

BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACADEMIC ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2025
14:00PM VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Dr Nick Gee, Executive Dean of Faculty (NG)
 Professor Hilary Grainger OBE (HG)
 Professor Marianne Howarth (MH) **(Chair)**
 Rev'd Canon Dr Sarah Lawrence (SL)
 Dr Claire Thomson, Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning & Student Success (CT)

In attendance:

Leanne Chancellor, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office (*minutes*)
 Tom Dannatt, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations) & University Secretary
 Dr Matt Dunn, Head of Programmes: ITE (*for agenda items 7 and 8*)
 Kymberley Gill, Students' Union Vice President, Education (*attending on behalf of Max Gordon*)
 Ami Montgomery, Deputy Head of ITE Programmes (*for agenda items 7 and 8*)

1. Welcome

- 1.1 The Chair, Professor Marianne Howarth, welcomed members to the third meeting of the academic year for the Academic Assurance Committee (AAC).
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed Professor Hilary Grainger OBE (HG) to AAC.

2. Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from:
 - Max Gordon, Students' Union President;
 - Professor Andrew Jackson, Executive Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange; and
 - Elise Temple (ET)

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 There were no new declarations of interest to raise for this meeting.

4. To Receive the Minutes of the AAC Meeting held on 6 November 2024

- 4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 November 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record and the Chair was authorised to sign them.

Action

5. Matters Arising

5.1 There were no matters arising from the last meetings held on 6 November 2024.

6. To Note: Approval Letter from the Office for Students (OfS) on BGU's Access & Participation Plan

6.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the letter from the OfS dated 15 January 2025, confirming their decision to approve BGU's APP 2025/26 and the four-year plan for 2025 to 2029.

6.2 The Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning & Student Success, Dr Claire Thomson (CT), REMINDED members that the APP is driven by the OfS and was a key piece of our regulatory compliance. The APP is required as part of our institution's registration to be able to charge the higher fee level.

6.3 CT NOTED that the APP aligns closely with BGU's Widening Participation (WP) agenda.

6.4 CT NOTED that following the submission to the OfS, they responded with two minor queries, one was reference to a data set and the other was over a particular finance allocation – both queries were addressed and resubmitted.

6.5 CT CONFIRMED that BGU's approved APP 2025/26 to 2028/29 and APP Summary was now be published on the website, as requested by the OfS.

6.6 CT NOTED that the internal Access & Participation Committee (APC) would commence again following the approval and was scheduled for 25 March 2025. It was NOTED that their first focus of work would be reviewing the foundation work in preparation for next year when it begins in earnest and monitoring the delivery and maintaining progress of the implementations of the interventions within the APP.

6.7 The Chair NOTED that she felt this committee was very close to this APP, as members had extensive debates about it in previous meetings and she was very pleased it had been accepted.

6.8 HG NOTED, as a new member to the committee, how impressed she was with the APP – it was extremely thorough, readable and the engagement with the Students' Union was welcomed.

6.9 CT also NOTED that the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published today (20.03.2025) a report looking at the achievement gaps with male students and had undertaken an oversight review of the APPs approved by the OfS. In the report HEPI refer to 30 institutions who had made specific reference to male students within their targeted interventions – four institutions specifically mentioned 'white males' and BGU was within the remaining 26 institutions who had identified 'male students' as one of our target groups.

7. ITE – Updated Ofsted Areas for Development Action Plan

7.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Strategic Plan to Address Ofsted Inspection Outcomes and Areas for Development prepared by the Head of Programmes: ITE, Dr Matt Dunn (MD) and the Deputy Head of ITE Programmes, Ami Montgomery (AM).

- 7.2 MD REMINDED members that the ITE Ofsted inspection took place in March 2024 – this was a full inspection with 13 inspectors. It was NOTED the final Ofsted Report was published on 13 April 2024.
- 7.3 MD NOTED that the documentation and presentation he and AM was about to provide to members was to provide assurance that progress has been made following the area identified for development and that there are strategic plans in place to address the outcomes of the inspection.
- 7.4 MD NOTED that BGU was graded “Good” across all areas – therefore a very positive outcome.
- 7.5 MD NOTED that our own ‘self-evaluation’ process that the team put in place a couple of years ago, was well received by Ofsted and agreed with all the area of our own self-evaluation.
- 7.6 MD PROVIDED an overview of the ITE’s internal governance processes and NOTED that they meet as a Governance Board three times a year – this is made up of a membership predominantly of Lead Partners and External Representative who hold us to account.
- 7.7 AM PROVIDED members on the updated progress towards addressing the key areas for development across all three of our phases, Primary, Secondary and Further Education.
- 7.8 AM HIGHLIGHTED the progress made on the following:
- **Primary** (page 3 and 4 of the Update Report):
 - Area for development 1 – Mentoring quality.
 - Area for development 2 – English as an Additional Language (EAL) strategies.
 - **Secondary** (page 5 of the Update Report):
 - Area for development 1 – EAL strategies and adaptive teaching.
 - **Further Education** (page 6 and 7 of the Update Report):
 - Area for development 1 – Quality assurance of mentors.
 - Area for development 2 – Curriculum focus.
- 7.9 AM NOTED the following next steps that the team will be focussing on:
- Targeted interventions.
 - Ongoing monitoring and further refinements.
 - To become a Centre of Expertise for EAL (through accreditation with the Bell Foundation).
- 7.10 Members were encouraged that those areas for improvement have been addressed and acted on swiftly and effectively, especially as teacher training was core to who BGU is and what it offers.
- 7.11 The Chair THANKED MD and AM for their presentation and report and NOTED that it really helps us to understand what is a major part of the core business of BGU.
- 8. Update on the New Ofsted ITE Framework**
- 8.1 The Chair NOTED that the new Ofsted ITE Framework had been identified via our external Governance Consultant, which was presented to the Governance and Nominations

