

## Academic Board Committee Structure: Workshop Facilitation

### Background:

In August 2015 Edinburgh Napier University will be moving from a Faculty-based to a School-based academic structure.

This necessitates **significant changes to the academic committee structures**, from Academic Board down, and a requirement for these changes to be determined well in advance of the organisational change.

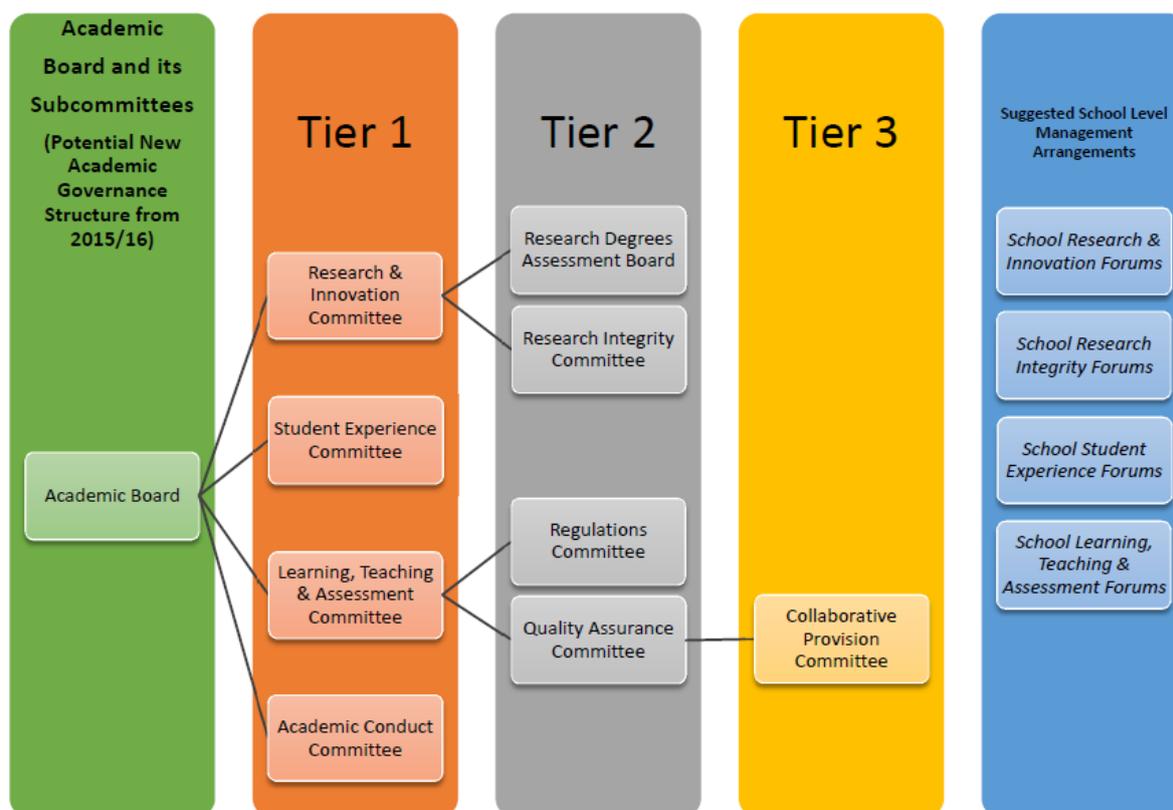


Image: Proposed Committee Structures, before the consultation

### Activity:

In **October 2014** we were approached by the Assistant Secretary, to provide a workshop as one input into the redesign of Academic Board and associated committees led by him. Operating within a strict and predetermined timeframe, the commission was to provide an opportunity for staff to **engage with proposals discursively**, alongside an opportunity for written submissions.

Between October and November we worked on a consultancy basis with the Assistant Secretary and senior administrative staff to produce an approach that would: allow all members of academic board, and the convenors and clerks of relevant committees, to engage as appropriate with a produced consultation document.

The session was designed along a format based on conversation-café or world-café approaches, allowing participants to **circulate around identified group discussion zones**, interspersed with **plenary feedback**.

Critical to this was ensuring the design of the workshop was clearly communicated to participants in advance, and that the individual discussion zones were individually professionally **facilitated and recorded**.

This was achieved by utilising the facilitation skills of staff from Student and Academic Services **Confident Futures'** team, and HR and Development's **Learning and Development** team. Record keeping was undertaken by staff from the **University Secretary's office, Principal's Office**, and the **organisational change project team**.

The session was attended by **38 representatives** across each school and faculty, and from relevant professional services.

