The Open University

THE SENATE

Recommendations of the Academic Governance Review Group

This paper presents the recommendations of the Academic Governance Review Group.

The Senate is asked to:

a)   **comment** on the recommendations;

b)   **approve** recommendations 1-13 on the structure and operation of academic governance;

c)   **agree** that a Steering Group and Project Team is formed for the implementation of recommendations 1-13 and to undertake the further reviews outlined in Next Steps.

BACKGROUND

1   At its meeting on 5 June 2013, the Senate agreed to establish a group to review the effectiveness and performance of the Senate and its sub-structure. The scope and terms of reference of this review are provided at Appendix 1. The membership of the Review Group and Project Team is provided in Appendix 2.

2   A progress report was noted by the Senate at its meeting on 5 February 2014. A list of the activities undertaken by the appointed consultants, the Higher Education Consulting Group (HECG), during the research and consultation phase of the Review is provided in Appendix 3.

INTRODUCTION

3   This report presents recommendations from the Academic Governance Review Group. These have been developed from the key findings of the research and consultation phase of the review and the consideration of a number of options by the Review Group at its meeting on 3 March 2014.

4   An information session for members of the Senate and all those who took part in the consultations is being held on 1 April 2014. This session will present the research and consultation findings, outline the recommendations and provide attendees with the opportunity to ask questions.

5   In summary, the main finding, that provides the context for the recommendations that follow, is that whilst there is broad support for the general approach to participative academic governance a majority feel that current arrangements are complex and inefficient.

NEXT STEPS

6   Much of the detail will need to be developed in the next (implementation) phase. A Steering Group and Project Team for the implementation of these recommendations will be formed (possibly comprising members of the existing Review Group and Project Team) under the direction of the Chair of the Senate, with its first task being to agree a detailed implementation plan.

May - July 2014	Develop implementation plan
August 2014 - July 2015	Prepare for implementation
2015/16 committee year	Implement new academic governance structure

7   Progress will be reported back to the Senate at appropriate points in this implementation phase.

COMMITTEE ACTION

8   The Senate is asked to:

a)   **comment** on the recommendations;

b)   **approve** recommendations 1-13 on the structure and operation of academic governance;

c)   **agree** that a Steering Group and Project Team is formed for the implementation of Recommendations 1-13 and to undertake the further reviews outlined in Next Steps.

Belinda Tynan
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)
Academic Governance Review Group Chair

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the Review Group are set out as follows:

Part 1   Recommendations on Academic Governance Structure and Operation   Pages 3-9

Part 2   Next Steps   Pages 9-11

Part 3   Rejected recommendation   Page   11

Attachments:

