

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

COUNCIL, 16 October 2014

**Guidelines for the Operation of Dual Assurance 2014/15**

The Council Effectiveness Review undertaken in 2013/14 recommended that:

“The Dual Assurance / Dual Engagement process should be subject to review to tighten up on procedure including ensuring greater consistency in the process between different portfolios.”

As a result the guidelines for the operation of dual assurance have been reviewed and re-drafted for 2014/15. These are provided at **Appendix A**.

The guidelines will be published at: <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/organisation/dualassurance/> and the Coordinators of all portfolios will be asked to provide copies to the Executive and Lay leads of each dual assurance partnership.

The guidelines will now be reviewed annually as a matter of course.

Jill Williams  
Executive Officer to the Chief Operating Officer

October 2014

## University of Exeter

### Guidelines for the Operation of Dual Assurance

October 2014

#### 1. Introduction

These guidelines are intended to provide signposts to management and lay leads and the co-ordinators of dual assurance partnerships, to ensure that the process of Dual Assurance is as effective as possible, and that the partnerships adhere to the values and principles of Dual Assurance.

Although there will be some degree of variation owing to the different characteristics of the business areas covered by dual assurance, there must be some fixed points and structures which ensure a level of consistency in the process between the portfolios. This will result in effective accountability and communication. The notes which follow bring together all the main points which those involved in dual assurance need to know.

#### 2. The Aims of Dual Assurance

The concept of dual assurance was introduced at the University to provide for more executive decision making in place of committees without compromising on sound governance and the accountability and transparency required by Council.

The system of dual assurance aims to achieve the following:

1. To empower managers.
2. To speed up decision-making.
3. To reduce bureaucracy.
4. To make clear the lines of accountability.
5. To expand consultation and involvement across the University community.
6. To make the most of the talents of lay members of Council.
7. To enhance the University's performance as an entrepreneurial institution.

The way dual assurance operates in all areas will take account of equality and diversity considerations and aim positively to promote anti-discriminatory practice.

The business areas covered by dual assurance are listed at:

<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/organisation/dualassurance/>

#### 3. Roles

There are three people in the dual assurance or dual engagement relationship and each performs a specific, essential role:

*The Management Lead*

For Dual Assurance the management lead is a member of VCEG. The management lead takes responsibility for the development of policy and its implementation and delivery in their business area. Following consultation with colleagues and other relevant stakeholders (who could be external as well as internal) and consideration of data and other evidence, the Management Lead will take impartial, unbiased decisions and judgements about strategy and actions in their area. In this, he or she will keep the Lay Lead informed and consulted and make regular reports to VCEG, which is the first port of call for advice and support for the Management Lead.

### *The Lay Lead*

The role of the Lay Lead is **not** to manage the business area, but to ensure that it is well-managed, and that the Management Lead and other University colleagues have followed appropriate processes in reaching decisions. In particular the Lay Lead should consider three questions:

1. Are the objectives in the strategy/plans relating to the business area being delivered?  
To what extent – fully, partially, nearly, not at all?
2. Are the risks relating to activity in the business area being well-managed?
3. Is communication sufficient?

The Lay Lead should also feel able to participate in debate, stimulate thought and challenge received wisdom in their business area.

For dual assurance the Lay Lead, as a member of Council, will be expected to develop an in depth understanding and knowledge of the business area in order to give guidance to the Chair of Council on whether there is cause for concern in its management. It is emphasised, however, that dual assurance does not interfere with line management and its processes for objective setting and performance monitoring.

### *The Co-ordinator*

The Co-ordinator's role is similar to that performed by a committee secretary, but with perhaps a greater emphasis on communication. He or she is responsible for the maintenance of an audit trail of all dual assurance activity, including a record of all meetings between the Leads and the decisions that are reached. Further guidance on this is provided later in the notes.

The Co-ordinator will facilitate the work of the dual assurance partnership: convening meetings, bringing relevant information to the attention of the Leads, coordinating agendas and circulating paperwork as necessary.

The Co-ordinator also takes the lead in ensuring that there is information available to all staff and Council members about the dual assurance business area and any developments in it; this will include maintaining the dual assurance web page(s) for the business area.

## 4. Dual Assurance in Practice

Although Dual Assurance is designed to reduce bureaucracy, it is important that there is a structure within which the partnerships must work. This is described below with some more detailed suggestions and templates for Co-ordinators to take forward and use in the operation of the partnerships.

*i) Subjects for Discussion in the Dual Assurance relationship*

The partnership should focus its discussion on strategic matters which require development. The following documents should be looked at as a basis for determining what these might be:

- the strategic plan in the relevant area. This is the document which Lay Leads can use as a way of measuring progress towards the institution's stated objectives.
- the institution's annual Planning Framework
- The risk register in the relevant area and reports

The issues discussed will change from year to year and working out a fairly simple plan/list for the year every autumn is a good idea.

*ii) Terms of Reference*

**All partnerships must draw up Terms of Reference** to define the purpose and scope of their dual assurance business area. The terms of reference must be reviewed annually - at the start of every academic year – and updated as necessary. In particular, all business areas should include a commitment to equality and diversity in all decision making and the management of risk.

