University of Plymouth
Senate Terms of Reference and Membership 2026-27

1. Terms of Reference

Article 3.3.1 of the Articles prescribes that, Subject to the overarching responsibilities of the Board and the specific responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor, the Senate shall be responsible for:

"3.3.1

(a) *the strategic oversight of the University's activities in relation to teaching, learning and assessment; research; and any other academic matters impacting on the student experience;*

(b) *providing assurance to the Board of Governors in relation to areas of academic governance; and*

(c) *advising on the academic implications of significant University developments."*

Within the framework of the Articles, Senate's detailed Terms of Reference are set out in the Byelaws (Part E, 1.2.1):

Senate is responsible for:

(a) approving, and evaluating the implementation of, the University's academic strategies, policies and regulations relating to teaching, learning and assessment, research, and the student experience; ensuring that they are relevant, consonant with the University's strategic plan, comprehensive, fair and compliant with external and legal requirements; and that they reflect sector good practice;

(b) advising on proposals to create, merge or discontinue schools, faculties or academic disciplines;

(c) overseeing the University's academic portfolio, including approving the addition or discontinuation of programmes and awards;

(d) approving and reviewing the University's academic collaborations and partnerships, subject where appropriate to the final authority of the Board;

(e) awarding taught undergraduate and postgraduate academic credit, including credit awarded jointly with other institutions recognised for this purpose, and research degrees;

(f) ensuring the quality and standards of all University awards and academic credit (wherever delivered); confirming that curricula offered are appropriate, challenging and dynamic, that programmes are subject to regular monitoring and review, that outcomes of monitoring and review are acted upon in a timely manner, and that the University continues to meet the requirements of relevant external agencies (including validating and accrediting bodies and national bodies with responsibility for the assessment of quality and teaching and research excellence) *(whilst annual review is standard, we may wish to adapt in the future and introduce a continuous improvement approach for example);*

(g) ensuring that assessment of all University awards is conducted in accordance with agreed regulations and policies and reviewed as appropriate by external examiners;

(h) approving and terminating the contract for external examiners in accordance with agreed policies and procedures;

(i) approving policies and regulations governing the admission, education and discipline of students;

(j) monitoring the University's research performance;

(k) advising on the establishment of new, and/or the dissolution of existing, Research Institutes;

(l) proposing to the Board the names and recipients of honorary awards, as recommended by the Honorary Awards Committee;

(m) approving and reviewing policies and procedures for the award of honorary academic titles;

(n) reporting regularly to the Board about the ways in which it is fulfilling its obligations, and providing appropriate evidence to the Board of the robustness of the University's academic governance arrangements, including the provision of an Annual Quality Assurance Report;

(o) establishing Committees with specific remits, in order to carry out its business and, where appropriate, delegating powers and functions in whole or in part to those bodies; identifying reporting mechanisms to enable Senate to evaluate and report on this work;

(p) nominating or electing from amongst its number, for Board consideration, two members of Academic Staff to serve on the Board of Governors.

2. Composition and Membership

2.1 The Senate shall comprise the following Members:-

Ex-officio Members

(a)	the Vice-Chancellor (as Chair)	1
(b)	Deputy Vice-Chancellors (with academic responsibilities)	3
(c)	Executive Deans (with academic responsibility for faculties)	1 from each faculty (3)
(d)	Associate Deans (Education and Student Experience)	One/two per faculty (max 4)
(e)	Associate Deans (Research)	one per faculty (3)
(f)	Students' Union President (FoH)	1
(g)	Students' Union President (FoAHB)	1
(h)	Students' Union President (FoSE)	1
(i)	University Librarian and Head of Library & Learning Services	1
(j)	Director of Research Institutes	2
(k)	Director of Doctoral College	1
(l)	Director of Research, Partnerships and Innovation	1
(m)	University Registrar and Secretary	1
(n)	Director of Student and Academic Services, and Academic Registrar (Clerk to Senate)	1
	Maximum Total Ex-officio Members	24

