The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 25th April 2024, 2-5pm
Hybrid meeting: Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House
and Microsoft Teams

1. Attendance

Present:	Position:
Professor Tina Harrison	Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) (Convener)
Professor Matthew Bailey	Dean of Quality, CMVM
Dr Michael Barany	Senate Representative
Professor Laura Bradley	Doctoral College Representative of CAHSS (PGR)
Marianne Brown	Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling
Brian Connolly	Acting Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services
Dr Anne Desler	School Representative of CAHSS
Dr Gail Duursma	School Representative of CSE
Olivia Eadie	Co-Director, Institute for Academic Development
Carl Harper	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Dr Pia Helbing	Senate Representative
Professor Nazira Karodia	Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of Learning & Teaching, Edinburgh Napier University
Professor Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE
Dr Neneh Rowa-Dewar	School Representative of CMVM
Dr Emily Taylor	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, CAHS
Sinéad Docherty	Committee Secretary, Academic Services
Apologies:	
Callum Paterson	Academic Engagement and Policy Coordinator
Professor Jose Vazquez-Boland	Senate Representative
In attendance:	
Dr Kate Nicol	Academic Policy Manager, Head of Student Conduct Team, Academic Services

2. Minutes of meeting held on 22nd February 2024

The Committee discussed the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd February 2024. A correction had been accepted prior to the meeting and an amendment proposed to the account of the QESR assessment & feedback discussion.

The Committee agreed that the response to the QESR recommendation around A&F must give feedback quality the same attention as turnaround times, and agreed that this position should be reflected in the minutes. Discussion highlighted concern held by some members that turnaround times would become the main focus of the response to the A&F recommendation, due to the immediate action being taken to understand and collect the data, and this focus was at the expense of feedback quality. This view was not held by all members; it was noted that the Assessment & Feedback Strategy Group are focussing on feedback quality, and data collection which evidences turnaround times is also relevant to quality of feedback and its timeliness.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, pending the amendment to reflect the emphasis on equal attention to be given to feedback quality and turnaround times.

The note of e-business from February 2024 was approved by the Committee.

3. Matters Arising

- **Update on use of the fines collected by ACE**

In relation to an action regarding the Student Discipline report in the February meeting, Academic Services requested clarity from ACE on the collection of student fines. The Convener confirmed that ACE has an arrangement to transfer the sum collected as a result of disciplinary action to the University's Hardship fund.

- **Curriculum Transformation Workshop**

As agreed during the Curriculum Transformation discussion in the February meeting, SQAC members are invited to attend a workshop to explore the Postgraduate Taught Framework. This workshop will be held on Tuesday 7th May 2024.

- **QESR update**

The Convener informed the Committee that the QESR oversight group met most recently on 23rd April so discuss the response and related actions. Action is being taken in relation to all recommendations, and the following specific updates were shared in relation to the high priority recommendations:

Assessment & Feedback
- A data dashboard has been created to show collected data on turnaround times.
- The dashboard appears to show a correlation between student feedback (via surveys) and the collected data.
- The data does indicate some vast differences between subject areas within some Schools.
- Convener & Deputy Secretary, Students met with internal audit colleagues to look at the process of auditing quality of feedback. It is intended that this work will help with consistency of approach across the institution.

Tutors & Demonstrators Training
- There is concern that this recommendation will not be met this academic year, and plans must be urgently put into place for the next academic year.

- Professor Antony Maciocia is leading on this work to address the recommendation.
- The QESR recommendation focussed on postgraduate research students who teach and therefore this will be the initial institutional priority. However, the longer-term plan will address career & development needs for all tutors & demonstrators.

Members discussed the training needs and provision for PGR tutors and demonstrators, noting that some development aspects, such as those provided by the Institute for Academic Development, are intended to complement the training provided by Schools & Deaneries. However, the training is discretionary and not monitored. The Committee recognised that some aspects of training will be mandatory as a minimum requirement, with additional aspects being available for the continued development of tutors and demonstrators.

Action: Committee Representative for IAD to look into the uptake on IAD courses and report back to Committee.

- **Appeals subcommittee**

The Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE reported having approached colleagues about joining the Academic Appeals Committee, as per an action from the February meeting. Colleagues had asked for further information on the requirements and commitment involved in the appeals process.

Action: Committee Secretary to liaise between Academic Appeals and Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE to provide information to those looking to volunteer.

