

**ACADEMIC AUDIT METHODOLOGY 2013-2014****1. Introduction**

The University of Salford's arrangements for academic governance and management were radically reformed and changed from the start of the 2008/09 academic session enabling the clear distinction of the respective roles and responsibilities of governance and management.

A key part of the reform of academic governance was the establishment of Academic Audit and Governance Committee (AAGC) to be responsible for the effective auditing, monitoring, reviewing and oversight of governance processes. AAGC combines in a single standing committee of Senate responsibility for Ethics, Nominations and Academic Audit and oversees the academic audit of the operation of regulations, policies and procedures and advises Senate on the operation and effectiveness of academic governance and academic activities.

**2. AAGC Terms of Reference**

The Terms of Reference of AAGC comprise:

- i. To oversee and report to Senate on the outcome of academic audits and the implementation of any recommendations.
- ii. To advise Senate on the operation and effective discharge of the University scheme for academic governance and the appropriate delegation of Senate's authority.
- iii. To advise Senate on its terms of reference, composition, membership and standing orders.
- iv. To advise Senate on the establishment, terms of reference, composition, membership and disestablishment of its standing committees and their standing sub-committees.
- v. To monitor and report to Senate on the effective operation of the Senate's standing committees and sub-committees and time or task-limited working groups.
- vi. To advise Senate on the development and periodic review of policy governing the audit of its academic regulations, policies and procedures.
- vii. To advise Senate on the development and periodic review of policy governing the ethical approval of the academic work of the University's staff and students.
- viii. To oversee and advise Senate on College and School schemes of management.
- ix. To monitor the outcomes of and responses to internal reviews of the University's academic units and to refer relevant issues to Senate and its standing committees.
- x. To recommend to Senate the establishment, terms of reference and composition of any time or task-limited working groups deemed necessary to develop, advance or review the Committee's business.

**3. AAGC Members**

The [Governance website](#) carries up to date lists of members of Senate and its standing committees including AAGC.

**4. Academic Auditors**

AAGC recruits a pool of academic staff through nomination by Schools to conduct academic audits. AAGC also invites the Students Union to nominate academic auditors. Recruitment is against the following Person Specification:

▶ **Role:**

To assist in the quality assurance of the University's academic processes and, through this, of the quality of the student experience.

▶ **Key Responsibilities:**

- ▶ reading and analysing University academic policies, procedures and other documentation;
- ▶ conducting structured interviews with relevant staff involved in managing or administering University academic procedures;
- ▶ with a team of peers, drawing evidence-based conclusions and making recommendations and judgements on University academic policies and procedures;
- ▶ drafting sections of audit reports for consideration by AAGC.

▶ **Knowledge and Understanding Required:**

- current experience of University academic policies and procedures such as:
  - Academic Regulations
  - Admissions
  - Assessment
  - Quality Assurance
- knowledge and familiarity with the QAA Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points such as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies;
- familiarity with academic processes for improvement and enhancement;
- service elsewhere within Higher Education for example as an External Examiner or on secondment to QAA.

▶ **Skills Required may include the ability to:**

- conduct meetings and interviews with staff
- conduct meetings with current and former students
- write succinctly and coherently
- meet tight timescales and deadlines
- interpret statistics
- work effectively as a member of a team
- work courteously and professionally
- maintain confidentiality
- communicate electronically

AAGC invites nominated Academic Auditors to advise on their particular areas of interest and expertise so as to inform AAGC's selection of audit teams. All Academic Auditors are offered training.

## 5. Selection of Audit Topics

AAGC employs a number of mechanisms in selecting audit topics:

- a call to the three other Standing Committees of Senate:
  - Academic Programmes and Partnerships Committee
  - Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee
  - Research Committee

requesting possible audit topics supported by a clear rationale for the nomination of the particular topic;

- liaison with Council Audit Committee and with the University's Internal Auditors, including at least one meeting a year, to ensure that their respective audit programmes dovetail rather than duplicate;
- consultation with the Executive on which audit topics might best complement the University's strategic priorities. The suggestion of topics for academic audit should be included on the Executive agenda at least once a year. The Chairs of the three other cited Senate Standing Committees are also members of Executive;
- a balance between new topics and revisits to previously audited topics and between existing long-standing procedures and new or prospective procedures;
- preparation for forthcoming external review events such as formal visits by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) or the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA);
- committees may also propose as a topic a review of one of their own past resolutions as a mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of committees;
- allowance for contingency – an urgent and unforeseen need to audit a particular topic.