S-2014-02-04 Appendix 1   Review terms of reference and scope
S-2014-02-04 Appendix 2   Review Group and Project Team membership
S-2014-02-04 Appendix 3   Activities undertaken in the research and consultation phase of the review
S-2014-02-04 Appendix 4   Academic Governance objectives, principles of operation and purposes
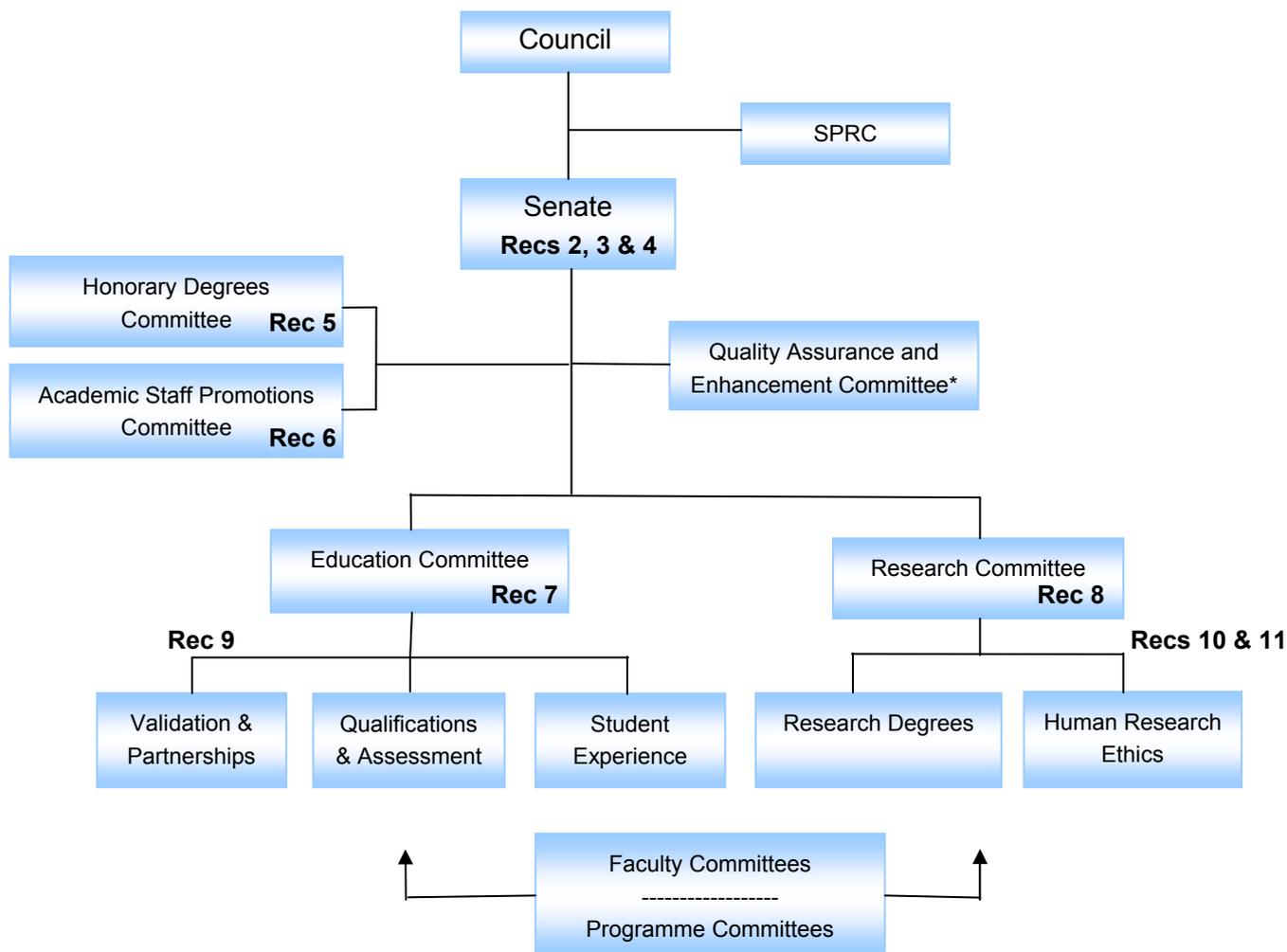
PART 1   ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND OPERATION

Recommendation 1

9   The existing Academic Governance objectives, principles of operation and purposes (Appendix 4) are retained. In the short-term, the effectiveness of the current academic governance structure is increased by 'simplifying' it as much as possible (recommendations 2 - 11).

Rationale for recommendation 1:

10   The current five tier academic governance structure – i) Senate, ii) Middle tier, iii) Middle tier sub-committees, iv) Faculty Committees, v) Programme Committees - is unnecessarily complex, makes business planning difficult and results in delays. The proposed new structure (pictured below) aims to increase simplicity and transparency as much as possible pending a decision on whether further devolution of academic governance (see Part 2 Next Steps), that could see one of these layers removed, is possible.

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                          Council
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                             |————————————— SPRC
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                          Senate
                        Recs 2, 3 & 4
    Honorary Degrees |
    Committee   Rec 5 |
                      |——————          Quality Assurance and
    Academic Staff Promotions          Enhancement Committee*
    Committee   Rec 6 |
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          ———————————————————————————————————————
          |                                       |
    Education Committee                    Research Committee
              Rec 7                                 Rec 8
  Rec 9                                                    Recs 10 & 11
   |        |          |                    |              |
Validation &  Qualifications  Student    Research Degrees   Human Research
Partnerships  & Assessment   Experience                        Ethics

                  Faculty Committees
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                  Programme Committees
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THE SENATE

Recommendation 2

11   Retain the current Senate with the same responsibilities and same number of meetings, but with moderate changes to its way of working (see Part 2 Next Steps).

