

BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACADEMIC ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 5 JUNE 2024
14:00PM VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Dr Nick Gee, Executive Dean of Faculty (NG)
 Professor Marianne Howarth (MH) (Chair)
 Professor Andrew Jackson, Executive Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange (AJ)
 Rev'd Canon Dr Sarah Lawrence
 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)
 Professor Karen Stanton, Interim Vice-Chancellor

Action

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 Karen Stanton (KS) to the meeting of AAC, who was joining this meeting as an observer.
2. **Apologies**
 - 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from:
 - Emily Allden, Student Representative;
 - Anne Frost (*attendance only*);
 - Elise Temple; and
 - Rev'd Marian Toyne.
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 13 March 2024**
 - 4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 March 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record and the Chair was authorised to sign them.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 The action table was RECEIVED and progress against the actions from the meeting on 13 March 2024 was NOTED.

5.2 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations) & University Secretary, Tom Dannatt (TD), NOTED that there was one action arising from the last meeting and CONFIRMED that Dr Claire Thomson, Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning & Student Success (CT), had been appointed as the Deputy Chair for AAC.

6. Research Plans

6.1 The Chair gave thanks to the Executive Dean of Research & Knowledge Exchange, Professor Andrew Jackson (AJ), for his work on preparing such a comprehensive and accessible set of papers relating to the future research plans and strategy.

6.2 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the BGU Research & Knowledge Exchange (RKE) Strategy Timeline document for 2024-30.

6.3 AJ NOTED that the timeline would be subject to year-on-year review, in-line with changing institutional budgetary circumstances, external policy requirements, and other internal strategic priorities.

6.4 AJ NOTED that the timeline takes an overarching and co-ordinated approach to RKE planning up to 2025, integrating and inter-relating the following:

- BGU's strategic planning cycles.
- External policy frameworks and aspirations.
- Internal capacity and capability.
- Resource input.

6.5 AJ NOTED that the timeline assumes a cautious growth position, but sets an upward path towards the end of 2030 in support of:

- An excellent submission to Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029.
- Application for Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) by 2030.
- Strengthening of Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) returns.
- Achievement of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) threshold by 2030.
- A more established, mature, and sustainable RKE staff base.

6.6 AJ HIGHLIGHTED the key points for members to note:

- The timeline currently assumes a five-year planning cycle pattern.
- The timeline sets an incremental increase in investment within the RKE budget, peaking from 2026 up to 2030.
- *RDAP* – the 30 conferrals threshold has been met, and the timing is set out for the three-year data capture window for meeting the other key RDAP threshold criteria.
- *REF* – the planning assumes the release of key documentation in the Summer and Autumn 2024, and its guide to the production of a Code of Practice and the key data-capture years.
- *KEF* – submissions will be updated three-yearly to record activity and growth aspirations.
- *KEC* – the three-yearly KE Concordat Action Plans will be revised in parallel with strategy development and growing KE activity.

- *HEIF* – the plan assumes a building of KE activity in line with REF and RDAP trajectories, and an enhancement of KE-data capture in support of meeting the Higher Education Innovation Fund eligibility threshold.
- *Academic Staff* – following an end of 2024-25 review of numbers, the timeline assumes a gradual if cautious increase, if portfolio growth allows, and REF and RDAP priorities determine. This caveat would also include the following areas:
 - *Teaching & Research* – contracted staff.
 - *Significant Responsibility for Research* – defined staff (REF2029), and above the REF2021 FTE level.
 - *Workload Allocation Model – RKE Allocation*.
 - *RKE Staff* – lead and administrative roles, with key positions indicated.
 - *Professoriate*.
 - *Promotions* – with promotions rounds indicated.
- *Studentships* – if portfolio growth allows, and REF and RDAP priorities determine.
- There may be other possible investment areas if higher levels of institutional growth allow.

6.7 It was NOTED that the BGU RKE Strategy Timeline document for 2024-30 had been shared with the University Executive Group (UEG), the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), the Professoriate and the Unions.

It was NOTED that it will continue its committee structure journey and be presented to the RKE Committee.