### Outcomes:

The workshop ran successfully, with feedback on the day including:

*"To be honest I was dreading the prospect of spending a morning talking about committee structures. I found the **session well-structured** and the **quality of dialogue was excellent**. Much better than I thought it would be."*

*"It was good to hear the perspectives of other people and I found this **helped to spark off my own ideas**."*

Content produced from the workshop resulted in material changes to the proposal documentation, which were welcomed by the Vice Principal and Deputy Vice Chancellor.

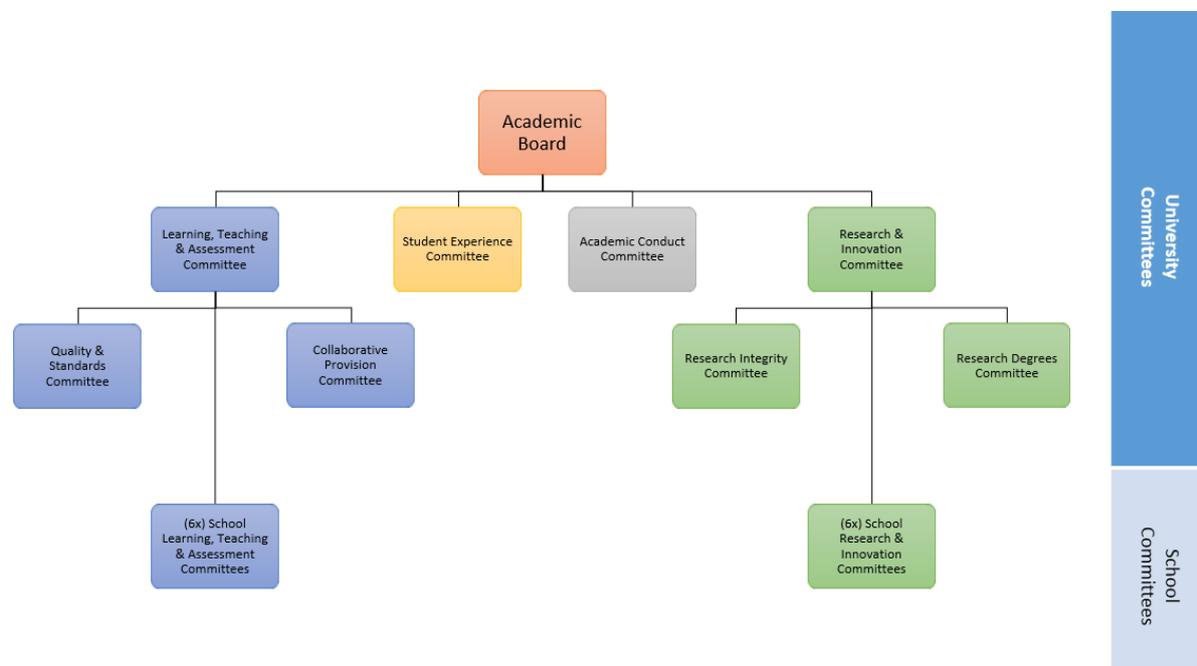


Image: Proposed Committee Structures, after the consultation

At their meeting on 6 March 2015 **Academic Board endorsed the proposals in their entirety**; and strongly welcomed both the **nature** and **result** of the consultation exercise. Academic board were very pleased that the feedback was taken on board and resulted in changes to the initial proposal.

### The difference involving Sustainable Futures made:

Involving the team enabled a considered, innovative, and successful workshop. Critical, though, was the involvement of **senior administrative support** in order to prepare for the event, and involving colleagues across the institution in both running the session and in recording it.

Feedback from participants indicated that:

- The design of the session along with the **skills and independence** of the facilitators and record keepers were valued.
- Participants appreciated the opportunity to **discuss in an open forum**, and learned much from the process (notably about colleagues in the wider University), and will be considering similarly designed exercises in future.

Reflecting on lessons we can learn from this activity:

- Designing and delivering a workshop like this takes a **significant staffing resource** commitment.
- **Positive** comments were striking, with people enjoying the session and finding it useful
- These comments were tempered with concerns that this might be “just an exercise to keep the troops happy”
- This indicates the importance of using (and demonstrating the use of) the **outcomes** events like this one moving forward.
- Feedback also points to the importance of **clearly defining purpose**.

The outcomes of the workshop were welcomed by the participants, and University senior management.

When asked to feedback what went well and why, a typical response indicated:

*“The **preparation** - feeling very informed and well prepared. The **structure and timings**. The **positive energy and engagement in the room**”*