



Senate

Paper Title	Update on the Review of Academic Governance
Outcome requested	To note and discuss the update on the review of Academic Governance.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	The main themes and issues arising from the review of Senate are included with this paper and a more detailed analysis is available in Appendix A: 'Main issues for Senate: Themes from Surveys and Discussions'. The paper will be taken as read at the meeting.
Questions for Senate to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do members have any comments or reflections on the findings from the review so far?• Do members have any views on how to address priority areas?• Do members support the suggested 'quick wins'?• Do members have any feedback on the proposed next steps and areas for further exploration? Members are welcome to provide these in the meeting, or by email directly to Danny Hassell (d.hassell@qmul.ac.uk).
Regulatory/statutory reference points	The OfS' 'Public Interest Governance Principles' state that the governing body should receive and test assurance that academic governance is adequate and effective through explicit protocols with the senate/academic board (or equivalent). The CUC Higher Education Code of Governance states that 'The governing body [Council] must actively seek and receive assurance that academic governance is robust and effective'.
Strategy and risk	Ensuring academic governance is fit for purpose will help ensure delivery against the ambitions of the Strategy 2030 and reduce risks related to academic governance and regulation.
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	This is an update for Senate. The last updated was provided at the April meeting. The report will be presented to Senate in October. An update will also be provided to SET.
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Introduction

The review of academic governance is part of the Internal Governance Review project. The purpose of the review is to consider the effectiveness of arrangements for academic governance and where there are opportunities for improvement.

Senate is the body responsible for the overall academic activity of QMUL, reporting and accountable to Council, as the University's Governing Body.

The current [Academic Governance Framework](#) is from 2016. Since this time there have been several changes in the context which the university operates. Some of these are sector changes, including changes to regulation, and others specific to the context of QMUL such as the Strategy 2030.

This first phase of the review is focused on Senate and its Sub-Boards. The review was due to report to the June meeting Senate but has been extended to October. This has enabled further engagement to take place.

This paper focusses on Senate and does not include analysis of the findings from the Sub-Boards.

Engagement

The following engagement has been undertaken as part of the review:

- 1:1 meetings with President and Vice Principals (7).
- 1:1 meetings with the Chairs of all Senate Sub-Boards (not chaired by a SET member, 3).
- Survey of Senate members (with 34 responses).
- 1:1 discussions with Senate members (10).
- Survey of members of Senate Sub-Boards (although not the focus of this paper) – with 45 responses over the 5 main groups.
- Observations of Senate meetings and several of the Sub-Boards (EQSB, TPB, RDPEB and Partnerships Board).
- Lunch and Learn for Professional Services staff on the wider Internal Governance Review project.
- Regular reporting and updates to the PS Transformation Steering Group (as part of project reporting).
- An update presentation to SET in June, ahead of this update to Senate.

Main Findings

A detailed analysis of the main themes and findings are included in the appendix to this paper.

The main themes and issues are broadly related to:

- The role of Senate and the extent to which members are confident that it is discharging its responsibilities effectively.

- A mixed (or limited) understanding of the role and purpose of Senate and its relationship with other bodies such as SET and Council.
- Opportunities to improve induction and ongoing training and support for members of Senate.
- A limited understanding of the role and purpose of the Sub-Boards, satisfaction with the work they undertake and how they are communicated to Senate.
- Lack of clarity or understanding around mechanisms for consultation and engagement on policy proposals/reviews and for feedback from Senate.
- Size of agenda packs, opportunities (or a lack thereof) for discussions at Senate either in terms of time for participation in meetings or ability to influence decisions.
- The capacity and suitability of the meeting space.
- An overwhelming view that Senate is too large to be an effective body.

Senate is asked to provide any comments or reflections on the findings of the review so far.

Priority areas to be addressed

From these findings, there is a need to take actions which enable the following:

1. A more thorough and consistent understanding the role of Senate, specifically in relation to regulation and assurance to Council.
2. A shared understanding of the role of members and support for members to undertake their roles effectively.
3. Greater clarity on the role of Senate, and its members, in decision-making and the authority of Senate in relation to the other Boards (including clear delegation and reporting).
4. Improved communication and engagement more broadly and earlier input into decision making processes, involving the right people at the right time.
5. Further consideration to the size and composition of Senate.

Senate is asked to discuss and provide views on how the above issues might be addressed.

'Quick Wins'

From these findings, it is proposed to implement the following over the summer, ahead of the start of next academic year:

- a) Review the current cover sheets for Senate to ensure they provide clear information to members.
- b) Consider guidance to report authors – succinct writing, cover papers etc.
- c) Provide PDF pack of papers in SharePoint, in addition to Convene.
- d) Explore the option of microphones/audio for the next Senate meeting.
- e) Implement a pro-forma for VP and SU President reports – with a two-page limit on information (to be noted only at meetings).
- f) Introduce a one-day induction event for new (and existing) members of Senate.
- g) Make space for discussion of business plan for first meeting next year (or even collate views ahead of this).

- h) Review of the annual business plan for EQSB; with suggested changes to terms of reference and membership and new approach to managing the agendas.
- i) Introduce induction training for EQSB members.

Senate members are invited to provide their views on the proposed 'quick wins' to be implemented.

Next Steps

- Analysis of surveys of the Sub-Boards.
- Observation of REC (to complete all observations).
- Implementation of the proposed 'quick wins'.
- Provide feedback from surveys and observations to Sub-Board Chairs.
- Review of EQSB business plan for meetings, terms of reference and membership (alongside exploring education strategy reporting and oversight).
- Further areas to explore over the summer – Membership including composition, size and elections; consideration of the introduction of Faculty Boards; Board Structure; assurance to council.
- Final report to October Senate meeting.

Senate is asked provide feedback on the next steps for the review of academic governance review.

Appendix A: Main issues for Senate: Themes from Surveys and Discussions

1. Role and Purpose of Senate

There is a general understanding of the role of Senate. But there is a lack of clarity and confidence in this being well understood by members.

Of the 34 responses to the survey:

- 15 responses described an oversight role.
- 13 responses referred to the role in terms of approval of regulations, policies and processes.
- 12 responses made reference to performance, quality or standards.
- Council was only mentioned in 2 responses.
- Assurance was no mentioned in any response.
- No responses made reference to external regulation, the regulatory bodies, or conditions of registration.