6.8 Members RAISED the following questions and comments:

- Would the BGU RKE Strategy Timeline document for 2024-30 be presented to Senate?
 - AJ NOTED that the RKE Committee would receive it and Senate would subsequently receive the minutes of this committee.
 - AJ also NOTED that it would be presented at the forthcoming Faculty Forum on 26 June 2024, which would be an opportunity to present it to the wider staffing base.
- Clarification was sought regarding the WAM and its units.
 - AJ NOTED that that the WAM was the Workload Allocation Model, which was an internal management device/process, as a reference point in terms of staff allocation, which as noted, was regrettably removed for Semester One.
 - AJ NOTED that in Semester Two a bidding process was established which staff could request up to 300 hours or three units.
 - AJ NOTED that it was important to understand that the 300 hours or 0.2 FTE also equates with what many institutions in the sector regard as what a member should hold to have ‘significant responsibility for research’, which would then allow their work to be eligible for submission as an individual into the REF.
 - AJ NOTED that for next academic year, he is making sure that everybody who is on a Teaching & Research Contract gets at least one unit as a standing unit – and then staff can bid for up to an additional two units.
- Members liked the idea of the bidding process for additional hours, as they felt it helped people think positively about the kind of research they are going to complete.
- It was mentioned that BGU required three years of data capture for the RDAP application – could further information be provided?
 - AJ NOTED that for the RDAP Policy currently, there were three metrics that have to be consistently met over three years up to application:

1. a significant proportion (normally around a half as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies.;
 2. a significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its academic staff have recent (that is, within the past three years) personal experience of research activity in other UK or international university institutions by, for example, acting as external examiners for research degrees, serving as validation/review panel members, or contributing to collaborative research projects with other organisations; and
 3. a significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its academic staff who are engaged in research or other forms of advanced scholarship, can demonstrate achievements that are recognised by the wider academic community to be of national and/or international standing (e.g. as indicated by authoritative external peer reviews).
- AJ NOTED that this data was being carefully tracked through the research audit.
 - Why did BGU did not currently qualify for the HEIF?
 - AJ NOTED that BGU was short of what that thresholds needs to achieve.
 - AJ NOTED that a scoping exercise needed to be completed against the existing HEIF criteria, which will be completed over the next year. It was NOTED that BGU needed to be receiving £200K more of knowledge exchange funding more consistently, across a range of knowledge exchange dimensions.
 - AJ NOTED that we had hit the HEIF one year when we did well with European Funding, but that was a one-off.
 - Did BGU have a Sabbatical Policy or was that dependent on funding from the REF / affordability?
 - AJ NOTED that BGU has funded sabbaticals in the past but was not something that had been reflected in the RKE strategy plan due to wider budgetary circumstances.
 - AJ NOTED that sabbaticals could be something that could be investigated again, but they were subject to budgetary constraints. It was NOTED that in terms of RDAP, it may be something to reintroduce by the time we submit our application.
 - What was the financial impact of this strategy on BGU?
 - AJ NOTED that the strategy document would be reviewed annually, and discussions would be held with TD to review costings in terms of the budget and what the institution could afford.
 - AJ NOTED that the current strategy document has been reviewed in terms of the investment levels for next academic year, which was currently that one standing unit and two units of time which could be bid for.
 - AJ NOTED that as a longer-term aspiration, if the institution wants to apply for RDAP then this would require some targeted investment.

6.9 TD gave thanks to AJ for taking the time to complete a medium to long term view, which does help with the future financial planning. It was NOTED that BGU has a five-year financial framework and to see the levels of resource that may be required, depending on certain criteria, was helpful. TD NOTED that the draft 2024/2025 budget did incorporate all the anticipated costs for this coming academic year.

6.10 The Chair NOTED that the BGU RKE Strategy Timeline document for 2024-30 provided a lot of useful information and the reassurance that the RKE Strategy was robust.

7. ICON Quality Review Update

7.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the ICON's Interim Review Report (28 March 2024), including the Quality Assurance Action Table, and the ICON Quality Review Outcome letter sent to Professor N Nabi, Principal & Chief Academic Officer on 8 May 2024.

7.2 CT provided some background information for members:

- ICON had signed their Memorandum of Co-operation (MoC) with BGU in March 2023, and as part of that MoC, the agreement was that they would be on a probationary period for the first year as a new partner.
- At the end of the probationary period (March 2024), BGU undertook a Quality Review Process.

7.3 CT REASSURED members that BGU valued this partnership and because it was valued, BGU are keen to make sure that this partnership was working positively for both institutions.