4. Annual Reports 2022-23

Complaint Handling (Paper C – closed)

This paper was presented by the Head of Student Conduct from the Academic Services department who highlighted that the report presents data for academic year 2022/23, includes a commentary on themes and account of the recommendations following an internal audit of the Complaints Handling process.

The Committee discussed the nature of complaints, and the impact on staff who are involved in an investigation over what may be an extended period of time. It was recognised that further support and enhanced long-term follow-up may be needed by staff, and also recognised that better information may be needed in order to differentiate between HR processes and the complaints process. It was felt that a more open culture around complaints that encourages learning would be valuable to staff and the University, and would provide some reassurance to those involved in the complaints process.

There was some discussion as to why the complaints report was presented as a closed item. It was clarified that complaints data is published online and meets the public reporting requirements, but the report itself may hold identifying features when looking at small numbers

of cases and this carries a risk. Furthermore, a small number of staff within Academic Services work on complaints and limited resource affects the ability to close the loop on some details in the report.

The Committee noted appreciation for the well-presented and high-quality report that had been compiled by the Complaints team.

> **Action:** Head of Student Conduct to take forward comments from this discussion to the upcoming review of the procedure for handling student complaints which relate to the conduct of University staff.

5. Annual Monitoring: Reporting templates 2023-24 (Paper D)

The Acting Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services spoke to this paper. The annual monitoring templates at programme, School and College level were presented for approval. It was noted that the guidance had been informed by pilot work undertaken by the Director of Quality for ECA in the previous academic year, and a new question added to the programme and School template around awarding gaps. It is expected that more significant changes to the templates will be included next academic year to reflect the outcome of the external tertiary framework review.

During discussion of the templates, the Committee emphasised the importance of factual, evidence-based reporting rather than more general reflections and impressions. It was agreed to update some of the language used to increase the emphasis on effectiveness and evidence. It was highlighted that awarding gap data may return small numbers at programme level and it was agreed that guidance should note the use of rounded data in instances where small, identifiable numbers would present a reporting risk. Other amendments to the templates included corrections to the advised length of responses and an update to the assessment and feedback section to cover assessment challenges and not only over-assessment.

A member of the Committee welcomed the revisions and PGR focus, noting that the specific questions on PGR last year made a material difference to the annual monitoring outcomes and this is another step forward. It was proposed that additional prompts in the Student Voice section of the templates could be useful.

> Action: Academic Services to update templates to reflect corrections and amendments and circulate to Schools.

6. Student Data Monitoring (Paper E)

The Acting Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services spoke to this paper which revisits the plans for institutional and systematic oversight monitoring student retention, progression, and attainment data. This package of work had been impacted by the pandemic

and industrial action, but the recommendation from the recent QESR visit builds on the previous recommendation from ELIR 2021 which requires the University to monitor the attainment gap.

It had previously been agreed by the Committee that a sub-group would be responsible for this oversight, which would rely on data gathered from across the University, and would ultimately become a regular, systematic approach. The Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE shared details of the Progression and Attainment (ProAttain) Working Group that operates within CSE and has a remit to analyse progression and attainment outcomes and to identify and share good practice to address issues. It was recognised that the work of this group would be useful to inform the remit and role of the SQAC sub-group operating at institutional level. It was also highlighted that the expertise of a colleague with quantitative data skills, such as from within SPS, would be a valuable addition to the membership of the sub-group.

The Committee discussed the importance of contextualising the work of the sub-group and avoiding any duplication with work happening at College-level, or work undertaken by the EDI Committee or the Curriculum Transformation Project. Whilst various strands of work are ongoing, the institutional oversight and sharing of good practice is not assured and this area falls within the remit of the Committee. Members of the Committee were in agreement that this is a vitally important issue and is necessary to respond to Schools having already asked for help to address gaps, as well as in order to meet external requirements.

The Committee approved in principle the establishment of a task and finish group to explore methodological options and make recommendations to the Committee for a new systematic approach to monitoring student data at University level. It was also agreed that the initial focus of the group will be to ensure that the new approach will also address the [Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2021](#) and the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) 2023](#) recommendations regarding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the student population.

The Committee agreed that a draft Terms of Reference and membership for the proposed task group be brought to the May meeting.

> **Action:** Academic Services to submit a draft Terms of Reference and membership for the Student Data Monitoring Task Group to the May meeting.

