitment; induction; development and training; and appraisal of Chair and members; and the use of a progressive and regularly updated skills matrix to inform future need.
- + examines and tests confidence in the Board's arrangements for **seeking and receiving assurance of robust and effective academic governance** through working with the Senate, to understand the range of students and their experiences, maintaining standards and improving quality.
- + **considers Council's effectiveness in providing oversight of - and support for – strategy implementation** including ownership and appropriate assurance of strategic issues, performance against the strategic aims.as well as use of member skills and stakeholder engagement.
- + examined **the impact and visibility of Council to the wider University community** i.e. how Council raises awareness about its work, whether there are appropriate and relevant opportunities to hear the **staff and student voice**, to understand the **staff and student experience**, to engage with and hear the perspectives of other stakeholders.
- + considered Council's effectiveness in **learning from the previous effectiveness review conducted in 2020 and the effectiveness of implementing previous recommendations to support continual development of good governance**.
- + was fully contextualised: the review will **took account of relevant guidance, reference points and benchmarks** including the Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England and other publications of the Office for Students (OfS); and the University's use of the Committee of University Chairs' 2020 HE Governance Code, the HE Senior Staff Remuneration Code, and the HE Audit Committees Code of Practice.

The review deployed a number of strands to gather evidence including an extensive review of documentation, a benchmark survey, one to one interviews and Council and committee observations. The review was overseen by a working group of both University of Sheffield representatives and the Advance HE team which met on 3 occasions during the period of the review. The results of the survey are referenced in the report. Questions invited scores on a Likert scale (1-5, with 1 indicating strongly disagree through to 5 strongly agree) and results were benchmarked against over 60 other universities who have completed the survey within the last 5 years. Interviews were undertaken on a non-attributable basis, although themes and matters raised are referred to in general terms in the report.

2. Executive Summary

Overall we found governance at the University of Sheffield to be **highly effective**, and noted it has been on an upward trajectory in recent years. Considerable attention is given to the 3 main elements of governance identified in the Advance HE framework; the governance enablers, the value added by governance and board culture.

Of particular commendation is the emphasis given to an open culture of discussion and scrutiny between Council and the Executive, a highly regarded Secretariat team and the support that Council is given with wider opportunities to be briefed about developments across the university and the sector.

A part of the review methodology was the deployment of a self-assessment benchmark survey. In total there were 56 questions (with a further 8 demographic questions). Overall Sheffield scored very positively in this survey, above the sector average in 9 of the 10 sections overall and only below the sector benchmark in 4 of the 56 questions. The positive results in the survey were triangulated against our wider evidence gathering through the meeting observation, one to one interviews and document review.

We found all participants in the review to be open, constructive and self-reflective in their consideration allowing us to identify areas of strength and opportunities for further development.

Our report makes **11 recommendations** and 2 suggestions for further improvement. A number of these recommendations are routine in nature, our more significant findings relate to further **strengthening the references to strategy and key performance indicators** in Council discussion and papers (recommendation 1), **continuing to focus on improving Council diversity** (recommendation 2) and further **improvements to governor induction and ongoing training** (recommendations 8-10).

We would like to express our thanks to the Secretariat and Governance team for their support in facilitating the review and furnishing us with the requisite documentation and material to aid our work.

3. Main Findings

3.1 Strategy and performance

The role of strategy in higher education has become more important in recent years as the market environment has intensified, competition for student recruitment has increased and finances have become squeezed. Over time, the role of the governing body in agreeing an over-arching strategy and then monitoring performance has become much more significant.

At Sheffield there is a clearly articulated strategy, which runs for the period from 2020 through until 2027 with a vision, “to deliver life-enhancing research, innovation and education that not only transforms the lives of our graduates, but shapes the world we live in”. For Sheffield the best way to achieve this is by fostering an ambitious, inclusive, collaborative community underpinned by 4 pillars of research, innovation, education and one university. We were told how the development of the strategy was an inclusive and consultative process that helps to frame discussions at Council and the governance of the university more widely.