7.4 CT NOTED the following from the Quality Review Process:

- The process was made collaborative, rather than feel that ICON was put in the 'spotlight' – it was about us working together to equally acknowledge where there were challenges on both side with regards to identified trend and themes.
- The process was robust and transparent, to ensure a clear audit trail for any external bodies, such as the Office for Students (OfS), that BGU was secure in the quality and the assurance of the standards.
- An Action Table was developed collaboratively, which a series of colleagues across BGU and ICON was asked to complete.
- CT and Dr Caroline Meredith (CM), Academic Leader for Flexible and Distributed Learning amalgamated the feedback that had been received from both institutions into a single Action Table, which was then mapped against the OfS B-Conditions, to ensure that BGU was secure in those quality and assurance standards.
- The Action Table was rag-rated to easily identify areas to monitor or review:
 - Green – assurance areas, and will continue to be monitored through our annual monitoring review process;
 - Amber – areas that were felt could be addressed specifically by having some joined up thinking and dedicated Operational Action Plans; and
 - Red – areas where BGU would need to ensure support in place for ICON – these red rag-rated areas mainly related to data.
- The Action Table was shared with ICON and BGU colleagues over a series of collaborative meetings to agree and discussed all the issues raised from the Quality Review Panel to mitigate some of these challenges.
- BGU colleagues have worked closely with ICON colleagues to ensure they understood.
- Through the rag-rating process, four key areas were identified to explore further:
 1. Recruitment: the use of agents, resource capacity – staff, campus, and student support.
 2. Data: quality and timeline for sharing.

3. Student support: how their student attendance was being monitored, access agreements were in place to ensure equality of opportunity and access to appropriate learning, teaching, reasonable adjustments.
4. Academic timeline: challenges with the three entry points per year.

7.5 CT NOTED that in conclusion the following recommendations were presented to UEG and agreed that:

- BGU was no longer in a position where it could collaboratively manage the three current entry points of Sept, Jan and April – therefore, effective from next academic year (2024/25) BGU to propose two entry points in Sept and Jan.
- The proposal for the probationary period would remain, until ICON could provide assurance that they had resolved the issues raised in the Quality Review by January 2025 – then UEG would reconsider the April cohort.
- Following the concerns above, BGU would not be in a position to take forward any new programmes to start from September 2024.

7.6 CT NOTED that following the Quality Review, there have been various visits to ICON from different department areas to better secure key stakeholder contacts, and BGU colleagues have now direct access to Professional Support and administrative teams.

7.7 CT REASSURED members that following the Quality Review, it was felt that the relationship between the two institutions was firmer in terms of strategic and operational dialogue, and that everything was moving in the right direction.

7.8 The Chair gave thanks to all colleagues involved with ICON and the Quality Review and AGREED that BGU had been sensible to extend the probationary period.

7.9 The Interim Vice-Chancellor, Professor Karen Stanton (KS), NOTED that ICON were visiting BGU campus on 10 June 2024, with approx. 30 students, to get a sense of the university. It was NOTED that BGU was also looking forward to a number of ICON students who have decided to graduate with us at Lincoln Cathedral.

8. Portfolio Review Update

8.1 NG NOTED that he took over responsibility for leading the portfolio review in January 2024, from the former Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor Scott Fleming.

8.2 NG NOTED that the portfolio review was linked to one of the seven Critical Path workstreams and the overall goal, was to create a portfolio of “courses” that enable BGU to be attractive to learners and businesses, is competitive and successfully grows income.

8.3 NG NOTED that in terms of the approach, in February 2024, he had broadened the scope of the portfolio review and created a structure that had seven different workstreams with specific colleagues to lead and deliver them:

1. *Alignment to the revised University Purpose* – ensuring the portfolio is aligned to the Purpose, Mission, and Vision of the institution.
2. *Alternative modes of delivery* – reviewing BGU blended and online capabilities and reviewing a viability of courses for new modes of delivery.
3. *Modularisation* – reviewing value creation from the Credit Framework and exploring value across the Joint degree offer.
4. *Review current offer* – reviewing whether there were any further actions to address from the portfolio review, reviewing the postgraduate offer and simplifying the course offering (in line with the Joint offer review).

