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

**Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 22 April 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
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
Fizzy Abou Jawad	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
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
Stuart Lamot	Edinburgh University Students' Association Representative
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
Professor Leigh Sparks	Deputy Principal, University of Stirling
Paula Webster	Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling, Student Systems and Administration

In Attendance:

Hannah Melville	Senior Analyst, Insights and Modelling, Student Systems and Administration

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

2. **Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25 February 2021**

   The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

3. **Matters Arising**

   There were no matters arising.

4. **Convenor's Communication**

   ### 4.1 Enhancement Led Institutional Review

   The Convenor updated the Committee on the recent Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). The University was judged to have "effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience", a positive judgement and the best possible outcome for an ELIR.

   The review team commended the University for: commitment to working in close partnership with students; the work of the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) in supporting staff development and sharing good practice; the development and expansion of Peer Support/Peer-Assisted Learning Schemes; support for student involvement in Internal Periodic Reviews. The review team identified a number of areas for further development, the majority of which the University is already working towards. There are two areas in particular where the University has been asked to make significant progress over the course of the next academic year: personal tutoring/student support and assessment and feedback.

   It was noted that the Convenor had produced a Teaching Matters Blog on the outcome of the ELIR and the final report will be published by the middle of July (and then circulated widely). The University is required to take action on the areas for further development and to report on this to the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (who run the ELIR process) one year after the publication of the report. The Committee will consider how to oversee the response to the recommendations and how this can be aligned with existing areas of work.

   ### 4.2 Scotland's Rural College

   The Convenor reported that the annual meeting of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) Accreditation Committee had been held on Wednesday 21 April 2021. It was noted that the Accreditation Committee had affirmed continued accreditation of SRUC programme, 'Environmental Resource Management (BSc)'. A full report will be submitted to the Committee at the next meeting in May.

   ### 4.3 Academic Integrity Charter

   The Convenor reported that the University had signed up to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Academic Integrity Charter for UK Higher Education

For Discussion

5.   Data Monitoring

The Convenor noted that one of the Committee's current priorities is to examine data and methodological options for the systematic monitoring of retention, progression, and attainment data.

The Committee noted that this work was prioritised in response to the 2017-18 Thematic Review of support for Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers and the 2018-19 Thematic Review considering black and minority ethnic (BME) students' experiences of support at the University which recommended that the Committee implement systematic monitoring of retention, progression, and attainment data.

Both reviews had stressed the importance of using data to understand the extent to which student needs have been supported by the University particularly in regard to the 'distance travelled' by these groups of students and the 'value added' by the University. The review panels were also in agreement that the University had a duty of care to support all of its students and provide them with an equal opportunity to succeed at their studies.

Members welcomed a more systematic approach to monitoring student data but noted concerns that staff confidence in centrally held data would need to be nurtured, particularly through greater clarity when using data snapshots, more data granularity and appreciation of local contexts.

5.1 Data Task Group

The Committee received an update from the Group tasked to examine data and methodological options for the systematic monitoring of retention, progression, and attainment data. It was noted that due to the pandemic the work of the Group had been progressed at a slower pace. This year the Group focused on the following action remitted to the Committee by the Online Remote Examinations and Assessment (OREA) working group report:

- The outcome of future online assessments should be prospectively mapped to a variety of student characteristics, to understand whether there is any change in systematic advantage or disadvantage of particular student groups. This should be reported through standard data dashboards and Schools asked to reflect on the data and outcomes in annual QA reports.

It was noted that guidance on interrogating dashboards to explore this data is in preparation for this year's round of QA reporting. During the summer 2021 student interns will be recruited to examine the available data and identify possible gaps in relation to different student groups across the University. The Group will then explore options for enhancing and systematising the way the Committee oversees student data.

5.2 Data

The Committee considered a set of papers analysing data on student outcomes and progression for the year 2019/20. It was noted that whilst trends had been identified,

it was important to acknowledge that 2019/20 had been an exceptional year due to the ongoing pandemic and therefore trend data should be treated with caution.

The Committee considered the following papers:

- **Degrees Awarded Analysis** – an analysis of the proportion of first class and higher classification degrees awarded by the University in 2019/20. The awards were benchmarked against the Russell Group and attainment gaps between key student groups examined.

- **Differential Attainment Analysis** - a more detailed statistical analysis of undergraduate student attainment to supplement the Degrees Awarded Analysis paper.

