<u>The University of Edinburgh</u>
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13 September 2022
at 2pm via Microsoft Teams**

Present:

Professor Tina Harrison **(Convener)**	Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance
Professor Matthew Bailey	Dean of Quality, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Marianne Brown	Co-opted member with expertise in Student Systems
Brian Connolly	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team (Interim), Academic Services
Dr Gail Duursma	School Representative (Engineering), College of Science and Engineering
Olivia Eadie	Assistant Director and Head of Operations and Projects, Institute for Academic Development
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 Sciences
Professor Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, College of Science and Engineering
Sam MacCallum	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Dr Paul Norris	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Dr Claire Phillips	Dean of Quality Assurance, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

Apologies:

Professor Leigh Sparks	Deputy Principal, University of Stirling

In attendance:

Patrick Jack   Academic Governance Officer, Academic and Student Administration, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Tom Ward   Director, Academic Services

1.   Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed Sam MacCallum (new Students' Association VP Education) and Professor Matthew Bailey (Dean of Quality, CMVM) to their first meeting. The Convenor also welcomed Tom Ward (Director of Academic Services) and Patrick Jack (Academic Governance Officer, CAHSS) in attendance to observe proceedings.

2.   Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 19 May 2022

The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

3.   Matters Arising

3.1 Quality Arrangements
The Convenor reported that the Scottish Funding Council recently published guidance on sector quality arrangements for 2022-23 and 2023-24. During this period QAA Scotland (QAAS) will focus activities on Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) and Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILM) as it continues to develop a new external institutional review method following the completion of the fourth cycle of Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR).

3.2 External Examiner Principles
The Convenor noted that in November 2022 the QASS will publish advice that expands on the External Examining Principles, giving practical help to external examiners and the degree-awarding bodies that appoint them. It will set out typical activities and optional functions and practices for external examiners and institutions, and will apply to postgraduate and undergraduate courses.

3.3 Subject Benchmark Statement Review
The Convenor reported that the QASS will shortly call for expressions of interest to join Advisory Groups for the review of QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. This will be a great opportunity, especially for any teaching-focused colleagues, looking to demonstrate leadership and impact at a sector level within their subject areas.

3.4 Senate Committee Operations (tabled paper)
The Convenor reported that Senate, at its 11 August 2022 meeting, approved some guidelines for the operation of the Senate Committees, including arrangements for access to and production of Senate Committee papers. The Committee noted the new guidelines (as set out in the tabled

paper) and agreed to take them into account when preparing Committee papers.

The Convenor reported that Senate, also at its 11 August 2022 meeting, agreed to add three elected Senate members to each Senate Standing Committees. Senate Conveners will meet with a group of interested Senate members in September 2022 to discuss the mechanisms for this, with a view to presenting proposals to Senate's October 2022 meeting.

The Convenor reported that Senate, at its May 2022 meeting, agreed to bring forward to 2022-23 an external effectiveness review of Senate, and at its August meeting approved the terms of reference for the review. The review will cover the Senate Committees as well as Senate itself (for example, the effectiveness of the relationship between Senate and its Committees, and the effectiveness and suitability of the current membership of the Senate Committees). In due course Committee members will have opportunities to engage with the review.

For Discussion

4. **School Annual Quality Reports 2021-22: Sub Group Report**

The Committee discussed the report from the sub-group tasked with reviewing the School annual quality reports.

It was noted that the light touch, interim approach had been maintained for the 2021-22 reporting cycle focusing on the impact of and learning from the Covid-19 pandemic. The streamlined reporting template was used and Schools were informed that reports should include consideration of the approach and effectiveness of student voice activities in line with the new Student Voice Policy and the move to locally managed course level feedback. Schools were also advised that SQAC would be particularly interested in their reflections on student progression and outcomes (focussing on the difference in attainment of groups of students with in year, rather than comparing against other years) and student support (in relation to the current Personal Tutor system and wider support for students). Also, whether the industrial action has impacted the quality of provision and student experience, and, if so, how this has been mitigated.

The following themes for further development at University level were noted:

- **Extensions and Special Circumstances (ESC)** - the significant increase in students seeking extensions and special circumstances in the recent period is an increasing cause of concern across the Schools and Deaneries, in particular leading to knock-on effects in delays for marking and feedback turnaround times. Concerns were also raised about potential issues with communication between the recently developed central ESC system and local course teams in Schools making it difficult to manage expectations and local communications with students.

Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the Convenor of the Academic Regulations and Policy Committee review of Extensions and Special Circumstances.

- **Resourcing** - a number of issues were grouped under a broad theme of resourcing including estates/space, IT/systems, and staff workload/welfare. As the University returned to campus and 'business as usual', reports noted difficulties accessing suitable teaching and office space particularly given the move towards new ways of hybrid working and the expansion of various professional service teams (due to the new student support approach). Reports also noted issues arising from the EUCLID system 'going down' at key times (e.g. welcome week and awards publication) and the knock-on effects of certain publication dates (particularly on Fridays). It was noted that these resource issues exacerbated existing concerns in relation to staffing and workload pressures and there is a need to consider these holistically.

  Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the University Executive.

- **On-Campus Transition** - Schools and Deaneries reported concerns that student on-campus lecture/class attendance remained relatively low compared to pre-pandemic levels. While the return to on-campus teaching was broadly welcomed, reports noted specific challenges related to teaching on-campus when Covid cases are high. It was also suggested that some students may be unused to on-campus teaching and may have struggled to attend for personal reasons and that some have adjusted to online provision and may prefer this mode of delivery for reasons of increased flexibility or accessibility.

  Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the University Executive.

- **Student Voice Policy** - the first year of operation of the new Policy, with a move from centralised to localised management of course feedback (in response to requests from Schools/Deaneries) was welcomed, but it was acknowledged that this increased flexibility had created additional work for Schools. Schools took varying approaches to implementation with a number of Schools taking a School-wide approach. Further monitoring will continue to ensure effective approaches are taken in Schools and effective approaches are shared. Some Schools also queried how locally managed course evaluation data could be used as benchmarked evidence of excellence in teaching.

  Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the University Executive.

The Committee noted that the streamlined interim process had worked well again this year and commended the Directors of Quality and all the School staff who had collaborated in the process for their excellent work once again under very challenging circumstances. However, it was agreed that there needed to be more consistency across reports in the way data is selected and used as evidence.

Action: Academic Services and Student Systems to provide more directed guidance to Schools on the use of data in the annual quality reporting processes.

The Committee noted that the reports represented a rich depository of good practice that should be shared across the University. It was agreed that the College Deans would nominate outstanding examples of innovative learning and teaching practice for Academic Services and the Institute for Academic Development to share at University level. It was also noted that the School and Programme Quality System (SPQS) had again worked very well and that a move to a fully online reporting process across all three Colleges would allow for more efficient analysis and utilization of the data held within the reports.

Action: College Deans to send Academic Services examples of innovative learning and teaching practice to Academic Services.

The Committee agreed that a themed template would allow for a more standardised approach to reporting while also allowing Schools the scope to expand on specific local issues and activities. It was agreed that Academic Services would explore reporting options, and the plans for the next QA reporting cycle, and discuss with the College Deans during the first semester.

Action: Academic Services to explore reporting options, and the plans for the next QA reporting cycle, and discuss with the College Deans during the first semester.

The Committee confirmed that it was content that local quality assurance processes were effective in ensuring the quality of provision and academic standards across the University, as evidenced in the School annual quality reports.

5. **Internal Periodic Review Themes 2021-22**

The Committee discussed and approved the areas of good practice and further development arising from internal periodic reviews held in 2021-22, and the responsibilities for action in response.

Action: Academic Services to report areas for further development identified in the 2021-22 internal periodic reviews to the University Executive for information.

6.   Students' Association Priorities 2022-23

The Committee noted the following priorities of the Students' Association Vice President Education for the academic year 2021/22:

- Increasing academic transparency and student academic support

  Post-pandemic assessment literacy has been identified as a key priority for students, particularly undergraduates entering honours without previous experience of in-person examinations. The VP will seek to ensure that adequate provision is in place to support students through this transition, particularly in relation to methods of assessment and accessibility and equitable outcomes. The VP will also work to improve student awareness of academic expectations, particularly in relation to academic misconduct and online assessment methods.

- Working towards a more accessible and inclusive curriculum

  The VP will seek to ensure that the student voice and experience, as well as staff workloads, are prioritised within the Curriculum Transformation Programme. The VP will push to create spaces for staff and students to work together on key issues surrounding curriculum decolonisation to inform design priorities. The VP will also work to ensure that experiential learning within teaching is accessible, particularly for disabled students and those from Widening Participation backgrounds, so that all students feel able to fully engage with opportunities available to them.

- Improving staff and student engagement with student voice

  The VP will continue to improve engagement and overall awareness with the Association's student voice structure across the University. They will work towards ensuring that student representatives have greater agency in learning and teaching matters, and that staff and students are partners in decisions impacting academic experience.

7.   Personal Tutor (PT) System Oversight Group

The Committee discussed an update on the activities of the Personal Tutor System Oversight Group, in particular the annual review of the School Personal Tutoring Statement (SPTS).

It was noted that the 2022-23 academic session will be a transitional year for student support across the University with some areas implementing the new model for some students in September 2022 (ahead of full implementation in September 2023). Those areas adopting the new model from September 2022 have submitted plans to the Student Support Project Board, setting out their baseline provision for students under the new system and how this aligns with current PT provision. The current PT system will still remain in

place for the majority of students during the coming year and therefore the existing quality assurance processes for the PT system will also continue for one more year, centred on the annual review of the SPTSs which the PT System Oversight Group has recently completed.

The Committee noted that the Student Support Project Board will continue for an agreed period beyond September 2023 in order to monitor consistency of implementation and evaluate the impact of these changes on the student experience. However, once mainstreamed, SQAC will have a central role in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of the new student support arrangements. It was noted that an overview of evaluation and monitoring plans during the implementation period and proposals for mainstreaming will be presented to SQAC at the December meeting for further consideration and discussion.

For Information and Formal Business

8. **Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance and Committee Priorities 2022-23**

    The Committee noted the Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance, and summary of the planned priorities for 2022-23 approved by Senate in May 2022.

9. **Scottish Funding Council Annual Report 2021-22**

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

10. **Enhancement Themes: End of Year Report**

    The Committee noted the University's end of year one report on Enhancement Theme activity.

11. **Internal Periodic Review: Reports and Responses**

    The Committee approved the final reports for: Biological Sciences (undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision); Data, Science, Technology and Innovation (postgraduate taught online provision); Informatics; Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (postgraduate taught provision).

    The Committee confirmed that it was content with progress in the year-on response from Oral Health and the 14 Week Response from Biological Sciences (postgraduate research provision).

12. **Any Other Business**

    There was no other business.

13. **Date of Next Meeting:** Thursday 8 December 2022 at 2pm in the Cuillin
Room, Charles Stewart House