Some responses showed a very limited or mistaken understanding of the role of Senate, for example:

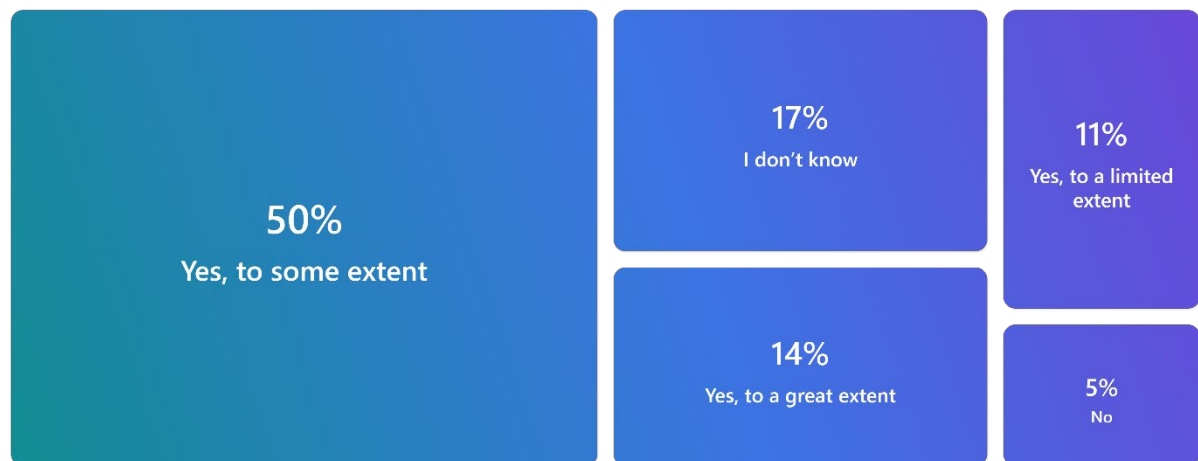
- Somewhere for the leadership to report to and consult with academics and students.
- Overseeing all the operations of the University.
- To scrutinise the work of faculty research and education leads.
- To endorse or veto recommendations from the Boards of Senate.

There was a very mixed understanding of the role of a member of Senate:

- 10 responses referred to the role involving some form of supportive or friendly criticism or scrutiny.
- 9 responses referred to a role of reporting from or representing a group or unit of the university.
- Some responses presented a description of a Senate members as limited to attending meetings, reading papers, reviewing policies and contributing to discussions.

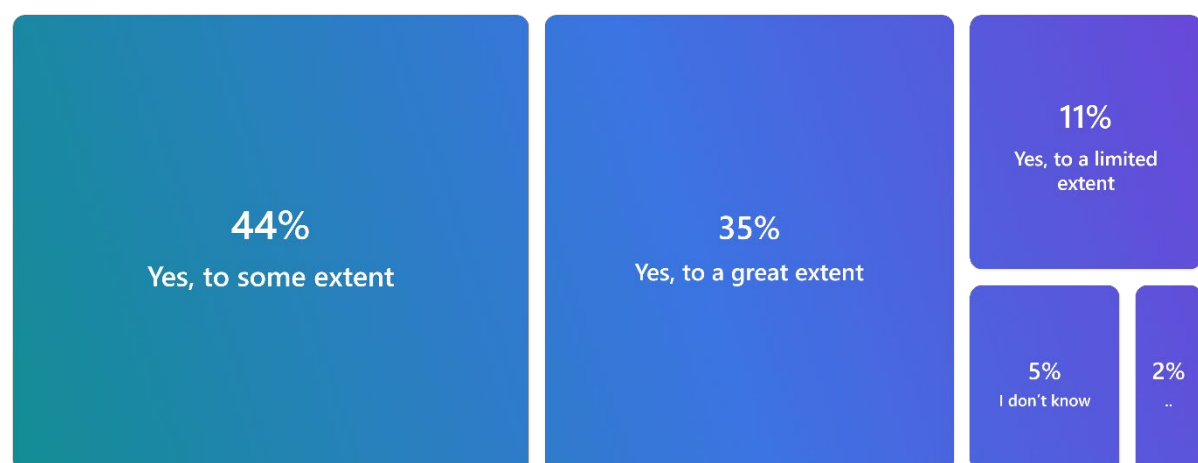
There was not a great deal of confidence that other members understood the role and purpose of Senate.

Is the role and purpose of Senate well understood by members of Senate?



Broadly there was agreement that Senate has the skills and experience to be effective.

Does Senate have the range of skills and experience that it needs to be effective?



Through discussions with Senate members and observing meetings, the following issues arise in relation to the role and purpose of Senate:

