

BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACADEMIC ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 4 JUNE 2025
14:00PM VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Dr Nick Gee, Executive Dean of Faculty (NG)
Max Gordon, Students' Union President (MG)
Professor Andrew Gower, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive (AG)
Professor Marianne Howarth (MH) **(Chair)**
Professor Andrew Jackson, Executive Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange (AJ)
Rev'd Canon Dr Sarah Lawrence (SL) *(from agenda item 9 to 13)*
Elise Temple (ET)
Dr Claire Thomson, Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning & Student Success (CT)

In attendance:

Leanne Chancellor, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office *(minutes)*
Jonathan Lidster, Director for Corporate Information Systems, Strategy and Performance *(for agenda item 7)*

		Action
1.	Welcome	
1.1	The Chair, Professor Marianne Howarth, welcomed members to the fourth meeting of the academic year for the Academic Assurance Committee (AAC).	
2.	Apologies	
2.1	Apologies for absence were received from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Hilary Grainger OBE; and • Tom Dannatt, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Operations) and University Secretary. 	
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 20 March 2025	
4.1	The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 March 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record and the Chair was authorised to sign them.	
5.	Matters Arising	
5.1	There were no matters arising from the last meeting held on 20 March 2025.	

6. Access and Participation Plan (APP) Update

- 6.1 The Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning & Student Success, Dr Claire Thomson (CT), NOTED that following our APP approval by the Office for Students (OfS) in January 2025, the Head of Student Success, Phil Davis (PD), was working on making minor changes regarding the institution's tuition fee and bursary offers, which now have to reflect in our APP.
- 6.2 CT NOTED that PD has been liaising with the OfS and HIGHLIGHTED the following:
1. Submission of a revised Financial Investment Template (FIT) which was submitted by the deadline of 30 April 2025, to enable BGU to charge the new higher rate of fees (£9,535 maximum fee) in 2025/26.
 - CT confirmed that this had been approved by the OfS and was published on BGU's website.
 2. The production of a variance to our APP 2025-29 submission to accommodate some changes to our Mature Students Bursary to reflect discussions with our franchise partner, The Language Gallery (TLG).
 - CT NOTED that further to a review of the current and prospective student cohort with TLG, we have noted a preponderance of 21–24-year-olds, therefore, in content of this provision, the risk to equality of opportunity is 25+.
 - CT CONFIRMED that acknowledgement has been received from the OfS that we can request to make these variations, and work is underway to revise both our main body document and the new FIT template to reflect the changes. It was NOTED that the revised documents would be presented to the University Executive Group before being resubmitted to the OfS.
- 6.3 The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Andrew Gower (AG), REFLECTED the point that there was a tension around the setting of the value of bursaries and HIGHLIGHTED the following:
- The social purpose of the University.
 - The Widening Participation agenda of the University, plus our Partners.
 - The financial realities of the University, in relation to wanting to offer and maximise the bursary support the institution provides to those students who have the greatest need versus the affordability that the institution can afford.
- 6.4 The Chair ENQUIRED about the current numbers and future recruitment of TLG students.
- AG NOTED that currently in this academic year (2024/25), there are 201 TLG students studying on the Level 4 Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) in Business and Management.
 - AG NOTED that for next academic year (2025/26), TLG are indicating a significant growth to 1,800 students. It was NOTED that this was due to a backlog of interest from February on the Level 4 CertHE, when TLG did not recruit to these cohorts, and recruitment to a Level 5 Diploma in Management.
 - AG EMPHASISED the need for appropriate planning and resource allocation to accommodate the significant growth in TLG student enrolment. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that the planned growth materialises, and that the University is prepared for the resource implications.
 - AG NOTED that he will be visiting TLG on 30 June 2025, along with Allison Webb (AW), Director of Business and Community Engagement. AG also NOTED that AW speaks positively about the relationship with TLG and their commitment to

quality enhancement, and mentioned the change in staff at TLG to recognise the quality enhancement agenda and their authentic sense of purpose towards widening participation.

6.5 The Chair THANKED CT and AG for their updates to members on the APP and TLG student numbers.

7. Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) Compliance Assurance

7.1 The Director of Corporate Information Systems, Strategy and Performance, Jonathan Lidster (JL) EXPLAINED the importance of CMA compliance, especially in light of the upcoming name change, and the steps being taken to ensure students are informed and the university remains compliant.

