

BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACADEMIC ASSURANCE COMMITTEEWEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2024
14:00PM VIA MS TEAMS**Present:**

Dr Nick Gee, Executive Dean of Faculty (NG)
 Max Gordon, Students' Union President
 Professor Marianne Howarth (MH) (Chair)
 Rev'd Canon Dr Sarah Lawrence (SL)
 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*)

Action

- 1. Welcome**
 - 1.1 The Chair, Professor Marianne Howarth, welcomed members to the second meeting of the academic year for the Academic Assurance Committee (AAC).
- 2. Apologies**
 - 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from:
 - Professor Hilary Grainger OBE;
 - Professor Andrew Jackson, Executive Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange; and
 - Tom Dannatt, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations).
- 3. Declarations of Interest**
 - 3.1 There were no new declarations of interest to raise for this meeting.
- 4. Terms of Reference for 2024/2025**
 - 4.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Terms of Reference (ToR) for 2024/2025.
 - 4.2 The Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office, Leanne Chancellor (LC), NOTED that the only amendments made to the ToRs from last academic year was to nomenclature.

4.3 Members were CONTENT to APPROVE the ToR for the AAC – members felt that the responsibilities were still comprehensive and gave the Committee the opportunity to fulfil the core mission of providing assurance to University Council.

4.4 Deputy Chair:

Members were CONTENT to appoint the Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning & Student Success, Dr Claire Thomson (CT), as Deputy Chair.

5. To Receive the Minutes of the AAC Meeting held on 5 June 2024 and Extraordinary Meeting on 19 September 2024

5.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 June 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record and the Chair was authorised to sign them.

5.2 The minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 19 September 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record and the Chair was authorised to sign them.

6. Matters Arising

6.1 There were no matters arising from the last meetings held on 5 June and 19 September 2024.

7. Confirmation of Access & Participation Plan and Students' Union Submission

7.1 CT CONFIRMED that following the extraordinary AAC meeting on 19 September 2024 (where the committee thoroughly reviewed the Access & Participation Plan (APP)), the APP 2025/29 was submitted to the Office for Students (OfS) ahead of its deadline of 1 October 2024.

7.2 CT NOTED that the APP submission included the following:

- the APP Submission for BGU;
- the Students' Union submission – that verifies that they have been involved in the development of BGU's plan and that they feel it is accurate; and
- the FIT document (fees, investment and targets).

7.3 CT NOTED that the OfS had confirmed that they had received the submission.

7.4 CT NOTED that it was expected that any recommendations and conditions the OfS had would be received in the Autumn Term, with final feedback in December 2024 (earliest).

7.5 The Chair 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 (£9,250). It was NOTED that if the institution did not succeed with an approved APP, delivering it or have not engaged with the process, BGU would only be able to charge the lower fee level (£6,165).

7.6 The Chair NOTED that there would probably be conditions, especially in view of the recent announcements from the Government regarding the increase in university fees.

7.7 The Chair NOTED that the APP Update would continue to be a standing agenda item, and was hoped that the institution would have heard from the OfS by our next meeting in March 2025.

8. Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) Cycle

- To note the Faculty Overview AMR
- To note the Research AMR

8.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Faculty Overview AMR and the Research Centre/Edd/PhD AMR, which were included as examples for members.

8.2 CT PROVIDED members with some background to the AMR process to help explain to members and HIGHLIGHTED the following:

- Every programme area and Professional Support area provides an AMR.
- The AMR assures quality assurance and academic standards.
- It allows the authors of the AMRs to reflect on feedback from students and External Examiners.
- Includes survey results and looks at key data sets, such as progression rates and Graduate Outcomes.
- Authors identify the drivers for further enhancements, to make an even greater and richer student experience and journey.

8.3 CT NOTED that the AMR was a little onerous for the authors of these documents, but they are key quality assurance documents for the institution and are key pieces of evidence that can be shared where necessary, such as External Examiners, Ofsted or if BGU had an OfS Review – these documents would then be used to demonstrate that we are accurate in our quality assurance processes and are fair, honest and transparent.

8.4 CT NOTED that this years AMR process was pulled back from Spring to Autumn, as it seemed to be a little bit illogical to be signing AMRs in Spring when teams were already rolling out enhancements for this academic year.

8.5 CT NOTED that to support staff this year, a wealth of workshops had been delivered to go through data, demo the dashboards (which were simplified) and to outline information that staff may want to include in their AMRs.

8.6 It was NOTED that the AMRs go through their relative deliberative committees to be reviewed and agreed before they come to the Academic Enhancement Committee (AEC) to be reviewed. It was also NOTED that all the AMRs are presented to the Student Unions' AMR Sign Off event, which took place on 16 October 2024 – the event was a collaboration between Students' Union and The Hub, asking probing questions regarding the evidence and data sets utilised by Programme and Subject Teams.

8.7 CT NOTED that for the future, it was agreed with colleagues that the current AMR template was cumbersome – it was NOTED that an AMR consultation event would be set up this academic year to review the AMR and its process/timeline – making the AMR simpler to use, reduce repetition and potentially have different reiterations of the AMR depending on those departments having to map to the OfS.

