

The University of Edinburgh  
Senatus Quality Assurance Committee

**Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 10 December 2015 at 2pm  
in the Hodgson Room, Weir Building, the King's Buildings**

<b>Present:</b>	
Dr Linda Bruce	Academic Policy Manager, Academic Services
Professor Tina Harrison (Convener)	Assistant Principal, Academic Standards and Quality Assurance
Erin Jackson	Co-opted Member: Distance Learning & E-learning
Dr Sheila Lodge	CMVM Head of Academic Administration
Tanya Lubicz-Nawrocka	EUSA Academic Engagement Co-ordinator
Dr Robert Mason	Associate Dean (Quality Assurance) College of Humanities and Social Science
Dr Gordon McDougall	Dean (Quality Assurance), College of Science and Engineering
Barry Neilson	Director, Student Systems
Dr Claire Phillips	School Representative (Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies), College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Professor Michael Summerfield	School Representative (School of GeoSciences), College of Science and Engineering
Dr Jon Turner	Director, Institute for Academic Development
Tom Ward	Director, Academic Services
Imogen Wilson	Vice President (Academic Affairs), EUSA
<b>In attendance:</b>	
Brian Connolly	Secretary to Senatus Quality Assurance Committee
<b>Apologies:</b>	
Professor Jeremy Bradshaw	Director of Quality Assurance, CMVM, Assistant Principal Researcher Development
Ronnie Millar	Director, Student Counselling Service, Representative of Student Services
Professor John Sawkins	External Representative. Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), Heriot-Watt University
Dr Inger Seiferheld	School Representative (Business School), College of Humanities and Social Science

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Convener welcomed members and noted apologies.

## 2. Minutes of previous meeting held 28 May 2015

QAC 15/16 3 A

The Minutes of the meeting of 29 October 2015 were approved as an accurate record.

## 3. Matters Arising

- 3.1 The Committee noted that the action regarding feedback from Schools on the new Principles for Student Staff Liaison Committees had been brought forward to this meeting (Paper J) in order to allow for any required changes to be made in time for semester two. QAC 15/16 3 B

## 4. Convener's Business

### 4.1 Simplification Working Group

The Convener reported that the Simplification Working Group had been established, to be convened by Gavin Douglas, to look at ways in which University's learning and teaching administrative processes could be simplified. The review of the University's Quality Assurance framework would provide a key input to this process and the Convener would be part of the group to consider QA simplification.

### 4.2 Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy

The Committee noted that the Convener and the Director of the Student Disability Service had attended a meeting of Coordinators of Adjustments (CoAs) in November to discuss the implementation of the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy and raising awareness of the policy further in schools. The Convener reported that the meeting had provided a very useful discussion regarding ongoing challenges and possible solutions which had in turn resulted in a number of actions for CoAs to take forward. EUSA had met with the University's marketing department to discuss how students could be better informed about the policy. EUSA noted that the guidance on the IAD website was very helpful. The Convener requested colleges to encourage schools to remind staff to use microphones in centrally serviced teaching rooms.

**Action: College representatives to prompt School uptake of Learning and Teaching Spaces Technology.**

### 4.3 EvaSys

The Convener reported that the Principal's Strategy Group (PSG) had agreed that all undergraduate and postgraduate courses within all Schools must use EvaSys by academic session 2016/17.

## 5. For Discussion

### 5.1 Annual Report on Complaint Handling 2014-15

QAC 15/16 3 C

The Committee received and noted the Annual Report on Complaint Handling 2014-15.

It was noted that there had been a significant increase in complaints during the preceding year 559 complaints in the period August 2014 – July 2015, compared to 392 the previous year. The figures covered all complaints, including those from members of the public. Most of the increase was attributed to the improved recognition and recording of complaints. Under the new two stage process, 98% of complaints were resolved at Frontline stage. Of the complaints reviewed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, the University's handling was endorsed in all cases.

In order to enhance the University's learning from complaints, the Committee requested that the annual report should include further categorisation of complaints, including provenance and nature of the complaint. **Action: Investigations Manager**

## 5.2 Annual report on Student Appeals

QAC 15/16 3 D  
CLOSED

The Committee received and noted the Annual Report on Student Appeals 2014/15.