We found that the strategy was both well understood and highly regarded by Council, and it provided the over-arching framework for discussions. This was supported by the survey where 100% respondents agreed, “*the governing body is well equipped to support the organisation’s long term strategic plans*” and 90% agreed that, “*the governing body balances its time effectively in reviewing the organisation’s performance alongside its strategic direction.*”

The review team felt that there was an opportunity for the strategy and its associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be referenced more prominently and consistently in the Council and committee papers (beyond the Vice-Chancellor’s report which is already structured to directly correspond with the strategy).

There is a comprehensive range of KPIs which are monitored, maintained and reported to Council at periodic intervals. There is always a balance to strike to ensure that the strategy report is sufficiently comprehensive, takes into account performance across the university, is appropriately benchmarked and forward looking, whilst also being focussed enough to be easy to digest. Strategy reporting also recognises that different Council members will have slightly different appetites for the depth at which they would like to review this information. There is an opportunity to draw out a summary KPI RAG rated dashboard which would be produced and maintained by the Strategic Planning team of the university which would help to identify progress more clearly in these reports.

In the self-assessment benchmark survey, respondents at Sheffield scored very highly and this was supported in our triangulation with the meeting observation, one to one interviews and document review. There were only 4 questions where Sheffield scored below the sector benchmark (which is derived from over 60 universities who have completed the survey in the last 4 years), one of these questions was in relation to the use of “*agreed*

performance measures including leading and lagging indicators against which it receives assurance of institutional performance against the strategic plan", which scored -3% below the sector benchmark (76% of respondents at Sheffield agree or strongly agree these are in place). Although the difference against the sector is relatively small, in a context where Sheffield has scored highly this points to an area for potential improvement.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen the attention placed to Environmental Social Governance (ESG) an area which organisations in sectors beyond higher education have been developing their approach to, although as yet practice is less developed in higher education. This could be an area, which Sheffield could develop a sector-leading approach, the areas where this could be addressed might be through the annual report, appropriate performance monitoring and via relevant committees (e.g. the Investment sub-group).

Recommendation:

1. Where appropriate seek to directly reference the University Strategy and Key Performance Indicators more prominently in Council and committee papers.

Suggestion:

- A. To develop a summary RAG rated KPI dashboard to the periodic Key Performance Indicator progress reports presented to Council which would be created and maintained by the Strategic Planning team.
- B. Consider how the approach to Environmental Social Governance could be further developed.

3.2 Executive and Council interface

We were both told about and observed a healthy open and constructive culture between the Executive and Council. The Chair fosters an inclusive environment which welcomes constructive challenge and discussion and this is also encouraged by the Executive. There was clear mutual respect between the Executive and Council and an understanding of their respective roles. It was noted by some of the more long-standing members that there has been a particular improvement in the willingness of the Executive to listen to and respond to feedback and this has been led by the Vice-Chancellor. Maintaining this healthy dynamic always requires constant attention, but Sheffield can pursue this from an existing position of strength.

The boundary between governance and management is not fixed, and shifts depending on the context, performance and circumstances of different providers. At Sheffield, there was a

clear understanding of the appropriate boundary to maintain and it is respected. The recent move to a new School structure was cited as a positive example of this boundary operating effectively, whereby the Executive engaged with Council to seek their approval for a direction of travel. Implementation was then left to the Executive to deliver upon, keeping Council apprised through the process of delivery.

The wider opportunities which are provided for Council members to hear about developments in the university and the sector such as the pre Council information sessions and opportunities to be linked with members of the Executive outside of meetings help to foster this positive dynamic between Council and the wider university. There always remain a need to ensure that discussions at Council itself remain strategic in nature, but members are informed by their wider engagement with the university.

Members of the Executive also noted that the mechanisms to stimulate engagement between Council and the university were partly driven to ensure Council were sufficiently informed by ongoing developments, to allow them to make connections with colleagues at different levels across the university, but also because it meant Council were able to offer more effective support as a critical friend.

