Senate 12.03.2026
Paper Code: SE2025.39

Senate

Paper Title	**Senate Membership: Principles for Discussion**
Outcome requested	To **discuss** principles related to the future size, shape and composition of Senate, as set out in this paper.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	The report proposes principles for discussion to support the further development of any proposals for referring the size and composition of Senate membership. The phase 1 review of academic governance, reported and endorsed by Senate in October 2024 included a recommendation to consider reforming the size and membership of Senate so that it becomes a smaller body. *Recommendation 26: Once other recommendations have been implemented, consider whether Senate size and membership should be reformed so that it becomes a smaller body.* Whilst not all the other recommendations have yet been implemented, they are in progress and are due to be completed by the end of December 2026. As such, principles are being brought forward for Senate to discuss at this stage.
Questions for Senate to consider	Key questions for Senate to consider are set out in Section 4 of this paper.
Regulatory/statutory reference points	
Strategy and risk	The review of academic governance forms part of the Internal Governance Review Project, a strategic project of the University. 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	For Senate to discuss. Following discussion at Senate, further recommendations or options will be reported to a future meeting of Senate to consider.
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Senate Membership: Principles for Discussion

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Senate currently consists of 72 members. The membership of Senate is specified in the University's Ordinances (Ordinance 10). It specifies that the membership of Senate shall be as follows:

a) President and Principal [1]
b) Vice-Principals [7], the Deans for Education [3] and Deans for Research [3]
c) Heads of Schools and Directors of Institutes: FMD [6], HSS [6] and S&E [5].
d) President and Vice-Presidents of the Student's Union for each of the faculties [4].
e) Elected of academic staff so there is an overall elected majority and an even number of members across each of the three faculties: FMD [12], HSS [12] and S&E [13]

1.2 The first phase of the academic governance report focussed on the role of Senate and, to a lesser extent, the Boards of Senate. The findings were reported to Senate in October 2024. The implementation of the recommendations is ongoing, and the progress has also reflected the further development of phase 2 of the review.

1.3 In that review, concerns identified included whether Senate meetings enable effective discussion and decision making and the implications of its size and composition for meeting dynamics. There was also a need to clarify the role of Senate and of Senate members. The new Senate Member Role Profile, approved by Senate, emphasises the need for the active participation of each of its members; 'all members contribute their knowledge, experience and skills to discussions, to make informed decisions and safeguard the academic activity of the University. All members have a responsibility to ensure Senate business is conducted effectively and that academic governance is fit for purpose'.

1.4 A key element of good governance is ensuring a blend of knowledge, skills, perspectives, and backgrounds that enable effective discussion and decision making.

1.5 In the survey of members in 2024, when asked if the current structure and size of Senate enables effective discussion and decision making 35% selected 'not particularly', 20% 'yes, definitely', 20% 'yes, to a limited extent' and 20% 'not at all' (and 2% 'don't know').

1.6 The survey also showed a mixed range of views on whether Senate meetings involve participatory, quality discussions to enable effective academic governance: 55% 'sometimes', 26% 'mostly', 15% 'always' and 15% 'never'.

1.7 For the question 'Does Senate have the range of skills and experience that it needs to be effective, 44% selected 'to some extent', 35% 'to a great extent', 12% to a limited extent, 6% 'don't know' and 3% 'no'.