7.2 JL OUTLINED the regulatory expectations, our current compliance infrastructure, and the specific measures being taken to ensure continuity of compliance throughout the transition and beyond.

7.3 JL HIGHLIGHTED the three core regulatory expectations associated with CMA compliance and emphasised the importance of these obligations at key touchpoints with students:

1. **Provision of clear, accurate, and timely information** to enable informed student decision-making.
2. **Fair and transparent terms and conditions**, avoiding unexpected changes to courses or costs.
3. **Accessible and fair complaints handling processes**, these obligations apply at all key student decision points: application, offer, and enrolment.

7.4 JL EXPLAINED the impact of the upcoming name change on CMA compliance, highlighting the need to inform students about the change, particularly regarding the awarding body for their degrees and the steps being taken, such as updating the website, prospectus, student contracts, offer letters, digital infrastructure, and ID cards.

7.5 JL EMPHASISED the importance of a strong communication strategy to ensure that students are properly informed about the name change and its implications. JL NOTED that information had already been shared with future, current, and past students, including a comprehensive 'Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)' to address any concerns.

7.6 JL NOTED that he had established a Task and Finish Working Group, to actively oversee CMA compliance across the institution, and NOTED that a cross-departmental Project Group had been formed to ensure a smooth transition of the University's name change, ensuring key information is communicated to stakeholders to ensure compliance with CMA regulations.

7.7 The Students' Union President, Max Gordon (MG) ASSURED members that students were aware of the upcoming name change and were generally happy with it, with the current graduating students graduating under Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU), and then from next year onwards, graduating under the new name of Lincoln Bishop University.

7.8 Members RAISED the following questions and queries:

- As well as the new incoming students starting in September 2025 needing to be made aware that their degree award would be under the new name of Lincoln Bishop University, would that also apply to our existing students enrolled on programmes with us?

- JL CONFIRMED that the students who would be graduating in July 2025, would be awarded under BGU.
- JL CONFIRMED that new students and existing students, would then be awarded under Lincoln Bishop University and will have to be duly informed in a timely fashion.
- JL NOTED that some information has already been circulated to current, future and past students, including a comprehensive FAQ to address any concerns.
- Have students had written clarity around the university name that would go on certificates, especially international and Widening Participation students where the institutional recognition is a relevant part of their application process?
 - JL CONFIRMED that there is a specific Name Change Working Group, which focuses on all the different areas that we have to complete, in order to achieve successful transition, and digital and physical branding.
 - JL NOTED that when it comes to international students, there was an additional piece of work to complete around UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) –we want to ensure that any name change does not impact on that application process for international students from a CMA compliance perspective.

7.9 The Chair ACKNOWLEDGED the amount of work that was going to have to happen over the coming months, but was assured that processes were in place and hopefully the transition will go through smoothly.

8. Executive Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange’s Biannual Report:

- ***Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029 Implementation Plan Report***
- ***Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) Strategy – Progress Report***
- ***Five Year Investment Plan***
- ***Research Conference – 9 and 10 July 2025***

8.1 REF 2029 Implementation Plan Report

8.1.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the REF 2029 Strategy and Implementation Plan Interim Report 2 (January 2025).

8.1.2 The Executive Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange, Professor Andrew Jackson (AJ), PROVIDED an update on the REF2029 Implementation Plan, which included:

- REF 2029 policy developments and publications since July 2024;
- Internal policy developments since July 2024;
- Analysis of the 2023-24 internal Annual Research Audit (ARA);
- Report of progress against the action plan and KPIs; and
- The REF 2029 Strategy.

8.1.3 AJ DISCUSSED the recent policy releases related to REF 2029, which included Open Access requirements, the development of the Code of Practice for the Inclusion of Staff and Outputs, and the volume measure for calculating eligible staff. It was NOTED that these policies trigger a series of actions to align with the new requirements.

8.1.4 AJ NOTED that further major policy releases were expected end of June / early July 2025.

8.1.5 AJ MENTIONED BGU’s participation in the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) pilot exercise for the development of the ‘People, Culture and Environment (PCE)’, which involved submitting an 8000-word submission for the institution. It was NOTED that BGU was selected to join 30 other HEIs with History Unit of Assessment (UoA) teams.