3.3 Composition, skills, diversity and inclusion

Overall, it was felt that the composition and skill mix on the Council operates effectively. There are 19 members (1 Chair, 10 independent members, 3 Executive members, 3 Senate members, 1 Professional services member, 1 student member). This is broadly in line with the sector average (the average size of an English university governing body is 18.7). The skill mix is seen to be effective covering the key areas of expertise which is required by the Council and its committees and recruitment continues to be informed by periodic assessment of skills recorded through a matrix. 100% of respondents to the survey felt that, *“the governing body membership has an appropriate range of skills and experience.”*

There has been increased attention paid to the diversity of Council which had resulted in some improvement, particularly in relation to gender. It was felt that there could be further improvements in relation to other characteristics particularly ethnicity. Of the 21 respondents to the review survey only 2 returns marked ethnicities beyond a white background (and a further 2 responses stated they “preferred not to say”). In the survey, 81% of respondents agreed that, *“the governing body membership reflects the diversity of the organisation”* and 81% also agreed that, *“all governing body members demonstrate up-to-date knowledge and confidence in discussions of equality, diversity and inclusion matters.”* Sheffield demonstrates a clear commitment and progress to improve Council diversity and the recently published Advance HE toolkit may also be a further source of useful information as this remains an area of interest (<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/higher-education-board-diversity-and-inclusion-toolkit>).

Compared to other universities, including other research-intensive universities, the internal composition of Council members is more heavily skewed toward academic members with an under-representation of professional services members. The relative lack of professional services membership on Council, was also raised in the interviews (although we acknowledge that the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer are in attendance to provide high level perspectives on professional services matters). At present, the internal members are made up of 1 Vice-Chancellor, 2 Vice-Presidents, 3 Senate members (all academic), 1 professional services member (up to a maximum of grade 7) and 1 students' union nominee. In reality this means there will generally be 6 members with an academic background, 1 professional services and 1 student representative. We would invite Council as a whole and the Nominations committee specifically to reflect on this balance of 6 academic and 1 from professional services. There are different ways this could be addressed including adding 1 from professional services (we would recommend this be above grade 7, as the existing professional services member is drawn from grade 7 or below), potentially as a replacement for 1 of the existing academic members (either 1 of the 2 Vice-Presidents or 1 of the 3 Senate members). If it was decided that 1 of the 2 Vice-Presidents were replaced by a professional services member, that post-holder could still be invited to attend Council (for the duration such as the Chief Finance Officer and Chief Operating Officer does or for items which are most appropriate).

Recommendations:

2. Continue to focus on improving Council diversity, with a particular focus on ethnicity.
3. Reflect on the composition of the internal members (currently 1 Vice-Chancellor, 2 Pro-Vice-Chancellors, 3 Senate members (all academic), 1 professional services member (up to a maximum of grade 7) and 1 students' union nominee) which skews strongly toward academic over professional services members at present.

3.4 Secretariat and papers

There is a highly assiduous, professional and proactive approach to supporting governance at Sheffield via the University Secretary and the governance team. They were widely lauded in interview and this was supported by our document review and engagement with them throughout the review. Council members cited that they felt very well supported both in respects of governance, but also in terms of logistics. There were a number of references in interview commending the Secretariat for going "above and beyond" and being "exceptionally attentive and professional". 100% of respondents to the survey agreed, "*the approach, style and contribution of the governing body secretariat supports effective governing body meetings.*"