A list of audits conducted by the former Academic Audit Committee and by AAGC is attached as Appendix A for information.

Proposers of academic audit topics are requested to identify

- which academic objectives within any appropriate University Strategy (such as the Learning and Teaching Strategy or the Research Strategy) the nominated topic aligns to
- how far reaching the topic might be, so what proportion of the overall student population might be impacted upon.
- whether any specialist skills or additional resources might be required to audit the nominated topic

## 6. The Academic Audit Process

### ► Appointment of an Audit Team

AAGC appoints an audit team for each selected audit topic from the pool of trained Academic Auditors, taking account of individual areas of expertise and interest. AAGC also seeks to share out the workload involved in assisting on audits so Academic Auditors will probably serve only once, at most twice, in any academic session. AAGC nominates one member of the team as Team Leader and the Head of Governance Services Unit (GSU) appoints a GSU officer to support the audit as Review Secretary. On occasion, so as to broaden the experience of other Professional Services staff and in discussion with their line managers, the Head of GSU may invite an officer of a College, School or another Professional Service to support an audit as Review Secretary. Training will be provided as needed.

AAGC also appoints one of its own members to each audit team. AAGC members who are also members of the Executive are not eligible for appointment. The AAGC member will primarily act as a facilitator, an adviser and a bridge between AAGC and the audit team. The AAGC member does not actively engage in the detailed activity of the audit.

On occasion AAGC may have available for particular audits additional support for audit teams through the use of external consultants. This is allocated as a set number of consultancy days for a particular audit. Executive determines the level of external consultancy resource available in any academic session.

### ► **The Audit Proposal**

The first task of an audit team is to agree an Audit Proposal comprising the particular Terms of Reference and Methodology for the audit. This can be agreed by electronic exchange between members of the audit team, facilitated by the Review Secretary and including the AAGC member. A sample Audit Proposal is attached as Appendix B.

The Audit Proposal is approved by the Chair of AAGC who may consult the AAGC member of the audit team and other members of AAGC.

### ► **Communication**

Appropriate notification is composed by the Team Leader, supported by the Review Secretary, and is sent to Schools/Units where an audit will take place outlining:

- the remit of AAGC
- the topic to be audited
- the membership of the audit team
- the terms of reference and methodology for the audit

The Schools/Units where the audit will take place are:

- invited to offer any initial factual commentary they may wish on the audit;
- requested to provide information on the location of any necessary documentation and key contact persons;
- invited to provide information on any relevant work already in progress or planned in the area of the audit topic.

A sample notification is attached as Appendix C.

### ► **The Audit**

The audit may include structured interviews, questionnaires, attendance at already scheduled meetings, document review and agenda/minute trails. The detailed programme of activity will reflect the methodology set out by the audit team in the Audit Proposal.

The Review Secretary assists audit team members by advising on appropriate contact persons in the Schools/Units where the audit is to take place. However, audit team members will need to arrange the timings of any visits to those Schools/Units according to their individual availability.

The Team Leader, assisted by the Review Secretary, agrees with members of the audit team which team members will cover particular aspects or venues. For avoidance of doubt, the Review Secretary will circulate a note of the allocation of the respective tasks to all team members.

The Team Leader, again assisted by the Review Secretary, agrees with members of the audit team which team members will draft which parts of the audit report. Again the Review Secretary will circulate that allocation in a note to all team members.

## **7. The Audit Report Process**

- a) Upon completion of the audit, the audit team agrees a draft report.
- b) The Team Leader, assisted by the Review Secretary edits the draft audit report. He/she may also consult the AAGC member of the team on editing matters. At this stage of the process the Team Leader is likely to engage the rest of the audit team in an interactive exchange of electronic drafts to arrive at a draft which reflects the consensus view of all the audit team.

