

Useful Questions for Governors/Governing Bodies

These are a set of generic strategic questions for governors/governing bodies to consider in carrying out their responsibilities and primary accountabilities. In assessing their institutions performance in these areas, governors could consider a number of questions including the following:

INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

- 1 Does our strategic plan map out a clear development path for the institution?
- 2 Do we have confidence in our ability as an institution to focus on the essential challenges and to adapt to the changing environment?
- 3 Do external rankings/league tables and our own benchmarking show that we are broadly keeping pace with the institutions we would regard as our peers or competitors?
- 4 Are we attracting and retaining the calibre of staff needed to deliver our vision for the institution?
- 5 Do skills shortages or other HR issues threaten our performance?
- 6 Do we have the confidence of our students, faculty, the communities we serve and our main funding bodies and partners?
- 7 Are there threats to our viability (e.g. from rising staff costs, buildings or utilities inflation, pensions liabilities, competitive pressures), and do we have convincing strategies for managing these?

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- 1 Do we have a clear view of what students get out of their experience at the institution?
- 2 Is our teaching and learning strategy understood by the governing body?
- 3 Does the Senate/Academic Board ensure that the academic programme and assessment structure are fit for purpose?
- 4 Are we performing as well as we should in the main academic and student-related activities which are important to our mission?
- 5 Have we acted on all the recommendations made by external agencies, if any, in regard to quality in their latest reports?
- 6 What are our goals in terms of quality enhancement, student and portfolio development? How will we deliver these?

RESEARCH *(If Appropriate to the Institutional Mission)*

- 1 Do we have a clear view of why the institution is doing research and what type and volume of research is appropriate to the mission and position of the institution?

- 2 How can we assess the success of the institution's research?
- 3 What are we doing to improve research outputs in terms of quality and cost recovery?
- 4 What is the relationship between research and teaching?
- 5 What is the relationship between research and knowledge transfer and how well are we exploiting this?
- 6 Do we understand the financial implications of our research activity (and do the senior management)?

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND RELATIONSHIPS

- 1 What is our mission in this area?
- 2 How systematically and successfully are we identifying and exploiting opportunities to use our academic work to develop additional income and services?
- 3 How strong is our reputation and contribution in our local and regional communities?
- 4 Which are our ten most important relationships in our region and what are we doing to develop and maintain them?
- 5 How many local businesses and organisations have significant contacts within the university?
- 6 What contribution do our Alumni and Fund-raising activities make to the institution:
 - a Financially
 - b In terms of profile and reputation?

FINANCIAL HEALTH

- 1 How strong is our institution financially and what are we doing to maintain and enhance this?
- 2 Are we satisfied with the financial management of the institution and the quality and timeliness of information and advice presented to governors?
- 3 What level of surplus do we need to generate on a consistent basis to provide cash for investment and financial headroom to cope with contingencies?
- 4 Do we have significant areas of loss-making activity in our portfolio?
- 5 Do we have a financial strategy and policies for the following, which are broadly in line with good practice as recommended by the Good Practice Guide and is integrated with other strategies of the institution?

Are we satisfied with the rationale for, and contribution made by our policies on:

- Borrowing
- Fund-raising
- Efficiency and utilisation of assets
- Collaboration?

- 6 How do we compare with the other institutions in our peer group in terms of high-level ratios such as:
 - Income per academic
 - Surplus/deficit.

ESTATES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- 1 Is our infrastructure fit for purpose?
- 2 Do we have the facilities needed to meet student expectations, to attract high quality staff, and to deliver our academic objectives?
- 3 Is the total infrastructure bill, including utilities costs and efficiency, being managed effectively?
- 4 Are we managing technology, information systems and innovation in our operations effectively, so that we remain at “industry standard” in these areas?
- 5 Are we satisfied with the management of capital projects and the effectiveness of planned maintenance programmes?
- 6 Do we have a ten-year capital investment strategy?

STAFF AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

- 1 How satisfied are we with the institution’s overall management of staff and with the quality of HR strategy and advice to governors?
- 2 Are we satisfied with the quality of appointments made to senior positions and the way these posts are managed and appraised?
- 3 Do we have a clear framework of succession planning?
- 4 Are our policies for promoting equality and diversity, including affirmative action, in our staff effective?
- 5 Is staff development given appropriate priority, investment and leadership in the institution?
- 6 Do we have an appropriate framework for performance management for all types of staff bearing in mind the nature of academic work?

GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- 1 How satisfied are we with the working of the governing body and its committees?
- 2 Are the composition of the governing body and the processes for refreshing its membership and maximising the contribution of governors effective?
- 3 Are communications between governors and the institution effective?

- 4 Do governors understand the management structure and systems in the university?
- 5 Are legislative compliance and related issues including risk management, health and safety, diversity and equality, industrial tribunals, student complaints, external audits reported to the governors in an appropriate manner?
- 6 Does the institution have a coherent and good quality set of strategies in the key management areas (academic, finance, estates, HR, Information Systems)?