

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

**Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16 September 2021
at 2pm via Microsoft Teams**

Present:

Professor Tina Harrison (Convener)	Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance
Brian Connolly	Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services
Dr Gail Duursma	School Representative (Engineering), College of Science and Engineering
Tara Gold	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
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
Nichola Kett	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, Academic Services
Professor Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, College of Science and Engineering
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
Paula Webster	Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling, Student Systems and Administration

Apologies:

Olivia Eadie	Assistant Director and Head of Operations and Projects, Institute for Academic Development
Stuart Lamot	Edinburgh University Students' Association Representative
Professor Leigh Sparks	Deputy Principal, University of Stirling

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

The Convenor welcomed Tara Gold to her first meeting as the new Students' Association Vice President Education, and thanked Paula Webster, attending her final meeting, for all her work as a member of the Committee.

2. **Minutes of the meetings held on Thursday 20 May 2021 and the electronic meeting conducted between Wednesday 18 and Monday 23 August 2021**

The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meetings.

3. **Matters Arising**

- **Student Voice Policy**

The Convenor reported that discussions had taken place with Directors of Teaching regarding practical support and guidance to develop a new approach to course level feedback. It was noted that work to develop the toolkit and supporting guidance was ongoing.

- **Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)**

The Convenor reported that the Principal had submitted a letter in support of SRUC's application for degree-awarding powers.

For Discussion

4. **School Annual Quality Reports 2020-21: 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 2020-21 reporting cycle focusing on the impact of and learning from the Covid-19 pandemic. The streamlined reporting template was used but Schools were asked to complete all three questions this year (updating on actions from the previous reporting cycle was optional for the 2019-20 reports). This year Schools were informed that the Committee was particularly interested in their reflections on student progression and outcomes (focussing on the difference in attainment of groups of students, rather than comparing against other years) and student feedback. To aide their reflection, student data was available at the Insights Hub and the Student Analytics, Insights & Modelling SharePoint with online training available at PowerBI help videos. The Student Systems team also produced new guidance on using data for annual reporting made available to Schools at the Analytics SharePoint.

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

- **Staff Welfare and Student Experience**

There are ongoing concerns that the pandemic has exacerbated existing issues in relation to staffing and workload pressures, particularly as the University admitted an exceptionally large number of students in 2020-21. This year's reports raised concerns that these may now be impacting the student experience.

The Committee noted that the recent Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) recommended the University ‘implement an approach to facilitate institutional oversight and the effective planning and monitoring of student numbers, in order to ensure that appropriate and timely actions can be taken where increases in student numbers impact on arrangements for learning and teaching and student support.’

Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the ELIR Response Oversight Group.

- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**
Increasingly Schools/Deaneries have engaged with student data and reflected on the gaps in attainment of different groups of students within their local area and across the University. Concerns were raised in a number of reports about the University’s support of students with protected characteristics, particularly in relation to the impact of the pandemic. The issues have been widely discussed and Schools/Deaneries would now like support from the University to address the underlying causes.

The Committee noted that this was also the focus of an ELIR recommended encouraging the University to ‘consider how to address attainment gaps in student performance through the oversight, coordination and monitoring at an institutional level of school-level actions’.

Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the ELIR Response Oversight Group.

- **Online/Hybrid Platforms**
In response to the pandemic, Schools/Deaneries developed new approaches to teaching & learning and administrative systems and procedures. They would like to maintain and carry these innovations into the post-pandemic world and, to support this aspiration, there is a general desire for a strategic assessment of the University’s online learning platforms with the aim of improving functionality and suitability.

Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to Information Systems and the Curriculum Transformation team.

The Committee also noted the importance of the following issues and agreed to request follow-up actions and monitor progress:

- **Postgraduate Research (PGR) Students**
A number of issues relating to PGR students were noted including the long term impact of Covid on both their research (e.g. lack of lab access adversely affecting their submission rates and funding) and their welfare (e.g. due to the isolation from their social and academic communities). Concerns were also raised regarding the level of PGR fees set by the University and the limits this set on the breadth and diversity of the PGR student community (e.g. deterring students from a non-traditional or widening participation background from considering research as a career step or option).

Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the Doctoral College.

