

Response submitted by email
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Committee of University Chairs
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Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find below our consultation response on the new Code of Governance for Higher Education Governors.

Consultation: Consultation on the Higher Education Code of Governance

EAUC – The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education:

Response on behalf of our Members (United Kingdom and Ireland)

About the EAUC

Our passion is to create a world with sustainability at its heart. That's our vision. We exist to lead and empower the post-16 education sector to make sustainability 'just good business'.

The membership of the EAUC comprises higher and further educational institutions, with a combined budget of some £25 billion, responsible for educating over 2 million students supported by half a million staff.

We have regional and country chapters, with member institutions connected deeply with business, industry, health and civic bodies at local levels, with reach internationally via their research, innovation and student mobility.

We believe

- That UK and Irish education should be a global leader in sustainability
- That educational institutions have a responsibility as anchors in their communities to be agents of change
- That education has a unique opportunity to transform lives and communities
- That education is at the heart of global sustainability
- That every student should have access to sustainability education
- That education should reflect best practice in operational sustainability
- In being flexible and adaptable to find solutions for a resilient future
- In the value of international collaboration

Our values

- Pioneering - driving sustainability through innovation
- Independence - our own unique voice
- Collaboration - together we go further
- Role Model - leading by example
- Empowering - supporting and inspiring our members

Response to the consultation:

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the draft 'Higher Education Code of Governance' and commend CUC for reviewing this. We have enjoyed working with CUC on specific projects over the last year. One project we worked closely with CUC on is the publication ['Sustainability: Key to Long-term Institutional Success - A Guide for Members of Governing Bodies'](#). Some of the principles from this guide are present in the Code, but not all of them, and there is scope to better reflect some of this work in a more overt way.

We have some thoughts on the content of the Code and would like to feed that back.

The length of the Code has been suitably amended, it is now a good length.

Most of the foundation of the code seems fair, and we are particularly pleased to see that one of the values mentions the need to ensure 'student outcomes reflect good social, economic and societal value'. Though this should be phrased 'Social, economic and environmental value' rather than the social duplication. The balance of these three pillars should form the core focus of good governance. The objectives, however, fail to reflect the changing world in which we live, and should have more focus on an institutions social and environmental role, particularly regarding sustainable development, resilience and adaptation.

The six primary elements of the Code constitute an effective framework in theory, but we were a little disappointed by some of the content. The accountability section had the potential to go into the need for universities to communicate their societal contributions more effectively. Not doing so is an increasing reputational risk factor.

The sustainability section was underwhelming. This had the potential to go into more depth about the need for environmental, economic and societal balance, considering this is the very definition of sustainability. However, it primarily focused on financial sustainability. This criticism is actually the same criticism we made in 2014 when consulting on the draft Code – so it is a little disheartening to say the same again. While financial sustainability is entirely necessary, 'sustainability' in its broadest sense, which this title implies, is about assuring the future through developing resilience and adaptability in staff and students, through building coherence and synergies across all university operations, and ensuring our sector's impact is beneficial at all levels from local to global. It is about acknowledging the role of Governors in ensuring an institution has a clear civic role. Many universities already play a significant role through their governance, research, teaching and learning, campus management and use, business and investment, and their impact on staff, students and community. This should be better reflected in this section. If this section is to be finance focused, ethical finance should also be outlined as a key consideration. There should also be clear warning of increased risks from failing to properly prepare and adapt to the increasing risks posed by climate change – such as extreme weather. This poses a financial risk with regard increased insurance claims from issues such as flooding.

The reputation section focuses on ethics, which is right, but it focuses on it solely from the perspective of Governors rather than Governance. The Governors must be ethical in the way they do things, but the process of governance must be more aspirational in its ethics.

The inclusion and diversity, and effectiveness sections are fair. On the engagement section, we are particularly pleased to see an emphasis on listening to the student voice – this is a necessity. We recommend that the engagement mechanism here is robust. Similarly, the emphasis that institutions should be in open discussion with their community is welcome, but there is scope to expand on this mechanism further. We note that there is also a requirement for the Governing body to 'promote and ensure the, social and economic, impact of the Institution, and its successes are reported to stakeholders' –

and would encourage you to include 'environment' here as well. Looking at incorporating the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which present a blueprint for Sustainable Development, would be a worthwhile endeavour here. These are increasingly being integrated at a strategic level in institutions and this should include Governance. Governors should formally discuss the Government's updated Climate Change Act 2008 which includes the need for the UK to reach net zero GHG emissions by 2050 at the very latest. All institutions must work towards meeting this requirement as soon as possible, and it should form a key consideration in good governance.

Overall, it is this Code of Practice which reflects accepted good practice so this is a critical opportunity to ensure UK universities are fit for purpose in protecting and improving quality of life through our teaching, research, students and sustainable campuses. No other type of organisation has such an opportunity to contribute so much and with that comes a responsibility to do so.

The EAUC is fully supportive of CUC and would be happy to work alongside CUC to support university governance better embrace students and the wider publics increasing demands for economic, social and environmental responsibility and accountability. We are currently continuing to work with CUC to make sure the voice of Governors is being heard within the work of the Higher and Further Education sector's [Climate Commission](#) – with a Governor focused virtual event in September.

We hope this is useful feedback and we are happy to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,



Iain Patton, CEO, EAUC