Elected and Nominated Members (elected in accordance with paragraphs E1.4 – 1.6)

(a)	Heads of School (elected or nominated by and from the Heads of School Forum)	one per faculty (3)
(b)	Students (elected or nominated by and from school and course representatives)	2
(c)	Academic Staff	28
(d)	Research Staff (elected or nominated by and from the Researchers Forum)	1
(e)	Technical Staff	1
(f)	Head of Faculty Operations (elected or nominated by and from the Head of Faculty Operations Forum)	1
	Maximum Total Elected Members	36

(a)	*Partner College Member*	*1*
(b)	*Co-Opted Member*	*Up to 3*

2.2 The maximum total membership of the Senate will be 64 Members.

3. Use of Co-opted Members

Co-opted Members will only be used to ensure that the Chairs of Senate Committees are represented on the Senate (should they not be ex-officio Members).

4. Elections of Academic Staff Members of the Senate

4.1 In order to ensure a balanced membership of Academic Staff across faculties and levels of staff, each faculty will manage its own elections of Academic Staff to the Senate on the basis of the following key principles:-

(a) Subject to sub-paragraph (b) below, the quota allocated to each faculty will be based on its respective share of the University's total academic full time equivalents;

(b) The allocation referred to in sub-paragraph (a) above shall be reviewed by the Clerk to the Senate prior to each proposed election of Academic Staff members to the Senate, to ensure that the allocation to each faculty continues to reflect its respective share of the University's total academic full time equivalents;

(c) Each faculty may fill vacancies up to the limit of its quota as referred to in subparagraph (a) above provided that for each faculty:

(i) at least one Member shall be a Professor (if more than one, being the Professor with the most votes);

(ii) at least one Member shall be a Programme Leader (if more than one, being the Programme Leader with the most votes); and

(iii) the remainder shall be from any level or category of Academic Staff within the faculty (as determined by the 'first past the post' method).

(d) For the purposes of the election within the academic staff category, the following definitions apply:

(i) Academic Staff means all Professors (excluding Emeritus and Honorary) or those of professorial equivalence, Associate Professors, (Grade 9) and Lecturers (Grade 7/8) within the faculties. In the case of the Faculty of Health, any person with such title who holds contracts of employment with both the University and the National Health Service (referred to as a Follett Contract);

(ii) Professor means all those with the title of Professor or Clinical Professor, excluding Emeritus and Honorary professors;

(iii) Programme leader means someone who is charged with running a taught programme.

4.2 Any member of Academic Staff with an employment contract greater than twelve months prior to 1st January immediately preceding the relevant election, shall be eligible to stand for election to the Senate in the Academic Staff category. A member of staff on

a fixed term contract must be able to serve a minimum of 12 months on Senate, within the parameters of their existing contract, to be eligible for nomination.

5. Election of Technical Staff Member of the Senate

5.1 One member of the Technical Staff shall be elected to the Senate.

5.2 Any member of the Technical Staff with an employment contract greater than twelve months prior to 1st January immediately preceding the relevant election, shall be eligible to stand for election to the Senate in the Technical Staff category. A member of staff on a fixed term contract must be able to serve a minimum of 12 months on Senate, within the parameters of their existing contract, to be eligible for nomination.

6. General Provisions for Elections to the Senate

Elections and Nominations to Senate will take place in accordance with the provisions set out in the Terms of Reference – see Annex B.

7. Terms of Membership

7.1 Ex-officio Members of the Senate will continue as Members for so long as they continue to occupy the relevant role listed in paragraph 2.1 above.

7.2 Subject to paragraph 7.3 below, elected staff Members of the Senate (whether within the categories of Academic Staff or Technical Staff) will hold office for three Academic Years, expiring on 31st July provided that they remain eligible for membership during that period.

7.3 Up to one-third of Academic Staff Members of the Senate will be subject to election or re-election every year as a result of an initial staggering of membership terms following the inaugural elections to Senate.