An example Terms of Reference (from Environmental Sustainability) is attached at [Annex A](#).

*iii) Dual Assurance Meetings*

Formal meetings of the Dual Assurance partnerships must take place at least **once a term** although leads may wish to meet more regularly if there is a business need. The timing of the meetings should take in to consideration any key decision making points, timing of necessary reports to VCEG, Council, other committees, the annual cycle of University business,

The face to face meetings are intended for a discussion of progress in the business area, consideration and decision-making against any significant issues, review of any reports from Task & Finish Groups, consultation exercises, risk reviews etc.

The partnership may invite other colleagues to attend as necessary – although leads should be cautious about numbers becoming too large. In addition, other members of Council are entitled to observe dual assurance meetings if they wish. Dates of meetings will be circulated to them by the COOs office each year and members will be asked to liaise with the partnership coordinators if they wish to attend any meetings.

Whilst meetings must take place at least once a term, correspondence and discussion between the leads should also take place between meetings as necessary via email and other informal contact. Partnerships should also have the flexibility to schedule additional meetings in-year if urgent business or matters arise that require formal dual assurance consideration.

*iv) Records*

The Coordinator for the partnership **must take a concise note of the formal dual assurance meetings**. This need not be as discursive as traditional minutes but should include the following details:

- Who was in attendance
- What matters were discussed
- Key points made in the discussion
- Actions to be taken, by whom and when
- Any decisions made and to whom they should be communicated
- Implications of any decisions for equality and diversity

A template for recording the notes is provided at [Annex B](#).

**The notes should be drafted within two weeks of the meeting taking place** and should be approved by the management lead prior to onward communication.

The coordinators of the partnership should also be copied in to all informal communication between the leads between meetings in order that a complete record of any actions or decisions taken can be maintained outside the formal meetings.

Reports from Task & Finish Groups and any other records relevant to the business area should also make-up a 'perfect file' for the partnership. In business areas where there may be a lot of complex activity going on at once, the coordinator may need to keep track of tasks delegated to other colleagues, consultation exercises and any sub-projects to ensure that their work reaches the dual assurance partnership in a timely way, as well as so that it can be added to the record.

#### v) *Communication / Website*

The Dual Assurance website (<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/organisation/dualassurance/>) should be considered the primary communication tool for the Dual Assurance partnerships. Each partnership has a dedicated page which the coordinator is responsible for developing and maintaining. The page should be regularly updated and reviewed to ensure content is relevant and current. Whilst the coordinator has responsibility for the page it is also important that the leads are involved in the content given the centrality of good communication in the overall success of dual assurance.

#### **Each partnership's webpage must provide:**

- Details about the membership of the partnership – the names of the leads and coordinator and any other colleagues that attend meetings.
- The terms of reference for the partnership
- The dates for meetings of the partnership for the academic year
- The notes from each of the dual assurance meetings – these should be published in a timely fashion and at most within three weeks of the meeting taking place.
- Information about or links to information about any Task and Finish Groups that have been set up by the dual assurance partnership.

In addition, leads and coordinators may wish to consider publishing the following information on the website:

- Key policies or procedural documents relating to the business area

- Reports relevant to the business area or made by the partnership to other key committees / groups.

*vi) Reporting*

DVCs should cover dual assurance activity on which they are leading through their reports to Senate and these reports are available on the Senate website:

(<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/organisation/senate/>).

There is also a routine item at VCEG meetings each week for the management leads to report on activities, note significant progress or flag any issues in their area.

In addition, Council now receives updates from dual assurance partnerships on a bi-annual cycle. This provides Council with the opportunity to understand more about the key matters being discussed by the partnership.

*vii) Freedom of Information and Dual Assurance*

The Freedom of Information Act (Fol) does not require organisations to create specific records, it does however, provide a right of access to information held by Public Authorities, including Universities. The Act therefore requires good records and information management, so that information requested can be easily located and formatted for disclosure.

The right of access extends to all information held throughout the University and includes committee papers and records created through Dual Assurance. This means that subject to the application of any exemptions, information (emails, meeting notes, reports etc.) created during dual assurance may be open for public scrutiny. This applies to the 'Record/Perfect file' held by the Dual Assurance Co-ordinator but also to any other information and correspondence held.

The Freedom of Information Act does not mean that the University must make all its records available to the public; there are 23 exemptions or reasons for which information can be withheld. The main exemptions that may apply include:

- Data protection: if records relate to specific individuals, the information should not be released, if doing so would contravene the Data Protection Act.
- Information intended for future publication: if there is a firm intention to make the information publicly available and it is reasonable to ask the applicant to wait, the information need not be disclosed.
- Commercial interests: if there is a real likelihood that disclosing the information would prejudice the University's (or another organisation's) commercial interests it can be withheld.
- Information provided in confidence: if the information is confidential and releasing it would be an actionable breach of confidence, the information need not be disclosed.

When compiling records and corresponding on University business you should bear in mind the possibility of the information being released under Fol. The labelling of records as 'Commercial in Confidence' can help identify those items which are not for further circulation. However, if a request for a piece of information that has been marked 'Commercial in Confidence' is received, the request must still be considered and information can only be withheld if an exemption applies.