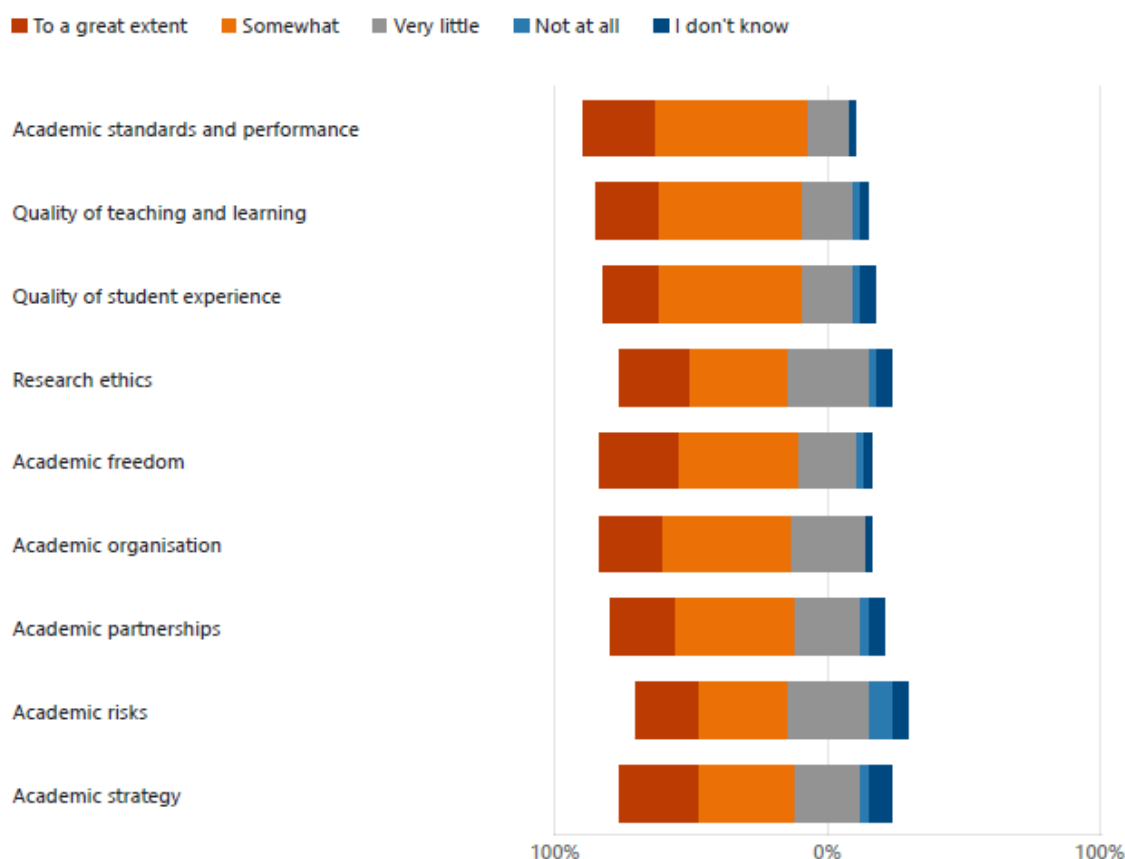
- Many members of Senate either directly or indirectly suggest that part of Senate's role in about holding the Senior Executive Team (SET), or 'management' more broadly to account.
- Most members of Senate understood there was a role in ensuring the quality of education but were less clear about the role in relation to research.
- Only a small minority of members offered any comment (unprompted) on Senate's role in providing assurances to Council as the governing body.

Moreover, very few members could articulate what that meant or how it operated in practice.

Senate Responsibilities

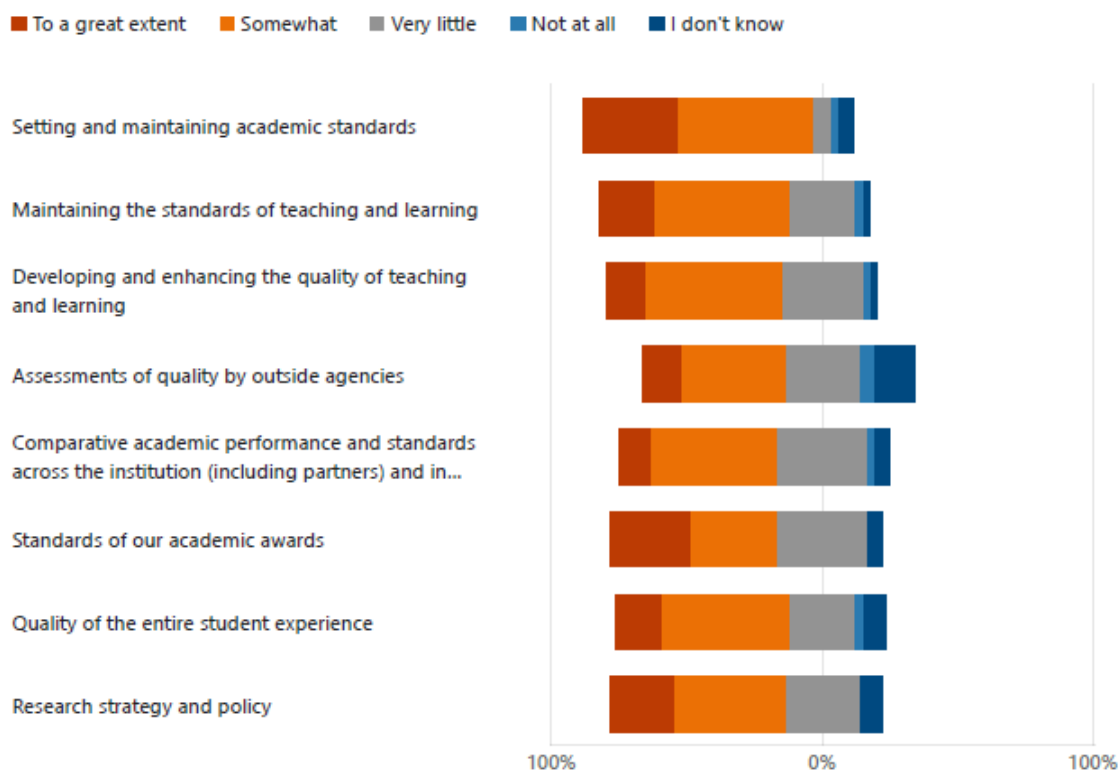
Members feel that Senate does exercise responsibility somewhat across the areas of responsibility. But for most, it is only ‘somewhat’ doing this.

How well does Senate exercise its responsibility to oversee the following areas?



	To a great extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all	I don't know
Academic standards and performance	26.5%	55.9%	14.7%	0	2.9% (1)
Quality of teaching and learning	23.5%	52.9%	17.6%	2.9% (1)	2.9% (1)
Quality of student experience	20.6%	52.9%	17.6%	2.9% (1)	5.9% (2)
Research ethics	26.5%	35.3%	29.4%	2.9% (1)	5.9% (2)
Academic freedom	29.4%	44.1%	20.6%	2.9% (1)	2.9% (1)
Academic organisation	23.5%	47.1%	26.5%	0	2.9% (1)
Academic partnerships	23.5%	44.1%	23.5%	2.9% (1)	5.9% (2)
Academic risks	23.5%	32.4%	29.4%	8.8%	5.9% (2)
Academic strategy	29.4%	35.3%	23.5%	2.9%	8.8%

How well does Senate actively ensure it has assurance on the following areas?



