QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

FACT SHEET 1: INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS

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 12 members covering the following key areas: Students, Finance, Curriculum and awards, Learning and teaching, Research and enterprise, Business development, Information management, Fundraising and international development, and Administration. Membership consists of the Vice-Chancellor, the two Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the University Secretary, the Group Finance Director, four Executive Deans, the Chief Operating Officer and Director of External Engagement, Director of Strategy and the Group Human Resources Director. They comprise the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive (VCE).

---

1 Links to external and internal websites were checked in January 2018.
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.

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 and Academic Strategy);
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching Innovation);

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, Human Resources, and Information Technology.

The Group Finance Director is responsible for the University’s budgetary control and financial matters, and the production of the University’s financial statements and other financial reports.

The Executive Deans are the chief academic officers and, as heads of 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

The Chief Operating Officer & Director of External Engagement has responsibility for all external engagement activity, overseeing the Marketing Unit, Communications Unit (including Government and External Affairs), Development Office and Business Development Unit. The Director has a key role in helping the University to respond to the opportunities in the external environment and to project the University to a global audience.

Group Director of Human Resources is responsible for the University’s central administrative support services including learning and organisational development, human resources policy, occupational health and human resources administration, management information and systems.

The Director of Strategy is responsible for the evaluation of major opportunities and threats to the University and the development and delivery of its strategy. The Director’s portfolio
includes responsibility for student number planning, reporting and returns, unit business planning, the institutional performance and also has a key role in building the organisation’s ability to manage change.

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

- Executive Deans are supported by Associate Deans, Heads of School, Discipline or Centre and Module Team Chairs.
- 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.
- Other Directors include the Director of Academic Policy and Governance, the Director of Marketing, the Director of Communications, the Director of Estates, and the Director of Business Development Unit.
- The Director, Academic Services, who reports to the University Secretary, is responsible for the promotion and evaluation of services to students in support of the University’s teaching, as well as the recruitment and retention of students in the UK and elsewhere.

Mission, Core Values and Principles

17 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

18 The University’s strategic and development plans are contained in a document known as Students First: Strategy for Growth. The purpose of the Strategic plan is to define the University’s mission, core values and overall strategic intent, establish the University’s strategic objectives and outline how these will be delivered through a portfolio of Strategic Priorities.

Finance Division

19 The Finance Division 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

20 Unit Business Plans are the plans of an individual faculty or administrative or operational unit, and are prepared on a systematic basis and cover a forward five year period to correspond with Students First: Strategy for Growth. 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. The plan also provides information to the University as a whole. Specifically, the plan enables the University to
determine whether the unit is carrying out its objectives; it also provides an indication of the resource that the unit will need in order to achieve its plans.

**Monitoring and Review**

21 The University has established systems for monitoring and reporting spending against budget, for assessing performance against plan, and for evaluating cost-effectiveness. The University also gains feedback on performance from various forms of external scrutiny such as the assessment of research quality and volume. On the basis of this feedback data, an assessment is made by the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee on progress towards the achievement of the strategic aims and targets set out in *Students First: Strategy for Growth* and whether changes are required to the document. The Committee, or other committees in the government structure, may also decide to initiate policy reviews in areas where performance is falling short of target, or where objectives or targets may require review. This activity informs the next cycle of the planning process, which again begins with the review and revision of *Students First: Strategy for Growth* and continues with the updating of institutional action plans, Business Plan Summaries and the setting of budgets.