5. *Alignment to local economic and skills agenda* – assessing our current offer against key regional priorities to identify priority opportunities and potential gaps.
6. *International* – assessing international opportunities within the current portfolio and assessing the viability of new portfolio offer to meet international opportunities.
7. *Partnerships* – assessing opportunities for extending the reach of the portfolio through Partnerships and assessing the impact of portfolio changes on them.

8.4 NG NOTED and ACKNOWLEDGED the expertise of Leigh Rengger, Interim Chief Commercial Officer and John Lidster, Director of Corporate Information Systems, Strategy & Performance, who had been supportive in creating a strong project management structure.

8.5 NG NOTED that since February, each of the seven workstreams were set a series of tasks to complete and provided fortnightly updates as routine check in points. Through these regular check-ins, colleagues were able to cross pollinate ideas and update the decision making. Following the individual workstreams and the ideas that were being received, the intention was then to focus on a small number of priority areas and to do them well.

8.6 NG NOTED to help assist with the priority areas, NG and the team have been testing the different ideas that had been put forward through the portfolio review through a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation criterion of:

- Market attractiveness;
- BGU competitiveness;
- Financial;
- Alignment to Purpose, Brand and Mission;
- Performance metrics, i.e. OfS B Conditions, Student Satisfaction and Graduate Outcomes.

8.7 NG NOTED that there were 34 viable suggestions that came forward across the seven workstreams, which were all reviewed in February – 12 were placed on hold (as there were deemed not to high priority to be progressed), and the remaining 22 were scored against the full criteria and tested at a Challenger Day Event in March.

8.8 NG NOTED that following that process, five main priority areas emerged:

- Online delivery;
- Health & Social Care;
- PGT offer;
- UG core/pathway models; and
- Our existing portfolio.

It was NOTED that Action Plans had now been created around each of the five priority areas, and workstream leads are starting to work through the due diligence, the details, the operational logistics, and the specifics of what courses might look like.

8.9 Please find attached Appendix 1, to see the sort of ideas that were being investigated further by teams, in relation to the five priority areas.

8.10 NG HIGHLIGHTED the timescales for the five priority areas:

- Existing portfolio: recommendations by July 2024.
- PGT: Portfolio Viability Document (PVD) to be received by July 2024, with delivery from September 2025.

- UG Core/Pathway: PVD to be received by September 2024, with delivery from September 2026.
- Online: ongoing due diligence with OPM's, with strategy proposal to be presented to UEG in July 2024, for delivery by September 2025 and 2026.
- H&SC: ongoing meetings with stakeholders; with a strategy proposal to be presented to UEG in July 2024, for delivery September 2026 and 2027.

8.11 NG NOTED that alongside this work, colleagues reviewing the alignment of the portfolio with the institutions Values and Purpose and reviewing the following:

- Defining social purpose;
- Review, re-focus, re-emphasize within curriculum;
- Embed within validation process;
- UN Sustainable Development Goals;
- Enhancement modules & enrichment opportunities; and
- Empowering students.

8.12 Members ACKNOWLEDGED the huge amount of work, which was currently underway, but was pleased to see a timeline with end points being worked to.

8.13 The Chair NOTED that she was familiar with the core and pathway model and noted she felt it was efficient in terms of delivery and enabled students to focus on areas they want to specialise in.

8.14 The Chair gave thanks to NG for a very comprehensive presentation and update on the portfolio review, it was felt that members were well informed of all the developments.

9. Access and Participation Plan Update

9.1 CT NOTED that she had updated members on the importance of the Access and Participation Plan (APP) and the areas of focus at the last meeting in March 2024, and reminded members that the submission date for the APP was 1 October 2024.

9.2 CT NOTED that the institution was still very focussed on this and taking leadership from Phil Davis (PD), Head of Student Success and an external advisor, Karen Heard-Laureote (KL), who comes with great expertise and knowledge of this area – KL is providing helpful guidance to CT, PD, and the Access & Participation Committee.

9.3 CT NOTED that for submission, four to five intervention strategies, called “Theories of Change (TOC)”, need to be identified for submission, which BGU is committed to delivering on – these could be things that the institution was already delivering, and strategies of intervention that can incrementally show enhancement and impact over the next five years.

9.4 CT NOTED that they were currently at development stage and was working with the data, evidence, historical evidence and the trends and themes of our delivery, to identify those four/five strategic TOCs that map to the OfS' directions of the key areas they want covering.