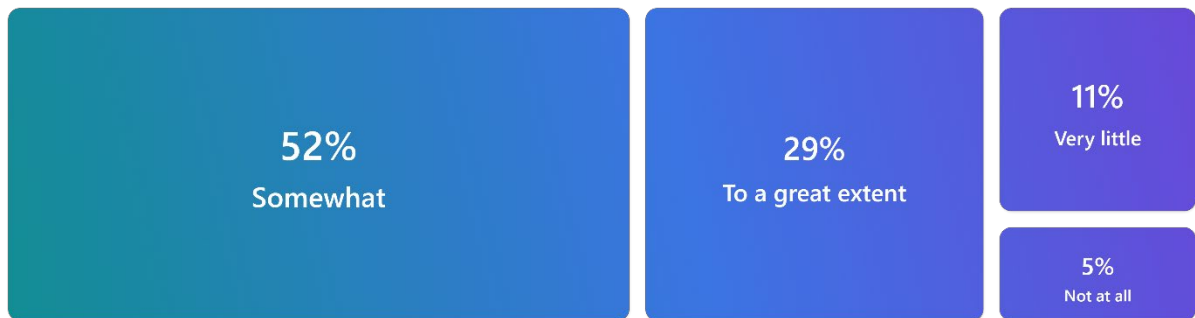
	To a great extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all	I don't know
Setting and maintaining academic standards	35.3%	50%	5.9%	2.9%	5.9%
Maintaining the standards of teaching and learning	20.6%	50%	23.5%	2.9%	2.9%
Developing and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning	14.7%	50%	29.4%	2.9%	2.9%
Assessments of quality by outside agencies	14.7%	38.2%	26.5%	5.9%	14.7%
Comparative academic performance and standards across the institution (including partners) and in comparison with other institutions	11.8%	47.1%	32.4%	2.9%	5.9%
Standards of our academic awards	29.4%	32.4%	32.4%	0	5.9%
Quality of the entire student experience	17.6%	47.1%	23.5%	2.9%	8.8%
Research strategy and policy	23.5%	41.2%	26.5%	0	8.8%

There was less confidence from members that Senate actively ensures it has assurance for:

- Assessments of quality by outside agencies
- Comparative academic performance and standards
- Quality of the student experience

Alignment with Strategy

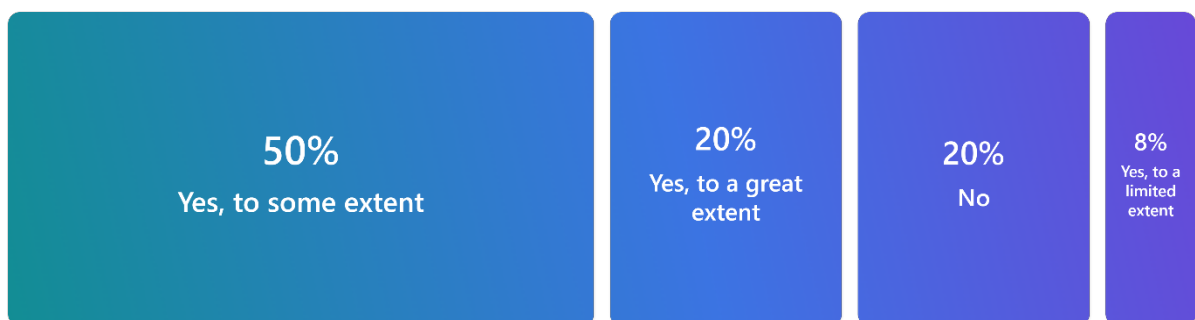
Most people felt decisions made by Senate were aligned with the Strategy:



However, when discussing the strategy in 1:1 meetings, very few members of Senate were able to share their understanding of the specific priorities for improvement beyond general statements around student recruitment and improving the student experience.

Assurance to Council

Based on the survey, members felt they had some extent of understanding as to how Senate provides assurance to Council (To a great extent 21%, to some extent 50%, limited extent 9% and no 21%).



However, in discussions members of Senate did not unprompted talk about the relationship with Council or the role Senate has in providing assurance to Council. When asked, members were not clear how Senate provides this assurance to Council.

“ I don’t know how assurance is given...through the Principal?”

“Assurance to Council is via reports...a closer relationship would be helpful”

“I don’t think it does particularly”

“Don’t know who sits on Council other than the President and Chair”

“No idea”

“Not necessarily very clear”

2. Election, Induction and Training

Elections

There were a mix of views expressed in relation to elections for Senate members:

“I felt that it made it too political...most people didn’t know the candidates”

“Some people are there for their citizenship and CVs”

“There should be a mechanism other than election to be on Senate...it’s very random”

“It’s not a democracy if we don’t elect” [in reference to candidates being elected unopposed/without the need for an election]

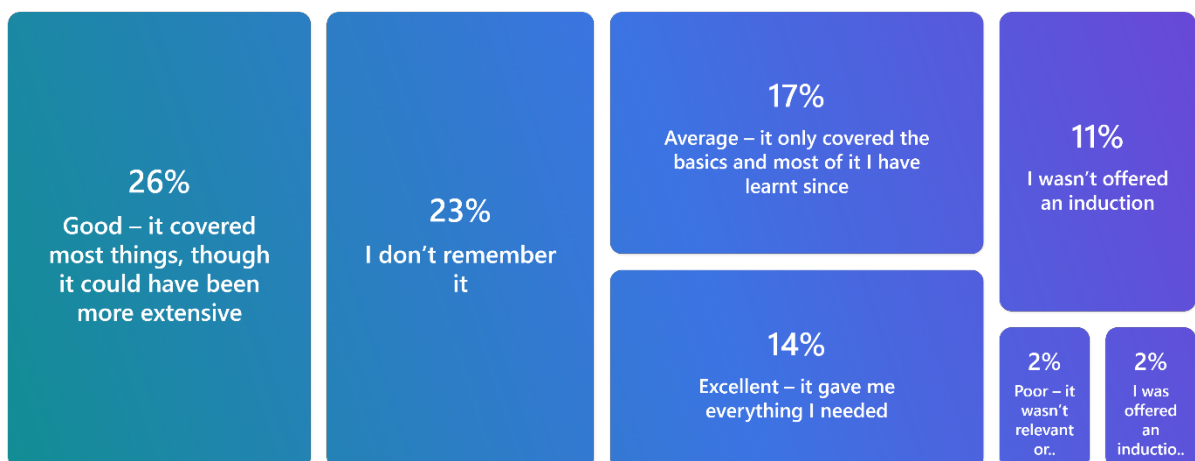
“An element of randomness in the process”

“Do people really know what it [the role/being a member] is when they stand for election?”

There were also some references to people being elected based on alignment to or membership of a particular group within the University. There is also some evidence that candidates have withdrawn from the process of expressing interest in joining Senate when they are aware there would be a ballot.

