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

**Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 18 September 2019
at 2pm in the Elder Room, Old College**

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
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
Dr Claire Phillips	Dean of Quality Assurance, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Dr Inger Seiferheld	School Representative (Business), College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Steph Vallancey	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Paula Webster	Head of Student Data and Surveys (Student Systems), co-opted representative for Student Systems.

In Attendance:

Alastair Duthie	Academic Administrator, Governance, QA and Enhancement, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Apologies:

Brian Green	Deputy Associate Principal (Learning & Teaching), University of Strathclyde
Dr Shereen Benjamin	Associate Dean (Quality Assurance) College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Dr Jeni Harden	School Representative (School of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences), College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

1.   **Welcome and Apologies**

The Convenor welcomed **Steph Vallancey** to her first meeting in her new role as Students' Association Vice President Education and **Paula Webster** (Head of Student Data and Surveys, Student Systems) as the new co-opted representative for Student Systems. The Convenor also welcomed back and thanked **Dr Inger Seiferheld** (Director of Quality and Accreditations, Business School) for volunteering to step-in as the CAHSS school level representative for Dr Katherine Inglis until she completes her sabbatical in December 2019.

The Convenor thanked **Sarah McAlister** (Institute for Academic Development representative) and **Megan Brown** (Students' Association permanent member) for their work on the Committee and noted that their replacements (Dr Sara Shinton and Sarah Moffat respectively) would attend the next meeting in December.

The Convenor also noted that **Alastair Duthie** (Academic Administrator, Governance, QA and Enhancement, CAHSS) was attending on behalf of CAHSS.

2. **Minutes of the previous meetings**

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 23 May 2019 and the electronic meeting conducted between Monday 19 and Monday 26 August 2019.

3. **Matters Arising**

The Committee discussed the following matters arising:

- **eSQAC** – the Convenor thanked members for all comments received and noted that these had been incorporated.

- **Student Panel** – the Head of Student Data and Surveys reported that Student Systems was seeking to recruit more students to the panel this year and would be looking to provide them with more regular activities.

- **Service Excellence Programme (SEP)** – the Convenor noted that due to the busy agenda the Design Lead of the Personal Tutor and Student Support Review had not been invited as agreed at the previous meeting. However, SEP will be invited to a future meeting once a substantial proposal emerges from the review.

- **Terms of Reference** – the Convenor noted that an updated terms of reference had now been approved (in a new format) and would be circulated after the meeting.

For Discussion

4. **School Annual Quality Reports 2018-19**

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

> **Action: College Deans of Quality to ensure that the outcomes of the Committee's discussions in regard to the School Annual Quality Reports 2018-19 are made available to and considered by the relevant College committee(s).**

It was noted that in preparation for this year's reporting process each Director of Quality had been sent an aide memoire summarising actions proposed by their school in last year's report and recommendations from the Committee in response to that report. The aide

memoire also included a progress report on actions agreed by the Committee for the Colleges and the University in response to issues for further development across the institution identified in last year's reports. The aide memoire appeared to have been effective as each report, to a greater or lesser degree, addressed the actions from the previous reporting cycle.

The Committee noted that there had been a general lack of reflection and engagement with the data on the new BI dashboards. Whilst it was acknowledged that encouraging use of the new BI data dashboards would entail a gradual process of cultural change it was also agreed that more hands-on development and training sessions will be useful over the coming year to encourage Directors of Quality to engage with this new resource.

> **Action: Student Systems to organise and deliver more local hands-on development and training sessions for Directors of Quality.**

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 following was noted:

- **Personal Tutor system** - there was limited reflection on the PT system and in many cases Schools were explicit in citing the current PT and Student Support Review as the reason for holding-off on PT related initiatives and enhancements.

- **Degree Classification** - a number of Schools had failed to reflect on Degree Classification data (in line with the general lack of engagement with the new BI dashboards). The Committee agreed that these Schools will be asked to submit a further update to the December meeting of SQAC.

> **Action: The School of Engineering, Edinburgh College of Art, and Moray House School of Education to submit additional updates on Degree Classification Outcomes to the December meeting of the Committee.**

- **Industrial Action** - the previous year's Industrial Action appeared to have had no discernible residual effect, with no Schools reporting issues.

The Committee agreed that examples of curriculum review underway at school level should be harvested from the reports and sent to the new Vice-Principal Students in order to feed into the proposed University level curriculum review.