9.5 CT NOTED the TOCs that had been identified:

- Access – regarding our Widening Participation agenda and focussing on the institutions new contextual offers that have been rolling out from the Admissions Department.

- The contextual offers allow us to provide that targeted approach for students within key characteristic groups to make sure that we are providing that quality of opportunity to access our portfolio for all students.
- *Continuation* – focussing on ‘personal tutoring’ .
 - Personal tutoring is something that BGU offers to all students (it is mandatory that HE providers offer personal development planning, but it is not mandatory that students engage with it).
- *Progression* – relating to our Graduate Attribute Framework.
- *Attainment and Completion* – it was noted that the actual focus of the intervention strategic approach was yet to be confirmed, as CT was still working with the Data Team to undertake evaluation.

9.6 CT NOTED that once an identified strategic intervention has been identified, a TOC document is to be completed, which allows us to append that to the APP submission, to demonstrate and show the OfS what had been identified, why it has identified and what our journey will be going forward.

9.7 CT NOTED that she had been working with Emily Allden, Students’ Union Vice President, Education, who has taken the lead for the APP student submission.

9.8 Members were reminded that an Extraordinary AAC meeting may have to be called for the committee to review and approve the APP and the TOCs before its submission – end of August/September 2024.

10. Safeguarding Update

10.1 TD NOTED the following updates:

- He had received a successful and smooth handover of the Designated Safeguarding Lead from the former Registrar & University Secretary, Dr Steph Gilluly before her departure from the institution.
- Connor Short (CS) was successfully appointed to the new Contention, Quality & Student Engagement Officer, and will be supporting the safeguarding area.
- Policies are being reviewed and amending, with nomenclature following the new university structures and job title roles.
 - It was NOTED that this was also an opportunity to improve our policies and procedures and are building in a different style of referral that will enable individuals to flag welfare concerns as well as safeguarding issues.
- CS has been updating the safeguarding logs to make them easier and accessible to use.

10.2 TD NOTED that as of 4 June 2024, there were two live cases:

- One of these live cases has been closed satisfactorily with no serious concerns.
- One case remains open, which requires some communication over the next week, and then it can be closed.

10.3 TD NOTED that CS had recently shared with UEG:

- The updated (anonymised for UEG) contention and complaint log.
- The new draft Policy and Procedure for Processing Complaints by Students.
- The new revised templates for staff – for Stage 1 and Stage 2.

10.4 Members suggested that CS could be invited to the AAC meeting in November, to provide them with an update.

11. To Note: ITE Ofsted Report

11.1 Members RECEIVED and ACKNOWLEDGED the positive ITE Ofsted Report, which resulted in BGU receiving a “Good” rating.

11.2 NG NOTED that Ofsted completed their four-day inspection (with 13 inspectors) for the ITE provision over primary, secondary and Further Education on 5 to 8 March 2024.

11.3 NG HIGHLIGHTED the following from the inspection:

- The inspectors visited a range of partner schools and saw student trainees teach.
- The inspectors spoke to colleagues and completed focus reviews on subject aspects of that curriculum.
- Day one, the inspectors focussed on the intent of the curriculum – ‘what we say we are good at and what we say we are trying to achieve through the curriculum’.
- Days two and three, the inspectors explored the implementation of that curriculum – which is the time where they identify gaps and lines enquiry to gather further evidence from us.
- Day four, the inspectors raised the areas where they wanted to see further evidence.

11.4 NG NOTED that over the past two years, a rigorous self-evaluation process had been put in place, and Ofsted agreed with the evaluation of our own provision.

11.5 The Chair gave thanks to NG and both the academic and Professional Services colleagues, Partner Colleges and schools who worked hard throughout the inspection week.

12. Any Other Business

12.1 There was no further business to discuss.

13. Key Items for University Council

13.1 The key items to HIGHLIGHT to University Council at its next meeting on 3 July 2024 was:

- ICON Quality Review update discussions, and the reassurance that BGU are monitoring the academic quality and collaborative partnership; and
- BGU’s Research & Knowledge Exchange (RKE) Strategy Timeline for 2024-30 discussions.

14. Date of Next Meeting

14.1 The Chair NOTED that there would be an extraordinary meeting of AAC early September 2024 to review the APP submission.

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

- Wednesday 6 November 2024 at 2pm.

The Chair also THANKED members for their attendance and contribution.

Signed *M. Howan*

Date *06-11-2024*