- **Extensions and Special Circumstances (ESC)**

The new centralised ESC system continues to be an issue across a number of reports, exacerbated by the Covid mitigations last year. Concerns persist about the timing of the implementation of the ESC and the additional workload and stress this caused staff due to systems issues and response times, at a time when they were already under pressure. Concerns regarding the extra assistance required to inform PTs and students of the new ESC system and the necessity to highlight to students the importance/benefits of involving the PT (if feasible/appropriate) when submitting a SC application (inherent risk of circumventing the PT). A major concern is the lack of automated notice to PTs when a case has been submitted.

Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the Deputy Secretary Student Experience.

- **Student Support and Personal Tutor (PTSS) Review**

Schools/Deaneries reported concerns that consideration must be given to how the new system will be resourced. The proposed evolved model of student support will require additional resources for Schools/Deaneries in order to recruit sufficient professional services staff for the new system. It is fundamentally important that the new system of student support is aligned and thoroughly linked to the ESC system.

The Committee again noted that the PT system was also the focus of an ELIR recommended.

Action: Committee Secretary to refer issue to the Deputy Secretary Student Experience and the ELIR Response Oversight Group.

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 under very challenging circumstances.

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.

Action: College Deans to send 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 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. However, the Committee acknowledged concerns in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine in relation to the open nature of the SPQS and the limited functionality for course level reporting.

Action: Academic Services to explore reporting options, and the plans for the next QA reporting cycle, and discuss with the College Deans during the 2021-22 academic year.

5. Internal Periodic Review Themes 2020-21

The Committee discussed and approved the areas of good practice and further development arising from internal periodic reviews held in 2020-21, and the responsibilities for action in response.

Action: Academic Services to report areas for further development identified in the 2020-21 internal periodic reviews and annual School and College reports to the University Executive for information.

6. Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR): Response Action Plan

The Committee discussed the recent Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) outcome and recommendations and considered the high-level initial plan for progressing the recommendations.

The Committee noted that whilst the overall judgement was positive, and there were several commendations in the report, two key themes run throughout the findings:

- inconsistency in implementation of policy and practice due to variability arising from the University's decentralised nature.
- speed of change has been slow and projects have not delivered substantial change.

The Committee noted that an ELIR Oversight Group has been established (comprising VP Students, Deputy Secretary Student Experience, Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, Director of IAD, Director of Strategic Change, Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services) which has had an initial meeting to discuss how to take forward the recommendations.

7. Annual Students' Association Priorities 2021-22

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

- Strengthening the University's response to the pandemic by prioritising the centring of student voices in decision making and planning, advocating for measures to support students who have missed essential components of their degrees, and working to ensure progress on accessibility is not lost in the return to on-campus activity.
- Modernising Edinburgh's curriculum by supporting student engagement and involvement in the Curriculum Transformation programme's work and outputs.
- Increasing transparency, responsibility, and accountability by working with stakeholders to make the University's structures more accountable on issues important to students (such as sustainability and ethical partnerships) and by

advocating for the strengthening of reporting procedures, support structures, and policy protections for marginalised students in academic spaces.

8. Student Staff Liaison Committee Policy

The Committee considered the revised Student-Staff Liaison Committee Operational Guidance, updating and formalising the previous Student-Staff Liaison Committee Operational Guidance into University policy. It was agreed that the Policy required further development to remove repetition and clarify School and College level procedures.

9. Personal Tutor (PT) System Oversight Group

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

10. Annual Review of Senate Committees Effectiveness

The Committee considered the initial analysis of the feedback received from the Senate Committee Effectiveness survey and approved the actions in response. It was noted that the results of the effectiveness review and agreed actions would be reported to the October 2021 meeting of Senate.

For Information and Formal Business

11. Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance and Committee Priorities 2021-22

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance, and summary of the planned priorities for 2021-22 which was approved by Senate in May 2021.

12. Scottish Funding Council Annual Report 2020-21

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

13. Enhancement Themes: End of Year Report

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

14. Internal Periodic Review: Reports and Responses

The Committee approved the final reports of the Moray House School of Education and Sport (postgraduate provision) and the Maths (postgraduate research) reviews. The Committee also confirmed that it was content with the year-on response of the School of Informatics (postgraduate research) review.

15. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

16. Next Meeting: Thursday 9 December 2021, 2pm, MS Teams