

LINCOLN BISHOP UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACADEMIC ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2026
15:00PM VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Douglas Blackstock (DB)
Stephan Bolton, Students' Union President (SB)
Professor Hilary Grainger OBE (HG)
Professor Andrew Gower, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive (AG)
Professor Marianne Howarth (MH) **(Chair)**
Dr Claire Thomson, Executive Dean for Teaching, Learning & Student Success (CT)

In attendance:

Leanne Chancellor, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office and Interim University Secretary (*minutes*)
Jane Fletcher, Deputy Dean for Apprenticeships and Partnerships (*item 6*)

		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: • Elise Temple. • Dr Nick Gee, Provost & Chief Academic Officer. • Professor Andrew Jackson, Executive Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange.	
3.	Declarations of Interest	
3.1	There were no new declarations of interest to raise for this meeting.	
4.	To Receive the Minutes of the AAC Meeting held on 9 December 2025	
4.1	The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 December 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record and the Chair was authorised to sign them.	
5.	Matters Arising	
5.1	AAC RECEIVED the action table from the meeting on 9 December 2025, and progress against actions was either noted, due to be addressed through the agenda of the meeting or were closed.	
5.2	Following the last meeting in December, the Chair ASKED for the following updates:	

5.2.1 Update on portfolio progress

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Andrew Gower (AG), HIGHLIGHTED the following:

- The academic portfolio development is progressing as previously described, with a focus on launching new programmes in health and business for the upcoming academic years.
- The appointment of Dr Firoz Bhaiyat, as the new Dean of the Business School, joining from UA 92, which is expected to accelerate business school provision.
- The two-Faculty structure has been implemented as planned – comprising of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of People and Society. The Faculty of People and Society encompasses the Business School, Applied Humanities, and Health, with ongoing development of the Institute of Health and the Business School as distinct entities.

5.2.2 Update on Strategy 2030

AG NOTED that the Strategy launch event for key stakeholders on 21 January 2026, was well attended with active steps taken to integrate the Strategy into the work of the University.

AG NOTED that a new structure of University committees and groups has been revised and implemented to reflect strategic priorities.

5.2.3 Update on B3 Outcomes

The Executive Dean of Teaching, Learning and Student Success, Dr Claire Thomson (CT), NOTED that a new comprehensive metrics table has been developed in collaboration with the Data & Planning Team to record all B3 metrics for Lincoln Bishop University and its partner institutions. This table will be reviewed by deliberative committees and brought to the committee for consideration.

Members RAISED concerns about the pace of committee processes, especially with the inclusion of partner institutions.

- CT REASSURED members that partnership data and B3 metrics are monitored at local levels through quarterly meetings with Deans and Deputy Deans, and that the data is fed into subcommittees for regular review. While the formal committee process may be slower, real-time checks are conducted to ensure timely responses to any issues.

6. **Apprenticeship Update**

6.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Apprenticeship Review Report prepared by the Deputy Dean of Apprenticeships and Partnerships, Jane Fletcher (JF), which provides an overview of the University's Higher and Degree Apprenticeship provision, with a focus on the alignment with Strategy 2030, development of the portfolio and quality assurance.

6.2 The Chair and members ACKNOWLEDGED and THANKED JF for the impressively detailed, informative and comprehensive report, which had a good story to tell for the University ahead of uncertainty and turbulence in this area.

6.3 JF HIGHLIGHTED the following from her report:

- The recent Government changes and that 16 apprenticeship standards have been defunded, impacting the University's the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) from September 2026 – the Department for Education (DfE) has allowed a cap on starts during the notice period, and the Apprenticeship Team is currently managing this transition.
- Ongoing efforts to align modular apprenticeship provision with employer needs and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), including the launch of short courses

in areas such as AI and digital skills. The university is monitoring developments to further integrate these offerings, also considering how modular provision might align to how employers use the growth and skills levy.

- The significant improvements over the past two years in qualification achievement rates and reductions in out-of-funding learners.
- The positive, though non-judgemental, Ofsted Pilot Inspection (in September 2025), which reinforced the University's quality improvement plans, especially in leadership and governance.