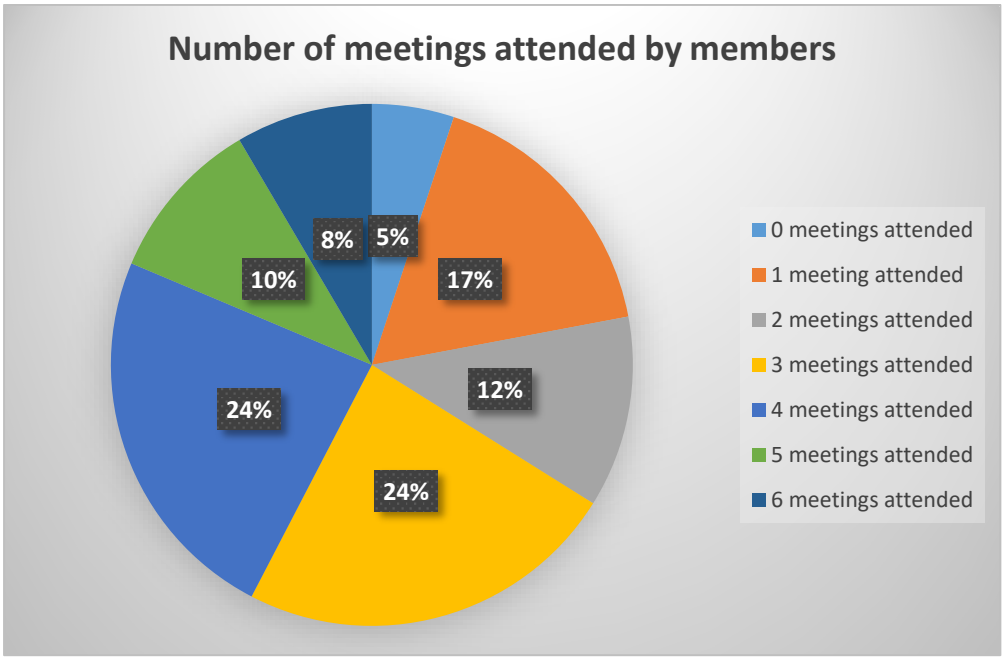
1.8 There are currently several vacancies for elected academic members of the Senate and a further 7 members who have had their terms extended, but would otherwise be vacant, with elections due to be held. This presents an opportunity to consider the future membership in a way that may limit the impact on any existing elected members. As such, Senate elections have not yet been held this academic year.

1.9 Additionally, the work undertaken in respect of the new Senate structures includes opportunities for academic staff in memberships across a range of these boards.

2. Attendance at Senate Meetings

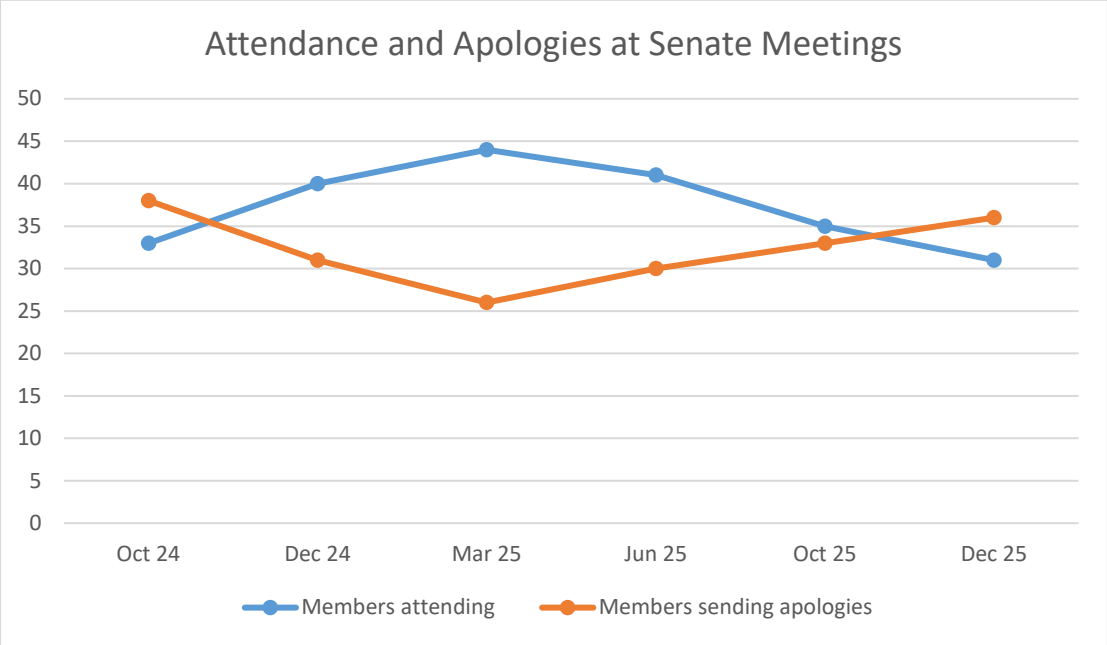
2.1 Analysis of Senate attendance for members of Senate who were members for the entire period of the last academic year (2024/25) and for the first two meetings of Senate this academic year, has shown:

a) 3 members did not attend any meetings
b) 10 members attended 1 out of 6 meetings
c) 7 members attended 2 out of 6 meetings
d) 14 members attended 3 out of 6 meetings
e) 14 members attended 4 out of 6 meetings
f) 6 members attended 5 out of 6 meetings
g) 5 members attended 6 out of 6 meetings
h) For the two meetings of this academic year alone there are 19 members who have not attended any meetings.



2.2 The total number of members in attendance for each meeting is as follows:

a) October 2024: 33 members attended and 38 sent apologies.
b) December 2024: 40 members attended and 31 sent apologies.
c) March 2025: 44 members attended and 26 sent apologies.
d) June 2025: 41 members attended and 30 sent apologies.
e) October 2025: 35 members attended and 33 members sent apologies.
f) December 2025: 31 members attended and 36 members sent apologies.



3. Benchmarking

3.1 Benchmarking of Senate sizes with other Russell Group institutions (Appendix A) shows that whilst not the largest Senate, it is towards the larger end of a Senate. The sizes in this comparator group range from 109 at the University of Manchester and 109 at the University of Bristol down to 47 at the University of Birmingham and 35 at Imperial College London.

3.2 Whilst there is a general trend across the sector of moving to smaller Senate sizes, it is not the size per se that determines the effectiveness of the academic governance. However, the size needs to enable engagement and opportunities to participate in arrangements which enables effective academic governance and to offer robust assurance to the governing body of academic standards and the integrity of academic qualifications.

3.3 Most institutions have other groups represented on their Senate (e.g. Professional Services staff) and some include a process of nominations for certain categories of membership.

4. Principles for Discussion

4.1 The paper invites Senate to consider and discuss different principles for the composition of Senate, with a view of potentially reducing the overall membership.

4.2 Given the information above on attendance, from the survey of members and the research on benchmarking with other institutions, below are principles for considering the size and composition of Senate, for discussion.

4.3 Senate may wish to offer other principles which they consider important to the composition of Senate.

4.4 Ensuring a wide range of perspectives: Diversity of ideas, backgrounds and experiences in their widest sense helps ensure informed and inclusive discussions. Currently this is interpreted as having ex officio and elected members from all schools and institutes (which is a key driver in terms of the overall size of Senate), but are there other dimensions and experiences that Senate may want to bring to bear to enable a richer diversity of perspectives and skills:

- Are there staff from other academic roles within the University e.g. programme directors, research centre leads, or professional services staff that could be included in the membership?
- Are there steps that could be taken to achieve broader representation from a range of protected characteristics?
- How might different methods of election or appointment assist with ensuring a wider range of perspectives on Senate?

4.5 Balance of ex-officio and elected members: Currently, the Ordinances specify the balance of membership, that a majority must be elected academic members. As Senate's role is not to hold to account, but to give assurance, the key thing is to have the right skills and perspectives. Additionally, there is a need to provide opportunities for people to gain governance experience as part of their development and preparation for future leadership roles:

- Should membership composition look beyond simply a mix or balance of ex-officio and elected members?
- How could membership composition support the skills that Senate needs, whilst also supporting development opportunities?

4.6 Size of Senate and the effect on meeting dynamics: With over 70 members, Senate is large body:

- Would a smaller size improve engagement/attendance and/or improve the extent to which there are participatory, quality discussions that enable effective academic governance?

