

Guidelines for the Operation of Dual Assurance and Dual Engagement

Introduction

These guidelines are intended to provide signposts to management and lay leads and the co-ordinators of dual assurance and dual engagement relationships, to help in navigating through the post-committee landscape. Although there will be variations owing to the different characteristics of the business areas covered by dual assurance and dual engagement, and the different dynamics in each trio, there are some fixed points and structures which are designed to ensure that there is effective accountability and communication. The notes which follow bring together all the main points which those involved in dual assurance and dual engagement need to know.

The Theory

Below are briefly described the principles and rationale behind dual assurance and dual engagement. The system aims to achieve the following:

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

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

From 2010/11 the University decided to differentiate between mission critical activities subject to full dual assurance and a new category of "dual engagement" for less mission critical areas where lay members of Council have particular expertise.

Dual assurance covers the following business areas:

- Finance & Investment
- Human Resources and Health and Safety
- Equality and Diversity
- Infrastructure & Capital Programme
- Environmental Sustainability
- Education
- Research
- Strategic communications and Information Technology
- Internationalisation
- Risk
- Fundraising and Alumni Relations (to commence May 2014)

Dual engagement covers the following business areas:

- External Affairs and Corporate Social Responsibility
- Sport & Wellness
- Ethics

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; whilst for Dual Engagement the management lead is either a member of VCEG or Director of Professional Service. 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 continues to be similar to that performed by a committee secretary, but with perhaps a greater emphasis on communication than traditionally. He or she is responsible for the maintenance of an audit trail of all dual assurance and dual engagement activity, including records of discussions between the Leads and decisions reached, and should result in a "perfect file". The Co-ordinator also takes the lead in communicating decisions and ensuring that there is information available about developments in the business area; for Dual Assurance this will include writing reports for VCEG and Council. The Leads should consider the Co-ordinator as a source of advice on how to progress their work, including whom to consult and what kind of evidence to consider in particular issues, and he or she will generally facilitate the work of the dual assurance partnership, bringing relevant information to their attention, convening meetings and organising consultations.

Co-ordinators may find it helpful to keep in mind the key message so that their attention can be focussed on supporting the Leads in achieving this:

The success of dual assurance and dual engagement depends entirely on the quality of decision-making and the effectiveness of communication.

In Practice

Although dual assurance and dual engagement are designed to reduce bureaucracy and streamline processes, there is nevertheless a loose structure within which the partnerships are expected to work. This is described below with some more detailed suggestions about how Co-ordinators might want to take things forward with the Leads, especially in the early stages of operation.

What should be the subject of discussion in the dual assurance / dual engagement relationship?

Strategic matters which require development.

Look at the following documents as a basis for determining what these might be:

- the strategic plan in the relevant area (there is or will be one in most areas and this will have been approved by Council for dual assurance areas). 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 University's risk register and reports

These issues will change from year to year and working out a fairly simple plan/list for the year every autumn is a good idea. Consider at this point what are the larger projects which might need a Task and Finish Group to progress, and what consultation or evidence gathering is required for other matters.

Terms of Reference

As well as an annual work plan, some business areas might benefit from drawing up Terms of Reference to define the general purposes and scope of the dual assurance or dual engagement partnership. For those business areas which have been transferred from committees, take the old committee terms of reference as a starting point. In particular, commitments to equality and diversity should be transferred across. An example from Infrastructure is attached at Annex A.

Dual Assurance / Dual Engagement Meetings

These are the pivotal moments in the dual assurance or dual engagement relationship, during which the Leads and Co-ordinator communicate with each other and discuss relevant business with a view to reaching decisions. They must take place at least once a term, but correspondence and decision-making between the Leads will also take place between meetings via email and other informal contact. The face to face meetings are intended for a discussion of progress in the business area, and decision-making against the more significant issues. The partnership may consider reports from Task & Finish Groups, and may invite other colleagues to attend if necessary. The Chair of Council and the Vice-Chancellor are entitled to attend any dual assurance meeting, so dates should be circulated to them, although their diaries should not be the determining factor. In practice, the Chair of Council and VC's office will indicate any strands of dual assurance they particularly wish to be involved with.

The Co-ordinator is to take a concise note of the meeting, which need not be as discursive as traditional minutes but should include the following details:

Who attended

What matters were discussed

Key points made in the discussion – bullets

Actions to be taken

Decisions made and to whom they should be communicated

Implications of decision for equality and diversity

Informal Communication

There is a tension between keeping the Lay Lead informed and all bases covered in terms of accountability, and information overload. As a guide in terms of quantity, two or three emails a week to Lay Leads should be considered a maximum. Decisions on minor, operational matters (which in the past might have been taken by Chair's action outside the main meeting of a committee) can simply be taken by the Management Lead, and the Lay Lead brought in only in relation to larger, strategic decisions.

