

THE SENATE

Minutes

This paper details the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of Senate held on Wednesday 12 October 2022 at 1.30pm via Teams.

Senate approved these Minutes as a correct record of the meeting on 1 February 2023.

Dave Hall
University Secretary

Becky Sexton
Working Secretary to the Committee
Email: becky.sexton@open.ac.uk
Tel: 01908 653351

Attachments

S-2022-04-M Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 12 October 2022

THE SENATE

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 12 October 2022 via Teams.

PRESENT:

Professor Tim Blackman	Vice-Chancellor
Professor Josie Fraser	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Dr Liz Marr	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students)
Professor Kevin Shakesheff	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship)
Professor Ian Fribbance	Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Devendra Kodwani	Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Law
Professor Fary Cachelin	Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies
Professor Denise Whitelock	Director, Institute of Educational Technology
Gary Elliot-Cirigottis	Director of Library Services
Dr Nicholas Barratt	Director, Learner and Discovery Services

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Dr William Brown	Dr Richard Marsden
Dr Eleni Andreouli	Dr Andrew Griffiths
Dr Emma Barker	Professor John Wolffe
Dr Donna Loftus	Dr Lystra Hagley-Dickinson
Tony Murphy	Dr Jon Pike
Professor David Johnson	

Faculty of Business & Law (FBL)

Carol Howells	Ash Odera
Professor Caroline Clarke	Claire Maguire
Dr Olga Jurasz	

Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Dr Fiona Moorman	Dr Leonor Barroca
Dr Magnus Ramage	Dr Hayley Ryder
Dr Kaustubh Adhikari	Dr James Hague
Dr Claire Kotecki	Professor Richard Holliman
Dr Andy Hollyhead	Donald Edwards
Dr James Bruce	Jill Shaw
Dr Susanne P Schwenzer	Professor Sally Jordan
Frances Chetwynd	

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Dr Severine Hubscher-Davidson	Dr Mark Addis
Dr Carol Azumah Dennis	Dr Elodie Vialleton
Professor Joan Simons	Professor Jonathan Rix
Bärbel Brash	Judy Chandler
Dr Gillian Ferguson	Steph Doehler
Dr Sharon Mallon	Paulette Johnson

Institute of Education Technology (WELS)

Professor Eileen Scanlon	Professor Rebecca Ferguson
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Associate Lecturers

Dr Catherine Halliwell	Rob Parker
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Mary Shek
Dr Sue McKeogh

Mike Hay
Dr Tony Cox

Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Margaret Greenaway
Nigel Patterson
Gareth Jones

Laura Marulanda-Carter
Dr Barbara Tarling

Academic-related Staff

Rukhsana Malik
Julie Gowen
Dr Hossam Kassem
Dr Caitlin Adams
Caitlin Harvey
Paris Graham
Kit Power

Elaine Walker
Jane Ball
Jonathan Nimmo
Dr Franziska Florack
Dr Rachel Leslie
Ellen Cocking
Paul Farrington

Co-opted members

Susan Stewart
Louise Casella

John D'Arcy OBE
Professor Marcia Wilson

In attendance

Hâf Merrifield, Director of Strategy
Dr Camilla Briault, Assistant Director,
Governance
Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer
Anna Barber, Director, Academic
Donna Wright, Senior Manager, Quality
Assurance

Dave Hall, University Secretary
Jhumar Johnson, Director of Vice-Chancellor's
Office
Sue Thomas, Senior Manager, Governance
Jacky Hinton, Director of Apprenticeships
Jean McAvoy, Head of School Psychology
and Counselling

Council members

Andrew Dickinson
Malcolm Sweeting
Sas Amoah

Julia Goodfellow
Paul Kett

Observing

Maria Kantirou (Head of Academic Strategy
and Planning)

APOLOGIES:

Professor Elaine Moohan
Dr Helen Fraser
Dr Kambiz Saber-Sheikh
Dr Thomas Martin

Dr Christopher Turner
Dr Jon Golding
Professor Monica Grady
Professor Nicholas Braithwaite