8.8 CT NOTED that she hoped the consultation process would be complete, and a new template agreed by May 2025.

8.9 CT NOTED that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) had published a report and guidance on annual monitoring reports, and this would form the starting point for the consultation process with the Task & Finish Group.

- 8.10 The Chair THANKED CT for the extremely helpful summary description of the AMR process. The Chair ACKNOWLEDGED that she felt it was the right thing to do bringing forward the AMR cycle.
- 8.11 Members RAISED the following comments and questions about the process and the AMR's from Research and Faculty:
- That the relationship between the University and the Students' Union was a strength – and testing it against student understanding and expectation.
 - The use of data throughout the documents was excellent to see – as it confirms that they are underpinned by valid information that makes it concrete and accessible.
 - It was good to see the successes with the National Student Survey (NSS) and the achievements that have been awarded in 2022/23.
 - Appreciated the nuance between the document for Research and the document for the Faculty.
 - Agreed they felt they were fit for purpose and were strong documents.
 - Commended the strong inclusion of students – which was felt was vital.
- 8.12 Faculty Overview AMR:
- 8.12.1 The Executive Dean of Faculty, Dr Nick Gee (NG), NOTED that every subject area has a full AMR, and then at Faculty level, each of the Heads of Programme for their portfolio area will write an area report, summarising the key trends, issues and exceptions worthy of note.
- 8.12.2 NG PRESENTED his Faculty Overview AMR and HIGHLIGHTED the following:
- Overall Highlights
- Excellent 2024 NSS overall outcomes – 1st
 - NSS – 1st Learning Opportunities, Assessment & Feedback, Academic Support.
 - Apprenticeships and ITE Ofsted inspection 'Good' outcomes.
 - Improved morale and cross-Faculty collaborations.
- Overview of subjects falling below baseline performance
- NSS: Business.
 - Continuation: Counselling, Health & Social Care, Drama, Foundation Year (FdY).
- Areas for Development
- Variability between subjects: monitored NSS action plans.
 - Portfolio viability/efficiencies – being implemented via Portfolio Review Critical Path 2 (CP2) workstream.
 - Portfolio development – being implemented via Portfolio Review CP2 workstream.
- Key institutional enhancements
- Timeliness and availability of data.
 - Student recruitment – to include strategic growth of ITE partnership.
 - Partnership planning and management – continue to develop processes as Partnerships grow, in particular ICON College and The Language Gallery.
- 8.13 Research/EdD/PhD AMR Overview:
- 8.13.1 CT PRESENTED in the absence of the Executive Dean for Research & Knowledge Exchanges overview, which he had kindly sent through prior to the meeting:

- Completions continue to build more comfortably beyond the 30-conferral RDAP-requirement threshold.
- Annual review with Leicester in 2025 will open up conversations with Leicester regarding preparation of the next validation-partnership period.
- There will be some in-year regulatory updates at Leicester, which we will be looking to adopt.
- There are some actions being implemented this year which will help with alignment with Leicester processes, that is, date of enrolment, and introduction of an interim exam board.
- The on-campus presence of doctoral students will be enhanced, through work with the booking of activities in the library, and the rebranding of the three EdD weekend as all-doctoral-student weekends.
- There will be some work with marketing on further developing the web presence of research and the doctoral degrees through webpages for BGU's RKE Units.

8.13.2 The Chair ASKED the Students' Union President, Max Gordon (MG), if the Doctoral students were all included within the Students' Union.

- MG CONFIRMED that all students are members of the Students' Union, including the Doctoral students, unless they opt out.
- MG NOTED that there were three Doctoral Course Representatives (one EdD and two PhD students) who attend meetings, such as Student Council.
- MG also NOTED that a Doctoral student had recently enquired about starting a Doctoral Society.

9. Update on Portfolio Review

9.1 NG NOTED that a full Portfolio Review would be presented to University Council at its meeting in November or December 2024.

9.2 NG NOTED that since his last update to this committee in June 2024, it was noted that the institution adopted a thorough and rigorous project management approach and process to the portfolio review, which was supported by the Interim Chief Commercial Officer, Leigh Rengger, which led to five main priority areas:

1. *Online provision.*

- NG NOTED that BGU had currently a one-year online programme – the iPGCE, and the team have engaged with an External Auditor to complete a comprehensive review of this programme in terms of the platform, the approaches to online learning, the assessments, talking to students and staff, and some benchmarking with other programmes.
- Following the findings of this audit, this will form the basis of the approach that the team will take towards the collaboration.
- NG NOTED that the Faculty had recently appointed, through an internal secondment, a Head of Online Learning, who will drive the portfolio developments forward.

2. *Health & Social Care*

- NG NOTED that the team were in ongoing conversation with the NHS and other various bodies regarding how the institution can meet their needs, as there is becoming a huge demand in the Health & Social Care sector.
- NG NOTED that the institution would be looking at non-clinical provision between L4 and L7.
- NG NOTED that a strategy in terms of what the team are going to do to achieve something in this area and timescales was presented to the University Executive Group (UEG).