- **Disability Attainment & Satisfaction Differences** - an analysis combining multiple data sources to look at the attainment and satisfaction gaps between disabled students and their non-disabled peers.

- **Course Marks Analysis** - an analysis of different demographic groups and the attainment differences between them.

- **Progression** - an analysis of the progression rate of 1st year undergraduate students undertaken to compare the favourable progression of different student groups.

The following was noted:

- **Degree Classification Outcomes**

  The Committee noted that nearly all Russell Group members had seen an increase in the proportion of first class degrees awarded and most had seen a smaller increase in the proportion of high classification degrees awarded. However, the increase in first class awards at Edinburgh was greater than the Russell Group average (13 percentage points between 2018/19 and 2019/20 compared with 8 percentage points) and placed Edinburgh in the top third of the Russell Group for firsts awarded this year (ranking the percentage of firsts awarded last year placed Edinburgh at 17th out of 24).

  The Committee was in agreement that due to the effects of pandemic the 2019/20 academic year should be regarded as a statistical outlier as trend data for the year would be difficult to interpret reliably. Therefore the Committee would not be in a position this year to reliably identify specific subject areas where patterns in degree classification outcomes diverged substantially from either the institution average or disciplinary comparators. However it was agreed that comparisons could be made between different student groups within the academic year 2019/20, particularly in relation to attainment gaps.

- **Ethnicity**

  The Committee noted that the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) attainment gap for first class degrees had increased to -10.3 percentage

points and that Edinburgh had moved to just below the Russell Group average for this metric. Whilst the gap for achieving a high classification degree had narrowed at Edinburgh between 2018/19 and 2019/20 (from -6.6 percentage points to -4.5 percentage points) the gap for first class degrees had widened (from -6.2 percentage points to -10.3 percentage points). Comparing the attainment gap for firsts with the Russell Group average showed a year-on-year increase in the gap. This year the attainment gap at Edinburgh was slightly below the Russell Group average where in previous years it had trended above. Furthermore, in 2019/20 the uplift in the proportion of firsts was 12 percentage points for BAME students but 16 percentage points for White students. Concerns were also noted in relation to the attainment gap between Scottish domiciled students and students from the rest of the United Kingdom.

- **Disability**

    The Committee noted that disabled students are less likely to achieve a first or a higher classification degree than their peers with no known disabilities (39.8% of disabled students and 43.9% of students with no known disability achieved firsts in 2018/19). Furthermore, the attainment gap at Edinburgh is wider than the Russell Group average in 2019/20 (-3.5 percentage points) and has been for the last five years.

    The Committee also noted that undergraduate (UG) disabled students at the University have lower pass rates and course marks than their non-disabled peers. For all courses at the University the average pass rate attainment gap for UG disabled students has consistently been between 2% and 3.6% lower than their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, between 2015/16 and 2019/20, disabled students have seen lower levels of favourable progression than their non-disabled peers.

    The Committee noted that disabled students also show lower levels of satisfaction with their overall experience at the University as demonstrated in the in the National Student Survey (NSS) and in the monthly Pulse Survey. In the 2020 NSS, disabled students show lower levels of satisfaction than their non-disabled peers across all of the NSS main themes. In all of the main questions in the Pulse Survey relating to Teaching & Learning and Belonging, disabled students show lower levels of agreement than their non-disabled peers. Over the 4 months included in the Pulse Survey analysis, the percentage of disabled students who agreed they had access to the resources they needed, was on average 15.7% points lower than their non-disabled peers.

    The Committee agreed that more qualitative work was needed to understand the differential attainment gap for disabled students.

    Action: Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling, Student Systems and Administration to submit a proposal for further qualitative analysis to the next meeting of the Committee.

    Concerns were raised that the category 'Disabled' may not be sufficiently granular to be helpful.

Action: Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling, Student Systems and Administration to discuss data granularity with the Director of the Student Disability Service.

Action: Schools/Deaneries will be asked to reflect on student progression and outcomes data, and in particular the differences in attainment, during this year's cycle of annual quality assurance reporting.

The Committee commended Paula Webster and Hannah Melville for the quality of the student data papers.

6. **Annual Monitoring**

   6.1 Reporting Templates

   The Committee discussed arrangements for this year's annual quality assurance reporting cycle. It was noted that the programme, School and College report templates had been updated to reflect the extension to the interim reporting process. The streamlined reporting template will be used again but Schools/Deaneries will be asked to complete all three questions this year (question 1 was optional for the 2019-20 reports). The reporting timeline will revert to the usual dates, with late August once again the key deadline date for school submissions.

