

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 5th December 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 Jake Ansell	Senate Representative
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	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Quality and Standards, Registry Services
Dr Anne Desler	School Representative of CAHSS
Faten Adam	School Representative of CSE
Olivia Eadie	Co-Director, Institute for Academic Development
Professor Nazira Karodia	Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of Learning & Teaching, Edinburgh Napier University
Professor James Hopgood	Dean of Quality and Enhancement, CSE
Callum Paterson	Academic Engagement and Policy Coordinator, Students' Association
Dr Emily Taylor	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Validation, CAHSS
Professor Patrick Walsh	Senate Representative
Sinéad Docherty	Committee Secretary, Academic Quality and Standards, Registry Services
Apologies:	
Dr Neneh Rowa-Dewar	School Representative of CMVM
Dylan Walch	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
In attendance:	
Nichola Kett	Head of Academic Quality and Standards, Registry Services
Ailsa Taylor	Academic Policy Officer, Registry Services
Meg Batty	Academic Policy Officer, Registry Services
Fiona Buckland	Learning Technology Team Manager, Learning, Teaching & Web Services Division, Information Services
Stuart Nichol	Head of eLearning Service, Educational Design and Engagement
Dr Melissa Highton	Assistant Principal and Director of Learning, Teaching and Web

2. Welcome and introductions

The Convener welcomed new members to the Committee; Professor James Hopgood as the new Dean of Quality and Enhancement for CSE, and Professor Jake Ansell and Professor Patrick Walsh who join the Committee as Senate Representatives following the recent election process.

3. Minutes of September meeting (SQAC 24/25 2A)

The draft of the September minutes had been made available for consultation ahead of this meeting. The Secretary noted that one comment from a member had been overlooked in the revision, and would be incorporated into the final version.

Action: Committee Secretary to amend minutes to include addition.

There was a query around the process for external reporting, which had been discussed in the matters arising segment of the September meeting. It was agreed that the Convener would add further detail to this section of the September minutes to better explain the external reporting process.

Action: Convener to add further detail to September minute to explain differences of the new external reporting process.

There was a question around metrics and measurements used in relation to student satisfaction with assessment and feedback, which had been discussed in the previous meeting. It was confirmed that there will be a focus in the National Student Survey (NSS) questions around assessment and the University will be looking for robust satisfaction data to come through via the NSS.

Action: Head of Academic Planning to share NSS question bank with the Committee when possible.

4. Matters Arising

- **Action log**

The Secretary shared the [action log](#) with members, which is saved on the Committee SharePoint. This details the updates and progress on actions as captured in meeting minutes.

The Secretary updated members on a particular action concerning the Senate newsletter. Whilst the recipients are known, there is no information available on engagement to give insight into how widely read the newsletter is. There are plans for Senate Support to circulate the newsletter via SharePoint rather than email, which will give greater insight into engagement. It was suggested that a link to the newsletter could be included in the University's Bulletin update to increase awareness of the Senate newsletter.

- **External review and sector updates**

The Convener informed the Committee that the University will be subject to its Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) in academic year 2027/28. The specific timing of the review will be confirmed in due course. The University has expressed its preference for the review to fall in semester 2 of 2027/28.

Action: Convener to share communication addressing timeline for review and associated actions, which will also be widely circulated within the University.

The Academic Policy Manager informed the Committee of a new sector initiative - Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP). A key focus of this new process is institutional collaboration on enhancement projects, and there are several areas of interest already pinpointed, including awarding gaps, Generative AI and student sense of belonging.

- **Student Data Monitoring Task Group update**

The Committee were informed that the Group have met twice this academic year, and discussions have explored the data that the University has available and where data analysis can be carried out. The Group have discussed gaps in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) analysis of the student population and how to best understand the drivers of awarding gaps in the institution. Two workstreams are ongoing, with one area focussed on sector analysis and interventions that have been applied in other institutions, and the other focussed on data analysis.

- **Internal Periodic Review (IPR) Forward Schedule Update**

The Secretary updated Committee members on activity around the IPR schedule that had taken place since it was discussed in February 2024. To better balance the schedule for upcoming years, some Schools were asked to change their review year. Six Schools have volunteered to do so. The Secretary noted thanks to these Schools and to College colleagues who supported this activity.

5. Annual Report 2023/24: Academic Appeals (SQAC 24/25 2B – closed paper)

The Head of Academic Quality and Standards (the new name for the Academic Services area within Registry Services) was in attendance to speak to this item. The Committee were informed that the appeals process is managed through the Academic Appeals Regulations which belong with Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC). However, this Committee was asked to reflect on the process from a QA perspective and identify any enhancements to the process where possible. The presenter noted thanks to the Academic Appeals Manager within Registry Services who compiled the reports and leads the appeals process.

It was reported that the number of appeals cases increased in 2023/24, continuing the upward trend in number of submissions. The appeals report showed that the upheld rate for an academic appeal had dropped to 5%, and that UG submission had increased whereas PG submissions had

decreased compared to the previous year. It was noted that there has been a slight increase in the numbers of appeals from students with a declared disability, although the percentage of 22.8% is in line with the overall student population who have identified as having a disability.