Appendix A: Senate Membership Benchmarking

Name of Institution	Size	Senior Leadership	Heads of Schools or Faculty leadership	Other leadership	PSS	Elected academic members	Other academic members	Student members	Other comments / observations
Manchester	109	P&VC Vice-Presidents: 4 VPs/Deans of Faculty: 3	Heads of School: 9	Associate VPs: 6 Vice Deans: 6	Associate VP Librarian Director of Student Experience Director of Research and Business Engagement Director of Social Responsibility	58 (53%)	Chairs of School Boards: 9	Appointed by SU: 8	Co-opted members: 5
University of Bristol	102	Vice-Chancellor DVC/Provost PVCs: 6 Deans of Faculty: 3 Associate Deans: 1	Heads of Academic Schools (or nominees): 24 (all)	Chair of Ethics of Research Committee	COO University Secretary Librarian Executive Director of Education and Students Executive Director Faculty Operations	48 (47%)		Sabbatical officers: 2 Undergraduate students: 6 Postgraduate Students: 4	
University of Sheffield	74	P&VC VPs: 2 Faculty VPs: 5	Heads of Schools: 21 (all) Faculty Directors of Education: 5 Faculty Directors of Research and Innovation: 5	Chair of Research Ethics Committee: 1 Research Centre Lead: 1	Chief Operating Officer Librarian Elected PSS: 3	22 from across all faculties (30%)		SU officers: 6	
University of Southampton	71	P&VC: 1 VPs: 4 Deans of Faculties: 5		Director of Doctoral College Chief Executive of Malaysia Campus	Librarian Executive Director of iSolutions Director of Research & Innovation Chief Digital and Information Officer Deputy Vice President (Operations) Chief of Staff and Chief Strategy Officer Elected PS staff members: 4	43 from across all faculties (60%) Plus 1 representative of technical and experimental staff (elected)		5	
University of York	58	VC Provost PVC: 4 Faculty Deans: 3	Heads of Department (nominated by Faculty Executive Groups): 15	Dean of Graduate Research School Principal of Europe Campus:	Chief Academic Services Officer Academic Registrar Librarian	18 (6 from each faculty) (31%)	Nominated by staff equality networks: 3	SU officers: 2 Faculty reps: 3 Nominated students: 3	

Name of Institution	Size	Senior Leadership	Heads of Schools or Faculty leadership	Other leadership	PSS	Elected academic members	Other academic members	Student members	Other comments / observations
University of Warwick	57	VC: 1 Provost: 1 PVCs: 3 Vice Provosts/Chairs of Faculties: 3	Heads of Academic Departments: 24	Dean of Students Chair of PGR Committee Chair of Academic Freedom Review Committee	Registrar: 1 Academic Registrar: 1 Director of Research Services: 1 Librarian: 1 Appointed by Assembly: 2	Appointed by Assembly: 4		SU Officers: 3 Students appointed: 3 (one from each faculty, appointed by Senate Nominations Panel)	Appointed by Senate Nominations Panel (across all staff): 6
University of Leeds	50	VC & DVC: 2 PVCs: 4 Executive Deans of Faculty: 7	Heads of Schools and Institutes (one from each faculty): 7 The Faculty Pro-Deans for Learning and Teaching, Research and International: 6 (2 from each group, across all faculties).	Dean of Doctoral College Dean of Digital Transformation		9 from across all faculties (at least three must be academic) 1 academic member elected from each faculty: 7 (32%)		SU officers: 6	
Newcastle University	46	VC DVC: 1 PVCs: 7 University Deans: 6		Lay member of Council: 1	Elected PSS: 1	Professorial: 11 Non-professorial: 11 (48%)	Co-opted: 3	Sabbatical officers: 4	
University of Birmingham	47	VC Provost: 1 PVC: 3 Head of Colleges (Faculties): 5		Directors of Education and Research from each College (faculty): 10 One further from each college (faculty) leadership: 5		Elected from each College, 4 per college: 20 (43%)	Co-opted members by Senate (on recc. of VC): 6	Education Officer Students, nominated by SU: 5	Note: ‘Other’ college leadership comprises Deputy Head of College, Head of school or Director of International.
Imperial College	35	Provost: 1 Deans of Faculty: 4	Chairs of Faculty Education Committees (Dean of Education equivalent): 4 Heads of Departments: 4 (one from each faculty)	Vice Provost: 1 Assistant Provosts: 2 Director and Deputy of Graduate School: 2 Senior College Consul: 1	Director of Student Services and Director of Student Recruitment	8 (2 from each of the four faculties) (23%)	Imperial College Union reps: 4		Provost, not President is Chair.