Induction and Training

Feedback on the induction was a mixed picture – good (26%), don’t remember (23%), average (17%).



From discussions with Senate members it was not seen as a key feature of preparing them to be a member of Senate. When asked about the things that had, or would, help them feel more prepared in being a member of Senate the following:

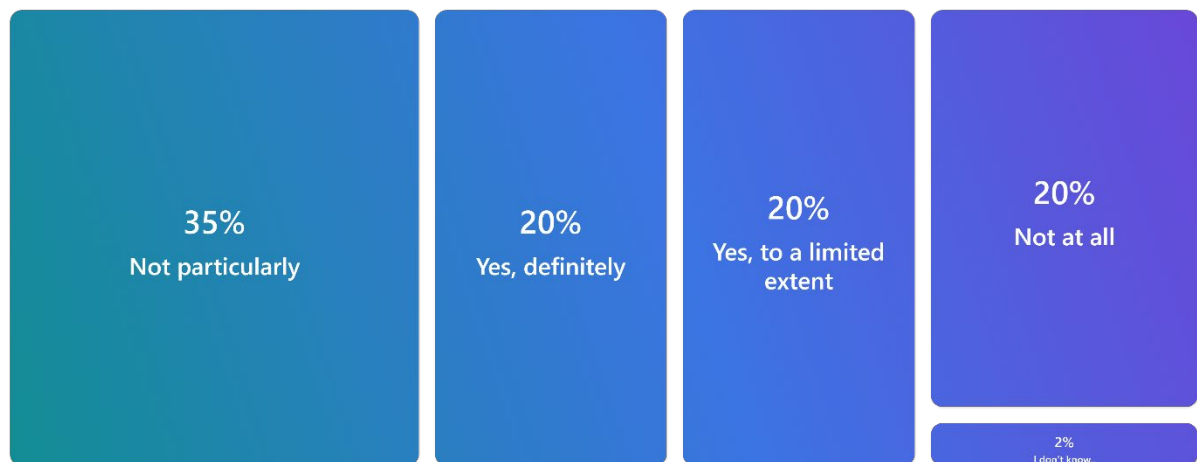
- Experience of going to meetings and getting a sense of Senate from these.
- Conversations with other Senate members.
- Having refresher sessions relevant to the papers coming to future Senate meetings
- Being aware of the business plan for the year ahead
- Greater understanding of what the sub-boards do and their membership.

Several people supported the idea of a more in-depth induction session. A number supported the idea of mandatory induction, and many supported the idea of a longer induction session.

3. Size and Membership

There is a clear sense that Senate is too large – it doesn't allow for good governance, discussion, or a sense of participation. A minority felt that size per se was not the main issue, but the meeting itself.

Do you think the current structure and size of Senate enables effective discussion and decision making?



“Senate meetings have too many participants, too many starred papers and too many issues to discuss in any one meeting such that it cannot really exert any genuine governance.”

“As a large group of people in a large room, I perceived it as difficult for younger, female and/or members from ethnic minorities to have their views expressed.”

“There is no such thing as an effective decision-making body with that many members.”

“Meetings can be confrontational...I have felt uncomfortable about the atmosphere created by a small minority of elected members.”

“It would be hard to engage people more in a meeting of that size.”

“A large group that is not useful in any real sense.”

“Membership is too big...there is a balance between representation and getting things done.”

“Senate is too large...there is not even enough room for everyone to sit around the table.”

Members of Senate generally felt engaged in academic governance: to some extent (44%) and limited (23%). Although 17% said they did not feel engaged in academic governance.

4. Senate Papers

Members feel that the quality of the content of papers and their timeliness is good. However, length of papers was seen as more of a problem and was repeatedly commented on by members.

“It can be hard to know what to look for in reports...some documents are technical... it is hard to know how to scrutinise them”

“People are not reading papers.”

“There is lots of pre-reading, too much content”

“Very detailed...sometimes too much”

“Only 130 pages this time!”

“It can be hard to know exactly what I am looking at...whether there might be something lurking in the papers which is a problem.”

In the survey, members were less confident that the papers are:

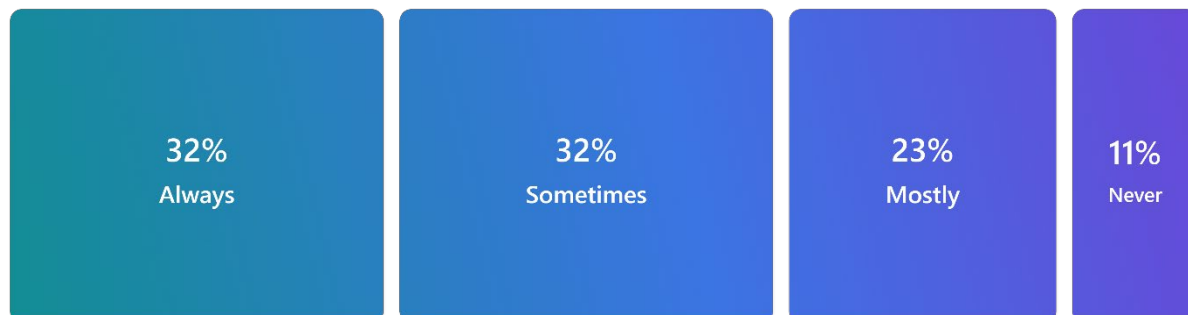
- Clear on the action required by Senate.
- Aligned decisions with strategy.
- Explained the groups consulted and the basis of their recommendations.

Members were mixed about whether they had sufficient information to make informed decisions: Mostly (55%), sometimes (23%), always (11%), never (5%).