If you receive an FOI request for Dual Assurance records you should contact the University's Records Manager, Caroline Dominey, who will co-ordinate the University's response and advise on any relevant exemptions.

#### *viii) Task & Finish Groups*

Task and finish groups are a key tool for ensuring greater participation from the wider University community in contributing to decision-making and advising dual assurance partnerships on particular problems. These temporary groups should be convened by the Management Lead as a mechanism for resolving a particular problem or issue or developing policy in a particular business area.

The following guidelines should be followed by all dual assurance partnerships for operating Task & Finish Groups as follows:

- Task and Finish Groups are only to be convened to deal with a discrete project or problem.
- Before convening, it should be checked whether the subject of the Group will overlap with or have implications for a Process Review or Internal Audit happening concurrently.
- The Group should only meet for a defined period of time – identifying from the outset what the task is, how many meetings there will be and when the report is due.
- Membership for the Group must be drawn from relevant internal stakeholders, taking into account equal opportunities and diversity balance, competence, knowledge and availability for involvement (i.e. do individuals have time, can they make participation a priority?)
- The Academic Staff Association must be invited to nominate a member. If you already have a particular academic member of staff in mind for membership, this name can be suggested but the ASA are entitled to nominate.
- It should be considered whether student representation would be useful
- The co-ordinator with the Management Lead should identify someone to service the Group to ensure there is a paper trail and a good report of the outcomes. (This is a good opportunity to involve other professional staff and broaden their experience).
- The final report from the Group must go to VCEG.

#### *ix) Reviewing Dual Assurance*

The Dual Assurance portfolios will be reviewed by the Council Nominations Committee each year to ensure that they remain relevant and aligned to the University's strategic aims and to ensure that we continue to make best use of lay members' skills and experience.

The system of Dual Assurance will also be reviewed as part of the wider review of Council Effectiveness every five years.

#### *x) Summary*

In summary, there are a small number of points to remember when operating a Dual Assurance partnership and which must be implemented:

- All members of the partnership should have a clear understanding of their role and the role of others in the partnership.
- There must be clear terms of reference for the partnership.
- The partnership must meet formally at least once a term.

- The Coordinator must take a concise note of the formal partnership meetings – which records key actions and decisions taken.
- The partnership’s website must be kept up-to-date and must publish the membership of the partnership, the dates of meetings, the terms of reference, and the notes from the meetings.
- Where Task & Finish Groups are set up, these must have a clear end date, must follow the guidelines for membership and must ensure they report to VCEG.

Overall, the partnership must always keep in mind that **the success of dual assurance depends entirely on the quality of decision-making and the effectiveness of communication.**

Jill Williams  
Executive Officer to the Chief Operating Officer

September 2014

## **Annex A**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EXETER**

#### **Dual Assurance Environmental Sustainability**

##### **Terms of Reference**

The University's senior management group responsible for the Environmental Sustainability Policy, its delivery and review.

##### ***Management Lead: Chief Operating Officer***

Member of VCEG, responsible for the development of policy, its implementation and delivery.

##### ***Lay Lead: Lay Member of Council***

Ensures that the business area is well-managed and that appropriate processes have been followed in decision making, giving guidance to the Chair of Council whether there is cause for concern.

##### ***Coordinator: Sustainability Manager***

Responsible for communication, information, advice and maintenance of an audit trail of decision making.

- To provide leadership for Environmental Sustainability across the University and wider community.
- To manage sustainability risks, responsibilities, opportunities and continual improvement in performance at the University.
- To ensure sustainability is embedded across the University's policies and activities.
- To ensure consultation and involvement from across the University community regarding the development and implementation of the Environmental Sustainability Policy, including a Sustainability Steering Group, and appropriate task and finish groups.
- To ensure the University actively seeks partners, sharing sustainability knowledge and good practice in the communities within which we operate.
- To ensure equality and diversity have been appropriately considered in the decision-making process.
- To report to The Council on an annual basis.
- The meet at least once per term.

## **Annex B**

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

<NAME OF DUAL ASSURANCE PARTNERSHIP E.G. EDUCATION>

A meeting of the xxx Dual Assurance Group was held on <Date and Time> in <Location>.

PRESENT:                    <List names and titles of members' present>

IN ATTENDANCE:        <List names and titles of colleagues who were present for the whole meeting  
or for particular items>

APOLOGIES:

### **1. Minutes of the meeting held on XX**

<To confirm the minutes from the previous meeting>

### **2. Matters arising and actions**

<To pick up any items from previous meeting and review the actions table from the previous meeting>

### **3. Item 1 for Discussion**

<Note of discussion of item 1 including **Actions noted:** >

### **4. Item 2 for Discussion**

<Note of discussion of item 2 including **Actions noted:** >

### **5. Item 3 for Discussion**

<Note of discussion of item 3 including **Actions noted:** >

### **6. Item 4 for Discussion**

<Note of discussion of item 4 including **Actions noted:** >

### **7. Any other business**

### **8. Date of Next Meeting**

<Date, time and Location>

ACTION TABLE

Minute No.	Action	Owner	Status