

Framework of Academic Governance

This framework sets out the definition, objectives, purposes and principles of academic governance at the OU.

Academic governance is the process of ensuring that the University's programmes of study, admissions, research, teaching and awards meet all relevant requirements, whether defined internally through academic strategy or externally through compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

Objectives of academic governance

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.

Purposes of academic governance (tasks that should be carried out by governance)

1. To regulate the academic activities of the University,
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.

Principles of operation of the academic governance system

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.

Academic management is the process of implementing agreed strategies, policies and plans and being accountable for delivery. As such, management is an executive function and is separate from governance, although there are close inter-relationships.

Purposes of academic management (tasks that should be carried out by academic management)

- Developing¹ strategy, policy and plans,
- Implementation of strategy, policy and plans (though governance should retain an interest in the way approved strategies, policies and plans are working out in practice),
- Checking and detail (though governance might agree the procedures under which checking related to key tasks is carried out),
- Managing operational processes, budgets and people (managers will be accountable to governance where the latter have approved plans covering relevant tasks),
- Project management (Project managers report to an executive sponsor, typically supported by a project management group),
- Consultation (governance may commission and oversee consultation, but it is inappropriate to design a governance structure so as to provide a consultation framework).

¹ There can be some confusion by the reference to *determining* strategy, policy, plans and priorities as an appropriate purpose of academic governance with *developing* strategy, policy and plans as an appropriate purpose of academic management. Governance is best suited to setting parameters for office holders and small groups who then develop drafts, referring these at intervals to governance bodies for scrutiny and approval.