- 8.1.6 AJ NOTED that the exercise provided valuable insights into the university's research culture and areas for improvement.
- 8.1.7 AJ HIGHLIGHTED the re-development of the Workload Allocation Model (WAM), particularly the research and knowledge exchange strand. The new model aimed to increase efficiency, accountability, and flexibility. It was NOTED that it had been well received by staff and included target setting and a nuanced approach to workload distribution.
- 8.1.8 AJ NOTED the three core elements of the REF:
1. Output – which was now going to be called ‘Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding’;
 2. Impact – which was now going to be called ‘Engagement and Impact’; and
 3. Environment – which was now going to be called ‘People, Culture and Environment’.
- 8.1.9 AJ EMPHASISED the importance of developing a positive research culture, which was increasingly recognised in the REF assessment. He mentioned the need for a clear strategy and direction, internal and external collaborations, inclusivity, responsible research, and staff development.
- 8.10 AJ DISCUSSED the alignment of research culture with the University's strategy, highlighting the need to integrate research culture development into the five-year strategy and research sub-strategy.
- 8.11 Members RAISED the following questions:
- Were we actively considering apprenticeships, vocational education and employer partnered learning within the ‘Engagement and Impact’ strand?
 - AJ NOTED that these areas would not necessarily feed into the REF relatively speaking. However, apprenticeship development could feed into the REF UoA that have apprenticeships developing within them as they express a form of engagement with the external sector.
 - AJ NOTED that in Government terms, forms of professional learning provision fall within the Knowledge and Exchange Framework (KEF), which AJ also leads.
 - AJ NOTED that he would be mindful to include these areas where he could in REF and KEF.
- 8.12 The Chair NOTED that the REF 2029 was a very useful report and was encouraged to hear the revisions to the WAM had been well received.
- 8.2 RDAP Strategy Progress Report
- 8.2.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the RDAP Strategy Progress Report (January 2025).
- 8.2.2 AJ NOTED that the purpose of this report was to provide members with an update on progress towards achieving RDAP, and informing related strategic RKE decision making, planning and investment up to 2030.
- 8.2.3 AJ NOTED that applications for RDAP must be underpinned by three consecutive research-data years. The current analysis collates data from across the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 Annual Research Audits.

8.2.4 AJ HIGHLIGHTED the following:

- The earliest academic year in which BGU could apply is 2028-29, subject to progress against key metrics over the preceding three-year period.
- BGU has made good progress in relation to the **Criterion H1**, 'Doctoral conferrals'. The threshold of 30 was met in 2022-23, and the total at the end of July 2025 will be scheduled to reach 36.
- Performance against the three 'mandatory-field', 3-year-cycle **Criteria F1** ('Academic staff') **A-C**, is a commendable achievement of the staff, but it is not sufficiently strong in relation to meeting all threshold requirements.
- Challenges are also evident in relation to certain '**Other**' **F1 Criteria** where relevant data is provided by the institution.
- Trends in the audit-data reflect factors having an impact on research performance, in particular: position in REF cycles, attention to other essential institutional priorities, and the changing size and composition of the academic-staff body.

8.2.5 AG NOTED that the university was institutionally committed to RDAP. He NOTED that BGU has been supported by the University of Leicester, who understands our positioning for achieving RDAP.

8.2.6 AG NOTED that AJ had set out a detailed roadmap in terms of developing the work and investing in it appropriately, in order to make sure BGU are successful by the end of strategic planning period.

8.2.7 The Chair ENQUIRED if there were many universities which have yet to acquire RDAP.

- AJ CONFIRMED that BGU was not alone in this journey and there were many universities, especially in our sector, e.g. Plymouth Marjon University, Birmingham Newman University and Leeds Trinity University.

8.3 Five Year Investment Plan

8.3.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the proposals for research in the 2025-30 BGU Strategy and Financial Resilience Framework.

8.3.2 AJ NOTED that the purpose of this paper was to inform the:

- Periodic review of institutional investment in research and related RKE.
- Development of the REF 2029 Code of Practice.
- Five-year strategic and financial-resilience planning stages.

8.3.3 AJ MENTIONED that the proposals had been presented to the University Executive Group (UEG) at its meeting on 3 June 2025, for consideration and the following proposals were approved:

- 200 hours upwards as the REF Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR), Teaching & Research (T&R) staff, RKE WAM threshold. This will enter the internal and external Code of Practice consultation and approval stages in Summer 2025.
- Receive the four areas of investment for consideration as part of the development of the 2025-30 Strategic Plan and Financial Framework through Summer 2025.