7.4 Elected student Members of the Senate will hold office for one year.

7.5 Co-opted Members of the Senate will hold office for one year.

7.6 Any elected Member is eligible to stand for re-election for not more than one further term of office. The maximum continuous term is six years. Elected Members who have served two consecutive terms of an aggregate of six years in office are eligible to stand for re-election to the Senate at a later date provided that there has been a clear break in their service as an elected Member of at least three years.

7.7 Candidates elected or appointed to fill a casual vacancy which arose during the course of a period of office shall serve the remainder of the unexpired period of office.

8. Quorum

The quorum for meetings of the Senate shall be one-third (rounded up to the next whole number) of the then current total membership of the Senate.

9. Chair and Acting Chair

9.1 The Vice-Chancellor shall be the Chair of the Senate.

9.2 If the Chair is not present at the commencement of a meeting, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor nominated by the Vice-Chancellor shall chair that meeting. If such Deputy Vice-Chancellor is not present at the commencement of a meeting, any other Deputy Vice-Chancellor so present shall chair that meeting. If no Deputy Vice-Chancellor is present, the meeting shall be adjourned in accordance with paragraph F5.2.

10. Clerk to the Senate

The Academic Registrar will act as Clerk to Senate, and will ensure that secretarial and administrative support for Senate is provided.

11. Frequency of Meetings

The Senate will meet at least three times per Academic Year on such dates as the Chair thereof shall agree provided that the Vice-Chancellor may call a special meeting of the Senate at any time in accordance with paragraph F2.

12. Restricted Business

12.1 Any matter relating to a named employee or student (or prospective employee or student) or other specified individual (including their personal affairs) and any other matter decided upon by the Senate is an item of Restricted Business for the Senate.

12.2 Restricted Business shall only be considered at a meeting of the staff Members of the Senate of which at least five days' notice has been given (Documents in respect of Restricted Business will be circulated only in password-protected electronic form or, if the Chair so specifies or agrees, in hard copy form).

Annex B General Provisions for Elections to the Senate

The Clerk to the Senate shall act as Returning Officer and shall be responsible for overseeing the integrity of the election process, resolving any questions, issues or complaints relating to the election process, and declaring results.

The Faculty Business Manager or Head of Administration for each faculty shall act as deputy returning officer for the election of Academic Staff members to the Senate by their respective faculty, and shall be responsible for verifying lists of eligible staff and administering such elections within their own respective faculty; and the Faculty Business Manager of the Faculty of Science and Engineering shall be the deputy returning officer for the election of the Technical Staff member to the Senate and shall be responsible for verifying the list of eligible staff and administering such election for the whole University.

Neither the Returning Officer nor the deputy returning officers shall be eligible to vote in the Senate elections.

The Returning Officer and deputy returning officers may nominate other University staff under their supervision to discharge any or all of their respective responsibilities with respect to any Senate election (in the case of the deputy returning officers, subject to the prior approval of the Returning Officer).

The Returning Officer may appoint such independent third party as they think fit to manage the voting process and any other aspects of Senate elections.

Nomination of Candidates

All staff eligible for Senate election (whether within the categories of Academic Staff or Technical Staff) will be notified by the relevant deputy returning officer of, and invited to nominate themselves (using a standard nomination form) for, each proposed Senate election, each such notice and invitation to be issued by e-mail on the same day and time.

To stand in such election, each candidate should be an eligible member of the Academic Staff or Technical Staff (as the case may be) and their candidature should be seconded by another eligible member of the same category provided that such eligible staff member may support the nomination of more than one candidate. Ex officio Members of the Senate may vote and nominate candidates for Senate elections in accordance with this sub-paragraph (b) but may not themselves stand in such election.