Rationale for recommendation 2:

12   The Review Group concluded that other options in relation to the Senate, such as a reduction in its terms of reference or its size, were unlikely to obtain the support of the Senate. However, changes to its ways of working as outlined in Part 2 Next Steps would address some of the issues about its effectiveness raised in consultation and allow it to spend more time on its key deliberative function.

Recommendation 3

13   Strengthen the role of the Senate in providing assurance about academic governance.

Rationale for recommendation 3:

14   Effective academic governance needs to be demonstrated in order to meet a range of external legal and regulatory requirements, and to provide transparency in the face of increasing pressures, including from students and the media, in relation to the student experience and value for money. Currently, there are a number of individual processes in place to provide assurance to the Senate - and therefore to the Council - on academic governance. Responsibility for its active oversight should be allocated to a single committee in the new structure delivering an integrated system for providing overall assurance on academic governance. Consideration of where this responsibility should sit will be determined during implementation.

Recommendation 4

15   The following aspects of membership are revised:

   a)   that Associate Lecturer (AL) members of the Senate are elected by the full membership of the faculties and that each faculty to be given an additional membership place to accommodate this;

   b)   that the quorum for Senate should be increased to 50%+1, representing a majority of those eligible to attend.

Rationale for recommendation 4:

16   a)   this follows from recent policy changes, most lately the implementation of Student Support Teams, which have strengthened the relationship between ALs and their faculty. It also supports compliance with the University's Code of Practice for University Elections and Committee Procedure which requires members to "*exercise their responsibilities in a corporate manner with decisions taken   collectively in the interests of the institution as a whole*";

   b)   the current quorum of 40% was proposed in the 2005 Academic Governance Review. The Review Group feels this is too low to assure good governance and the increase provides a quorum that is the majority of members. The quorum for sub-structure committees will be considered in implementation.

THE SENATE SUB-STRUCTURE

Recommendation 5

17   The Honorary Degrees Committee is retained, but membership is changed so that one of the five Senate members is also a member of the Council.
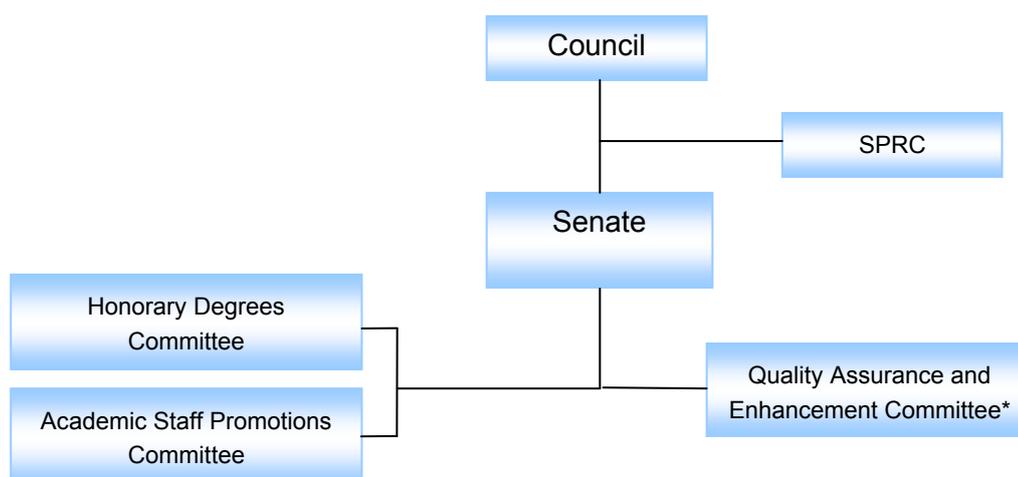
Rationale for recommendation 5:

18   Honorary Degrees Committees' are standard bodies in many senates of pre-1992 universities and formally enable the academic body to confirm such awards. The existing terms of reference are appropriate and the committee appropriately small, however the Vice-Chancellor is currently the only member who is also a member of the Council. This change in membership will help ensure that recommendations can be seen to have the confidence of the Council.