8.3.4 AJ EMPHASISED to members that due to the unfortunate decision to reduce research time allocation, it was important to be open and transparent to staff in terms of what the institution can currently afford. Therefore, due to the university's financial situation, we

cannot currently afford studentships, sabbaticals and staff time for completing doctoral research, and additional time for those staff who hold Professorships and Associate Professorships. However, these are the areas that will be invested into when the financial situation changes.

- 8.3.5 AG ADDED that the technical and financial work that has been undertaken would flow into the budget proposals through to 2030, which would be presented to University Council at its meeting on 2 July 2025, holding onto the benefits of RDAP, quality-related (QR) research and curriculum innovation.
- 8.3.6 The Chair NOTED that she was pleased to see the thought that had gone into the resourcing that would be required to achieve the objectives, the transparency with staff with affordability and the support in place for staff to complete their REF endeavours.
- 8.3.7 Members NOTED and SUPPORTED the important direction of travel for RKE.
- 8.4 Research Conference – 9 and 10 July 2025
- 8.4.1 AJ NOTED that the annual Research Conference was scheduled for 9 and 10 July 2025 and EXPLAINED that this conference is where the university celebrates its research.
- 8.4.2 AJ NOTED that the conference gives the opportunity for staff and post graduate researchers to present their research papers.
- 8.4.3 AJ INVITED and WELCOMED Council members to attend the Research Conference.

At this point of the meeting, Rev'd Canon Sarah Lawrence joined the meeting.

9. The Student Journey Project

- 9.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the PowerPoint presentation on the Student Journey Project prepared by the Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning and Student Success, Dr Claire Thomson (CT).
- 9.2 CT NOTED that the Student Journey was part of BGU's Critical Path 2 to deliver on this academic year. It also assists with alignment with the BGU's Retention and Continuation Strategy, APP, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Graduate Outcomes.
- 9.3 CT PRESENTED the Student Journey Project, outlining the rationale and key findings, and HIGHLIGHTED the following:
- This timeline was an example of one demographic of students mapped across the standard academic year – timelines for different categories of students have also been mapped (e.g. Apprenticeship, Doctoral, Distance, Blended, International and Collaborative Partner), ensuring parity in experience, compliance with regulatory standards (B conditions) and present gaps in where new national initiatives may be implemented to the betterment of the student experience (OfS E6 Conditions).
 - The Student Journey timeline was mapped in accordance with data provided by The Hub, Students' Union and Admissions.
 - The timeline includes the 'high level' key activities that happen within the institution.
 - The timeline tries to recognise touchpoints that support well-being and mental health, and also to capture social activities and events.

- This institution Key Performance Indicator (KPI) should have a knock-on effect to all departments and allow the institution to view their calendars holistically and without confusion.
- The timelines will be reviewed annually and regularly.

9.4 CT NOTED the three areas that had been identified for making further recommendations on:

1. Review 'information overload' at the beginning of Semester 1 and look at our pre-enrolment and pre-application processes to ensure all the right timelines and touchpoints are in place.
2. Look to increase engagement activities at the end of Semester 1 / beginning of Semester 2.
3. First-Generation support, to ensure entry into university life is not too daunting.

9.5 CT NOTED that the Students' Union have been involved on the Student Journey consultations, and it has been presented to the Student Engagement Forum on 19 February, Student Council on 3 March and the Academic Enhancement Committee on 5 March 2025.

9.6 MG NOTED that feedback from students following the Student Council was that they found it useful and helpful, and were happy with the direction it was going in. MG also NOTED that he agreed with the First-Generation students feeling daunted and scared at enrolment stage, so any further support would be appreciated at this touchpoint.

9.7 AG NOTED the subsequent follow-on thoughts to be considered:

- It was very useful to look at the Student Journey holistically to see it through the eyes of the students.
- With regards to continuation rates, this was an important area for us to keep focused on given the priority given to increasing student recruitment. There was a pool of students where we know that the continuation rates from Foundation Year are not quite where we want them to be, so a question is, what could we do to increase the progression of Foundation Year to undergraduate degree to postgraduate taught?
- Could the team embed data capture into the student journey touchpoints to support subsequent development learner analytics?
- Could a desktop exercise be mapped out for a Modular Student Journey under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) framework.