Claire Wallace
Dr Maria Aristeidou
Dr Gillian Jack

1 WELCOME

- 1.1 The Vice-Chancellor welcomed new members of Senate to their first meeting. He also welcomed members of Council who were attending the meeting.
- 1.2 The Pro-Chancellor thanked Senate for the opportunity to attend the meeting and in particular hear the discussion of the Annual Quality Report.
- 1.3 A change to the order of the agenda was announced:
A4 Report from Chair
B1 Student recruitment update
C2 Finance report
Questions on all the three reports would be taken after item C2

2 REMINDER OF THE SENATE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE S-2022-04-01

As this was Senate's first meeting of the academic year, members were reminded of the Statement of Purpose and Terms of Reference for the Senate and confirmed they had read the Code of Conduct and the Conflict of Interest Policies. The Vice-Chancellor reminded Senate of its important advisory role and the importance of respectful and constructive debate.

3 MINUTES S-2022-03-M

Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2022 subject to the following amendment:

Minute 7.1: Academic Governance Review

To read - additional text in italics:

Senate considered the final proposals to come out of the Academic Governance Review (AGR) recommendations. Senate discussed the interface between the two Academic Committees in each Faculty (Learning, Teaching & Assessment and Research), noting that there would be points of contact and a small core of common membership between the committees. *However a member was concerned that the overlap might not be sufficient to give effective shared oversight of Faculty academic activity in its entirety.*

4 MATTERS ARISING S-2022-04-02

Senate **noted** the responses to the matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2022.

5 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Academic Quality Report

5.1 The report this year was compiled against the context of change to the regulatory environment in England with publication of revised Office for Students (OfS) 'B' conditions of registration for quality and standards and a new version of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Black History Month

5.2 The central theme for 2022 was "Time for Change: Actions Not Words" with a focus on progress, achievement and change. The EDI Plan, which was on the agenda, was a significant part of that work. The success of black students and staff was very important to the University and the Vice-Chancellor encouraged Senate members to complete the Union Black course; a one-hour version had now been launched to enable as wide an uptake as possible.

Policy environment

5.3 Work continued across all four nations to ensure all OU students received the same experiences and opportunities whatever nation they lived in, but also recognising specific national needs and expectations. In Northern Ireland, the University had received £1.7 million to support the Skill Up initiative. Engagement continued in England with the Department for Education Policy Reform Team particularly in developing alignment with Further Education (FE) colleges to offer opportunities to offer top up qualifications to Higher National Diplomas and Certificates. The University was leading on PolicyWISE, brokering policy exchange discussions between the four UK nations and the Republic of

Ireland. This work had received a £1 million donation from David Dangoor, a long-time supporter of the OU and of its role in society.

Awards

- 5.4 Over £2.5m of grant income had been received by the University recently for research in a range of subjects. Congratulations were also recorded to:
- OU in Wales for winning the FairPlay Employer award at Womenspire 2022.
 - Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) for £750,000 from the Wolfson Foundation for the Wolfson Analytical Centre, for a project on environmental boundaries of life in the solar system.
 - Professor Monica Grady for receiving the Michael Faraday award from the Royal Society, as recognition for her work on public engagement with science,
 - Professor Denise Whitelock for being elected a Fellow, Academy of Social Sciences.

Scholarships and hardship funds

- 5.5 The OU's student scholarships, funded entirely from donations raised by the Development Office, continued to grow and two new programmes have been added this year for black students and forced migrants living in the UK. In the light of the impact of the cost of living crisis on students, the University was also looking at increasing hardship funds.