- c) This draft is then sent to the Head of School/Unit where the audit took place, and other staff as appropriate, primarily for factual correction. Only where it is clearly demonstrated that an error of fact has incorrectly influenced the audit team's findings will the audit team redraft a report to the extent that its findings are amended. Again it is for the Team Leader, with assistance and advice, further to edit the report.
- d) The audit team's report, as amended if necessary in response to factual correction, is then considered by the Chair of AAGC who may consult with the AAGC member of the audit team, other members of AAGC and Governance Services Unit, before determining:
- which member of Executive should have overview of a draft management response and should present that response to Executive ;
  - with advice from that Executive member, which University officer(s) should draft a management response, under the overview of and for the initial approval of that Executive member, for presentation by that Executive member to Executive .
- e) As the key executive managers in the University, Executive have the authority to commit staffing and other resources to ensure that recommendations in an audit report are implemented. Executive members also have a commitment to and expertise in the assurance of academic standards and quality and their enhancement. Executive therefore consider the audit report and a draft management response, as presented by the Executive member so requested by the Chair of AAGC, for approval.
- f) After receipt of the management response, AAGC approves an action plan, drafted by officers within GSU setting out the actions required to implement recommendations within an audit report. The action plan identifies the locus of responsibility for specific actions and sets out a timescale for those actions. The timescale will depend upon the particular topic audited but AAGC adopts a default position of expected completion of actions within twelve months.

A sample action plan template is attached as Appendix D.

AAGC then monitors its action plan until all actions are reported as completed. AAGC receives an update on all current action plans at its final meeting of the academic session.

A process chart is attached as Appendix E.

## **8. The Format of the Audit Report**

Audit reports have a standard format comprising:

- > Title of the audit.
- > Membership of the audit team.
- > Terms of Reference for the particular audit.
- > The methodology of the particular audit.
- > A description of the current policies, procedures and arrangements for the topic audited. This should preferably be a brief factual synopsis, eg:
  - purpose of the topic audited
  - policies, procedures and arrangements in operation
  - background documentation or records
- > A risk assessment outlining why the policies, procedures and arrangements underpinning the topic audited require to be quality assured:
  - what detriment might the University suffer if the current policies, procedures and arrangements failed?

- > The findings of the audit. These are principally of two types:
  - is there compliance with the current policies, procedures and arrangements for the topic audited?
  - could the current policies, procedures and arrangements for the topic audited be enhanced and be made more fit for purpose? In particular, the audit team may wish to promote across the University good practice identified in the Schools/Units where the audit took place.
- > Confidence Judgements

Drawing on QAA practice for Institutional Audit up to academic session 2010/11, a confidence judgement is accorded by the audit team to indicate the robustness of the quality assurance policies, procedures and arrangement for the topic audited.

One of the following judgements is given in each audit report:

### **Broad Confidence**

A judgement of broad confidence usually indicates that the area under audit:

- utilises rigorous procedures to ensure quality and to maintain standards;
- has procedures which are used effectively and consistently;
- is able to identify and address any situation which has the potential to threaten standards or quality;
- that where appropriate, information produced is complete, accurate and reliable.

A judgement of broad confidence may be accompanied by a small number of recommendations that are considered either advisable or desirable but none that are considered to be essential.

### **Limited Confidence**

A judgement of limited confidence usually indicates that there are some deficiencies in the area under audit. This may be as a result of:

- a notable weakness in the management or implementation of procedures;
- problems arising which have not been duly noted or fully investigated;
- prompt and appropriate action not being taken to rectify problems;
- where appropriate, reservations exist regarding the completeness, accuracy and reliability of the information made available to the public by the University.

A judgement of limited confidence is likely to lead to a small number of recommendations that are considered essential, as well as a number that are considerable advisable and desirable.

### **No Confidence**

A judgement of no confidence usually indicates that there is substantial evidence of serious and fundamental weaknesses in the area under audit and that this may impact on the quality of programmes and the standard of awards offered by the University. A judgement of no confidence will be reached if:

- there is a shortage of or flaws in procedures used in the area under audit;
- procedures are managed ineffectively;
- where appropriate, information made available to the public by the University cannot be relied upon and can be shown to be inaccurate and/or misleading.