> **Action: Academic Services to collate examples of curriculum review underway and send to the new Vice-Principal Students.**

The Committee noted the following themes of good practice for sharing across the University:

- **Student Voice** - was a strong theme across many School annual quality reports. Schools provided a number of examples of how student feedback was gathered and responded to, in many cases beyond the requirements set out in the Student Voice Policy.   Additionally, Schools reported that the new programme student representative system was bedding in well.

- **Academic Community** - Schools are continuing to build academic communities through a variety of activities including staff-student collaboration, engaging student representatives, and the use of Student Partnership Agreement project funding.

The Committee noted that Schools will be encouraged to include more reflection on local initiatives and good practice in next year's reports.

The Committee noted the following areas for further development at University level:

- **Space** - Schools continue to identify challenges with accessing suitable learning and teaching accommodation. This included social spaces for students and staff to interact outwith timetabled sessions, appropriate space for postgraduate research students, and study space for students. Some Schools also reported challenges with suitability of staff offices, including a lack of private space to meet with students requiring support, and issues with staff and/or teaching being split across multiple sites. These issues were felt to impact on the ability to build academic communities. The importance on minimising the impact on students of estates developments at King's Building was also noted.

- **Timetabling** - the majority of Schools reported increasing issues with timetabling. Individual examples included: significant changes to course timetables; allocation of rooms; consecutive classes timetabled in rooms some distance apart; and communication with the Timetabling Unit. Further investigation will be required to understand the specific issues. It was noted that the complexity of our provision is challenging to timetable. Challenges with the exam timetable, specifically its release date and tight timescales for marking when examinations with large cohorts happen late in the examination period, were also raised.

- **Pressure on staff time** - Schools reported that rising student numbers, especially in postgraduate taught programmes, and challenges with staff recruitment (appointing to and replacing posts) are increasing staff workloads and impacting on the student experience.

- **Assessment and Feedback** - some Schools requested that the 15 day feedback turnaround deadline be reconsidered in light of student feedback and challenges staff have in meeting this blanket deadline for different cohort sizes and types of assessments. The Sub Group **recommend** that the 15 day feedback turnaround deadline is reviewed to determine if it is appropriate in all circumstances and to explore if a different approach could be taken which still allows for timely and quality feedback to be provided to students in a clearly communicated timeframe alongside robust marking and moderation processes.

- **Student Voice** - several Schools questioned the purpose and usefulness of course enhancement questionnaires. This was felt to be contributing to the low, and declining, response rates. It was also felt that course enhancement questionnaires add to feelings of survey/feedback fatigue by students. The Sub Group **recommend** a fundamental review of the purpose of course enhancement questionnaires and their role in relation to other student voice mechanisms.

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

- **IT and Systems** - a collection of individual, and sometimes recurring, items were raised by Schools under this broad heading:

    – Student record-related issues raised included annual monitoring for postgraduate research students, work and study away, special circumstances, and Boards of Examiners.

> **Action: Committee Secretary to refer to the Director of Student Systems and Administration.**

– Student record-related workarounds and the challenges of accessing meaningful data for non-standard provision (interdisciplinary, online, and open learning) were also raised.

> **Action: Committee Secretary to refer to the Head of Student Data and Surveys.**

– Several Schools, primarily within the College of Science and Engineering, also made requests for more support for online examinations.

> **Action: Committee Secretary to refer to the Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services.**

The Committee **approved** the Sub Group commendations and recommendations.

> **Action: Committee Secretary to feedback to Schools and disseminate College and University level actions.**

The Committee noted that a University level event would be held in February 2020 to share examples good practice from this round of annual monitoring (and internal review) reporting. Academic Services is also developing a good practice and resources website which will be launched in October (in time for the joint Directors of Teaching and Quality network meeting on 23 October 2019). Good practice examples have been shared with the Institute for Academic Development for showcasing through the Teaching Matters blog.

5.   **Internal Periodic Review Themes 2018-19**

The Committee discussed the themes that emerged from teaching/postgraduate programme reviews held in 2018-19.

> **Action: College Deans of Quality to ensure that the outcomes of the Committee's discussions in regard to the Internal Review Themes 2018-19 are made available to and considered by the relevant College committee(s).**

The following areas of good practice were noted:

- **Student support** – the support, dedication and commitment provided to students by both academic and professional services staff.

- **Learning, teaching and the curriculum** – including the quality of teaching, breadth of curriculum, skills development, and fieldwork opportunities.