Committee at their meeting on 24 February 2025 and requested it be presented to AAC members.

8.2 MD NOTED that this new framework was currently in consultation until 28 April 2025. The consultation wants to know what institutions think about their proposed plans for inspecting schools and other settings where children and adults learn. This includes:

- Early Years
- State-Funded Schools
- Non-Association Independent Schools
- Further Education and Skills
- Initial Teacher Education.

8.3 MD HIGHLIGHTED the proposed changes that impact all remits:

- New Report Cards: Ofsted want to give parents and stakeholders better information about a provider's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Inspectors will evaluate more areas of a provider's work, using a five-point grading scale:
 - Causing concern
 - Attention needed
 - Secure
 - Strong
 - Exemplary.
- Introduction of toolkits
- Inspectors will apply the toolkit evaluation areas, themes and standards, tailoring evaluations to each provider's context.
- Inspectors will evaluate whether safeguarding is met or unmet at the whole provider level.
- Inspectors will no longer carry out deep dives.

8.4 MD NOTED that following networking meetings with University Council for Education of Teachers (UCET), the Cathedral's Group and the Lincolnshire Teaching School Hub, conversations have taken place to discuss these proposals and to work together on campaigning for any areas that we were not happy with. It was NOTED that below were the implications and concerns from the sector (in black) and our recommendations as an institution (in blue):

- Use of a five-point grading scale for ITE.
 - Replace the five-point grading scale with a 'met/not met' model OR a three-point scale (attention needed – met – strong).
- Risks of using employment rates as a quality metric.
 - Assess employment guidance and career support rather than graduate employment rates.
- Misalignment of governance expectations with university-based ITE.
 - Recognise the unique governance structure of ITE partnerships in HEIs.
- Unintended consequences of inclusion and SEND criteria.
 - Evaluate support structures for SEND and disadvantaged trainees rather than penalising providers for completion rates.
- Concerns over curriculum oversight and 'discredited research' terminology.
 - Ensure ITE curricula focus on research literacy rather than restricting research choices.
- Workload assessment should focus on support structure, not arbitrary burden levels.
 - Judge workload management based on provider support systems rather than subjective perceptions.

- 8.5 MD NOTED the ITE teams' strategic priorities:
- **Ensure** compliance with revised inspection framework.
 - Revise self-evaluation framework to **align** with final toolkit.
 - **Strengthen** inclusion for ALL, particularly for SEND and disadvantaged trainees.
 - **Embed** the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) into curricula and continue to ensure research-led content.
 - **Support** trainee well-being, professional behaviours and workload management.
- 8.6 MD NOTED the next steps and timeline around the consultation:
- Internal review and stakeholder engagement – March 2025.
 - Consultation response submission – April 2025.
 - Implementation of key changes – Summer 2025.
 - Ongoing sector engagement and inspection readiness – 2025/26.
- 8.7 The Chair THANKED MD for his update and presentation on the proposed Ofsted ITE inspection framework – it was good to be informed about the developments and BGU's ITE responses and reactions within the sector.
9. **Approve the Annual Health of the Institution Report, including**
- **Degree Outcome Statement**
 - **Research Integrity Statement**
- 9.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the draft version of the Annual Health of the Institution Report (AHIR) 2023/24, the Degree Outcomes Statement (DOS) and the Research Integrity Statement.
- 9.2 The Executive Dean of Faculty, Dr Nick Gee (NG), INTRODUCED the AHIR and NOTED that the AHIR had been reduced in size to reflect the new ways of working and efficiencies following the restructuring across BGU implemented by the former Interim Vice-Chancellor, Professor Karen Stanton last year. Previous reiterations of the AHIR included all of the reports within the institution (which have been approved and received through the deliberative committee structure), but this current version has embedded in it the relevant links to reports for efficiency.
- 9.3 NG NOTED that this version of the AHIR was sharper, simpler and more focused for a digestible read, without comprising on the quality, rigour or the importance of the information included within it.
- 9.4 NG NOTED that the AHIR had been through the internal deliberative committee structure of the Academic Enhancement Committee (AEC) and Senate for review and scrutiny. It was NOTED that the reduced iteration of the AHIR was warmly received by both committees.
- 9.5 NG NOTED that the 2023/24 academic year had been incredibly successful in terms of academic health, including the National Student Survey (NSS), BGU Student Satisfaction Survey (BGUSSS), OFSTED inspections and Graduate Outcomes data, especially when considering the amount of internal change within the institution from the change of Vice-Chancellor, the internal restructure and implementation of the Critical Path.
- 9.6 CT NOTED that academic health (including quality and standards) represents a significant risk to the University's registration with the OfS if not monitored and managed with rigour. It was NOTED that the detailed commentary in the AHIR provides reassurance to members about that risk.

