

The University of Edinburgh  
Senatus Quality Assurance Committee

**Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 20 September 2018 at 9am  
in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

**Present:**

Professor Tina Harrison	Assistant Principal, Academic Standards and Quality Assurance (Convener)
Dr Shereen Benjamin	Associate Dean (Quality Assurance) College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science
Megan Brown	Schools Engagement Officer, Edinburgh University Students' Association
Brian Connolly	Secretary to Senatus Quality Assurance Committee, Academic Services
Lisa Dawson	Director of Student Systems and Administration
Dr Gail Duursma	School Representative (Engineering), College of Science and Engineering
Brian Green	Deputy Associate Principal (Learning & Teaching), University of Strathclyde
Dr Jeni Harden	School Representative (School of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences), College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Dr Katherine Inglis	School Representative (Literatures, Languages and Cultures), College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science
Nichola Kett	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, Academic Services
Dr Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, College of Science and Engineering
Sarah McAllister	Head of Operations & Projects & Assistant Director, Institute for Academic Development
Diva Mukherji	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Dr Claire Phillips	Director of Quality Assurance, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

**In Attendance:**

Vasiliki Pothitou	Admissions Assistant, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
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## Apologies:

Tom Ward

Director, Academic Services

### 1. Welcome

The Convener welcomed the following new members to the Committee:

- **Diva Mukherji**, Students' Association Vice President Education.
- **Dr Linda Kirstein**, currently Director of Teaching in the School of GeoSciences and incoming appointment to the revised role of **Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture** in the College of Science and Engineering (CSE). It was noted that this role would involve the key aspects of the Dean of Quality role alongside a greater focus on enhancement of the student/staff experience and teaching culture, in line with the College's strategic priorities.
- **Dr Jeni Harden**, Director of Quality in the School of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences, and School Representative for the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM).
- **Dr Katherine Inglis**, Director of Quality in the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures) and School Representative for the College of College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (CAHSS).
- **Lisa Dawson**, Director of Student Systems and Administration, co-opted member with expertise in student systems.

### 2. Notes of the electronic meetings conducted between 18 - 25 May 2018 and 20 - 27 August 2018

The Notes of the previous meetings were approved.

### 3. Matters Arising

#### For Discussion

### 4. School Annual Quality Reports 2017-18

The Committee discussed the report from the Sub Group tasked with reviewing School annual quality reports. The Committee also noted a report outlining a selection of good practice identified by members of the Sub Group.

<b>Action: College Deans of Quality to ensure that the outcomes of the Committee's discussions in regard to the School Annual Quality Reports 2017-18 are made available to and considered by the relevant College committee(s).</b>
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The Committee agreed the following should be included in the Sub Group report and would be included in feedback to the Schools:

- 2.1.6 Economics – reference to be added to the School's concern at the insufficient feedback it had received on College and University level actions from the last

reporting cycle. The Committee noted that the need to close the loop on College and University actions had been a learning point from this year's review process and would be addressed retrospectively and going forward.

- 2.1.12 Social and Political Science – section to be amended to state that the report contained 'insufficient' reference to the Industrial Action (instead of 'no' reference).
- 4.1.1 Academic Community – section to include the School of History, Classics and Archaeology and the School of Health in Social Science as good examples of academic community building.

The Committee noted that the Sub Group had considered each report with particular attention to: the Personal Tutor system; Degree Classification; and Industrial Action. The Committee noted that the Sub Group had commended staff across all the Schools and Deaneries on the significant amount of work undertaken in relation to the Industrial Action. The Committee agreed the following action in relation to Degree Classification outcomes:

**Action: The School of Mathematics to submit an additional update to the December meeting of SQAC providing more reflective analysis on why more firsts are awarded at Edinburgh than at peer institutions.**

The Committee noted that quality assurance and enhancement appeared to be disconnected from learning and teaching strategy in many Schools. The Committee agreed that School senior management involvement in quality assurance and enhancement was important and that School annual quality reports could ideally be used as part of leadership messages within Schools.