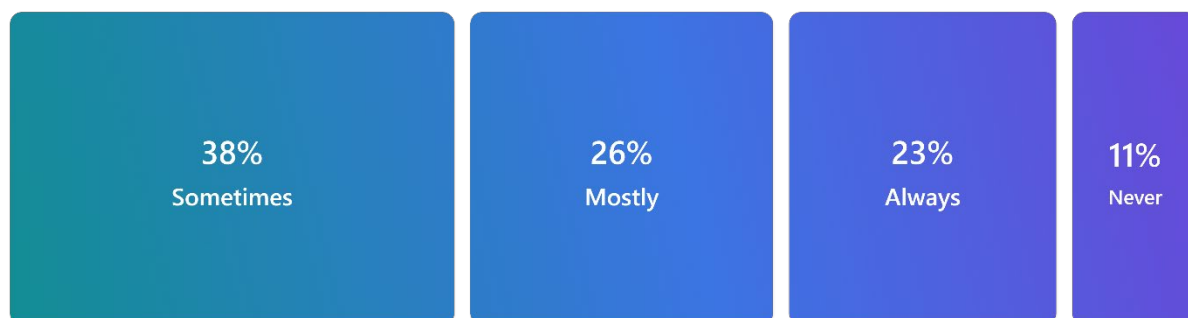
There was some feedback in 1:1 meetings that members do not find the Convene system easy to use for accessing papers and preparing for meetings. This ranged from difficulties in getting initial access (including restrictions on download and set up) to the general interface. It was described as ‘clunky’.

5. Senate Meetings

Most members felt able to express their views openly in meetings: always (32%) sometimes (32%), mostly (23%) and never (11%).



But people felt less encouraged to participate in meetings: sometimes (38%), mostly (26%), always (23%). Never (11%).



Members overwhelmingly felt that consideration of staff and student voice in decision making was limited to members of Senate and did not feel Senate engages with staff or students beyond Senate meetings.

“Agendas are too long and too crowded - as a consequence discussion is not invited.”

“A very packed agenda which makes deliberation difficult.”

“As a large group of people in a large room, I perceived it as difficult for younger, female and/or members from ethnic minorities to have their views expressed.”

“There is just too much business brought to Senate and Senate hasn't adapted over the years to reflect this.... There's just no way that amount of material can be covered - or at least not in a genuinely participatory way.”

“In my experience, Senate is largely a rubber stamping exercise. Long presentations take the place of meaningful discussion, debate, or decision making.”

“I would like to see Senate be much more about discussion and decision making. Currently it's very information giving heavy.”

“The agenda is too frequently overloaded; the presentations by university officers and administrative staff are sometimes of low quality and doubtful relevance; the volume of papers is such that on occasion it is almost impossible thoroughly to prepare.”

“Senate meetings have too many participants, too many starred papers and too many issues to discuss in any one meeting such that it cannot really exert any genuine governance.”

“Too much time is taken up in meetings with reports from Vice Principals, leaving too little time to consider actual questions of policy or principle.”

“Discussing reports from VPs is not a valuable use of time.”

“Reports and presentations should be provided in advance, with a word limit and should not then be presented in meetings.”

“There is just too much business brought to Senate and Senate hasn't adapted over the years to reflect this.”

“The agenda should be limited to 10-12 items (4-5 for discussion) if engagement is really desired.”

“There must be more space for open conversations.”

Decision Making

There was a sense of frustration (for some) or resignation to reality (for others) that most decisions were a ‘done deal’ before reaching Senate, although those members did recognise that Senate could veto or send things back if it really did feel strongly on a matter (and had done so). There was a great sense that members wanted more input into decisions before them arriving at Senate where they were harder to influence in any meaningful way.

“Senate should be consulted much earlier...[and] there should be more transparency at what stage proposals are at”

“Quite a bit of rubber stamping...but this is inevitable.”

“Senate is a rubber stamping entity”

“My most active engagement as part of Senate was to do with the freedom of speech and academic freedom working group over the last year during which I was a member. I think the group was an effective engagement ground on which different positions were discussed and the college administration could listen effectively to those different positions. Were I to have been part of more such groups my effectiveness as Senate member would probably have been more beneficial to both myself and to college.”

Chairing of Meetings

Whilst recognising that the Chair also needs to respond to issues of management, there was broad support for the Chair but also suggestions of how this could be approached differently:

“It is in my view a mistake to have the Principal as Chair of Senate meetings, since he often also needs to respond to points raised in a management capacity. Rotating between Heads of School (for instance) would provide a more impartial forum and allow better discussion.”

“The Chair could be elected from SET members but it would be a tricky balance”

“I don’t think Colin should chair because it becomes a conversation between Colin and others”

“I actually think the Principal chairs the meetings well”

“I would like to add that I find Colin to be a strong and fair chair.”

“The President and Principal is surprisingly sensitive to important issues.”

The meeting room

Many comments also referred to the meeting room itself:

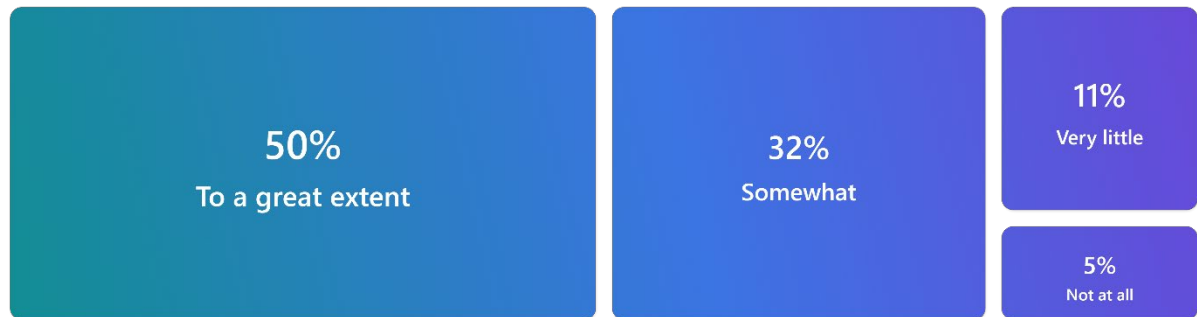
“The physical environment is completely inappropriate”

Typical comments related to the acoustics in the room and the lack of audio can make it difficult to hear all the contributions being made and remarked on the fact that not all members are able to sit around table in meetings.