- 9.7 CT NOTED that the AHIR related to the 2023/24 academic year and was an assurance report of the BGU's continued safeguarding of the standards of its awards and the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience.
- 9.8 CT NOTED that the AHIR was based on a critical review of performance across the academic portfolio and a culmination of an extensive programme of monitoring and review across the academic delivery departments and professional services departments, that support the students' experiences and is presented as a series of responses to the OfS' B Conditions of Registration
- 9.9 Degree Outcomes Statement:
- 9.9.1 CT NOTED that the Degree Outcomes Statement (DOS) related to the 2023/24 academic year and ensures clear and transparent communication in relation to the University's degree outcomes.
- 9.9.2 CT NOTED that the DOS applied to all undergraduate (Level 6) awards over the last five years and indicates that there is no indication of 'grade inflation'.
- 9.10 Research Integrity Statement:
- 9.10.1 CT (on behalf of the Executive Dean for Research & Knowledge Exchange) NOTED that the annual Research Integrity Statement provided an overview of governance and activity supporting research integrity across the institution. The Concordat to Support Research Integrity stipulates that research institutions should publicise a high-level statement each year to report on relevant governance, support and development of research integrity, and to report on any research misconduct.
- 9.10.2 It was CONFIRMED BGU had no cases of such misconduct to report over the 2023-24 annual cycle.
- 9.11 The Chair AGREED that this reduced reiteration of the AHIR was more accessible, simpler to read and more engaging. It provided a lot of confidence and reassurance.
- 9.12 Members were CONTENT to APPROVE the AHIR, DOS and Research Integrity Statement.
- 9.13 The Chair CONGRATULATED and THANKED all colleagues who were involved in putting together the AHIR, DOS and the Research Integrity Statement.

10. Safeguarding Update

- 10.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations), Tom Dannatt (TD), NOTED that in autumn 2023, BGU's internal auditors, Uniac, were commissioned to carry out an internal audit reviewing BGU's safeguarding policies and practices. It was NOTED that the results were very positive, and our policies and processes were sound with some good evidence of best practice.
- 10.2 TD NOTED that the first draft of the report was issued in October 2023, where the Audit Committee formally signed off the management responses and the action points were reviewed at the November 2023 Audit Committee, where actions have been addressed.
- 10.3 TD NOTED that he has met with Elise Temple, Link Governor for Safeguarding and Anne Frost, Chair of University Council, regarding some recent safeguarding issues the institution has encountered – it was NOTED that a full safeguarding update would be

presented to University Council at its meeting on 1 April 2025, along with Uniac's Safeguarding Audit.

- 10.4 TD NOTED that the institution was currently undertaking a safeguarding staffing review, looking at how tasks are allocated, responsibilities and reporting line. TD also NOTED that a specific Safeguarding & Prevent Committee had been established to monitor and discuss regulation and policy.
- 10.5 TD NOTED that the internal safeguarding team had built a good relationship with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). It was NOTED that the LADO and her team were planning with the Safeguarding team to visit BGU for face-to-face introductions and to better understand ours and their thresholds.
- 10.6 TD NOTED that four/five safeguarding incidents have been raised over the past three weeks but was not indicative of a trend. It was NOTED that these were all following through the process.

11. Any Other Business

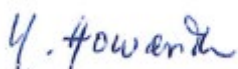
- 11.1 There was no further business to discuss.

12. Key Items for University Council

- 12.1 The key items to HIGHLIGHT to University Council at its next meeting on 1 April 2025 were:
- AAC's Approval of the Academic Health of the Institution Report, Degree Outcome Statement and Research Integrity Statement;
 - OfS' approval of BGU's Access & Participation Plan;
 - Update from the ITE area on progress on the development areas following the Ofsted Inspection in 2024; and
 - Update on the new Ofsted ITE Framework.

13. Date of Next Meeting

- 13.1 The date of the next full meeting of the AAC was scheduled for:
- Wednesday 4 June 2025 at 2pm via MS Teams
- 13.2 The Chair THANKED members for their attendance and contribution.

Signed 

Date ... 4 June 2025.....