6.4 Members DISCUSSED the financial implications of the L7 defunding on the University's budget and the future opportunities for Short Courses.

Budget Impact:

- JF NOTED that the University has had a great recruitment for the L7, which has enabled us to be forecasting approx. £930K for this year, which is income that will carry through into next year.
- JF ACKNOWLEDGED that a longer-term gap must be addressed, which might be that the University starts to look into some of the lower-level apprenticeships – potentially L4 and L5 in education and health sectors that do not then impact of the direction of travel from the Government, to mitigate the impact of the defunding on the CMDA.
- The loss of the L7 CDMA also affects relationships with local employers, particularly in health and business sectors.

Short Courses:

- JF CLARIFIED that short courses can be combined to build larger qualifications, allowing employers to select modules relevant to their needs.
- It was NOTED that the shortest published short course was 16 weeks, with durations varying by content and will be dependent on what elements of the apprenticeship standards they are being built from.
- JF NOTED that the University is exploring opportunities in education and health and continuing to maintain our strong relationship with the NHS trusts.

7. Access & Participation Plan (APP) Progress Update (for assurance)

7.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Access and Participation Plan (APP) summary update from the Head of Student Success, Phil Davis.

7.2 CT REMINDED members that the current APP was approved by the OfS in September 2025 as one of the conditions for OfS registration for a Higher Education provider charging the higher fee.

7.3 CT PROVIDED an update to members outlining proposed variations on the APP 2025/26 – 2028/29 to reflect:

- new partnerships (such as London East Teacher Training Alliance (LETTA) and Morley College London), as advised by the Office for Students (OfS);
- current strategic partnerships; and
- the APP's alignment with the institutional Strategy 2030.

7.4 CT NOTED that the draft variation was presented to the University Executive Group (UEG) on 17 February 2026 and approved at Senate on 11 March 2026.

7.5 CT NOTED that it is now pending an accompanying update to the Fees and Investment Template (FIT), reflecting the additional expenditure associated with the sixth intervention strategy, which is currently being worked on before it is submitted to the OfS.

- 7.6 CT INFORMED members that the Students' Union was actively involved in the development and verification of the APP, ensuring that the document accurately reflects the University's commitments and the perspectives of students.
- 7.7 Members DISCUSSED the significant resource investment required for the APP and the tension between regulatory demands and institutional affordability – AAC acknowledged the need for future iterations to balance commitment with financial sustainability.
- 8. Approval of the Academic Health of the Institution Report *(for approval)***
- 8.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the draft Annual Health of the Institution Report (AHIR), which had been reviewed by Senate at its meeting on 11 March 2026 and was recommending it for approval.
- 8.2 CT NOTED that academic health (including quality and standards) represents a significant risk to the University's registration with the OfS if not monitored and managed with rigorous and robust processes. It was NOTED that the detailed commentary in the AHIR provides reassurance to our University Council colleagues about that risk.
- 8.3 CT DESCRIBED the AHIR as a foundational assurance document, summarising processes and mechanisms that underpin academic quality and standards, which also references programme-level Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs), external examining and graduate data. It was NOTED that the report also now links to detailed data and committee-approved reports, focusing on assurance rather than duplication.
- 8.4 It was NOTED that when it was presented to Senate that the Chief External Examiner, Professor Janer Lord, was very complementary of the report.
- 8.5 Members SUGGESTED for future iterations of the AHIR, to include short headline data in the Executive Summary and also reconsidering terminology around Exit Awards, given the shift towards credit stacking and Lifelong Learning Entitlement.
- 8.6 AAC was CONTENT to APPROVE the AHIR, recognising its role as a comparative document for tracking progress year-on-year.
- The AHIR will be included in the University Council meeting papers for information.
- 9. Review Draft Student Protection Plan *(for recommendation to University Council)***
- 9.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the draft Student Protection Plan, based on the OfS template.
- 9.2 CT NOTED that the Student Protection Plan is a mandatory document, which is updated and reviewed annually and requires approval by the OfS.
- 9.3 CT NOTED that the document has been updated to reflect institutional changes (nomenclature and University branding), new guidance from the OfS on refunds, and a thorough review of risks and mitigations had been conducted, ensuring alignment with sector experiences.
- 9.4 AG INFORMED members that the draft Student Protection Plan had been submitted to the OfS for their comment, and any feedback the regulator may have would be incorporated before the document proceeds to University Council on 31 March 2026.