Recommendation 6

19   A single committee is introduced in the area of academic staff promotions.

Rationale for recommendation 6:

20   A single promotions committee is consistent with recommendation 1 on the simplification of the governance structure. Processes in this area have to comply with a range of legal and regulatory good practice and with internal policy, procedure and standards. Also, as all committee members are required to take decisions in the interest of the institution as a whole, it is felt that only one body may be needed. Appeals could be heard by a senior member of the committee who is not present for the determination of individual cases and a recommendation referred back to the Committee for approval. The detail will need to be considered in implementation, but with the work on a new scheme for academic and research staff promotion now is an opportune time to review current arrangements.

Middle Tier

Recommendation 7

21   A new single committee is created to cover the responsibilities of the current Curriculum and Validation Committee (CVC) and Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee (LTSSC).
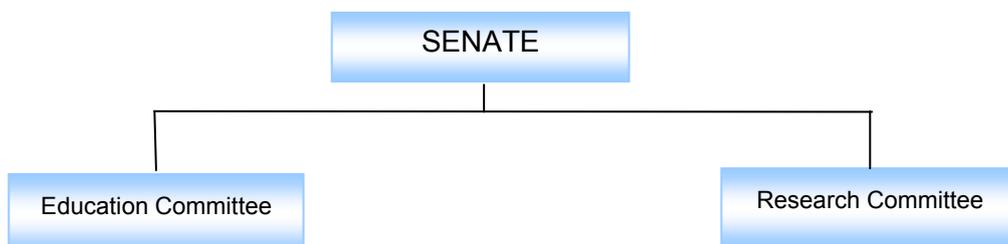
Rationale for recommendation7:

22   A single committee covering the responsibilities of CVC and LTSSC would provide clear and integrated accountability and ensure greater coherence in the governance of curriculum, learning, teaching and the student experience. Its membership should achieve a balance of expertise and perspective, whilst remaining as small as possible, in order to command the confidence of the Senate and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE).

23   For the new single Education Committee to work, the essential accompanying components are the rationalisation of the current sub-structures and a significant devolution of responsibility to named responsible individuals (with delegated authority and appropriate accountability) – see recommendation 9 below. Detail on its terms of reference, its membership, who should chair it and the name of the committee would be a matter for discussion in implementation; provisionally it is referred to as the Education Committee.

Recommendation 8

24   Research Committee is retained, but its role and membership is clarified.
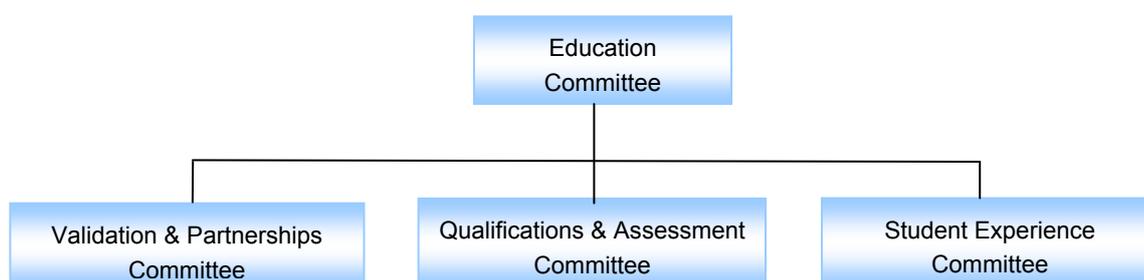
Rationale for recommendation 8:

25   The role of the Research Committee is well established and was little changed in the 2005 Academic Governance Review. There was no significant sense that major change was required in consultation. However, in response to comments that were made regarding role and membership, the Review Group recommend that consideration is given to whether it exists to represent the various interest groups involved in research, who are primarily its members, or whether it is to take a strategic institutional view as required by its terms of reference.

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            │ Committee      │        │ Committee        │
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MIDDLE TIER SUBSTRUCTURE