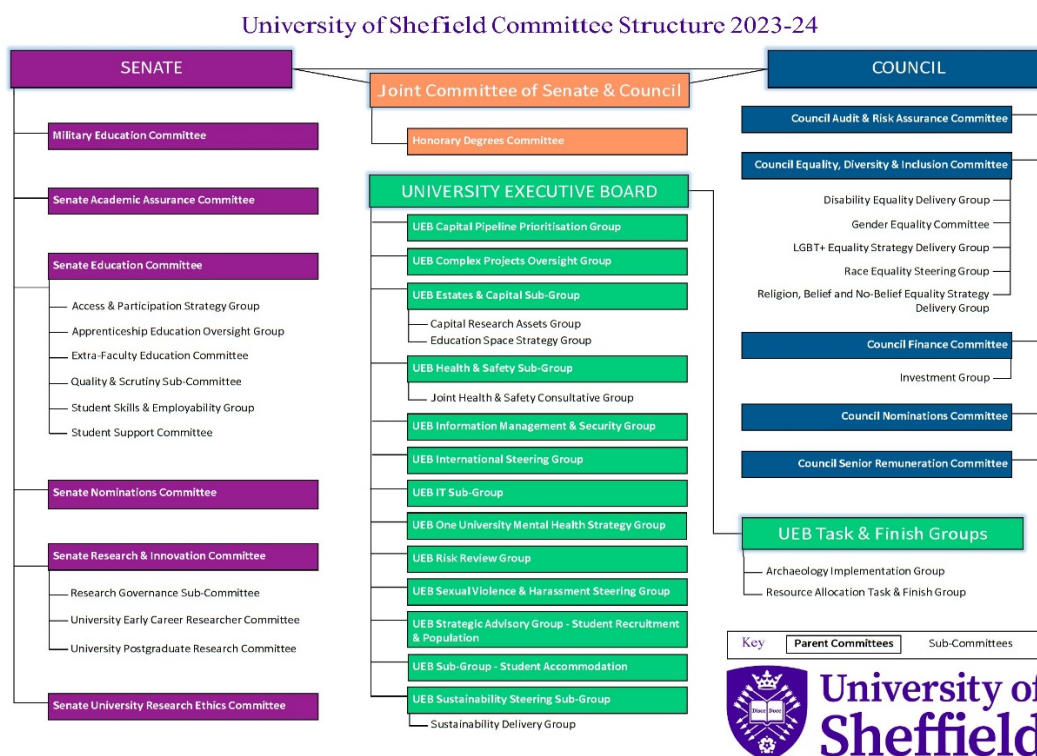
Like many other universities there is a comprehensive approach to the preparation and circulation of papers. Over time it was felt that there has been an increasing attempt to try and ensure that the length of papers become more focussed aided by cover sheets. We heard in interviews and would agree there could still be a more consistent approach to drawing out the headlines and the input sought from Council on cover sheets. Similarly (as referenced in section 3.1) there could also be a more consistent approach to referencing the strategy and KPIs throughout the papers. This would allow these key points and input from Council to be more explicitly identified.

At a time of financial pressure in higher education we know that all teams across a university come under the spotlight to deliver further efficiency. We would note that the Secretariat at Sheffield is comparably lean and are already working at capacity, indeed there were numerous examples where we heard about the team working beyond traditional working hours. Whilst no two governance teams have the same breadth of responsibilities, we would add that the team at Sheffield has a comprehensive remit and therefore is highly efficient in its output. Any reduction to the Secretariat would certainly lead to a diminution of the quality of what is provided.

Recommendation:

4. Further enhance the use of cover sheets with more consistent drawing out of the headlines, input sought from Council and the link to the strategy.

3.5 Committee structure



The overarching governance structure is clear and simple with a largely conventional split between Committees of Council, Committees of Senate and Joint Committees of Senate and Council in a way that is consistent with the respective responsibilities of these two bodies.

One area of concern which was raised internally relates to Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) and the relatively cumbersome structure that accompanies it (most notably the large number of more representational sub groups). This structure has been widely used and particularly so in the early stages of the development of governance for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

At a recent meeting (April 2024), University Council considered and approved a paper revising the governance arrangements for EDI. This paper drew on externally-commissioned reports by PwC (EDI specific) and Halpin (governance for schools and faculties) to address a recognised need for a more strategic and integrated approach to EDI governance. In particular the paper noted the need to separate the management/delivery of EDI from the associated governance and assurance responsibilities.