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- 9.5 CT NOTED that the draft Student Protection Plan had been reviewed at UEG on 5 March and at Senate on 11 March 2026, where confidence was felt that the Student Protection Plan was reasonable, and the University's mitigations had been reflected in the plan.
- 9.6 Members RAISED concerns that the Student Protection Plan did not contain a huge amount of specifics to protect the students, and ENQUIRED if there was a further plan should the worst case event happened.
- AG CLARIFIED that, in addition to the public-facing Student Protection Plan, the University maintains a detailed Market Exit Plan with communication protocols and data transfer arrangements, ensuring a sufficient level of operational readiness were the Plan be required.
- 9.7 AAC was CONTENT to RECOMMEND the draft Student Protection Plan to proceed to University Council for approval, subject to addressing any additional recommendations for amendment received from the OfS.
- 10. To Note: External Examiners Report**
- 10.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the External Examiners Report, which also included the University's Chief External Examiner Report.
- 10.2 CT SUMMERISED the findings of 43 External Examiners, identifying areas of good practice and development, and presented action tables detailing responses to recommendations, including improvements to Exam Board processes.
- 10.3 CT HIGHLIGHTED the role of the Chief External Examiner, Professor Janet Lord (JL), who provides oversight across the portfolio, attending Programme Boards and supporting the robustness of quality assurance processes. JL's report and the executive summary identified both good practice and areas for development.
- 10.4 CT NOTED that based on JL's recommendations, the University piloted changes to exam board processes, granting Programme Leaders greater autonomy and focusing discussions on exceptions and extenuating circumstances. CT NOTED that initial academic staff feedback from the pilot had been positive.
- 10.5 Members NOTED that it was a good External Examiner's Report – it is succinct, brought out the level of issues, the number of reports, the level of issues, the good practice, and the areas of development.
- 10.6 Members RAISED the issue of inconsistent assessment feedback quality in the overarching report and then again under the areas for development, which was felt may be a staff development issue.
- CT RESPONDED that targeted Continuing Professional Development (CPD), audit trailing, and a focus at the upcoming Learning and Teaching Conference (1 and 2 July 2026) would address these inconsistencies at a granular level.
- 10.7 Members RAISED the challenges of generative AI in academic misconduct.
- CT DETAILED the University's multi-year approach, including forensic monitoring, updated Codes of Practice and policies, student and staff training, and the development of an AI community of practice.

- CT also EXPLAINED that staff use of AI is being tracked and supported through pilot projects, a university-wide AI community, and the introduction of platforms, such as Knowledge Flow. New online courses and conference sessions will further embed AI literacy and ethical considerations for both staff and students.
- CT NOTED that AI would also be covered at the upcoming Learning and Teaching Conference in July 2026.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 There was no further business to discuss.

11.2 To Note: Agenda Items for next meeting:

- Research Excellence Framework (REF) Update.
- A Summary Overview of the new Ofsted ITE Framework.

12. Key Items for University Council

12.1 The most important key item to University Council at its next meeting on 31 March 2026 was:

- the recommendation from AAC for approval of the draft Student Protection Plan (with the caveat of the inclusion of OfS amendments).

12.2 Other key items to note at University Council were:

- Approval of the AHIR.
- Apprenticeship update.
- APP variation update.
- Received for information the External Examiners Report.

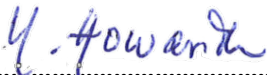
13. Date of Next Meeting

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

- Tuesday 16 June 2026 at 2pm via MS Teams

13.2 The Chair THANKED members for their attendance and to CT and staff members for their work in preparing the detailed and comprehensive reports.

13.3 The Chair felt that AAC was very well informed and supported the committee's assurance role.

Signed 

Date 16 June 2026