ASTON UNIVERSITY – EXTERNAL ADVISORY BOARDS

Overview

In order to achieve our aim of "Employable Graduates, Exploitable Research" Aston University needs effective mechanisms for gathering and acting upon advice and inputs from business, industry and the professions.

To this end, it is aided by external advisory boards, generally at School level, in order to inform School strategy, the design and delivery of our programmes, and research. We have developed a cross-institutional template for guidance on setting up and operating such advisory boards in order to maximise the benefits of external advice (Annex 1). In addition to the advisory boards, we have less formal external panels and groups to advise on specific programmes and projects.

These arrangements are summarised below:

School	Main advisory boards	Less formal panels, groups
Aston Business School	Aston Business School Advisory Board (Annex 2)	- Innovation Vouchers Project Steering Group - Transformation for Growth Project Steering Group - Servitisation Panel
School of Languages & Social Sciences	LSS School Advisory Board (Annex 3)	Aston Centre for Europe Advisory Panel
School of Life & Health Sciences	Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing (ARCHA) Advisory Board (Annex 4)	- Biomedical Science Group - Pharmacy Group
School of Engineering & Applied Science	EAS School Advisory Board (Annex 5)	- Chemical Engineering & Applied Chemistry Panel - Electronic Engineering & Power Engineering Panel - Computer Science Panel - Engineering Systems Advisory Panel - Mechanical Engineering and Design Panel - Aston Institute of Photonic Technologies Programme Committee (includes industry

		representatives)

The employability of our graduates is a key feature of the University's strategy and of the Aston University student experience, and School advisory boards and programme-based advisory panels provide advice to our learning and teaching committees on programme design and delivery, professionalism and softer skills, care and ethics. In addition, the University's Careers & Placements Centre works with employers to gather and collate corporate and broader-level inputs, through mechanisms such as employer presentations, placement workshops and visits, the placements survey, recruitment visits and careers fairs.

For postgraduate students, interactions with professionals, whether in industry, business, healthcare, or other areas, are as important as for earlier career stages. For staff, contacts with stakeholders outside academia are of great value, increasingly more important in aiding the generation of non-academic impact from research. Aston continues its tradition of extensive external engagement through a variety of mechanisms. Many students are part sponsored by companies through schemes such as the Research Council collaborative training schemes and Innovate UK KTP (Knowledge Transfer Partnership) projects, while others are part-time employees. In all these cases the students are undertaking research or other projects that draw from the needs of external parties and are relevant to both their coursework and employers. Knowledge of the external activities, markets, and professional environments are all conveyed through the students and their company contacts to the University supervisors / tutors and, in many cases, other students and academic or teaching staff via formal lectures, seminars, visits to and from professional workplaces, as well as more informal interactions. Some of these postgraduate programmes lead directly or indirectly towards an appropriate externally defined and accredited professional registration (eg CEng or the Postgraduate Certificate in Pharmacist Independent Prescribing) as well as the University masters or doctorate qualification. Furthermore, our use of professional doctorate qualifications within the healthcare arena (e.g. DOptom or PharmD) enables qualified healthcare practitioners to undertake structured research within their own environment facilitated by robust academic support.

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Template for External Advisory Boards

This template provides guidance when setting up and operating external advisory boards at Aston University. It covers role, reporting relationships, membership, frequency of meetings, and operations.

Role could include:

- Market and technology trends
    - Insight into market needs
    - Information on business and industry trends
    - Advice on technology trends, customer requirements

- Curriculum design and delivery
    - Identification of skills needs
    - Review / relevance of course curricula and materials
    - Advice that the School can use to design relevant and appropriate curricula

- Employability
    - Advice on provision of placements, site visits, guest speakers
    - Advice on softer skills needs
    - Advice on job opportunities for first and higher degree graduates

- Research
    - Guidance on focusing research to generate impact
    - Secondments and exchanges (both ways)
    - Research collaborations and knowledge transfer between universities and external parties
    - Professional development activity including research degrees

- Broader activities
    - Advice on student competitions and showcases
    - Development of outreach and community links
    - Volunteering and extra - curricular activity

Advisory Boards should have a clear purpose, role and structure. They are neither mandatory nor the only mechanism by which knowledge is shared between the University and external parties. Where they operate at School level rather than at subject/programme level, it may be appropriate to supplement the advisory board with less formal panels and groups to inject external advice in specific areas.

Staff placement visits, employer visits, careers fairs and other staff contact with employers / external organisations, particularly through the Careers & Placements Centre, provide further channels for external input.

Who does the Advisory Board report to?

- Strategic advice from external advisory board members should be discussed with / communicated to the Executive Dean and management committee of the School.

- Views and advice on programme design and delivery should be discussed with / communicated to the School's learning and teaching committee, programme committee, course director and academic staff.

- Views and advice on employability issues should be discussed with / communicated to the Executive Dean, management committee and other relevant staff in the School, and the Careers & Placements Centre as appropriate.

- Minutes should be taken and distributed as appropriate, taking account of issues relating to confidentiality and the extent to which comments should be attributed to individuals.

Membership could include:

- Employers and trade organisations (at various levels)
- Professional institutions
- Sector networks (subject associations, HEA)
- Professional services (learning technologists, disability and equality practitioners)
- Patients / expert patients, members of patient groups
- Community organisations
- Local and national government (political and non-political)
- Alumni
- Academics from non-competing institutions (eg overseas universities)
- Student representatives
- Schools (ie 5-19) and representatives of teaching profession
- Accrediting and regulatory bodies

………together with internal members.

Consideration should be given to the process for inviting / appointing board members and to the term of membership, eg for three years with the opportunity for this to be renewed.

Frequency of meetings

Generally 2-4 times a year.

Operations

- Boards should assist Aston to understand and meet the needs of employers and external stakeholder groups.
- Boards provide an opportunity for face-to-face contact between Aston staff, employers and other external members – opportunities for informal networking are helpful in addition to the formal engagements.

- Themed meetings with one or two key topics for discussion at each meeting, perhaps with additional specific internal and / or external specialists, are effective, rather than working through a standard agenda.
- The meeting structure and operation should enable employers and external stakeholders to become more familiar with the University, and hence become more involved and valued in School / University activities.
- External members have no executive authority, but their contributions must be respected and valued.

Value to External Participants

- Access to students for placements and graduate employment.
- Opportunities to sponsor, and become involved in, student prizes and competitions.
- Awareness of, and access to, research activity in the School, including opportunities for research partnerships and project collaborations.
- Potential access to School and University facilities – e.g., library, equipment.
- Enhanced networking with other Advisory Board members and University staff.

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