The proposed changes involve the establishment of a delivery focused EDI subgroup of the University Executive Board (UEB) and a refocusing of the existing EDIC to governance and assurance. This change will result in a smaller and more strategic EDIC which will have a clear remit to provide constructive challenge to UEB on its management and delivery of EDI. This is a welcome development and should ensure that the future management and governance of EDI is both more efficient and more effective.

More broadly, the evidence of the survey and the interviews shows a committee structure which is effective and indeed essential if Council is to manage the growing volume of business for which it is responsible, particularly in the areas of assurance and compliance. Interviewees were generally complimentary about the work undertaken by the sub committees and the reports provided to Council. They displayed a high level of trust in the work of their colleagues and the quality of the feedback to Council – the latter being of particular significance given the limited time for discussion of such reports.

It is also noticeable that in the survey, the question “*Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the governing body and its committees are well understood*” received a 100% agree rating.

Qualitative feedback from the survey and evidence from a subset of interviews has highlighted the presence of an informal officers’ group which meets periodically to deal with Council related business, feedback from members and prioritisation. Such groups are not unusual in the sector and help to ensure that headline issues across committees are brought together. Although it was acknowledged this was not a decision making body, and merely a means to better coordinate Council business there was a level of interest in the body from those Council members who were not members. The interview comments suggested that Council members recognised that there could be real value in a group of this nature – to support Chair and Vice-Chancellor and also to ensure responsiveness between meetings.

However there was a concern expressed in relation to transparency especially because awareness of the existence of this group was variable and its roles and responsibilities were unclear.

As one comment from the survey noted:

“There appears to be a sub section of the council that meet to discuss University matters: that is not as transparent as it could be - it has the potential to create division in the Council and therefore impact the effectiveness of the governing body as a whole.”

To help better inform those not on it and provide greater parameters around it for those who are, there is a case for setting out terms of reference and sharing with Council any headlines which emerge from meetings to ensure it has an appropriate level of visibility whilst reinforcing that the body itself is non-decision making.

Given the volume of work required of Council, the sub-committees have a key role to play and undertake significant and strategically important work providing assurance to Council across a range of areas. University staff outside of the senior team are represented on Finance Committee and Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC). EDIC is subject to reform as discussed above; Finance Committee has Senate appointed membership and Nominations Committee does not have staff representation outside of the University Executive Board.

As a consequence, staff members of Council who are not part of the Executive have limited engagement in the detailed work of Council sub committees; at the same time, there is limited opportunity for full Council to discuss the work of these sub committees and there is a risk that this makes it harder for staff members of Council fully to engage with these sub committees. Staff governors on Nominations Committee is fairly common elsewhere in the sector and could easily be adopted at Sheffield.

Some Council members mentioned in interview that in an effort to help build their engagement with the university, some new members of Council were not immediately appointed to a committee. Although the rationale for this is understandable so as to not overwhelm new members on appointment, it can mean that new members of Council feel slightly more isolated from key decision making. It may be worth assessing on a case by case basis the appetite and capability for new members of Council to join a committee more quickly.

Finally, although not a formal issue relating to governance structures and processes, it was noted by the review group that the increasingly difficult financial situation facing UK higher education is likely to increase the workload for Finance committees across the sector and that there would be benefit in the Council and the Committee considering how best in might respond, including the possibility of greater support for Finance committee and/or more frequent meetings.

Recommendations:

5. Review the role of the informal officers group and consider whether there would be benefit from constituting this group more formally and giving it visibility to others on Council and beyond.
6. Given the increasing focus across the sector on finance, remaining open to needing to schedule more frequent meetings of Finance committee in future years.
7. Consider extending the membership of Nominations committee to include a staff governor.