The Committee reflected that the increased number of cases is a trend across the sector and it may be reflective of students having a better awareness of the processes available to them and feeling safer about raising issues with the University. However, the upheld rate has decreased or remained static in recent years which indicates that the increased number of submissions does not correlate with the number of cases which meet the requirements for a successful appeal.

The Committee were informed that the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) in 2023 had commented on the appeals process, and there has been ongoing focus on helping staff and students better understand appeals and relevant regulations. There has been work to increase understanding of what is within the scope of the appeals process and to help staff to understand when boards can reconvene in line with the regulations. The Committee recognised the effectiveness of these efforts to resolve cases outside of the full appeal committee process, where appropriate, and to help students better understand what constitutes an academic appeal. The Committee hope that these efforts can be shared across Schools as good practice.

The Committee discussed the data presented in the report and suggested some enhancements which could be made. It was felt that it would be beneficial to include more information on how the statistics correlate to the University population, which may indicate where targeted action can be taken. There was also a suggestion that the appeal form could be amended to include a tick box to ask whether the student had spoken to the Advice Place or to their Student Advisor. This may help with identifying areas for training, and may help to manage expectations around the outcomes that the appeals process can deliver for students. However, it was acknowledged that this may create a sense of gatekeeping whereas it is preferable to avoid any additional friction in the process. The Committee agreed that the appeal form would need to make clear that it is not mandatory to have spoken to a member of staff before submitting an appeal.

Action: Academic Appeals team to frame statistics in the context of student population in future reports.

The Committee agreed that it was useful to see the number of withdrawn appeals cases (62) and discussed the importance of Schools taking voluntary action where appropriate, and how best to ensure learnings from cases are shared at School and College level. It was confirmed that instances of themes or groups of issues (e.g. negative marking) are followed up by the appeals team, and overall learnings will be shared with Student Advisors who are the most student-facing role for student support. There is believed to be variation as to how Schools and College manage oversight of appeals at a local level; some Schools have a dedicated member of staff who co-ordinates all appeals whereas others rely on committee level oversight within the College.

There was a query as to why this paper was presented as closed. It was clarified that some of the data presented reflected small numbers of cases within Schools, and these could be an identifying factor in individual cases. There was a request for an open version of the paper to be made available so it can be shared with a College Committee for oversight and action at that level.

Action: Academic Appeals team to create a version of paper which Committee members can share with relevant School and College committees.

The Committee were informed that the appeals team had undertaken some benchmarking activity to compare the 2-year window for accepting appeals. It was reported that the timeframe within the sector is more commonly 1 year and therefore the University of Edinburgh is an outlier. The appeals team plan to consult with relevant areas of the University and move to a 1-year window if there is support for this. The Committee agreed that it is appropriate to be in line with the standard across the sector, but expect the consultation team to consider what the impact would be on students if the window for late appeals is changed.

6. Annual Report 2023/24: Student Conduct (SQAC 24/25 2C – closed paper)

Academic Policy Officers from the Student Conduct Team, Registry Services were in attendance to speak to this item. The Student Conduct Report provided summary data on the number of breaches of the student code and number of suspensions from student within the academic year. The number of cases reported were similar to figures from the previous year. The report covered instances of academic misconduct and other breaches of student conduct.

The presenters provided an overview of their investigations within academic year 2023/24 and the type of breach that required an investigation. The Committee were advised that there is a significant amount of work involved in cases which do not reach full investigation stage; these may have been withdrawn by the reporting party or action may have been taken locally to resolve the case before it reached investigation.

New procedures from 22/23, now being reported on for the first time, enabled School Academic Misconduct Officers (SAMOs) to impose penalties or a warning in cases of academic misconduct. This is understood to be a factor in the significant increase in reported cases against last year's figures. The marking and assessment boycott (MAB) may have also had an impact, insofar as results from 2022/23 were delayed until 2023/24 and therefore cases of academic misconduct were identified in the most recent year.

The report highlighted the increase in misuse of Generative AI cases, with the vast majority of cases being reported from CAHSS. No cases were reported from CSE. It was acknowledged that staff may be more aware of Generative AI tools now and more attuned to evidence of use within assessment. Assessment format was also understood to be a factor in the number of cases concentrated in CAHSS. It was proposed that the annual monitoring templates could include a question on assessment and Generative AI, which may help to identify good practice in assessment and to also bring consistent focus to this issue at individual School level.

The Committee agreed it would be useful to include misuse of Generative AI as a standalone category in future reports, rather than these cases being classified under cheating. In making misuse of Generative AI an explicit category, it is hoped that this will better communicate to students that this misuse is an offence. The Committee also requested that the data showing the

breakdown of offences within academic misconduct be further broken down to reflect the number of cases within each College.

Action: Student conduct team to classify Generative AI misuse as a specific category in future records and reports.

Action: Student conduct team to provide breakdown of academic misconduct within each College in future reports.

Action: Student conduct team to create an academic misconduct version of the report which can be shared more widely with College teams.