The Committee noted that there had been a significant increase during the preceding year of 47.4% which reflected a general trend across the higher education sector. However, the number of appeals upheld in 2014/5 decreased to 5%, compared with 15% in the previous year. It was noted that the main themes arising from academic appeals were: dissertation and thesis supervision; special circumstances, perceived improper conduct of board of examiners/irregular procedure; and concessions. It was noted that since only 8 appeals were upheld in 2014/15 it was very difficult to extract trends across these three areas.

Members suggested that the rise in appeals may be linked to the growth of a more consumerist culture within the student body, itself linked to the expansion of student fees.

**Action: Report author to include analysis of appeals by fee status in next report.**

**Action: Report author to feed learning from thesis supervision theme to Senate Researcher Experience Committee for action, and from special circumstances appeals to the special circumstances working group.**

## 5.3 Annual report on Student Discipline

QAC 15/16 3 E  
CLOSED

The Committee received and noted the Annual Report on Student Discipline 2014/15.

The Committee noted that breaches of the Code of Student Conduct were up but the number of students disciplined for academic misconduct were down. Around 40% of breaches were for offences related to academic misconduct (however, the total number of academic misconduct cases continues to involve a very small proportion of the student population - around 0.5% during 2014/15). Breaches of the Code of Student Conduct increased to 465 in 2014/15, up from 383 the previous year. Within that, the number of students disciplined for academic misconduct fell compared to the previous year, with the number disciplined for plagiarism also falling.

The Committee was pleased to note that training on the Code had been delivered to conduct investigators

#### 5.4 **Annual report on External Examiner Themes**

QAC 15/16 3 F

The Committee received and noted the External Examiner Reports and Responses 2014/15. The Committee noted that the largest proportion of issues raised by External Examiners were linked to the themes of provision of information, issues raised in previous reports, and assessment process.

A number of suggestions were made for further development of the annual report format, including separate reporting schedules for undergraduate and taught postgraduate themes, and identifying themes from responses to External Examiners for training purposes.

**Action: Academic Services to review reporting format for annual reports on appeals, student discipline and External Examiners for 2016/17. Consideration would be given to including recommendations for specific action by the Committee.**

#### 5.5 **Annual report on cross-cutting themes from annual complaints, appeals and discipline reports**

QAC 15/16 3 G

The Committee received and noted the report on cross-cutting themes from annual complaints, appeals and discipline reports.

The Committee noted that the main theme of University wide significance to emerge from this year's reports was the continuing increase in the volume of student complaints and appeals, and an overall increase in the number of breaches of the Code of Student Conduct.

However, the Committee also noted that because of the very small number of upheld cases and the individual nature of the circumstances involved it had been difficult to identify areas for further action. Due to this fact the Committee was in agreement that the cross-cutting themes report should be discontinued. **Action: Committee Secretary**

#### 5.6 **University Quality Framework Review**

QAC 15/16 3 H

The Committee received reports on outcomes of discussions within each College in regard to the review of the University Quality Framework.

##### **College of Humanities and Social Science**

The Committee noted that that opinion in the College was broadly supportive of the existing University Quality Framework and the ongoing efforts to streamline QA processes and to maximize their impact - notably with regard to Teaching Programme Review and Postgraduate Programme Review. Current work on data, and on the dashboard concept for user-friendly presentation of data, carries great promise to achieve further simplification of QA processes in ways that maximize their value in enhancing learning and teaching.

It was suggested that the following areas of modification were worthy of further consideration:

- The role of annual programme-level monitoring and the relationship with annual course monitoring within the Quality Framework deserves reflection as part of the review.
- Further reflection on the School Director of Quality role would be welcomed, especially relationship between the School Director of Quality and school management structures.

### **College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine**

The Committee noted that that opinion in the College was broadly supportive of the existing University Quality Framework and recommended retention of the school and college reports in any revised quality framework. Furthermore, since the majority of undergraduate programmes (and a few postgraduate programmes) of the College were externally accredited, the College would like to see closer co-operation between internal and external review processes, particularly in regard to timing and the re-use of material.