3.6 Induction, development and appraisal

Our review of Induction showed that over the last 2-3 years there has been a real step change in orientating and supporting Council members in their roles. Almost everyone we interviewed felt that they were valued and that their skills were appropriately used. Longer serving Council members mentioned the Vice-Chancellor, Chair and a change in leadership and focus in the Governance Office as all positively contributing to this change. We were impressed with the inclusive nature of the Council and noted that the Chair, Chairs of sub-committees and the Vice-Chancellor took a real interest in supporting new members. Newer lay members praised the quality and organisation of the induction process and the helpfulness of their long-standing colleagues.

Having said that, both the interviews and the survey evidence indicated that more needs to be done with ongoing induction, although this will in part be explained by longer-standing members of Council who when answering questions about induction will be reflecting back to a time before more recent changes have been implemented. Whilst 95% of respondents to the survey agreed that “*the induction of governing body members is relevant*” only 57% agreed it was “*periodically evaluated*” and 81% felt it was “*tailored to individual need*.”

The other area in the survey with a slightly lower score was in relation to appraisal. The question on “*reviewing governing body members’ individual contributions*” (Q16) scored 67% agreement (although this was +8% higher than the sector benchmark).

There is often an assumption that staff members, whether Senate nominees or members of the Senior Management team already ‘know’ the university and would naturally understand the processes and role of Council. This is not the case and all members need to have an induction into their role on Council and the practice of Council.

Almost all the lay members observed that understanding the academic side of the University was the most difficult area and the newer members felt on a very steep learning curve. Given the rapidly changing external environment and the increasing burden of regulation of

the academic sphere it would be helpful for Council members to be directed to data and on-line material from Advance HE, the CUC and law and audit firms. Advance HE have recently published a number of resources in relation to academic governance which may be useful to share with members of Council (<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/governance/academic-governance-higher-education>).

Council members felt that there was a real effort from the Chair to include students wherever possible in Council discussions. Both students were relatively positive about their induction but still thought that their skills and knowledge could be used to better effect.

Recommendations:

8. The Governance team designs a specific induction for staff members. This should address in detail the role of the Council and its sub-committees, the question of what the role of University members is and a discussion of what their responsibilities are in that role.
9. Induction for students is reviewed. This should include the role of student members in sub-Committees as well as in full Council.

3.7 Academic oversight and student voice

Academic oversight is a critical function of Council and is increasingly important to Council's regulatory responsibilities. Governing bodies have to ensure thorough and effective mechanisms are in place to be assured of academic quality and standards. As the regulatory environment continues to evolve, it is an ever-growing imperative that the governance processes behind this are up-to-date and aligned to ensure the correct level of scrutiny and assurance is being carried out well.

Across the review, there was a broadly positive view reflected in the results of the survey (95% agree) and in the interviews we conducted in relation to academic oversight. In the responses we received, members expressed that there had been a significant improvement in the mechanisms used to ensure academic assurance and maintaining quality and standards. They cited '*a growing evolution of the Annual Academic Assurance report and work by both the Chair of the Senate Academic Assurance committee and the governance teams to emphasise where assurances are provided both to Senate and Council*'. It was especially clear that a significant factor to the confidence for this area was the close and collaborative relationship Council enjoys with Senate. Specifically, the role of the Senate Academic Assurance committee has clearly been integral to the academic assurance process for Council, providing 'fulsome' detail and clear guidance to Council. This a strong

representation of good reporting and working with academics and Senate to ensure there is clear communication in the meeting of regulatory requirements.

Linked to this, the close engagement of Council throughout the recent departmental restructures within Sheffield has clearly aided the positive relationship between the academic and the governing body. Both lay members and Senate-nominated members remarked on how much of a positive impact it had made for the regard each body had for one another. Through this, it was clear that there is a sense a trust in the academic voice on Council, and a real engagement with lay member's questions, expertise and scrutiny.

Despite the largely positive feedback, there were some concerns raised regarding understanding of the detail and background around the academic sphere of governance. Concern was expressed about the ability for mostly lay members to understand the academic side of the governance process. Whilst they bring a rich experience from an industry perspective, there was a sense that the greater understanding of the sector, the impact of academic decisions (especially in this financially precarious time) and the importance of smaller- seeming detail, wasn't strong enough. It is true that the academics have the appropriate expertise to lead in this area, much of which is strengthened by the presence of Senate members on Council, but there is a clear need to engage lay members more to ensure they can appropriately scrutinise and engage with this work.