A judgement of no confidence will be accompanied by a significant number of recommendations that are considered essential as well as a number that are considered advisable and desirable.

> Recommendations

Again drawing on previous QAA practice, an audit report ends with recommendations for action, categorised as follows:

- Essential recommendations refer to important matters that the audit team believes are currently putting quality and/or standards at risk and which require urgent corrective action.
- Advisable recommendations refer to matters that the audit team believes have the potential to put quality and/or standards at risk and require preventive, or less urgent, corrective action.
- Desirable recommendations refer to matters that the audit team believes have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure standards.

Recent past audit reports are available on request electronically to assist audit teams in understanding the standard format of an audit report. Please refer to Appendix A for details.

## 9. **The Role of the Governance Services Unit and/or the Review Secretary**

Officers of the Governance Services Unit support the academic audit process through:

- the secretaryship of AAGC;
- the maintenance of up-to-date information on the pool of Academic Auditors and their areas of expertise and interest;
- supporting the training of Academic Auditors;

A Review Secretary (whether or not a GSU officer) assists an individual academic auditor by:

- advising on the format of an Audit Proposal;
- notifying Schools/Units where the audit is to take place;
- advising on appropriate contact persons;
- recording and disseminating the division of responsibilities agreed between the audit team members;
- general progress chasing and facilitation during the audit;
- advising on the format of an Audit Report;
- assisting the Team Leader with his/her editing of the draft audit report;

Officers of the Governance Services Unit again support the academic audit process through:

- upon receipt of an audit report and Executive Committee management response, drafting an action plan for AAGC's approval;
- progress chasing and updating approved action plans for monitoring by AAGC.

10. **Review Date**

At the end of the 2015/16 academic session.

12. **Further Information**

For any further advice on Academic Audit, contact Gregory Clark, Secretary to AAGC, ext 55868 and [g.clark@salford.ac.uk](mailto:g.clark@salford.ac.uk)

**Titles of Audit Reports Produced by AAGC since 2009/10**

1. Aspects of External Examining – October 2009
2. Process of Ratifying Module Marks – November 2010
3. Process Withdrawal of Programmes/Strategic Management of the Programme Portfolio within Schools and Faculties – November 2010
4. Personal Tutoring System: Personal Development Planning – November 2012
5. Support for Students with Disabilities during Assessment and especially Examination – November 2012
6. Specialist Career Advice and Employability – November 2012
7. Support for Placement/Internship – November 2012/8. Consistency of the University's Marking Criteria and Descriptors – November 2012/9. Anonymous Marking – audit commissioned
10. PhD by Submission of Published Works – May 2013
11. Processing of External Examiner Reports – audit commissioned

An electronic copy of any Academic Audit Report can be obtained, on request, from Governance Services Unit

From 2012/13 academic session Academic Audit Reports, Management Responses and AAGC Action Plans were annotated for information to the academic audit team members for information

**Sample Audit Proposal***APPENDIX B***Audit of the Conduct and Recording of Boards of Examiners**Rationale

Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC) requested this audit of Boards of Examiners (BoX). The request arose from the consideration of academic appeals and the concern that decisions made by BoX were not being recorded properly. There was also a concern that there might be inconsistent practice in the ways that BoX were conducting their business.

Terms of Reference

The specific terms of reference for this audit are:

1. To determine practice at programme level through consideration of documentation provided by Schools and to compare it to the standard University commended practice.
2. To determine if the minutes, spreadsheets and other relevant documentation are clear and consistent and whether the reason for a decision is transparent and auditable.
3. To determine if the minutes record the correct procedure in relation to unfair means, debtors, Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs) and compensation.
4. To determine if Boards of Examiners are acting in a timely manner in the dissemination of their decisions and their reconsideration, as necessary, at the next available meeting.
5. To identify aspects of good practice in the operation of Boards of Examiners and their recording and make recommendations for enhancement.

