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Terms of Reference (ToR) Industry Advisory Panels/Boards CHEAD/DBA

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In conjunction with our Shared Vision for Industry Led Design Higher Education report, CHEAD and DBA have produced a set of principles for setting up, stewarding and ensuring designers can participate with impact on Industry Advisory Panels/Boards.

Whilst no one single terms of reference template would cover each institution's context and governance procedures, higher education institutions should create written terms of reference that clearly set out the board's purpose, scope, responsibilities, authority, and intended outcomes. We have, therefore, provided a draft ToR at Appendix A as a suggested starting point.

Context
When engaging industry advisors on university boards, advisory councils, or expert panels, the most effective models are built on clarity of purpose, mutual value, diversity of perspective, and meaningful engagement rather than purely symbolic representation.

Why this is needed
The industry members need clear guidelines and role descriptor of an advisory board member. Furthermore, the two sector partners working together will create, connect and support a network of advisors to ensure consistency of practice, provide briefings on matters of national importance and collate impact data on levels of industry-higher education collaboration and engagement at scale.

Benefits to Institutions
Embedding designers in Industry Advisory Panels and Boards brings an industry point of view and a real sense of pragmatism and practicality to proceedings.
— Gain awareness of current and emerging industry needs.
— Receive practical feedback for course design and content.
— Identify student collaborations, funding paths and opportunities.

Benefits to the Design Industry
— Early access to diverse student talent for recruitment.
— Influence the training and development of the future workforce.
— Raise brand visibility among students and university stakeholders.

Benefits to Students
— Direct exposure to real-world challenges and recruiters.
— Increased opportunities for internships, projects, and mentorship.
— Higher chances of employment with in-demand, job-ready skills.

Mutual benefits
The Industry Advisory forum creates a dynamic, active partnership where each side wins. The university ensures its teaching and curriculum stay aligned with industry trends, students gain first-hand access to employers and mentorship, design educators gain collaboration and co-learning opportunities, while companies shape future talent, tap into research

capabilities, and raise their visibility on campus. It's a win-win ecosystem driven by shared outcomes, agility, and innovation.

Key Principles
A forum for strategic discussion

Develop a clear purpose statement

Act as a sounding board for new developments and innovation

Bridge the curriculum-industry gap

Co-learning opportunities. Mentor-mentee relationships for continuing professional development and critical reflection

Move past transactional, episodic relationships and build long-term mutual collaborations

Let industry leaders and academics be the institutions change champions. Empower the board to really influence change

One of the biggest risks to effectiveness is in creating advisory groups - whose recommendations are then ignored.

Industry partners should:
— Understand how advice will be considered
— Receive feedback on decisions
— See evidence of impact arising from recommendations

Good practice: Report annually on specific actions taken in response to advisory input

A useful principle is to structure engagement around the **4 Cs**:
1. Clarity – clear purpose, expectations, and governance.
2. Credibility – experienced advisors with relevant expertise.
3. Collaboration – mutual value and genuine partnership.
4. Contribution – demonstrable impact and accountability.

This approach helps ensure Industry Advisory Boards and Panels move beyond consultation and become strategic assets for the university, enhancing education and external engagement.

Practicalities
Invite a broad range of companies and different levels of professionals to join the advisory board

Recruit for expertise, not prestige

Offer a compelling reason for companies to participate

Meet 3 to 4 times a year with at least one opportunity to meet in-person

Meetings to coincide with a student-facing event e.g., End of Year Degree Show, Industry Day

Prepare advisors well. Agenda developed together, issued well in advance, focus on one key discussion point and one main action. Maintain strategic rather than operational focus

Provide timely summaries of meetings

Consider rotating the Chair so that an industry member can lead the discussion and perhaps influence the format, set the brief, facilitate a sprint challenge/design workshop but do not place an unnecessary burden on busy industry members

Support panel members with travel and accommodation costs where possible to ensure inclusive representation from all types of design organisations including freelancers

Term of office 2 to 3 years to ensure sustained commitment and to allow for rotation

Regularly review effectiveness and have check-ins with industry members to ensure their feedback is heard.

CHEAD and DBA will review the ToR in 2027 and will include research and innovation in the second iteration.

Appendix A: ToR Template for guidance purposes, please adapt.

Terms of Reference

[University Name] Industry Advisory Board

1. Purpose

The Industry Advisory Board (IAB) provides independent external advice and industry insight to support the University's strategic objectives in education, research, innovation, knowledge exchange, and graduate employability.