- **Employability and graduate attributes** – engagement with alumni and employers, involvement of the Careers Service and use of placements.

- **Supporting and developing staff, including support for tutors and demonstrators** – rewarding and recognising teaching, roles to support and mentor tutors and demonstrators, and support provided to staff by other staff.

- **Academic community** – use of societies, social activities and student-led activities.

The Committee discussed the following areas for further development and approved the proposals for responsibility for action in response as follows:

- **Tutors and demonstrators** - recommendations related to training, promoting continuing professional development opportunities, improving two-way (feedback to and from) communication, allocating reasonable time for tasks, appointing a role to provide support, and appointment processes.

> **Action: Academic Services to refer recommendation to the review of the Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators, which was delayed from 2018/19.**

- **Widening participation** - recommendations related to increasing numbers of students from widening participation backgrounds, considering widening participation students through reviews of curriculum and induction arrangements, provision of additional management information, and the appointment of a subject area dedicated Widening Participation Director.

> **Action: Academic Services to refer recommendations to the Widening Participation team, and to the new Vice Principal Students for the specific reference to the curriculum review.**

- **Assessment and feedback** - recommendations focussed on quality of feedback and implementing assessment and feedback policy on formative assessment, feedback turnaround times, and scaling of marks.

> **Action: Academic Services to refer recommendations to the University Executive alongside the assessment and feedback further development outcomes from the annual monitoring, review and reporting process.**

- **Supporting and developing staff** - recommendations covered the importance of staff engagement in continuing professional development and aspects of promotion.

> **Action: Academic Services to refer recommendation to the Teaching and Academic Careers task group for consideration and response.**

- **Student voice** - two out of three PPRs had recommendations relating to clarity and enhancement of the student representation system at postgraduate research level.

> **Action: The Committee to discuss the student representation system at a future meeting.**

- **Employability and graduate attributes** - recommendations related to embedding transferable skills and graduate attributes within the curriculum, extending writing skills support, engagement with alumni and employers, and extending the use of inter-disciplinary projects.

> **Action: Academic Services to refer recommendations to the University Executive.**

6. **Thematic Review 2018-19**

The Committee received and discussed the final report and recommendations of the 2018-19 Thematic Review focused on black and minority ethnic students' experiences of support at the University.

The Committee noted the following key findings and recommendations:

- **Racial Literacy and Awareness Gap** - a gap exists between the awareness and racial literacy of University staff and the lived experiences of both UK-domiciled and international black and minority ethnic (BME) students. The Review Panel recommended that the Principal leads a conversation on 'race' in higher education and the implications for the University of Edinburgh. The Review Panel also recommended that University Leadership recognise the need to improve knowledge and upskill in the area of developing racial literacy. To kick start the institutional conversation the Review Panel recommended that the University provide each Head of College, School, and Professional Service area with a copy of '*Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*'.

- **Sense of Belonging** - the impact of attending an institution where BME people are in the minority can contribute to a sense of academic and social isolation. The Review Panel recommended that the University commit to increase the percentage of BME staff, both academic and professional services, with immediate priority in the professional services areas. The Review Panel also recommended that the University recruit a new BME Outreach Officer to work with BME communities. In relation to these two representation recommendations, the Review Panel encouraged the University to use positive action to diversify staffing.

- **Accessing Support Services** - BME students experience barriers accessing support services at the University. The Review Panel recommended that the Service Excellence Programme ensure that a systematic staff training programme is an integral part of the final recommendations of the current Personal Tutor and Student Support Team Review. The Review Panel also recommended that the Student Counselling Service use positive action to diversify its staffing.

- **Curricula and Learning** - there is an attainment or awarding gap between white and BME students at the University. BME students experience barriers related to both representation and cultural diversity within the curriculum and learning environments they encounter. Staff with a remit to improve BME inclusion and attainment also experience institutional barriers to achieving better outcomes.

  The Review Panel recommended that the University address the attainment/awarding gap that exists between BME and white students. The Review Panel also recommended that the proposed Curriculum Review enables BME students to be involved in diversifying content, including the co-design of curricula and assessments. It was also recommended that Senate Quality Assurance Committee implement systematic monitoring of retention, progression and degree outcome data for BME students and, if appropriate, recommend interventions where there are clear and consistent patterns of divergence between BME students and white students.

The Committee welcomed the findings and recommendations and thanked the review panel.