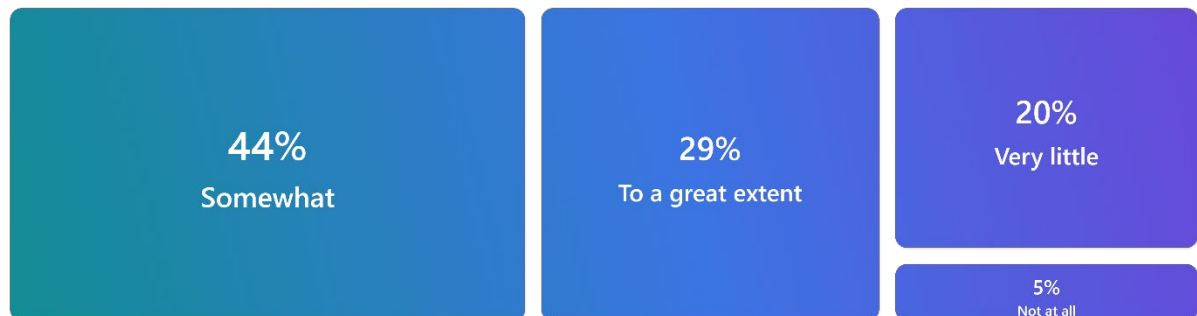
6. Values and EDI

The issue of values and EDI was not a notable feature of 1:1 discussions and the survey suggests that members do seem alignment with decisions and behaviours in Senate and the institutional values. Similarly, there were no major concerns about representation of Senate and consideration of EDI issues in decision making.

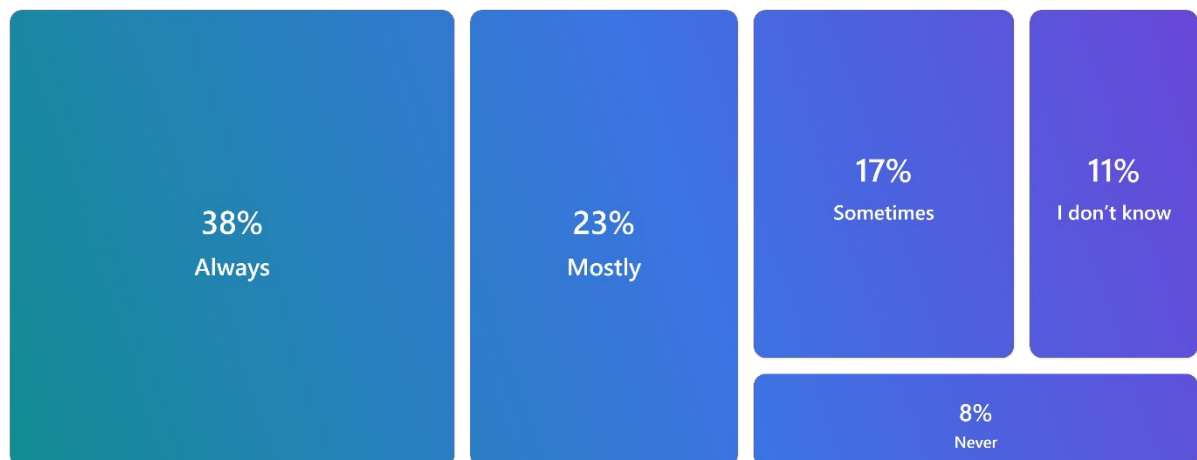
Does the behaviour in Senate meetings demonstrate our core values? (Values: Inclusive, Proud, Ambitious, Collegial, Ethical)?



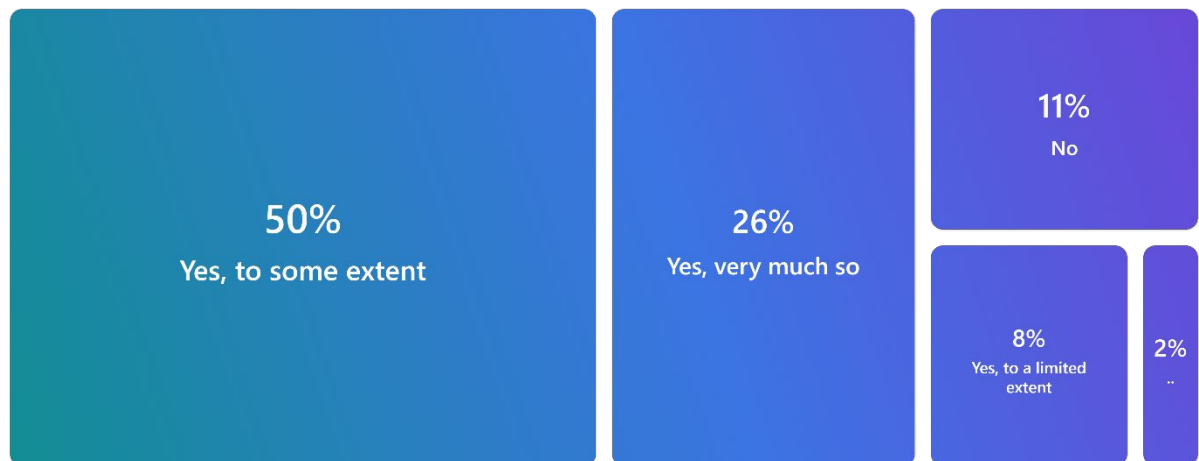
Are the core values demonstrated in the way in which decisions are made?



Does Senate give sufficient attention to equality, diversity and inclusivity issues across the Queen Mary?



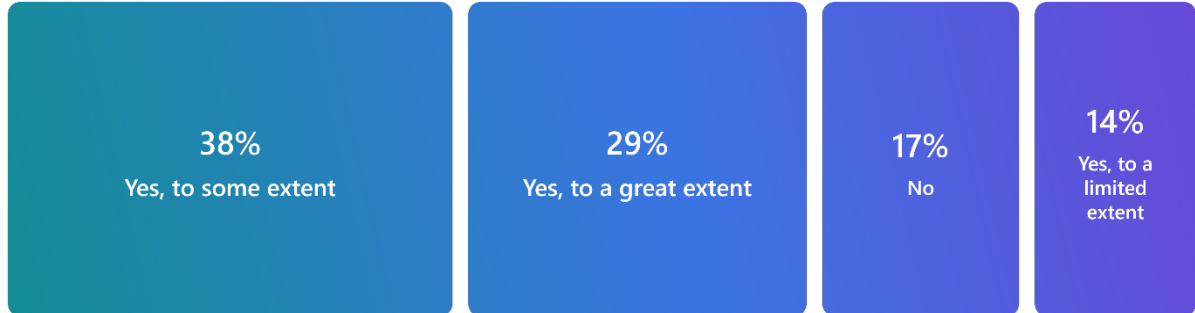
Do you believe that Senate members are a fair representation of the Queen Mary community?