### **College of Science and Engineering**

The Committee noted that that opinion in the College was broadly supportive of the existing University Quality Framework and that current work on the simplification of QA processes and the student dashboard were particularly welcomed.

### **Student Participation in Quality Framework**

It was agreed that the next meeting would include an item on student engagement in quality processes from the perspective of EUSA.

### **Action: EUSA Vice President Academic Affairs**

#### **Workshop – Simplification**

Due to time constraints the Committee agreed to postpone the workshop until a future meeting. However, members briefly noted the importance of the following issues: internal and external reference points; avoiding duplication of effort between programme and course levels; the importance of flexibility and consideration of local pedagogical practice; consistency in the use of data – increasing use of data sets/dashboards; potential for clustering programmes for review; timing of programme and course info gathering – different cycles.

## **5.7 ELIR Outcome**

QAC 15/16 3 I

The Committee received and noted the early draft outcome report of the University's 2015 ELIR setting out the overarching judgement and draft areas of positive practice and areas for development.

The Committee noted the overarching judgment that the University of Edinburgh had effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience and that these arrangements were likely to continue to be effective in the future. The Committee welcomed this positive judgement, recognising the University's robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

The Committee noted that the finalised outcome report and a detailed technical report would be sent to the University in March 2016.

The Learning and Teaching Policy Group (LTPG) would approve the approach to taking action on the ELIR recommendations, namely that the Committee would have responsibility for monitoring progress against the recommendations, with LTPG providing the strategic oversight and detailed discussion of the proposed actions

**5.8 Principles for Student Staff Liaison Committees – Update from Schools** QAC 15/16 3 J

The Committee received and noted an interim report on the implementation of guidance for Schools regarding communication between Student Representatives and Students. It was agreed that schools would stop sharing email addresses given potential data protection issues. The main learning point from the implementation of the guidance was the need to learn which methods of communication were effective. Further work would be undertaken in this light.

**Action: Director of Academic Services and EUSA Academic Engagement Coordinator to form group to discuss further, and agree arrangements for S2.**

**6. For Approval**

**6.1 Internal Review Reports and Responses** QAC 15/16 3 K

The Committee received a paper proposing the Committee's response to the following School year-on/14 week responses to the recommendations in their Teaching and Postgraduate Programme reviews:

- TPR of Business School 2013/14 - year on response.
- TPR of Informatics 2014/15 - 14 week response.
- PPR of Online Distance Learning Postgraduate Taught Programmes in CMVM - 14 week response.

It was noted that the paper had been drafted from comments received from Committee members between during 6-23 November 2015. The Committee **approved** the responses.

**Action: Committee Secretary to disseminate Committee responses to the relevant areas.**

**7. For Information**

**7.1 College Quality Assurance Priorities 2015-16 - CMVM structures**

The Committee received and noted the update on CMVM's committee structure for learning and teaching matters reflecting the College's new structure, which came into effect on 1st August 2015.

**7.2 Green Paper**

The Committee noted the UK Government green paper setting out proposals to change the higher education landscape, including the proposal for a Teaching

Excellence Framework. The consultation period would be 6 November 2015 - 15 January 2016 and the green paper could be accessed at the following link: [Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice](#)

### 7.3 Subject Benchmark Statements

The Committee noted that the following revised Subject Benchmark Statements had been circulated to the relevant Directors of Teaching:

[Biosciences](#)  
[Biomedical Sciences](#)

## 8. Electronic Business

### 8.1 Internal Review Reports and Responses: QAC 15/16 3 L

The Committee received the following Internal Review Responses:

- PPR of Maths - year on response
- PPR/TPR of Law - year on response
- TPR of History - year on response

The Committee noted that, subsequent to the meeting, individual Members would be invited to comment on specific responses. These comments would then be consolidated by the Convener and circulated electronically to the Committee, in order to avoid undue delay to the subsequent dissemination to the relevant subject areas and support service. The comments would then be submitted to the next meeting at which point the Convener may wish to highlight specific points for discussion.

**Action: Committee Secretary to allocate reports to lead readers for comment.**

## 9. Date of Next Meeting

### 9.1 Thursday 4th February 2016 at 2pm in the Raeburn Room, Old College