

Academic Governance Arrangements

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We were interested in the variety of approaches to satisfying the academic governance requirements of the HESF (see HESF 6.2.1f and 6.3). A survey was prepared and circulated with 33 returns.

Academic Governance Arrangements

Healthy Diversity

What is clear is that there is a healthy diversity in academic governance. Of the 33 returns, no two are identical.

Without being able to unequivocally claim this, it appears that the range of committees might correlate with institution size. A quote in the survey: “For small institutions having a multitude of committees is hard to manage and there are often insufficient staff available to sit.”

Often the separate functions are combined into a single committee eg Course Development, Course Advisory, Course Review. Teaching and Learning Committee might include Student Progress, Results Ratification, and include review functions.

Not to be ignored is the ‘cost’ of supporting a wide range of committees in terms of the time of the members and the effort of the professional staff in preparing and circulating papers, including writing-up minutes,

Committees

- ❖ Learning and Teaching Committee 29 (of 33 responses)
- ❖ Course Advisory Committee 22
- ❖ Results Ratification Committee 19
- ❖ Research and Scholarship Committee 12
- ❖ Academic Risk Committee 16
- ❖ Academic Integrity Committee 9

These are some of the committees included in the survey instrument. The numbers indicate the number of responses indicating that committee was present at the institution.

Other Committees

- ❖ Academic Board Executive
- ❖ Admission & Selection Committee
- ❖ Benchmarking Committee
- ❖ Appeals Committee
- ❖ Research Ethics
- ❖ Policy Committee
- ❖ Higher Degree by Research Committee
- ❖ Student Grievance Committee
- ❖ Industry Advisory Committee
- ❖ Student Services Committee

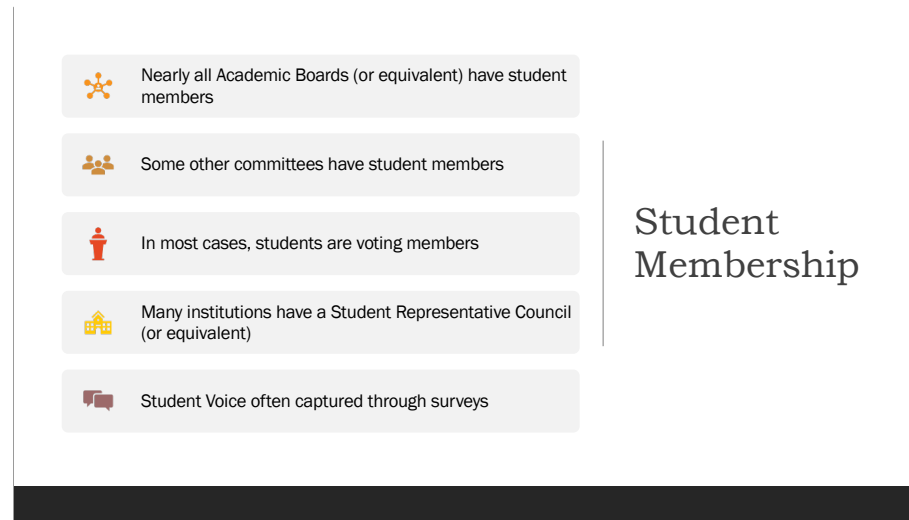
Listed are committees mentioned by respondents that were not included in the survey document. Note that some institutions report that they have merged their Industry Advisory Committee into their Course Advisory Committee.

A Policy Committee, mentioned by a few respondents, is an effective way of satisfying Standard 6.3.2.a – “developing, monitoring and reviewing academic policies and their effectiveness.”

Academic Governance Arrangements

Student Voice

The HESF includes a bald statement about engaging the student voice in academic governance (Standard 6.3.3 “Students have opportunities to participate in academic governance.”) and it was interesting to see how institutions involve students in academic governance.



Nearly all Academic Boards have student members, in most cases they are full-voting members. Sometimes students are non-voting members. In some cases, student members may not receive confidential papers and are not present when those papers are discussed.

One very positive response was: “Student members are on Academic Board and sub-committees of Academic Board. They undergo training in order to contribute effectively to the work of the committees. They have ongoing support and are paid for their time.”

The student voice is also captured through a Student Representative Council (SRC) and a variety of surveys. In some cases, the president of the SRC reports to Academic Board and also reports back to the student body.

Other committees, particularly those specifically concerned with student matters, may have student members.

Academic Governance Arrangements

Academic Integrity

It was somewhat puzzling that relatively few institutions had an Academic Integrity Committee (9/33). It may be that many institutions consider academic integrity an operational matter, having developed robust policies and procedures, with appropriate panels hearing cases, as needed.

Given that academic integrity is a fast-moving area, it would seem that a committee might be the best way to ensure that your institution is keeping up with developments as well as informing other committees of the changing environment eg TLC

Academic Governance Arrangements

Academic Community

What advantage might accrue to the institution through having robust and effective academic governance arrangements? Do the academic governance arrangements have any role in strengthening the sense of academic community? There were a variety of answers ranging from “Don’t Know.” to some sophisticated responses.

Enhancing Community

Academic governance arrangements:

- foster a strong sense of academic community by ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and shared responsibility in decision-making.
- are coherent and are structured around institutional core values.
- allow all members of the academic community to be reassured that we prioritise regulatory expectations as well as staff and student experience.

Key words that stand out include: Transparency; Inclusivity; Shared Responsibility; Core Values; Regulatory Expectations; Staff and Student Experience.

Minimal Committee Structure

Courses Committee

- Course Development Committee
- Course Advisory Committee
- Course Accreditation Committee
- Course Review Committee
- Benchmarking Committee

Student Life Committee

- Admissions Committee
- Progression Committee
- Student Experience Committee
- Student Services Committee
- Student Grievance Committee
- Academic Integrity Committee
- Appeals Committee

It is a Soapbox Presentation so perhaps it is time to propose something slightly different. I return to the idea that “for small institutions having a multitude of committees is hard to manage ...”. Staff are taken off-line from their usual duties and there is substantial professional staff effort in servicing committees.

Are there some minimal committee structures where the academic activities of the institution are managed and reviewed whilst assisting in meeting all of the requirements of the HESF?

This slide and the following one set out four possible committees that could handle the work. Putting all the responsibilities into relatively few committees might cause meetings to be overly long or require them to meet at greater frequency – it may not be a solution for everyone. Nor is the proposed structure the only possible solution – you can probably come up with your own.

Minimal Committee Structure II

Learning and Teaching Committee

- Assessment Committee
- Results Ratification Committee
- Academic Quality Committee
- Academic Risk Committee

Staff Committee

- Research and Scholarship Committee
- Professional Development Committee
- Staff Grievance Committee

It is worth noting that a weakness of these committees with very extensive responsibilities is that it might be easy to lose focus and spend excessive time on minor matters and ignore the important issues. Very good chairpersonship will be needed.

What about the review of academic policies? Perhaps the Executive Committee of Academic Board, proposed by at least one respondent to the survey, could handle policy review as part of its ToRs.

Academic Governance Arrangements

Acknowledgement

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