The Committee **approved** the report and recommendations. It was agreed that, due to the specific staffing recommendations, the Convenor would invite the Convenor of the People Committee and the University Secretary to comment before the publication of the final report.

Action: The Convenor to invite the Convenor of the People Committee and the University Secretary to comment 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 thanked the review panel and the author, Brian Connolly (Academic Services) for their work on the report.

Thematic Review 2017-18

The Committee considered an update on progress to implement the recommendations from the 2017-18 Thematic Review of Support for Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers. It was noted that the key recommendations and actions of the review were being addressed by the Edinburgh Cares project. The Committee was content with progress and agreed to receive an annual report until all actions had been completed.

Action: Committee Secretary to feedback to the review areas.

7. **Students' Association Priorities 2019-20**

   The Committee noted the priorities of the Students' Association Vice President Education for 2019-20 as follows:

   - Promoting quality and constructive feedback – to ensure that students receive quality feedback on their academic work, and that the feedback they provide to the University is taken seriously.

   - Ensuring students have access to the support they need - accessible and tailored academic and pastoral support as a key to improving student experience.

   - Improving the accessibility and inclusivity of academia - from a diverse curriculum to tackling hidden course costs and promoting innovative assessments.

   The Committee also noted the overarching priorities for the Sabbatical team for 2019-20 as follows:

   - Relevance – to ensure that Students' Association continues to be relevant to student life by working to respond to developing trends in students' lifestyles.

   - Participation – to ensure strong participation and engagement as a key to a healthy Students' Association and University.

- Support – to provide practical help with student life in relation to academic and pastoral support.

The Convenor welcomed the priorities and noted intersections with the Sense of Belonging strand of the Student Experience Action Plan (StEAP).

8. **Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC):**
   Operational Guidance & Escalation of issues

The Committee discussed the revised Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Operational Guidance and proposed action plan.

The guidance and action plan was approved with the following provisos:

- The use of 'should' throughout the document was a legacy of the original policy and therefore not appropriate for a guidance document.
- Membership amended to clarify that the school student rep must be 'informed of business … and may attended as they see fit' and staff attend 'as appropriate and relevant to school structure'.

It was noted that the principles of the guidance would receive a 'soft' launch with optional adoption during current academic session to allow for any issues to be identified and addressed before they became mandatory from 2020-21.

The Committee commended the author, Gillian Mackintosh (Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services), for her work on the document.

9. **ELIR Activity Workshop**

The Convenor invited the Committee to identify enhancements to showcase during the ELIR. Members suggested the following: streamlining and enhancing of QA processes (including the Aide Memoire for Directors of Quality); Thematic Review; Data Dashboards; the organisation of the internal periodic review processes.

For Information and Formal Business

10. **Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance and Committee Priorities 2019-20**

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference, Senate Committees Members' Guidance, and summary of the planned priorities for 2019-20 which was approved by Senate in May 2019.

The Convenor noted that a new Terms of Reference for the Committee had recently been approved by Senate (with minor amendments to Membership) and would be circulated after the meeting.

> **Action: Committee Secretary to circulate the new Terms of Reference.**

11. **Scottish Funding Council Annual Report 2018-19**

The Committee noted the University's annual statement on institution-led review and enhancement activity to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The Committee commended the author, Nichola Kett (Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, Academic Services) for her work on the report.

12. **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.

13. **Internal Periodic Review Reports and Responses**

   The Committee confirmed that it was content with progress implementing the recommendations from the internal periodic reviews.

   However, in relation to the TPR Medicine, the Committee agreed that it would be useful to have more milestones set and where possible earlier completion dates for implementation.

Action: Academic Services to feedback to the reviewed areas.

14. **Positive Outcomes from Internal Periodic Review 2017/18**

   The Committee noted the report identifying examples of a positive change as a result of the internal periodic review process.

15. **Higher Education in Apprenticeships - Characteristics Statement**

   The Committee noted the following link:

   Higher Education in Apprenticeships - Characteristics Statement

16. **SRUC Enhancement-led Institutional Review report**

   The Committee noted the following links: Outcome report and Technical report

17. **Personal Tutor (PT) System Oversight Group**

   The Committee noted the update on matters considered by the PT System Oversight Group.

18. **Knowledge Strategy Committee**

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

19. **Any Other Business**

   There was no other business.

20. **Date of Next Meeting:** Thursday 5 December 2019, 2pm, Torridon Room, Charles Stewart House