Recommendation 9

26   Three sub-committees to the Education Committee are created for:

   a) Validation and Partnerships (formed by merging the current Validation Committee and the Curriculum Partnerships Committee)

   b) Qualifications and Assessment (formed by merging the Qualifications Committee, the Vocational Qualifications Committee, and the Assessment Policy Committee)

   c) Student Experience (based on the current Student Experience Advisory Group).
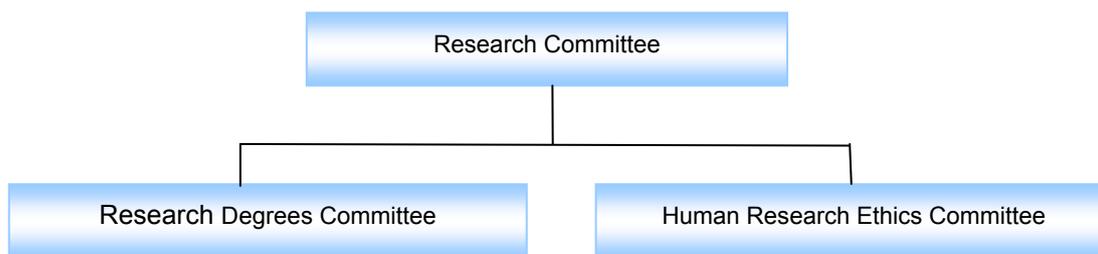

Rationale for recommendation 9:

27   As noted above, rationalisation of the sub-structure and devolution to management action are needed to ensure that the new Education committee (recommendation 7) focuses its attention on significant issues and is freed of much of the operational detail of academic administration which characterises current practice. Detail on terms of reference and membership for these new sub-committees will be considered in implementation.

28   The Review Group notes that there would also need to be clarity about the roles of any management advisory groups in this area and careful liaison with the University Governance Team. Consideration should also be given to incorporating the current Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel into the new Qualifications and Assessment Committee. The work here is almost entirely administrative action, but ratification of results by a Senate committee is required.

Recommendation 10

29   Two sub-committees of the Research Committee - Research Degrees and Human Research Ethics – continue.

Recommendation 11

30   Consideration is given to whether the Master of Research Award Board and the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee are needed.

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│ Research Degrees   │  │ Human Research Ethics      │
│ Committee          │  │ Committee                  │
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Rationale for recommendations 10 and 11:

31   The two research sub-committees it is recommended are retained have distinct roles. The other two sub-committees are primarily concerned with routine assessment and award approvals and meet rarely, and in both cases the chairs have authority to act on their behalf. With enhanced management and administrative action neither may be needed.

Recommendation 12

32   Given the substantial changes proposed to the academic governance structure, the overall administration of governance is reviewed as part of the implementation of new arrangements.

33   Specifically:

   a)   the Senate's schedule of delegation be updated as required to define revised committee responsibilities and those of relevant academic managers;

   b)   that the role of the committee secretary be reviewed and consistently applied with current guidance on committee practice updated;

   c)   that there be a greater focus and co-ordination on managing the business cycle for all committees;

   d)   that effective communication about the operation of governance generally is ensured – processes are transparent and outcomes communicated as widely as is appropriate.

Rationale for recommendation 12:

34   A revised schedule of delegation will provide the formal starting point for avoiding ambiguity in the operation of a revised academic governance structure.

35   In addition, broadly standard expectations need to be set about how committees in the University work. Currently responsibility is divided between the small central Governance Team and numerous others who deal with committee support as part of their main jobs, and this inevitably leads to inconsistency. The role of the committee secretary is not just that of relatively passive administrator and minute taker, but a much more proactive role in ensuring (with the chair) that a committee works effectively with similarities to that of a project manager. Therefore secretaries should be trained and empowered and unequivocally responsible for a wide range of processes, from ensuring that inappropriate papers do not go to committees, through to following up decisions and ensuring that relevant actions are taken (including between meetings), and that decisions are speedily communicated to those who need to know.

36   The traditional three meetings a year committee cycle needs to be reviewed so that the number of committee meetings fit the business required, rather than the timetable being an almost artificial constraint (electronic approval of routine items is to be considered in implementation as outlined in Part 2 Next Steps below). Current business planning should also be extended to all committees.

Recommendation 13

37   Training and developmental support is introduced for committee chairs.

Rationale for recommendation 13:

38   In implementing the structural changes to academic governance, chairs of committees need to understand clearly their role and undertake it in broadly consistent ways across the University. It would also be beneficial to introduce training and developmental support when new people are called upon to perform that role.

PART 2   NEXT STEPS

39   Much of the detail to implement the recommendations above needs to be developed. The Steering Group and Project Team formed to undertake this task will also look at the following areas – exploring devolution, allocating responsibility for the oversight of academic governance and enhancing committee efficiency.