It is, however, critical, that the Co-ordinator is kept informed of all decisions taken under dual assurance / engagement (ie: copied into emails) so that they can maintain a complete record of actions and decisions taken outside the formal meetings.

Record/Perfect File

Without the discipline of the committee cycle generating agendas, papers and minutes, the Co-ordinator will need to concentrate on ensuring that they develop a record-keeping system which results in a perfect file of all the dual assurance / engagement discussions and decisions. This will include notes of the formal dual assurance / engagement meetings, copies of email and other correspondence detailing action between meetings, reports from Task & Finish Groups, and schedules of approvals and other records relevant to the business area. In business areas where there may be a lot of complex activity going on at once (eg: Infrastructure) the Co-ordinator will 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 or dual engagement partnership in a timely way, as well as so that it can be added to the record.

Website/other communications issues

The dual assurance / engagement website has been created in a skeleton form but has a great deal of potential to develop according to how individual areas of dual assurance or dual engagement would like to use it. The webpages have two general purposes, first, as a repository of information (and therefore as a tool in helping with record-keeping) and secondly, as a means of communication. The Co-ordinator takes a lead on the strategic side of web development as well as on housekeeping, keeping up to date etc but it is also important to involve the Lay Lead here, given the centrality of good communication in the overall success of dual assurance / engagement.

Some ideas for using the website:

Post notes of dual assurance or dual engagement meetings
Advertise for members of Task & Finish Groups
Invite responses to consultations

News in Brief, as the principle method of internal communication, is also a good tool for informing the wider University community about dual assurance / engagement activity, calling for consultation responses/members for Task & Finish Groups etc.

Reporting (Dual Assurance Only)

DVCs should cover dual assurance / engagement activity on which they are leading through their reports to Senate and these should be made available on the web. There is also a routine spot at VCEG each week for the Management Leads to report on activities in their area.

Freedom of Information & Dual Assurance

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 possibility 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.
4. 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.
5. If you receive a Fol request for Dual Assurance records you should contact the University's Records Manager who will co-ordinate the University's response and advice on any relevant exemptions.

Task & Finish Groups

A key tool for ensuring greater participation from the wider University community in contributing to decision-making and advising dual assurance / engagement partnerships on particular problems. Some guidelines for operating Task & Finish Groups are as follows:

- Only to be convened to deal with a discrete project or problem.
- Before convening, check whether the subject of the Group will overlap with or have implications for a Process Review or Internal Audit happening concurrently.
- Only to meet for a defined period of time – identify from the outset what the task is, how many meetings there will be and when the report is due (the model operated for Process Reviews could be helpful here).
- Draw membership from relevant internal stakeholders, taking into account equal opportunities and diversity balance, competence, knowledge (including

ensuring there is a good understanding of equality and diversity issues – Groups may decide to charge one member with a specific E&D brief) and availability for involvement (ie: do they have time, will they make participation a priority?)

- Must invite Academic Staff Association 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.
- Consider if student representation would be useful – Education have a good model of student involvement which could be imitated.
- Co-ordinator with Management Lead to find someone to service the Group to ensure there is a paper trail and a good report of the outcomes. (Good opportunity to involve other professional staff here to broaden their experience).
- Final report from the Group to go to VCEG.

A variable model

It is intended that dual assurance / engagement is a flexible model, with the partnerships able to determine how they will run their areas of business. This is already apparent, with some varieties established as follows:

Infrastructure

Dual assurance partnership supported by Infrastructure Strategy Group, and functioning within Capital Procedures and financial envelope approved by Council. Project Groups for each element of the Strategy reporting to ISG. Infrastructure Co-ordination Group chaired by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research to deal with smaller projects arising from Schools and ensure links with academic community.

Research

Dual assurance partnership to be supplemented by Research Strategy Group. A key part of the process for Research is the central involvement of academics, and creating mechanisms for the dual assurance partnership to receive information from the grass roots.

Sport & Wellness

The three-way dual engagement partnership is augmented by a fourth person, the President of the Athletic Union.

Reviewing Dual Assurance / Dual Engagement

The Dual Assurance / Dual Engagement portfolios will be reviewed by Council Nominations Committee each year to ensure that they remain relevant and aligned to the University's strategic aims. The system of Dual Assurance / Engagement will also be reviewed as part of the wider review of Council Effectiveness every five years.

Jill Williams

Executive Officer to the Chief Operating Officer

Infrastructure and Capital Programme Dual Assurance

Terms of Reference

1. To be responsible for the delivery of the University's Infrastructure Strategy and capital programme, including the acquisition and development of land, sites and buildings on the University's three campuses.
2. To be responsible for the planning, execution and financial control of all major capital projects including new buildings, refurbishments and maintenance and major new and replacement information systems.
3. To be responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of buildings, services and grounds.
4. To approve the naming of rooms and minor buildings and make recommendations to Council on the naming of major University buildings.
5. To meet at least once a term.
6. To make regular reports to Council.