7. External Examiners

External Examiner Reporting System (EERS) Thematic Analysis (Paper F)

This paper was presented by the Acting Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services and is a thematic report which draws on the comments received by Colleges from their External Examiners. The Committee was informed that the overall report does not reflect programmes which have no comments, due to issues in pulling information from the central reporting system & Academic Services will be looking to resolves this system issue with Colleges

going forward. It was noted there are inaccuracies in tables 1, 2, 4 & 5 contained within the report due to some CAHSS reports having been omitted by the system.

Key themes highlighted in the report include the overall high number of commendations, low number of issues and appropriate action taken at local level when required. It was noted that concrete examples of good practice included in the report would be valuable.

It was agreed that this report should be presented to the Committee each year at its April meeting and should be divided into UG and PGT sections. It is intended that a fixed reporting point will enhance year-on-year reflection and progress, and facilitate more comparison.

External Examiner Appointments on BVM&S (Paper G)

This paper was presented by the Dean of Quality for CMVM. The challenges around course-level EE appointments, which are required by the accrediting body, were explained to the Committee; with only 12 Vet Schools in the U.K., it is extremely difficult to avoid reciprocal arrangements and there are conflicts with the University's External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy (section 22).

The Dean of Quality outlined the approach that BVM&S had developed to mitigate conflicts and to use the Exceptional Circumstances policy to ensure that the EE requirement is met at course level. Some external individuals can be brought in from the sector but insight into Higher Education is still required and arrangements for this may rely on the Exceptional Circumstances policy. Appointments of EEs would be reported to SQAC as standard. It was confirmed that the relevant accreditation bodies are supportive of the outlined approach as a practical, appropriate and transparent way forward.

The Committee approved the proposed mitigations to support External Examiner appointments on BVM&S.

8. Committee Priorities 2024/25 (Paper H)

SQAC members received a paper outlining the draft Committee priorities ahead of the April meeting to allow for consultation. The paper was then discussed during the meeting, taking into account the comments already submitted by some members in advance. These included the responsibility for reporting the progress against, and changes to, external requirements to Senate, clear identification of all the QESR recommendations which are the remit of the sub-group and the focus on the effectiveness of the Student Support model. It was acknowledged that clarity is needed on the evaluation model to be applied to the SSM; an update is expected at the May meeting. The Committee were in agreement that all priorities and objectives should be evidenced and data-supported, as far as possible.

The Committee considered other areas of business which may require additional focus. The Curriculum Transformation Project was discussed and is an area of interest, but as it will become part of the regular business it was not agreed as a priority. Internal systems were also discussed, with Timetabling, Learn Ultra and the Exceptional Circumstances policy identified as potential

areas of focus. As these areas sit within the remit of the Deputy Secretary, Students it was agreed that the appropriate course of action is for the Convener to investigate the relevant reporting strategies and update the Committee.

The Committee discussed a proposed review of the Marking & Assessment Boycott (MAB). It was agreed that the impact of MAB needs to be reviewed and understood, and the Convener informed members of work that is already being undertaken elsewhere in the University toward this review. The Committee agreed to wait for the findings of the current, ongoing review and the outcomes of the data analysis in relation to degree classifications (an item due to be presented at the May meeting of SQAC) before deciding on any course of action. It was highlighted that members of wider Senate consider the MAB review as a priority area and also expect to be presented with a report on the outcomes of the review.

Action: Convener to liaise with Deputy Secretary, Students about the reporting strategies for internal systems and processes under USG remit.

Action: Convener to investigate the reporting cycle for the MAB review already in progress and report back to the Committee.

Action: Academic Services to take the feedback provided by members to develop a revised draft of the proposed priorities to then be shared on the Committee's SharePoint site for further comment.

9.   Internal Periodic Review: Reports & Responses (Paper I)

Due to time constraints, it was agreed that the IPR reports and responses would be addressed via e-business.

Action: Committee Secretary to circulate this item via e-business.

10.   A.O.B.

The representative for IAD proposed that the Committee receive a twice-yearly standing report on the new, in-progress and completed Principal's Teaching Award Scheme (PTAS) projects. The Committee welcomed receiving updates on this matter.

Action: Committee Secretary and the representative for IAD to arrange the submission of the PTAS project reports to the Committee.

11.   Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 16th May, 2-5pm. This will be a hybrid meeting, taking place in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and via Microsoft Teams.