   The Committee agreed that Schools/Deaneries will be asked to reflect on student progression and outcomes (focussing on the difference in attainment of groups of students, rather than comparing against other years) and student feedback.

   It was noted that at the conclusion of the extended interim reporting process, the Committee will take a decision on when and how to return to normal annual monitoring, review and reporting processes, including on any changes to the normal process. The recommendations from the Digital Maturity assessment and how the quality processes can support the Curriculum Transformation programme will be considered as part of changes.

   The Committee approved minor changes to the annual monitoring, review and reporting templates for reporting on 2020/21 to reflect the decision to extend the interim reporting process.

   Action: Student Systems to provide Directors of Quality with new guidance (by mid-June) on using data for annual reporting and update online data training videos.

   6.2 University Level Actions

   The Committee considered the responses to issues identified as areas for further development in School Annual Quality Reports 2019-20.

   It was noted that at the December 2020 meeting the Committee had approved actions at University level and requested a response from each of the individuals and areas responsible. A report on these issues was also submitted to the February 2021 meeting of the University Executive.

Action: Committee members invited to send further comments on the responses to the Committee Secretary.

7.   External Examiner Reporting System (EERS):
**   Postgraduate Taught Reports - Thematic Analysis 2019/20**

The Committee considered an analysis of data from the External Examiner Reporting System (EERS) covering postgraduate taught programmes for the academic year 2019/20. The report included an analysis of External Examiners comments in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report noted a high number of commendations across the University and a low number of issues that required attention. Of the commendations, it was noted that the main theme across all three Colleges was the assessment process and many of the commendations were course or programme specific. As in the previous year, the most often occurring type of commendation in this theme related to the range, quality and diversity of teaching, learning and assessment. Of the issues raised the main theme was the provision of information to examiners, with the most common issue raised related to receiving material in too short a time before the Board meeting.

8.   Senate Committee Planning: SQAC Priorities 2021-22

The Committee discussed the following set of priorities for the 2021-22 academic session:

– Develop and oversee the implementation of a plan of action in response to the 2021 Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR).
– Implement the recommendations from the Digital Maturity report and consider how quality processes and the data that they produce can support the Curriculum Transformation programme.
– Continue to examine data and methodological options for the systematic monitoring of retention, progression, and attainment data.
– Continue to review the approach to gathering student feedback across the University from Course Enhancement Questionnaires (CEQs).
– Engage with quality assurance and enhancement-related aspects of the Scottish Funding Council review of coherent provision and sustainability.

The Committee approved the priorities for 2021-22.

9.   Student Voice Policy (Principles)

The Committee considered a proposal from the Course Enhancement Questionnaires (CEQ) Review Board for a new Principles section in the revised Student Voice Policy.

The Committee discussed the principles that underpin student feedback and representation activities at the University. The following was noted:
– feedback should involve a level of co-creation;
– the process for escalating issues must be clearly articulated;
– extra guidance is needed for short-fat courses;

- must avoid wording that may simply lead to default end of course feedback (suggested text: 'all courses should provide the opportunity…');
- must be 'effective' and 'constructive' feedback (valuable phrases);
- student reps have stressed the importance of an anonymous feedback mechanism;
- the policy must include a clear statement on data transparency (students should be informed about data gathering from the process).

The Committee agreed that a full policy document should be submitted to the May meeting.

Action: Committee members invited to send further comments on the principles to the Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling, Student Systems and Administration.

Action: CEQ Review Board to develop the full policy document and present to the Committee at the next meeting in May.

10. **Quality Code Mapping: Concerns, complaints and appeals**

The Committee noted the minor changes made to the mapping (updating links, reflecting the new Complaints Handling Procedure and referencing the Expected Behaviours Policy) approved by Convener's action. It was noted that the updated mapping was available at: 3concerns.pdf (ed.ac.uk)

For Information and Formal Business

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

The Committee approved the following Internal Periodic Review (IPR) final reports (and noted the commendations and recommendations):

- School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences (postgraduate provision) Final Report 2020-21;
- Oral Health Sciences (undergraduate provision) Final Report 2020-21;

The Committee confirmed that it was content with progress in the year-on response for the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures (PGR & PGT).

The Committee also noted a paper providing examples of positive changes resulting from the IPR process (as noted in year on responses).

12. **Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

13. **Date of Next Meeting:** Thursday 20 May 2021, 2pm, MS Teams