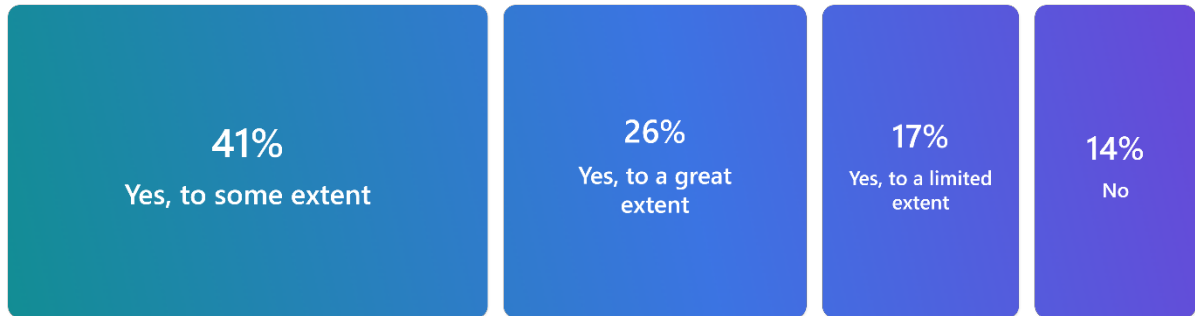
7. Boards of Senate

Members of Senate were mixed in their understanding of and their satisfaction of the work of the Boards of Senate.

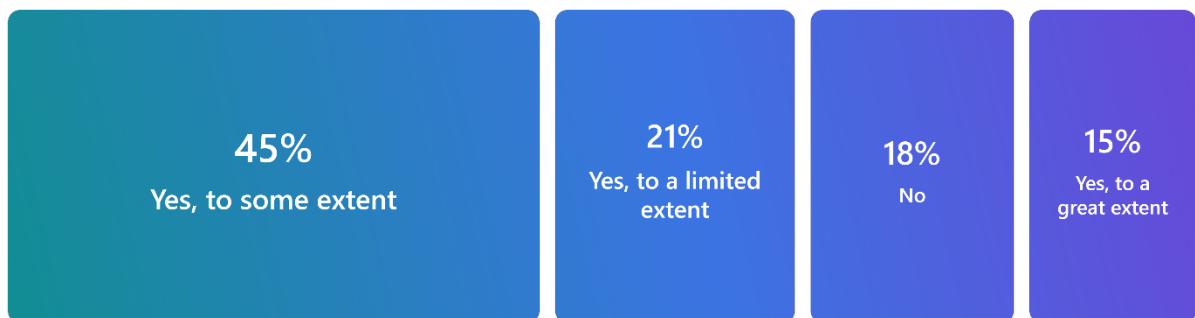
Are you aware of the work of the Sub-Boards?



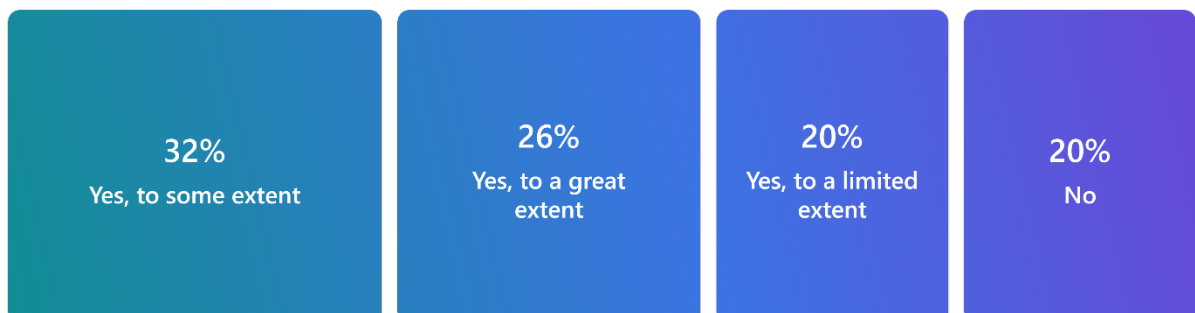
Do you understand the role and purpose of the Senate Sub-Boards?



As far as you are aware of the work of these Sub-Boards, are you satisfied with the role they perform?



Are you clear as to what decisions are made in Senate sub-boards and how they are communicated to Senate?



Many Senate members recognised that most of the more detailed work was undertaken at the level of the Sub-Boards:

“Where the real decision making is made...although Senate does retain ultimate power”

“I had not appreciated that many governance structures are official sub-groups of Senate. This makes sense and helps clarify how Senate is managing decision making and governance.”

This recognition also made it more important for members to understand the Boards of Senate. However, the lack of understanding of the work of Sub-boards, their membership or their role was a feature of many discussions with Senate members.

“I know about them roughly”

“I don’t know about Sub-Boards still.”

“Senate seems to sit in a vacuum between SET, Sub-Boards and Council”

“It is unclear who sub-committees are composed of or how they do their work.”

“Much of the decision-making power is exercised by the sub-boards, whose activities are opaque and not necessarily well-aligned with management structures within the institution.”

“The work of the Sub-Boards is not clear or well understood.”

There were also a range of comment that greater understanding of and/or reporting from these groups was welcome:

“Great to see the inclusion of EQSB and TPB papers [minutes] this year - thank you!”

“It would be useful to know more about them.”

8. Other themes and issues

Communications: Generally, communications came up as a recurring issue in a number of different ways. Firstly, there was a sense that many proposals or changes were not communicated or consulted upon until they 'appeared' at Senate. Secondly there was a sense that Senate did not communicate its work well (contrasted by one member to the SET 'read outs' which were seen as a useful tool). Thirdly, there was a theme around communications with forums and groups which are established but are not being effectively used (Head of Schools Form and Directors of Education Forum were given as examples). Several responses felt these groups were more information sharing and could be used more effectively. Other responses suggested that Senate should do more to engage staff and students beyond those who are members.

Workload: There is no specific workload allocation linked to being a member of Senate, or if there was this was determined locally. For some members (ex-officio) it is part of their role. There was a sense among elected members that being a member of Senate was, if performed properly, a notable addition to their workload and it would appreciate it being reflected in workload allocation, even if it was a more tokenistic acknowledgement.

Hybrid meetings: One survey response requested hybrid meetings and a smaller number of discussions raised the possibility of attending (even if based on only observing, not participating) via online facilities.

Industrial Action Strategic Contingency Group: A concern was raised about the continuation of this group and its role in the governance structure.