Candidates who wish to nominate themselves for the Senate elections shall (within such period not exceeding 14 days as shall be specified for the purpose) submit a completed nomination form, accompanied by a candidate statement (which shall not exceed 150 words in length and shall set out how they propose to uphold, discharge and perform the responsibilities, expectations and conduct of Senate Members referred to in sub-paragraph (d) below) provided that the omission of a candidate statement shall not invalidate a candidate's nomination for election. Candidates shall be deemed to have agreed to the publication of their candidate statement to all electors in the event of a ballot being held.

In submitting their nomination forms, each candidate shall be required to confirm their commitment to:-

- the maintenance and enhancement of academic quality and standards at the University and
- to uphold, discharge and perform the responsibilities, expectations and conduct of Senate Members, as described in these Bye-laws; and

- to devote sufficient time to their membership of the Senate for the purposes of sub-paragraph above, and that they have discussed and agreed such commitment with their line manager.

Candidates shall not campaign or otherwise promote their candidature for Senate elections.

Details of each election (including the names, and where provided, the statements of each candidate, the election timetable and names of the Returning Officer and deputy returning officers) shall be published on the University's sharepoint pages.

Conduct of Voting

The voting for Senate elections shall be conducted by electronic means and shall be accessible via desktop, laptop, mobile or tablet devices.

Not less than seven days' prior notice shall be given to the relevant electorate of the period during which votes may be cast in a Senate election.

Each elector in the election for Technical Staff shall have one vote; and each elector in an election for Academic Staff shall have the number of votes specified for the purpose. No elector may vote more than once for any one candidate.

No elector may transfer, assign, charge, surrender or otherwise dispose of or deal with any right to vote. Nor may an elector exercise their voting rights in accordance with the instructions or for the benefit of any other party.

The 'first past the post' principle shall apply to Senate elections. Each vote cast for the purposes of a Senate election shall be counted equally with all other votes cast and no provision shall be made for a voter to indicate an order of preference between candidates.

In the event of:-

- only one candidate being nominated for election either generally or within a particular category of candidates referred to in paragraph E1.4.1 (c), that candidate shall be deemed to have been elected without an election being held;

- no nominations being received for election either generally or within a particular category of candidates so referred to, the relevant post shall remain vacant until the next Senate election is held and then shall be included for the purposes of such election; and

- a tie between candidates, the relevant deputy returning officer shall determine by random allocation the order of the candidates so tied.

The successful candidate in the Technical Staff elections, and the list of successful candidates in the Academic Staff elections, shall be notified to all members of the eligible electorate and shall be published on the University's website through such media as the Returning Officer shall consider appropriate. Such notice shall include the name, job title, faculty and allocated term of office of each successful candidate, together with the number and percentage total voter turn-out of the eligible electorate in aggregate and by faculty.

Election Complaints

Any complaints or appeals relating to the election process shall be made in writing via e-mail to the Returning Officer and should identify which elections rules are alleged to have been broken with supporting evidence as appropriate.

A complaint against a candidate (or anyone acting on their behalf) or in respect of the administration and conduct of the election shall be submitted in writing to the Returning Officer before the close of the voting period and will be reviewed and assessed by the Returning Officer within three working days of it being lodged.

A complaint relating to the conduct of the vote count shall be made to the Returning Officer immediately following the vote count (and in any event within one working day thereafter).

In the event that the Returning Officer decides to uphold a complaint, they may either suspend the election, disqualify one or more candidates and/or recommend changes to the election process.

The decision of the Returning Officer in relation to an election complaint is final except where the Returning Officer is demonstrated to have acted in a manner which is improper, biased or partisan in which case the candidate concerned shall have a right of appeal to the Vice-Chancellor.

Procedural Irregularities

The accidental omission to notify (or the non-receipt of any such notice by) any eligible staff (whether within the categories of Academic Staff or Technical Staff) of a Senate election or any other person entitled to receive such notice, and any other defect in the elections process, shall not invalidate such election unless the Returning Officer, acting reasonably and in good faith, considers such omission or defect to be of such order as materially and adversely to have affected the integrity and outcome of the election process.