The Board will:
— Advise on current and emerging industry trends.
— Provide input into curriculum development and review.
— Help identify future skills and workforce requirements.
— Strengthen links between the University and employers.
— Support opportunities for student placements, projects, internships, and graduate recruitment.

— Inform research and knowledge exchange activities.
— Act as advocates and ambassadors for collaboration between industry and the University.

2. Scope

The Board operates in an advisory capacity and does not have executive decision-making authority.

The Board may provide advice on:
— Strategic priorities
— Curriculum relevance and market responsiveness
— Student employability and skills development
— Industry engagement and partnership opportunities
— Professional accreditation requirements
— Regional, national, and international labour market trends

3. Membership

The Board shall comprise:
— Chair
— Vice-Chair (optional)
— Representatives from industry sectors relevant to the University/Faculty/School
— Representatives from professional bodies (where relevant)
— Entrepreneurial and SME representatives
— Alumni representatives (optional)
— University representatives (ex officio)

Membership should reflect diversity in:
— Sector representation
— Organisation size
— Professional expertise
— Gender and ethnicity
— Geographic location
— Career experience

4. Appointment and Term of Office

Members will:
— Be appointed by the Dean/Director/Head of School.
— Serve a term of three years.
— Be eligible for one further consecutive term.
— Resign by providing written notice to the Chair.

The University reserves the right to end appointments where there is:
— Persistent non-attendance.
— Conflict of interest concerns.
— Conduct inconsistent with University values.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Chair
The Chair shall:
— Lead meetings effectively and impartially.
— Agree agendas with the University Secretariat.
— Ensure all members have the opportunity to contribute.
— Encourage strategic discussion and challenge.

Members
Members shall:
— Attend and actively participate in meetings.
— Provide advice based on professional expertise.
— Act in the best interests of the Board's purpose.
— Declare actual or potential conflicts of interest.
— Maintain confidentiality where required.
— Support collaboration opportunities between their organisation and the University.

University Representatives
University representatives shall:
— Provide relevant information and evidence.
— Facilitate implementation of agreed actions.
— Ensure effective administration of the Board.
— Report progress against recommendations.

6. Meetings
The Board will meet:
— A minimum of two times per year.
— Normally in person, online, or through a hybrid format.

Meeting papers will normally be circulated:
— At least one week in advance.

Minutes and action logs will be circulated:
— Within two weeks of each meeting.

7. Quorum
A meeting shall be deemed quorate when:
— The Chair (or nominee) is present; and
— At least 50% of appointed members are in attendance.

As the Board is advisory, discussions may proceed without a quorum, but recommendations should be formally recorded.

8. Conflicts of Interest
Members must declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest at the earliest opportunity.

A declaration of interests register will be maintained and reviewed annually.

The Chair may determine that a member withdraws from discussion of a specific item where a conflict exists.

9. Confidentiality

Members may receive confidential information relating to:

— University strategy
— Students
— Staff
— Commercial partnerships
— Research activities

Members shall not disclose confidential information without prior authorisation from the University.

10. Reporting

The Board shall report to:

[Faculty Board / Academic Board / Research Committee / Executive Board]

The Chair shall provide:

— An annual report summarising activities.
— Key recommendations.
— Emerging industry trends.
— Progress and impact achieved.

11. Evaluation and Review

The effectiveness of the Board will be reviewed annually against agreed performance measures including:

— Attendance and engagement
— Number of industry collaborations established
— Student employability outcomes
— Curriculum enhancements influenced
— Research and innovation partnerships supported
— Stakeholder feedback

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed every three years.

12. Success Measures (Suggested KPIs)

The Board will contribute toward:

— Improved curriculum responsiveness to industry needs.
— Increased placement and internship opportunities.
— Improved graduate employment outcomes.
— Enhanced employer satisfaction.
— Increased external engagement and partnership activity.
— Growth in collaborative research and innovation projects.

Member Code of Conduct

Members are expected to:

— Act with integrity and professionalism.
— Respect differing viewpoints.
— Promote inclusion and diversity.
— Focus on strategic advice rather than operational matters.
— Support the University's mission and reputation.
— Maintain confidentiality where appropriate.

Approved by: [Committee/Board]
Date Approved: [DD/MM/YYYY]
Review Date: [DD/MM/YYYY]
Version: 1.0

This template aligns well with governance expectations for UK universities and can be adapted for a Faculty Industry Advisory Board, Research Advisory Panel, Employability Board, or School-level Industry Advisory Committee.