Financial outlook

- 5.6 The University was facing an uncertain financial climate. Although reserves were strong, a growing gap was expected between income and operating costs and there would be a deficit this year that would increase in the following years if left unaddressed. Student recruitment had increased in 2020/21 but this had now fallen back to pre-pandemic levels and was being impacted by the current cost of living crisis. Total funding received for each student (unit of resource) was falling in real terms and not keeping pace with costs. Uncertainty also existed over the effects of the projected demographic shrinkage in adult age groups and the smaller addressable market created by more people having achieved degrees elsewhere after school or college. Operating costs had risen significantly, mainly due to increased staffing to support the recent growth in student numbers, and this was now at a level that would be hard to sustain.
- 5.7 The challenge for the University, in the coming two to three years, would be to restore the operating balance between income and expenditure but not compromise its mission or stifle future opportunities to grow. The Strategy Office and Finance and Business Services were working on high-level options for cost reductions and achieving new net income. Measures would be introduced this year to control spending and limit expenditure and others would be developed through a revised unit business planning process for 2022/23 and the following two years, commencing in November 2022.
- 5.8 Finance Committee and Council were responsible for financial strategy and would be considering the position at their forthcoming meetings in November 2022. A briefing for Senate would be arranged for the end of November to provide further information. As many of the questions submitted for the Town Hall session scheduled for 18 October 2022 cannot be answered fully until data analysis and forecasts were completed and scrutinised through the University's governance process, the session would be rescheduled to two new sessions at the end of November and early December.
- 5.9 The external environment had also made it extremely challenging for FutureLearn. The Chief Financial Officer would update Senate in his report.

6 UPDATE ON STUDENT RECRUITMENT

The Director, Strategy explained in a presentation that:

- a) Both Core Undergraduate and Postgraduate student populations were forecast to decline in 2022/23
- b) Student numbers had risen during 2020/21 but it was becoming apparent that this was due to students bringing forward plans to study and not new study. Research was now indicating that the cost of living crisis was having an impact on time available for study.

7 FINANCE UPDATE

7.1 The Chief Financial Officer explained in a presentation that:

- a) The accounts for 2021/22 were currently being prepared but it was anticipated that the operating position would show a positive variance to plan. Higher grant income than expected had been received and expenditure was lower than forecast. However the accounting position would show an adverse variance due to losses on long term equity investments. The accounting deficit including the University's share of the USS pension deficit would be £232.1m.
- b) An operating deficit had been set at £10.4m for 2022/23 but given the student number trend, the position for 2022/23 would be challenging with pay inflation higher than fee inflation. The latest operating deficit was forecast at £27.7m. Short term measures to mitigate the adverse movement including reductions to the University's cost base would be required and detailed planning for 2023/24 and beyond had commenced.
- c) The University had announced its intention to find alternative investment or a buyer for its 50% share in FutureLearn. A range of options was being considered and it was hoped a decision would be taken within six weeks.

7.2 Reflecting on the three previous reports, Senate:

- a) Emphasised the importance of the University learning from its experiences with FutureLearn. The decision to withdraw from the company was supported.
- b) Asked about the risks associated with not finding a suitable buyer for FutureLearn in the current economic climate including implications for the core activities of the University.
- c) Noted that significant staff time had been invested in FutureLearn which may not have been captured by existing workload models.
- d) Sought clarification on the plans to return the University to a surplus position after three years. There was concern that short term cost cutting measures, such as a staff voluntary severance scheme, would not consider the implications on staff and their workload. Clarification was sought as to whether a voluntary severance scheme would be introduced and what areas of work might stop if staff numbers were reduced. Members also asked what action was being taken with Universities UK (UUK) to reduce contributions and restore benefits to members of the USS Pension Scheme following a recent analysis that these could be restored at no extra cost and leave the scheme in surplus.

- e) Considered that an open and wide-ranging debate was required on the future size and purpose of the University Campus. There was concern that plans to close buildings over the winter would have an adverse impact on efforts to develop new ways of working.