Therefore, we would recommend for there to be an induction session for lay members with sector, regulatory, institutional, and academic context to support foundational learning for Council. In addition, we recommend that Council continue to deliver information sessions regularly to explain the technical components of the academic oversight and assurance functions performed by Senate and reported to Council. This should cover regulatory requirements, specifically OfS' 'A' and 'B' conditions, the HE landscape, and ongoing developments in the sector.

The student voice is an important part of the function of council, ensuring that there is due consideration of the impact of Council's discussions and decisions on the student body. In the survey, there was mixed feedback about student participation. Positive feedback spoke of the development of the Students' Union's student experience reports and more student focused briefings. However, we did observe that whilst there is student representation at Council, only one member has full membership, and speaking rights, whilst the other student representative didn't feel able to contribute due to not being a full voting member of Council. In order to ensure the student voice is being utilised properly, especially with the important link to quality and standards, making clear (particularly at induction) both attending student members are able to speak and participate the same, would be beneficial in enhancing and ensuring the student voice is engaged with and valued within Council.

The implications from the recently passed Freedom of Speech Bill will undoubtedly be tested in the coming months, although as yet there are no formal circumstances where this has as yet been tested in the Courts. The strong partnership relationship between the university and students' union place Sheffield in a strong position to deal positively with any issues

should they arise. Ensuring this remains actively considered, and assessed as a risk in the wider analysis of key risks facing the university will be helpful.

Recommendations:

10. Extend the induction for new lay members and ongoing training for all governors to strengthen information about the sector, regulatory, institutional, and academic context to support foundational learning for engaging with academic oversight and assurance at Council.

11. To clarify with the second student representative at Council they are permitted to contribute and speak in Council discussions and contribute alongside the student representative that is a full member of Council.

Annex One – Summary of Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Accept/ Reject
1.	Where appropriate seek to directly reference the University Strategy and Key Performance Indicators more prominently in Council and committee papers.	
2.	Continue to focus on improving Council diversity, with a particular focus on ethnicity.	
3.	Reflect on the composition of the internal members (currently 1 Vice-Chancellor, 2 Pro-Vice-Chancellors, 3 Senate members (all academic), 1 professional services member (up to a maximum of grade 7) and 1 students' union nominee) which skews strongly toward academic over professional services members at present.	
4.	Further enhance the use of cover sheets with more consistent drawing out of the headlines, input sought from Council and the link to the strategy.	