**Action: The Convenor to discuss School senior management involvement in quality assurance and enhancement with the Senior Vice-Principal.**

The Committee noted the many different sources and wide variety of formats of data considered during the annual monitoring, review and reporting process presented challenges for Schools. It was agreed that the sources of data needed to be reviewed with the aim of providing staff with clarity on how to access, interpret and effectively use data. The Committee noted the importance of trends and patterns of data for Schools rather than snapshots and suggested that Schools be provided with high-level data in line with the data sets used for teaching/postgraduate programme reviews. It was noted that Student System was currently undertaking work to review and enhance the provision of information on the Student Dashboards.

**Action: Academic Services and Student Systems to discuss the provision of data to Schools for the annual monitoring, review and reporting process.**

The Committee noted that several schools had mentioned low response rates to the Course Enhancement Questionnaires (CEQs) and had raised questions as to the value of the information provided to Schools from the process. It was noted that Student Systems was currently working with the Institute for Academic Development to improve response rates and understand what data schools would specifically value from the process.

**Action: Academic Services to inform Student Systems of concerns raised in relation to low response rates for CEQS and requests for communications in relation to any plans to increase response rates or plans to review communications to students in regard to CEQs.**

The Committee noted that in some schools there was a degree of disconnect in relation to actions and themes in reports between this year and the previous year. The Committee agreed that at the start of the reporting cycle a report should be sent to Schools providing an update on College and University level actions in order to close the loop from the previous reporting cycle and to act as an aide memoire for the next round of reporting. It was suggested that to help with the induction of new staff to the process an archive of exemplars of previous reports would be valuable as would guidance setting the context for the process and explaining its utility. It was also agreed that prompts should be added to the School annual quality report template to ensure that Schools include a narrative on postgraduate research provision and reflect upon how the actions they are taking reflect the student voice.

**Action: Academic Services to amend the reporting template (including references to postgraduate research provision and the student voice) and produce an update report detailing actions requested of the Colleges and the University. Academic Services to liaise with Sub Group members and College Offices to identify actions that will be taken forward. The information in update report will be shared with Schools at appropriate points throughout the academic year by Academic Services and College Offices as appropriate.**

The Committee agreed that a student member should be involved in the Sub Group review process but recognised that this may be challenging logistically due to the workload and timing commitments of the process. The Committee also agreed that an external member would not be required due to the external oversight on the Committee itself.

**Action: Academic Services to discuss enhancements to the reporting process with College Deans and the Students' Association (specifically in regard to student input to the process).**

**Action: Academic Services to seek clarity on Student Staff Liaison Committee meeting requirements within the quality model.**

Themes of good practice for sharing across the University were noted as follows:

- **Academic Community** - a strong theme across many school annual quality reports. Schools use a variety of electronic tools to develop virtual academic communities such as online discussion boards, blogs, and social media. Schools also use different types of in-person meetings such as teaching fora, annual events, competitions, and tea/coffee mornings to develop academic communities.
- **Innovative Learning, Teaching and Assessment** - schools are continuing to use innovative learning, teaching and assessment methods to enhance the student experience.
- **Student Support** – the school annual quality reports evidenced numerous examples of the provision of effective support across many aspects of the student experience, including the Personal Tutor system, wider academic support, widening participation and employability.

Areas for further development at University level were noted as follows:

- **Pressure on Staff Time** - as student numbers increase, staff are identifying challenges with, for example, effectively delivering the Personal Tutor system, providing quality feedback to students on assessments within the required timescales, and providing effective supervision for dissertations. The Committee noted that the

Sub Group had identified a particular tension between the provision of quality feedback to students on their assessments and feedback turnaround requirements. A number of comments specifically related to the increase in student numbers on postgraduate taught programmes.