7.3 The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer:

- a) Reminded Senate that over the ten years since FutureLearn was launched over 20 million learners had benefitted from the courses offered. Lessons would be reflected upon, and Senate would be included in that process. The University, as set out in its strategy, remained committed to diversifying its options for students including short courses. The University had established a strong capability for producing short course content and would continue to do so, whilst exploring alternative platforms for them.
- b) Assured the Senate that every effort was made to account for staff workloads. Although some short term measures may be necessary this financial year, the intention was to consider cost reduction carefully as part of longer term planning. Further details would be made available to the Senate at the briefing session. A variety of options would be considered in respect of reducing staff numbers and it was hoped to avoid compulsory redundancies. The University intended to work with UUK in respect of any future changes to the USS Pension Scheme.
- c) Explained that excluding the University's provision adjustment of the USS deficit, the accounting deficit for 2021/22 was within a tolerable range. However, looking ahead to 2023/23 and beyond, the situation was showing a much more significant downturn. Additional resources had been deployed to support the growth in student numbers during the pandemic period but as that growth had not been sustained, it would be necessary to reduce these. A three year window was anticipated to see the effects of this but it was acknowledged it might take longer.
- d) Informed Senate that alongside the Ways of Working project, work was ongoing on the future of the University's estate and would be reported in due course. The winter building closures announced would save energy, but these decisions were separate from longer term estate planning.

7.4 Senate **noted** the report.

8 STUDENT OUTCOMES PROGRAMME

S-2022-04-04

8.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) informed Senate that:

- a) The new student outcomes thresholds introduced by the OfS covered the proportion of students who continued their studies, completed a qualification, and progressed to graduate employment or further study, with student outcomes data covering a variety of splits including qualification type, student characteristics and subject level. The OfS had published the data along with individual providers' performance against the thresholds and would use it to identify providers for further assessment.
- b) The University had launched the Student Outcomes Programme to increase focus on improving student outcomes, by building on current activities and evaluating them for effectiveness. The Programme would also ensure the University was prepared for any potential further assessment by the OfS.

8.2 Senate:

- a) Supported the work of the Programme and acknowledged close parallels between this work and the work related to the University's Access and Participation Plan (APP). However a clearer focus was required in the Programme on issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) especially relating to retention and progression.
- b) Requested that data analytics be expanded to provide greater understanding of the reasons why students withdrew from studying. This could help develop personalised actions to prevent such withdrawals. It would also be helpful to have more data on milestone qualifications to see if their award could be motivational for students.
- c) Suggested that associate lecturers (ALs) who had extensive expertise in supporting students to succeed could help to support the Programme.
- d) Considered that offering a wider range of start dates for modules could help with retention as students could avoid a long wait before starting their next modules
- e) Sought clarification as to how the proposed changes from the Programme would be communicated, for example, via a compulsory induction programme
- f) Asked whether any further information was available on the reference in the Annual Quality Report to long standing student vacancies on Boards of Studies (BoS).

8.2 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students):

- a) Confirmed that there was a strong focus within the Programme's work on EDI issues with close links to the ambitions of the APP.
- b) Offered to discuss further the opportunities for ALs to support the Programme outside of the meeting. The interface between ALs and student advisors would also be examined.
- c) Explained that it was challenging to ascertain the background to withdrawals as students did not always give reasons. Further work would be undertaken in this area.
- d) Reported that automatic award of milestone qualifications had started, and early feedback had been very positive. Work had commenced on awarding qualifications to previous students who had not completed a degree but had gained sufficient credit for an award. Senate would be updated on this work.
- e) Agreed to consider how changes would be communicated and offered to meet with representatives of the OU Students Association to discuss further.
- f) Confirmed that a new appointment process for student representatives to non-governance appointments (steering groups, working groups etc) had been set up between the OU Students Association and Faculties.

8.3 The Senate **noted** the report.

9 ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT

S-2022-04-05

9.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC-S) and Dean, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) explained that:

- a) It had become evident during the compilation of the report that the University's quality assessment processes were complex. A comprehensive review had started, focussing on identifying greater efficiency and effectiveness through more streamlined and risk-based processes and any recommendations would be presented to Senate's subcommittees in due course.
- b) Further work was required in relation to EDI, but progress was evident. An Access and Participation Plan (APP) was in place, and a new inclusive curriculum tool had been devised which would be used in all new modules. There was also evidence of a reduction of awarding gaps by 3%. Further analysis of data relating to academic misconduct cases would be carried out to identify variations and potential inequalities.
- c) The quality assurance of apprenticeships was challenging due to multiple stakeholders being involved. Work to mitigate risks and improve Qualification Achievement Rates (QAR) was ongoing and being overseen by the Apprenticeship Steering Group.

