QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

FACT SHEET 1: INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS ¹

Governance

1 The University governance is bicameral: the Council exercises general control over the University’s affairs (subject to the academic powers of the Senate) and is particularly concerned with finance, property and staffing matters. The Senate is the academic authority of the University and is responsible for academic strategy, policy, priorities and performance. The Council and the Senate are established bodies by the authority of the University’s Charter with powers laid down by statutes.

2 The Council is chaired by the Pro-Chancellor. Its membership includes lay members (not members of the University’s staff or students) and students.

3 The Senate is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and its membership includes ex officio members comprising the Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Executive Deans of the faculties and the Director of Library Services, as well as students and Associate Lecturers. Senate controls the academic programme of teaching, student support and research, regulates examinations, and is concerned with qualifications and modules of study.

4 The Academic Quality and Governance Committee is responsible to the Senate for assuring the effectiveness of the University’s arrangements for managing academic quality and standards, for overseeing the University’s engagement with external quality assessment and assuring the effectiveness of academic governance.

5 The Strategic Planning and Resources Committee is a joint committee of the Council and the Senate and reports to both as appropriate. It approves planning proposals for strategically significant developments and business opportunities, ensuring that the proposals are viable in terms of staff and non-staff resource available to support them.

6 The Governance website is a compendium of information relating the University’s officers and governing bodies.

Management

7 The University’s senior management team has 14 members which comprise the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive (VCE): Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, four Executive Deans, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students), Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship), University Secretary, Group Finance Director, Group People Services Director, the Chief Information Officer, an Interim Director for Academic Services and an Interim Commercial Director. The following provides an outline of some of the senior management team roles.

¹ Links to external and internal websites were checked in March 2019. Some web links referred to in this document may be intranet based and so restricted to Open University staff.
The Vice-Chancellor is the chief academic and administrative officer of the University, with responsibility to the Council and the Senate for maintaining and promoting the efficiency and good order of the University. The Vice-Chancellor’s Annual Report to Council accounts for the University’s planning, receipt and allocation of resources, and development activity each year.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor provides oversight and leadership on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, to the academic domain of the University. The role provides significant support in developing and delivering the University academic strategy and provides visible corporate leadership on issues assigned and agreed by the Vice-Chancellor.

The Executive Deans are the chief academic officers and, as heads of a spending units are also the chief administrative officers of their Faculties, with accountability to the Vice-Chancellor in respect of its overall management. It is the responsibility of the Executive Deans to ensure that students receive the highest quality experience and have the greatest opportunity to succeed. The Executive Deans are members of the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Team, contributing to the University’s strategic direction.

- Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies
- Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
- Faculty of Business and Law

Pro-Vice-Chancellors share common responsibilities as well as their own defined responsibilities. They contribute to the co-ordinated development of the University generally as members of the leadership team, and develop and implement policy and management initiatives in particular areas as requested by the Vice-Chancellor. The portfolios are currently:

- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship);
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students);

The University Secretary is responsible for the effective governance of the University and for ensuring that the Professional Services are effectively and efficiently managed to meet University objectives. This entails membership of the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive, acting as secretary of Council and Senate, overseeing the work of the OU in the devolved nations of the UK, and the management of units responsible for: strategic and resource planning, student and associate lecturer support services, academic policy and quality assurance processes, and central administrative services including Finance, Estates, People Services, and Information Technology.

Management Sub-Structure – Heads of Unit reporting to the members of the senior management team include:

- Associate Deans, Heads of School, Discipline or Centre and Module Team Chairs who support Executive Deans.
- Providing support services for students, and the teaching infrastructure and support for student learning, are the members of the Academic Services Leadership Team, which includes the Nation Directors who are responsible for the academic and administrative management of nation centres.
Mission, Core Values and Principles

Mission: ‘The Open University is open to people, places, methods and ideas. It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnership it seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open learning.’

Strategic Plan

The University’s current strategic plan was approved by the University’s Council in March 2019. The key strategic priority for the Open University is student success. It is through the institution’s scale, reach and ability to support students to succeed that it is able to achieve a positive impact on society and the economy. Implementation of the strategic plan and its objectives are supported by documents including the Academic Strategy, Learning and Teaching Vision and Plan, Procurement Strategy and Unit Business Plans.

Finance

The Finance unit is responsible for the overall running of the finances of The Open University under policies approved by Council on the recommendation of the University’s Finance Committee. It operates under the Financial Regulations with which all units, staff and subsidiaries must comply. It provides financial accounting, procurement and contracting services to the University, helping to make best use of resources and fulfilling statutory responsibilities.

Unit Business Plans

Unit Business Plans are the plans of an individual faculty or administrative or operational unit, and are prepared on a systematic basis. The purpose of the plan made at unit level is to guide the activities of the unit itself and to provide the basis upon which the objectives and tasks for individual members of staff can be set.