- **Learning and Teaching Accommodation** - Schools continue to identify challenges with accessing suitable learning and teaching accommodation particularly in regard to the lack of availability of large lecture theatres and classrooms to accommodate growing student cohorts. The Committee noted that where improvements had been delivered (such as additional social space in the School of Chemistry and the Appleton Tower development in the School of Informatics) there had also been improvements in student satisfaction scores in the National Student Survey (NSS). It was also noted that the Space Strategy Group was exploring the issue in greater depth with a student survey in 2018 and a further staff survey in 2019. The Committee agreed that strategic plans for increases to student numbers should be considered in line with estates developments.

**Action: Committee Secretary to invite the Space Survey Group to report findings of the student and staff surveys to SQAC.**

- **Personal Tutor system** - student feedback on satisfaction with the Personal Tutor system has dropped across a large number of Schools at both undergraduate and taught postgraduate level. The Committee noted that there was no strong sense amongst Schools of why satisfaction has dropped and recognised a need to think more fundamentally about the Personal Tutor system. It was suggested that the PT system had succeeded in providing a point-of-contact not just for student support but also student dissatisfaction, acting as a lightning rod for general student experience concerns which may not be related to the performance of PTs. The Committee noted that schools were carefully considering the reasons for the drop and several had planned actions for academic session 2018/19 in response, including making changes to key processes and organisation. The Committee noted that following the decline in satisfaction scores, the University would be undertaking a holistic review of the Personal Tutor system which would link to a wider review of student support.

**Action: The Convenor to prepare a report on the areas for further development for consideration at University Executive.**

The Committee **approved** the Sub Group commendations and recommendations to Schools (with the amendments noted above) and agreed that the feedback to Schools should also include an update on College and University level actions in order to close the loop from the last reporting cycle.

The Committee noted that a University level event would be held on 6 February 2019 to share examples good practice from this round of annual monitoring (and internal review) reporting.

## 5. Internal Review Themes 2017-18

The Committee discussed the themes that emerged from teaching/postgraduate programme reviews held in 2017-18.

**Action: College Deans of Quality to ensure that the outcomes of the Committee's discussions in regard to the Internal Review Themes 2017-18 are made available to and considered by the relevant College committee(s).**

The following areas of good practice were noted:

- **Innovative learning and teaching** - examples of innovation in learning and teaching were identified throughout the reviews (in particular developments to enhance teaching practice, including discussion and teaching forums, exemplar sessions and Autonomous Learning Groups).
- **Listening to and responding to Student Voice** - there was evidence of examples of good practice specifically in relation to responsiveness to feedback.
- **Assessment and feedback** - reviews highlighted the wide variety of assessment methods and mechanisms used to provide feedback to students.
- **Student support** - the diverse ways of supporting students was commended, with a variety of good practice examples being highlighted (including pre-programme induction, peer support and alumni engagement).
- **Academic community** – supported through a variety of practices, including academic family and buddy systems, peer assisted learning schemes, as well as school conferences, seminar programmes and newsletters.
- **Supporting and developing academic staff, including postgraduate tutors and demonstrators, and professional staff** – particularly in relation to mentoring and peer support.

Areas for further development were noted as follows:

- **Building academic communities** - recommendations made related to developing academic communities which enable students to engage with research and developing a strategy for community building.

**Action: Academic Services to include building academic communities as a key theme at the University level sharing practice event scheduled for semester 2 2018/19.**

**Action: Academic Services to collate examples of good practice of building academic communities for Teaching Matters.**

- **Student support** - recommendations related to extending peer mentoring, supporting student transition and clarifying expectations of the Personal Tutor system, including the number of meetings. The Committee noted that the University would shortly be undertaking a holistic review of the Personal Tutor system which will link to a wider review of student support and no additional action was proposed.
- **Supporting and developing academic staff, including postgraduate tutors and demonstrators** - Recommendations focussed around career development, training and support, with a particular reference to training and support to ensure the effective use of virtual learning environments. The Committee noted that the University had established a task group to review the issue of Teaching and Academic Careers, considering how achievements in teaching are rewarded and recognised through the academic lifecycle and how the University can ensure it has appropriate academic development provision in place. Also, the Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators for will be evaluated in 2018/19 by Academic Services. No additional action was proposed.