9.2 Senate:

- a) Emphasised the need to integrate apprenticeships into standard quality assurance and governance processes
- b) Requested that the Report in future include more data on recruitment, retention, achievement and diversity for apprenticeships.
- c) Noted the increasing demands on staff time in resolving academic misconduct cases to avoid further backlogs. It would also be helpful to receive a detailed breakdown of cases by protected characteristics.
- d) Considered that the continuation of remote/online activities (eg, exams and day schools) introduced during the pandemic in the post-pandemic environment without scrutiny and discussion by Senate might be an omission from the report.
- e) Commented that there was a broad underlying positive trend in UG Pass rates and return rates and suggested focus should be on the actions the University did well which contributed to this trend.
- f) Noted that students sought help from a variety of informal sources such as social media support groups. The University's own sources of support should be more engaging to impact positively on undergraduate pass rates.
- g) Questioned how formalising monitoring duties as an expected part of the AL role would enhance quality and encourage sharing of best practice. The remit and responsibilities of monitors would need to be clearly established, with appropriate training. Poorly contextualised monitoring could impact negatively on the staff receiving feedback and on the student experience.

9.3 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC-S) responded that:

- a) A breakdown of the demographic data for apprenticeships would be included in future reports.
- b) Additional resources had been dedicated to handling academic misconduct cases in the short term. The long term objective was to reduce the number of cases through improved guidance for students, more proportionate penalties and a focus on authentic assessment.

- c) The University was continuing to learn from its experiences during the pandemic. Measures introduced during the pandemic were scrutinised by committees in the Senate's substructure and reported to the Senate. Initiatives including the Teaching and Learning Plan and Tuition Programme would be reflected in the Annual Quality Report for next year. Consultation was ongoing within the University on the future of exams building on learning during the pandemic.
- d) Undergraduate pass rates had shown a positive trend following the introduction of new initiatives to support students. This trend had fallen in 2020/21 and had been attributed to the pandemic with a key issue being a fall in submission rates for assessment. This had been discussed by the Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel and the Student Services Portfolio project would look at ways to identify stages in the student journey where more support might be required.

9.4 Senate:

- a) **noted** that the Annual Quality Report would be used as the annual report on institution-led review submitted to the Scottish Funding Council.
- b) **recommended to Council that it approve** the statement of assurance required by the Scottish Funding Council.

10 ANNUAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW OF ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE S-2022-04-06

- 10.1 It was suggested that whilst the formal governance processes were robust, there appeared to be a gap between governance and management processes. There was concern that decisions, such as the winter closure of buildings which had implications for academic strategies of Schools, were made with little scrutiny or consultation. It would be helpful to reflect on how consultation could be improved, for example, working with groups such as the Heads of School Group.
- 10.2 The Vice-Chancellor reported that improvements had been made to consultation processes, but further suggestions would be welcomed.
- 10.3 The Senate **approved** the assurance statement on the effectiveness of the University's academic governance arrangements in 2021/22, to be reported to the Council in November 2022.

11 INSTITUTIONAL EDI PLAN S-2022-04-07

11.1 The Dean, EDI informed Senate that:

- a) Following an extensive consultation the EDI Plan had been developed to provide strategic direction and guidance on embedding equity, diversity, representation and inclusion within the University. EDI was an institutional priority and a responsibility for everyone.
- b) Most feedback received was constructive and positive, however some contributions had been labelled 'anti-EDI' and characterised as respondents actively resisting any form of action associated with the principles of EDI work.