- NG NOTED that the team have identified a couple of courses that they would like to start moving with – Level 7 Health & Social Care Leadership Apprenticeship, for a September 2025 start, and Level 7 Specialist Advanced Clinical Practitioner in Palliative Care, which the team are liaising with St Barnabas over and looking for a September 2025 or 2026 start.

3. *PGT offer.*

- NG NOTED to members that they may recall trying to create a core and pathway model - so the team are taking our existing MA Education (which is the area that we are using as the core) and looking to co-teach where we can within the MA SEND, MA TESOL, Research Skills modules, but retain a distinctive element of those different routes as well.
- NG NOTED that the team were are looking at the possibility of new options aswell – for example Leadership and Management, Teacher Development, Psychology Education and Digital Education.
- NG NOTED that validations are currently ongoing, and the ones that are decided to be offered will be based on market insight and be recruited to from September 2025.

4. *UG core/pathway models*

- NG NOTED as above, but using Educations Studies as the core and SENDI, TESOL, Early Childhood Studies would be the shared core modules and then you could take a pathway in each of those programmes.
- NG NOTED that the team are completing some mapping work, which is complicated, but would ultimately lead to a streamlining and efficiency of delivery.
- NG NOTED that the team are looking for September 2026 start, as the team want to have it marketed with a full UCAS cycle.

5. *Our existing portfolio.*

- NG NOTED that decisions had already been taken to close Drama, Maths and Music, which were currently in various stages of 'teach-out'.
- NG NOTED that a costings model had been completed and there is now clear sight of which subject areas are vulnerable in terms of their viability.
- NG NOTED that there were no current plans to close any further subjects in 2025 currently and give it one more cycle with the brand change, potential name change and contextual offers coming in.

9.3

Members RAISED the following comments and questions:

- It was good to see that a Head of Online Learning had been appointed to lead on this provision.
- The opportunities in the Health & Social Care provision sounded exciting.
- It was refreshing and good to see Apprenticeships being considered as part of the portfolio review, as there was an enormous need for those qualifications and for progression from the lower levels.
- Elise Temple (ET) NOTED that in her working career she had spent time looking at Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) and the majority of these were talking about health care technologies. ET suggested whether the team should think about this in this space, as health care technologies appears to be a skills gap in most of the LSIPs.
 - NG NOTED that was really helpful information and would feed back to the team.

10. Contention Report

10.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the annual Student Contention Report 2023-24, which was written by the Quality, Contention & Student Engagement Officer, Connor Short (CS), who unfortunately was unable to attend this meeting.

10.2 In the absence of CS, CT NOTED that reporting period of this report was from 1 September 2023 to 1 September 2024 – but NOTED that CS had started his role halfway through this report (1 May 2024).

10.3 It was NOTED that this report aimed to capture the data collected on student contention issues that have presented across the academic year.

10.4 CT NOTED that based on the number of cases reported to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and the analysis of the student contention matters highlighted in the attached report, the risk of failure based on the OfS Conditions was low.

10.5 CT HIGHLIGHTED the following from the report:

- Work was completed on a new complaint process, practice and policy, which has been completed and working well.
- 47 Contention issues were raised with the University in the form of complaints.– this figure was below sector average, but was NOTED it was high for an institution of BGU's size.
- 38 were fully processed as completed cases
- Of those 38, 3 cases were escalated to the Formal Stage (Stage Two), 1 case was escalated to Formal Review (Stage Three), and 3 cases have been passed on to other more appropriate processes such as Student Disciplinary.
- The total number of recorded instances of Academic Misconduct within 2023-24 was 63 – this is over double the total number of recorded cases for the last 10 academic years. It was NOTED that this rise could be attributed to the introduction of the “Turn It In AI Detection Tool”.
- The total number of Academic Appeals across 2023-24 was 13 – this was consistent with the numbers tracked across the last 10 academic years and results in a .1% increase compared to 2022-23.
- Of these 13 cases, 3 were rejected and 10 were upheld – 39% originated from FdY, 8% from L4, 30% from L5 and 23% at L6.

10.6 The Chair gave THANKS to CS for all his work on revolutionising the complaints process and creating a more informative tracker for recording this and feels very secure.

10.7 ET NOTED that as the Link Governor for Safeguarding, she has regular catch-up meetings with CS and NOTED that it would be useful to have included in the report a very brief summary of what the complaints were, how it fairs across the sector, this is what has been taken forward, and these are the changes put in place as a result for our students.

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 22 November 2024 was:

- Confirmation that the APP had been rigorously reviewed by the committee and submitted ahead of its deadline of 1 October 2024;
- Assurance of the University's AMR Process; and
- Received the Annual Contention Report.

13. Date of Next Meeting

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

- Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 2pm.

13.2 The Chair also THANKED members for their attendance and contribution.

Signed 

Date 20-03-2025