- **Provision of study and social space for students** - recommendations were made in relation to a lack of dedicated space for postgraduate research students at King's Buildings, pressure on all types of accommodation, and students establishing and maintaining a sense of identity with their school.

**Action: The Convenor to include the provision of study and social space for students in the report to the University Executive on areas for further development identified from annual monitoring, review and reporting.**

- **Resourcing and planning** - recommendations related to the resourcing of programmes and courses should student numbers expand, investing in teaching to allow for forward planning, and rewarding and recognising teaching. The Committee noted the importance of ensuring that there were sufficient numbers of teaching staff in place to meet any proposed expansion in student numbers.

**Action: The Convenor to include the resourcing of programmes and courses in the report to the University Executive on areas for further development identified from annual monitoring, review and reporting.**

## 6. Thematic Review

The Committee received and discussed the final report and recommendations of the 2017-18 Thematic Review of support for Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers.

The Committee noted the following key recommendations:

- **Data Collection** – the review panel recommended that the University develop and implement a systematic collection of data on student parents and student carers to provide a baseline understanding of these student cohorts.
- **Disclosure and Support** - the review panel recommended that the University develop and implement a systematic and sensitive disclosure process for student parents and carers with follow-up assessment of needs and appropriate support, advice and guidance. The review panel also recommended that the University consider developing a system of adjustments (covering issues such as extensions and examination arrangements) that are consistent with, but not the same as, those for disabled students.
- **Flexibility and Understanding** - the review panel recommended that the University explore the options for growing undergraduate part-time provision to provide more flexible study options for mature students and student parents and carers.
- **Child Friendly Campus** - the review panel recommended that the University conduct a strategic review of childcare provision, from the provision of child friendly spaces and crèche facilities to nurseries and childcare bursaries. The review must include benchmarking with peer institutions and consultation with students and staff in order to understand fully the needs of students and staff and to provide an evidence base for strategic decision making regarding the allocation of resources.

The Committee welcomed the findings and recommendations and thanked the review panel. It was noted that the University was seeking to expand its intake beyond the 'traditional' student profile as part of the new Widening Participation Strategy. The Committee was in

agreement that the University must recognise the range of support needs of these student cohorts, including mature students and student parents and carers.

The Committee **approved** the report and recommendations.

**Action: The Convenor to consider the appropriate allocation of the recommendations with the Senior Vice-Principal before the publication of the final report.**

The Committee noted that the final report would be published on the Academic Services website and circulated to the heads of support services and academic areas included in the review, Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, Deputy Secretary Student Experience, review panel, student and staff participants, and all areas responsible for action. Following receipt of the final report, the areas remitted recommendations would be responsible for submitting progress reports (14 week and year-on) to SQAC for comment, approval and feedback. The Committee noted the importance of managing expectations during the communication of the report and findings by making clear that many of the recommendations would entail further consultative and developmental work by the individuals and areas with remitted actions.

#### **7. Senate Committee Planning**

The Committee discussed the arrangements for the forthcoming 2019-22 planning round and the initial thoughts on priorities for student experience, learning and teaching that should be engaged with during the planning round. The Committee discussed the inclusion of the key themes identified in schools annual quality reports, in particular the pressure on staff time due to increasing student numbers (which may link to the outcomes of the staff survey). The Committee agreed that employability should be added to the list of priorities and requested that the phrase "...ensuring that all teaching staff..." be changed to "... ensuring that all staff who teach...".

#### **8. Annual Review of effectiveness of Senate Committees**

The Committee received and discussed the outcome of the Senate Committees questionnaire on the effectiveness of the composition, support, engagement and impact of the Senate Committees. It was noted that members of the four Senate Committees had been invited to complete the questionnaire over the summer 2018.