11.2 Senate:

- a) Welcomed the Plan and the strong institutional focus on EDI and reiterated that responsibility for implementation was a responsibility of everyone.
- b) Reflected that the list of objectives and actions was extensive and would only be successful if they were distributed across the University.
- c) Acknowledged that publication of the negative responses was a brave and transparent step. There was concern that there was a lack of understanding of inequity and the University should consider embracing a more interdisciplinary approach to teaching in some curriculum contents
- d) Requested inclusion of the reduction of gaps in progression into highly skilled employment and further study which was a key part of the APP and student outcomes metrics.
- e) Welcomed the provision of extra support for Network leads which should be extended to others involved in EDI initiatives on a voluntary basis. Clarification was sought on plans for networks to share good practice.
- f) Noted reference to addressing inequality of opportunities and career progression for staff and queried how this would be applicable to certain groups of staff such as ALs and some student facing staff where progression was not well developed.
- g) Commented that the Plan did not include any reference to the handling of divergent opinions and protection of freedom of speech.
- h) Requested that current induction materials for staff on equality be examined to ensure they supported the Plan.
- i) Noted that reference to the disability pay gap in the title of objective 4 under Priority 5.6 was potentially misleading as work was still ongoing in this area.

11.3 The Dean, EDI responded that:

- a) Emphasis should be on positive actions and responsibilities for these were set out in the Appendix to the Plan. Work was continuing to support Networks to create a strong sense of connection and belonging.
- b) The Plan emphasised that learning should be designed and delivered as anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, accessible and inclusive. The inclusive curriculum tool had been designed to support this.
- c) The new AL contract included time for development. Other roles included good training to enable staff to develop transferable skills.
- d) Objective 3 in the section on Culture Change referred to a commitment to developing an environment respecting the opinions of others and contesting opposing views respectfully. The Plan would be regularly reviewed to reflect changes in the external environment.
- e) The induction materials would be checked. Further work was being carried out on the feasibility of providing information on the disability pay gap. Anonymous shortlisting was being piloted for some roles and the results would be reviewed.

11.4 Senate **agreed to recommend the EDI Plan for approval by Council.**

- 12 **UPDATE FROM A FACULTY - FBL** **PRESENTATION**
- This item was deferred to the next meeting
- 13 **EMERITUS PROFESSORS** **S-2022-04-09**
- Senate **approved** the recommendations from the Chairs Subcommittee that the title of Emeritus Professor is awarded to:
- Professor Steven Tombs (FASS)
 - Professor Jozef Siran (STEM)
 - Professor John Bouchard (STEM)
 - Professor Carol Morris (STEM)
- 14 **HONORARY DEGREES COMMITTEE** **S-2022-04-10**
- Senate **approved** en bloc the list of nominations recommended by the Honorary Degrees Committee, for the awarding of Honorary Degrees.
- 15 **ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT** **S-2022-04-11**
- Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on Tuesday 20 September 2022.
- 16 **RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT** **S-2022-04-12**
- Senate **noted** a report from the meetings of Research Committee held on 13 June and 6 July.
- 17 **STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT** **S-2022-04-13**
- Senate **noted** a report on the main items of business discussed at the meetings of the Student Experience Committee (SEC) held during the 2021/22 committee year
- 18 **CURRICULUM PARTNERSHIPS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT** **S-2022-04-14**
- Senate **noted** a report on the main items of business discussed at the meetings of the Curriculum Partnerships Committee held during the 2021/2022 committee year.
- 19 **THE COUNCIL** **S-2022-04-15**
- Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Council held 5 July 2022.
- 20 **SENATE FORWARD PLANNER** **S-2022-04-16**
- Senate **noted** a report on future business being presented to the Senate.
- 21 **CHAIRS ACTIONS** **S-2022-04-17**
- Senate **noted** the actions taken by the Chair since the last meeting of the Senate.

22 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 1 Feb 2023
Wednesday 29 March 2023
Wednesday 21 June 2023

Dave Hall
University Secretary

Sue Thomas
Senior Manager, Governance