9.8 The Chair THANKED CT for her presentation and update, it was very informative, and the committee would like to hear more about this project as it develops and progresses.

10. Development of the Academic Portfolio

10.1 The Executive Dean of Faculty, Dr Nick Gee (NG), PROVIDED members with an update on current progress with the Portfolio Review, which was launched in January 2024, and to provide them with an insight of how plans are moving forward – it was NOTED that a fuller update would be presented to University Council at its meeting on 2 July 2025.

10.2 NG RECALLED that when the first Portfolio Review was undertaken to capture colleagues' ideas, we ended up with 32 projects that were considered, and then those projects were distilled into five main priority areas, which teams have been working on significantly over the past year.

10.3 NG PROVIDED members with the latest updates on the current five portfolio review workstreams:

1. Current Portfolio Viability

- Forecast recruitment has been reviewed against current viability baselines and several courses have been suspended (e.g. Environmental Psychology, FdA Childhood and Youth + top up).
- Courses have been amended to optimise delivery hours (e.g. MA Theology, MA TESOL).
- Foundation Year revalidation has been completed for implementation in September 2026 seeking to increase progression to Level 4.
- Optional modules with insufficient numbers have been closed (e.g. Graduate Attribute modules).

2. Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Core/Pathway

- Validations have been completed, with shared modules to enhance the efficiency of delivery of specialist programmes to be implemented from September 2025 (MA Education, SEND, Early Years, EAL).

3. UG Core/Pathway

- Validations have been completed, with shared modules to enable efficient delivery whilst maintaining specialist pathways, to be implemented from September 2026 (BA Education Studies, SEND, Early Years, TESOL).

4. Online

- Validations have been completed for online/blended and face to face delivery for the MA Education and associated suite of core/pathway courses to increase the accessibility of provision.
- Module content co-creation discussions are ongoing with Oasis Multi Academy Trust (MAT), the Ministry of Defence and Bright Future International Training and Services (BFITS) Thailand to facilitate pipelines for potential students.
- Marketing has started advertising online provision and we currently have 13 Firm accepts and 51 further applications pending.

5. Health & Social Care

- Networking and marketing research is ongoing to inform future developments.
- Validation of a new Level 6 Leadership and Management degree apprenticeship, mapped to the [Mary Seacole qualification](#), is currently on hold pending confirmation of the new apprenticeship standard, fee band and Mary Seacole re-accreditation.
- A new Programme Leader for Health and Social Care, Dr Alexandra Carlin, has been appointed, commencing in September 2025.

10.4 NG NOTED that as the current portfolio review workstreams near completion, a new Portfolio Review 2 was launched in May 2025, to retain the momentum and strategic approach to portfolio development:

- Portfolio Review 2 was launched, with the creation of a new LLE workstream to scope potential opportunities around short courses, modular learning and stacked provision.
- Suggestions previously considered in Portfolio Review 1, and placed on hold, are now being re-visited for future consideration.
- Opportunities resulting from recent new initiatives are being actively explored (e.g. Oxford International Education Group partnership).

- New workstreams will be finalised, pending conclusion of market research commissioned in support of strategic portfolio development.

10.5 NG NOTED that pending analysis of the market research, further details will be shared with University Council on 2 July as part of the strategy development session and form the core of an Academic Portfolio Innovation sub-strategy in support of the Strategic Plan 2025-30. It is envisaged that portfolio developments will be phased throughout the strategy period, and this will be mapped to project student numbers and income and reflected in the Financial Resilience Framework.

10.6 Members NOTED the great ambition and excitement coming through and acknowledged that developments felt coherent, joined up and well aligned. It was also NOTED that members liked the language of 'a radical approach' and 'pioneers in LLE', as this is exactly what the institution should be reaching to be.

10.7 The Chair THANKED NG for his update on the Portfolio Review and looked forward to hearing further updates at the University Council meeting.

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 2 July 2025 were:

- APP Update.
- Update on the Student Journey project.
- Committee’s assurance of CMA compliance amidst the University name change.

The following items, will already be on University Council’s agenda for 2 July:

- Update on research planning.
- Update on the development of the academic portfolio.

13. Date of Next Meeting

13.1 The date of the next full meeting of the AAC was scheduled for:

- Thursday 20 November 2025 at 2pm via MS Teams

13.2 The Chair THANKED members for their attendance and contribution.

Signed 

Date9 December 2025.....