The Committee considered suggestions for addressing some specific issues. It was noted that due to the recent changes to the membership of the Committee the gender mix was now predominantly female.

**Action: Academic Services to monitor the membership of the Committees to ensure a representative balance.**

#### **9. MOOCs Annual Review 2016-17**

The Committee received and discussed the annual report from the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) Strategy Group.

The Committee agreed that next year's report should include more reflective analysis regarding MOOCs. The Committee suggested that the MOOCs Strategy Group could explore the demographics further to understand which groups are more likely to complete a certificate and progress onto further study at the University. The Committee also suggested that further analysis of the relative success rates for each of the three platforms would be useful. The

Committee noted that the Learning and Teaching Committee receives an annual report on the strategic direction of MOOCs.

**Action: Academic Services to develop and implement a template for the MOOCs Strategy Group annual report to the Committee.**

#### **10. Personal Tutor (PT) System Oversight Group**

The Committee received and discussed an update on the work of the PT System Oversight Group, in particular the notes from the meeting of June 2018 where the School Personal Tutoring Statements 2018-19 were approved.

The Committee noted that the University would be undertaking a holistic review of the PT system but also that in the meantime the system would continue under the current framework. The Committee noted the Oversight Group was currently exploring options to improve the way the PT system was described and communicated to staff and students. This enhancement work included a review of the PT central webpages and a leaflet for students and staff providing guidance on what each should expect of the PT system. It was noted that the leaflet had been delayed due to the need for further discussion with Colleges regarding some aspects of the content but a resolution was being sought which would allow the leaflet to be published (albeit later than planned). The Committee noted that this issue was indicative of one of the main challenges facing the PT system: the tension between local autonomy and diversity of delivery, and the demand for more effective and consistent communication to students regarding the PT system.

#### **For Information and Formal Business**

#### **11. Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance and Committee Priorities 2018-19**

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance, and summary of the planned priorities for 2018-19 which was approved by Senate in May 2018.

#### **12. Students' Association Vice President Education Priorities 2018-19**

The Committee noted the priorities of the Students' Association Vice President Education for 2018-19 as follows:

- **Promoting a diverse curricula** - student groups are increasingly discussing the need for a curriculum which represents voices from various backgrounds, and one wherein students are exposed to a host of different perspectives.
- **Creating inclusive teaching environments** – ensuring that all teaching spaces are comfortable spaces for students from different backgrounds, and that students are able to challenge various view points and opinions in a healthy environment. This includes ensuring students can access necessary support services, both academic and pastoral.
- **Developing alternative approaches to learning** - encouraging the use of innovative teaching and learning pedagogies which centre student engagement in their academic journey. By ensuring students have opportunities to critically engage with their studies, to collectively build wider learning communities.

#### **13. Scottish Funding Council Annual Report 2017-18**

The Committee noted the University's annual statement on institution-led review and enhancement activity to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

**14. Enhancement Themes Institutional Plan**

The Committee noted the University's end of year one report for the Enhancement Theme, Evidence for Enhancement, Improving the Student Experience.

**15. Service Excellence Programme: Student Administration and Support**

The Committee noted the update on the work being undertaken by the Student Administration & Support strand of the Service Excellence Programme.

**16. Knowledge Strategy Committee**

The Committee noted the update on matters considered by the Knowledge Strategy Committee.

**17. Any Other Business**

**QAA Scotland Annual Visit**

The Committee noted that at the annual QAA Scotland visit in May 2018, the University was encouraged to consider student representation for Zhejiang students and agreed that it should be referred to the School of Biomedical Sciences.

**Action: Committee Secretary to refer to the Director of Quality, Biomedical Sciences.**

**18. Date of Next Meeting:**

Thursday 6 December 2018, 2pm, Torridon Room, Charles Stewart House