Exploring devolution

40   Simplifying the academic governance structure further than is proposed in recommendations 1-11 above raises important issues about the assurance required by the Senate that faculties can undertake the work required. It is noted by the Review Group that there are too many variations in practice at faculty and programme level for devolution to work effectively in the immediate short-term. However, if this can be resolved then a planned move towards greater devolution in the medium to long-term is desirable.

41   Therefore, the Steering Group and Project Team formed to undertake implementation will be asked to explore further devolution of academic governance processes in the future and particularly whether the following options be pursued:

   a)   removal of sub-committees from middle tier committees and responsibility devolved to faculties and/or programme committees

   b)   rationalising the relationship between faculty and programme committees, and moving to a devolved single tier arrangement.

42   A working group will be established to consider the level of standardisation of governance processes that would be needed at faculty level, to clarify distinctions between academic governance and academic management, and to clarify the role and membership of faculty level governance in order to be able to provide assurance to the Senate and the Council that further devolution is achievable.

Oversight of Academic Governance*

43   In implementing recommendation 3, on strengthening the role of the Senate in providing assurance on academic governance, it is proposed that consideration is given to whether this responsibility is allocated to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. Clarification of responsibility for quality assurance and quality enhancement would need to be explored as part of a review of the terms of reference and membership.

Enhancing efficiency

44   It is proposed that the efficiency of the way the Senate conducts business be enhanced through:

    a)   piloting and evaluating an amendment of the current system of starring items to involve electronic queries and approval;

    b)   structuring the Chairs report to include items of strategic importance to the Senate;

    c)   structuring items for discussion against a small number of regular agenda headings:

        i.   a standing report from the committee responsible for the active oversight of academic governance (see recommendation 3 above);

        ii.   an item which regularly monitors academic performance and key academic risks;

        iii.   academic matters for discussion and decision (from either middle tier committees, the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC) or the Chair of the Senate);

        iv.   an item on academic strategy or innovation about which the Senate should express a view and advise the SPRC.

45   Making the Senate more effective will allow it to spend more time on its key deliberative function whilst assuring academic governance processes. The proposed efficiency changes are also consistent with the academic governance principles of operation (Appendix 4) that decisions be taken at the lowest level in the structure and will free up the time currently taken in the meeting by the scrutiny of a large number of items that the Senate needs to formally approve, without reducing oversight.

Relationship with University projects

46   The University's project management methodology impacts on governance processes in a number of ways. Case studies undertaken by the consultants exploring the relation between projects and governance revealed that there had been instances where there had been a lack of clarity at an operational level about the role of programme or project steering groups and the need for governance approval - in practice what does or does not need to be referred to a governance committee and when. In part this may be because of the complexity of the current governance structure, but it also reflects the tensions created by the need for programmes and projects to work to defined timescales and the timetabling of committee meetings.

47   The Review Group agreed with the findings of the consultants that there is a need to ensure that programme and project plans include key dates and milestones for governance approvals and that staff working on programmes and projects understand the difference between management and governance with clear distinctions maintained between approvals (governance function), implementation (management function) and consultation (clearly distinguished from governance). These findings will be referred to the Portfolio Office in the Strategy Unit.

PART 3   REJECTED RECOMMENDATION

48   The Review Group **rejected** the following recommendation relating to membership:

There is a change in the current arrangements to reduce the numbers of non-academic members of the Senate.

Rationale for rejecting this recommendation:

49   Academic-related staff are deeply interwoven into the academic life of the University and in many instances are student-facing. Frequently, and more so compared to their academic counterparts and their equivalents across the sector, academic-related staff are on the front-line and therefore need to be represented on the Senate.

ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SCOPE

1   The key term of reference for the Academic Governance Review will be to review the effectiveness and performance of the Senate and its sub-structure.

2   It will also review the objectives, principles and the statement of purposes of academic governance agreed by the 2005 review.

3   The scope of the task will include key elements outlined below:

      a)   function, role and responsibilities of the Senate, the committees in its sub-structure including the central academic units (CAUs) committees and programme committees;

      b)   Size, nature and composition of the membership of the Senate and the committees in the Senate sub-structure;

      c)   effectiveness of meetings, quorums, member contributions, decision making – i.e. value added;

      d)   sub-structure committees and relationship to the Senate; schedule of delegation;

      e)   election/appointment/co-option of all categories of members, including election timetable, terms of office, the role of the Senate Membership Panel (SMP);

      f)   operation and conduct of business, including: business cycle/committee timetable, quality and provision of information (papers), communication of decisions, use of technology;

      g)   rationale for and role of advisory groups;

      h)   relationship with the Council and the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC);

      i)   operation of annual effectiveness reviews;

      j)   induction, support and training of members, committee secretaries and chairs.