Methodology

1. Assessments Office to collect a random sample of BoX minutes and associated paperwork from across the University of postgraduate, undergraduate and foundation degrees to include two programmes per school for a two year period.
2. The Audit Team to examine the minutes and other documentation provided by the Schools in light of the terms of reference and seek further clarification as required.
3. The Audit Team to agree a draft report which includes results, recommendations for enhancement and a confidence judgement.
4. The report to be circulated to Schools for a factual accuracy check and amendments made, if appropriate.
5. The final draft report to be considered by Academic Audit and Governance Committee.

**Academic Audit and Governance Committee (AAGC)****MEMORANDUM**

**To** Heads of School

**From** Officer supporting the audit

**Date** Insert Date

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**Audit of the Conduct and Recording of Boards of Examiners**

Academic Audit and Governance Committee (AAGC) is a committee of Senate which assists Senate in quality assuring the University's procedures. The Committee, which is chaired by Professor Martin Bull, carries out audits not only to confirm compliance with University procedures, but also to work with the University community on the enhancement and improved effectiveness of those procedures. The Committee also oversees the implementation of any recommendations attached to the audits.

The Committee has decided to audit the conduct and recording of Boards of Examiners and I am writing, as Secretary to the Committee, to advise that all Schools will be contacted for copies of minutes and associated information for particular programmes. The Audit Team carrying out this audit are:

Dr AB, School of the Built Environment (Team Leader)  
Prof CD, School of Environment & Life Sciences  
Dr EF (AAGC representative)  
GH (Officer from GSU)

and it would be appreciated if you could inform appropriate staff in your School that they may be contacted for information and if you would let me know the appropriate contact names and details.

If you wish to offer the audit team an initial brief factual commentary on the topic to be audited, that would be most welcome. Any such comment or advice that you may have should be sent via me. It would be particularly helpful to know in advance if there is work already in progress or planned in this topic area.

The draft report produced by the Audit Team will be made available to you for factual correction before being approved by AAGC.

If you have any queries about the audit or any information relating to it, either at this stage or at draft report stage, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in anticipation of your assistance to Academic Audit and Governance Committee in its task of quality assuring and enhancing University procedures.

**Sample Action Plan***APPENDIX D***Audit of the Conduct and Recording of Boards of Examiners**

Recommendations for Enhancement	Action to be taken by	Completion Date	Update
1. That the template agenda should be updated to include the highlighted good practice found in the programmes audited. That the template should be accompanied by some guidance notes and circulated widely to all Board of Examiners' committee Secretaries and Chairs. The master template should be readily available electronically for ease of use.	Assessments Office	April. For implementation at the Summer examination boards.	
2. That there is a clear need for staff development, not only in relation to chairing Boards of Examiners, but also in terms of committee servicing specifically related to Boards of Examiners. It is recommended that a staff development session on minuting Boards of Examiners should be mandatory for all Secretaries. Schools should encourage all Board members to attend the training session and regular updates as required.	Heads of School	December. Must identify chairs and secretaries of all examination boards and eligible alternative in case of sickness and ensure that they receive mandatory or refresher training.	
3. A system of monitoring the minutes and spreadsheets of Board of Examiners needs to be put in place. It is recommended that the Colleges should carry out sample internal audits for their Schools. The audits should ensure that students can be tracked. These should take place after each session of progression and awards Boards and the results reported to the College Board. Colleges could make use of the methodology adopted for the compilation of this Academic Audit and Governance Committee report.	College Deans	June. For implementation after the Summer examination boards.	
4. There should be an investigation as to whether SIS: Banner or Gradebook could be developed so as to assist in the formatting of minutes, ensuring the inclusion and correct identification of all students on the programme. This may need investment and needs to be completed before the next round of Boards of Examiners.	Director of Student Information and Assessments Office	April. Need to investigate the feasibility and to advise Executive on the resources needed for implementation for summer examination boards.	

5. Guidelines for a module board should be drawn up and made available across the university, which should include prompts for the minutes.	Assessments Office	April. For implementation at the Summer examination boards.	
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APPENDIX E

## Academic Audit & Governance Committee Process for the undertaking of an Academic Audit