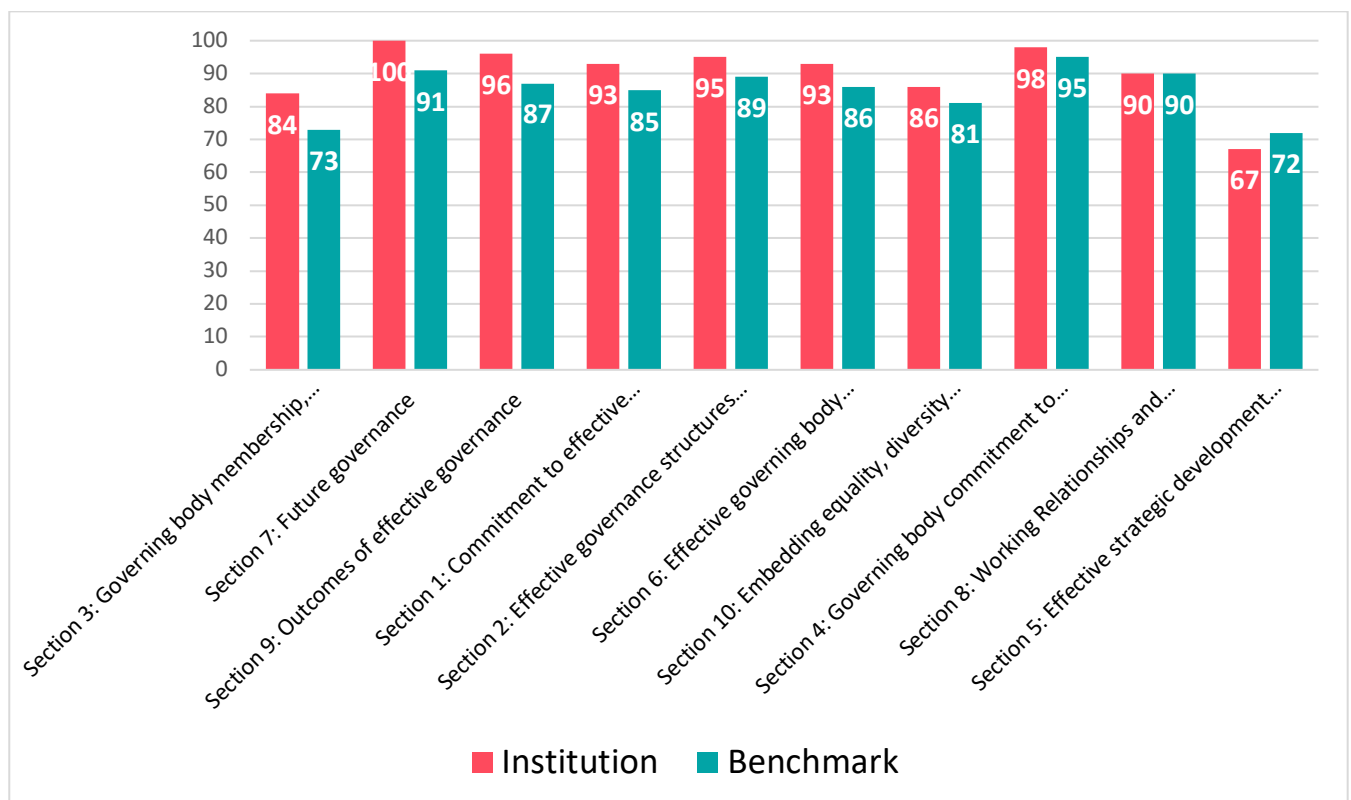
5.	Review the role of the informal officers group and consider whether there would be benefit from constituting this group more formally and giving it visibility to others on Council and beyond.	
6.	Given the increasing focus across the sector on finance, remaining open to needing to schedule more frequent meetings of Finance committee in future years.	
7.	Consider extending the membership of Nominations committee to include a staff governor.	
8.	The Governance team designs a specific induction for staff members. This should address in detail the role of the Council and its sub-committees, the question of what the role of University members is and a discussion of what their responsibilities are in that role.	
9.	Induction for students is reviewed. This should include the role of student members in sub-Committees as well as in full Council.	
10.	Extend the induction for new lay members and ongoing training for all governors to strengthen information about the sector, regulatory, institutional, and academic context to support foundational learning for engaging with academic oversight and assurance at Council.	
11.	To clarify with the second student representative at Council they are permitted to contribute and speak in Council discussions and contribute alongside the student representative that is a full member of Council.	

Annex Two – Summary of Benchmark Survey

Overall there were 56 questions (plus a further 8 demographic questions) included in the benchmark e-survey. Respondents were invited to state their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) through to 5 (strongly agree) with the option also to state “don’t know”.

Overall there were 21 responses broken down as follows (1 Chair, 9 External/Lay members, 3 Executive members, 4 Staff Members, 1 Student Member, 2 Executive Non-Member and 1 Staff Member) which is broadly representative of the Council composition.

The table below shows the summary response for Sheffield (red) against the sector benchmark (green) in each of the 10 main sections of the survey. Sheffield scores above the sector benchmark in 9 of the 10 sections and marginally below (-5%) in section 5 on effective strategic development and performance measurement.





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