4   Out of scope are the Council and its committees including the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee, the Consultative structure and the Management structure.

Academic Governance Review Group

Belinda Tynan, Chair, PVC Learning and Teaching
Anne De Roeck, Dean and Director of Studies, MCT
Joyce Fortune, Professor of Technology Management, MCT
Monica Grady, Professor of Planetary Sciences, Science
Michael Street, Senior Faculty Administrator, Science
Rob Humphreys, Director, The OU in Wales

Fraser Woodburn, In attendance, University Secretary
Dawn Turpin, In attendance, Head of Governance
Alexis Peters, In attendance, Secretary to the Review Group and Project Manager

**Governance
The Senate**

Project Steering Group

Belinda Tynan, Chair, PVC L&T
Fraser Woodburn, University Secretary
Dawn Turpin, Head of Governance
Alexis Peters, Project Manager

Project Team

Rachel Cragg, Director of Academic Planning and Resources, Office of the PVC Academic

Anita Jarvis, Senior Manager, Learning and Teaching, Office of the PVC Learning and Teaching

Alexis Peters, Senior Manager, Planning and Resources, University Secretary's Office [Project Manager and Secretary to the Review Group]

Julie Tayler, Senior Manager, Governance Team, University Secretary's Office

Dawn Turpin, Head of Governance, University Secretary's Office

Jane Wardale, Senior Manager, Research, Governance and Quality.

External consultants
The Higher Education Consulting Group

Note: The Director, Students attended the Review Group in March 2014 in place of the University Secretary.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN IN THE RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PHASE

Research

a) A review of current national developments in higher education (HE) governance.

b) A review of academic governance in selected other higher education institutions (HEIs).

c) A summary of previous Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA) reports on the OU.

d) A summary of the outcomes of previous reviews of academic governance at the OU, most notably the 2005 review which proposed changes to the size and membership of the Senate and the main committees reporting to it.

e) A mapping exercise of the formal and main informal committees with responsibility for aspects of academic governance.

f) Undertaking a small number of case studies agreed with the Review Group to examine some key aspects of the practice of academic governance across the OU.

Consultation

g) A wide range of interviews with relevant members of the University and key stakeholder groups.

h) Attending meetings of the Senate and a sample of the main sub-committees to explore the collective views of members on effectiveness.

i) Undertaking more detailed discussions in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Mathematics, Computing and Technology to explore governance issues involving faculty and programme committees.

j) Providing an opportunity for all members of staff to send a confidential email response on matters relevant to the Review.

ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE OBJECTIVES, PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION AND PURPOSES

Objectives

1	To ensure effective decision-making by drawing on the distributed knowledge of the institution and its environment held by members of the University.

2	To ensure that decisions are made by those with relevant expertise.

3	To provide a mechanism for the resolution of differences over key strategy and policy issues.

4	To contribute to a collective sense of identity and commitment across the institution.

5	To establish and maintain a framework within which those with executive responsibility can act quickly, effectively and with due accountability.

Principles of operation

1	Decisions should be taken with proper concern for the University's reputation and standards, for the principles of academic freedom, for relevant context and available resources.

2	Decisions should be taken at the lowest appropriate level in the structure.

3	Consultation about major decisions should be managed effectively.

4	Composition of governance bodies should reflect the diversity of the University community.

5	Information about the constitution and regular business of academic governance should be readily accessible.

Purposes

1	To regulate the University's programmes of study, admissions, research, teaching, and awards.

2	To assure quality and standards, including the conduct or commissioning of performance reviews and audits.

3	To determine academic strategy, policy, plans and priorities which will further the objects of the University.

4	To monitor, steer and review actions taken in accordance with the preceding Purpose, by officeholders and management teams.

5	To consider and decide cases which fall outside agreed frameworks.

6	To ensure that relevant appointments have been made according to due process, and to place them on the public record.