The Committee discussed cases relating to student behaviour and conduct. Comments addressed a potential gap in the policy about what outcomes can be for students, with concern that a better range of penalties may be required between warnings and exclusions. It was also noted that enhanced options for training, mentoring or support systems may benefit students whose behaviour has breached the student code. The Committee recommended that the Code of Student conduct be reviewed and consideration given to the outcomes and penalties that can be applied to cases.

The Committee were informed that the Code of Student Conduct is due for review in 2025/26 and both aspects noted above have been identified as areas for consideration. Probation periods and suspensions were suggested as suitable penalties to add to the available range. It was acknowledged that the University has changed its provision of training packages, and harassment training, for example, is no longer available to students. There was a suggestion from a member that students in breach of the Code of Student Conduct be liable for paying for their own training when it is not available within existing provision.

Action: Student conduct team to explore feasibility of students paying for their own training following a breach of the Code of Student Conduct.

7. College Annual Quality Reports 2023/24 (SQAC 24/25 2D)

College of Arts and Humanities (CAHSS)

The Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Validation, CAHSS presented the report on behalf of the College. The Dean highlighted the amount of work undertaken to drive forward the initiatives detailed in the report and thanked the Schools for their collaboration. The Dean also noted specific thanks to colleague CAHSS Quality Assurance Manager for their contribution to the College report.

Several themes were highlighted in the summary of the report. Late submissions to the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) service were highlighted as an area of concern. The Committee were informed that CAHSS have held conversations with Academic Quality and Standards addressing late EC submissions and that one School has begun a trial to find an alternative way

to manage late EC submissions. It was confirmed that all Schools have been instructed to use the central EC process rather than implementing local policies.

The moderation policy was also highlighted as an area for further attention as the College has found that some Schools continue to interpret the policy differently. This has resulted in some inefficiencies of practice and inconsistency of quality. The College seek commitment from the University for issues around the moderation policy to be addressed in a timely manner. The Convener informed the Committee that the moderation policy will be discussed by Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group in 2024/25 and will also be brought to Senate Education Committee (SEC). The updated policy and guidance will be implemented in 2025/26.

Action: Convener to take moderation policy discussion to the Assessment & Feedback Strategy Group.

It was noted that the focus within the College on assessment and feedback resulted in progress in many areas in 2023/24. The Convener noted thanks to the CAHSS Dean and colleagues for their work in this area. It is expected that the additional focus on assessment and feedback within the College will help to drive reflections on curriculum changes and transformation. The Convener informed the Committee that the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities are due for review by the end of 2025/26 and College work on assessment and feedback will be valuable to the review.

During discussion of assessment and feedback, the Committee were informed that Senate elected members recognised the value of work undertaken by CAHSS but noted caution around over extrapolating approaches that are thought to be effective and overriding discipline specific expertise. It was also noted that Senate elected members voiced concern as to where emphasis is placed, such as on points of assessment or on diversity of assessment format and feedback. There is concern that competing areas of emphasis may impact the objective to reduce volume of assessment in some areas.

The Committee discussed assessment tariffs as a mechanism for managing assessment. It was highlighted that if the tariff is presented as guidance, those who are already working in line with University guidance will continue to do so. There is a risk that those areas which are not meeting the guidance will not be required to adapt. It was noted that if the tariff were to set out the expected effort hours of assessment, it may help to address volume of assessment and clustering deadlines at the end of semesters.

In response to the discussion, the Dean of CAHSS confirmed that the College Assessment Group would continue to work on these areas of focus, and take a holistic approach to the design of assessment that makes pedagogical sense within the College.

With regard to the actions requested of the University by CAHSS, the following items were agreed:

- Exceptional Circumstances – the ongoing trial work within CAHSS will inform the action to be taken.

- Curriculum Transformation – feedback from the college will be shared with the CT project team and UIPB.
- Generative AI and assessment – the need for ongoing support will be shared with the AI task group, and will feed into the Senate discussion of Generative AI in its upcoming December meeting.

College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM)

The Dean of Quality, CMVM presented the College report and highlighted reflections from the past year. There is a notable risk concerning staff morale and burnout as staff members often work beyond their hours without a formal Workload Allocation Model (WAM) and there are concerns around job security. Despite these challenges, Schools and Deaneries have continued to impress with their good practice. It is felt that it would be valuable to bring back an institution-wide event to showcase examples of best practice.

The Committee were informed that quality assurance was a factor in investment and resource within the College and progress has been made in addressing potential QA issues. The College has been focussed on developing quality objectives around the PGR experience with the intention to feed these in to broader activity.

It was highlighted that the College is now into the third year of its modernisation plans, which have now been approved by University Court. The plans are due to be implemented in 2025/26. There is expected to be a fundamental change to how QA will operate within the College and it is recognised that this will also affect staff perspectives on how learning and teaching is managed.

For the year ahead, a priority for the College will be developing model of how programmes and teaching will map onto the new structure within the College. It was recognised that student voice will need to be strong in this, as there are concerns that consultation became disconnected from the student voice as modernisation plans progressed.

The College report also identified the need for a clearer timetable of prioritisation for institutional projects from the University. This will assist with appropriately allocating resource to various projects and plans. The Committee agreed that the UIPB should be asked to provide an overview of priorities and timelines to help Colleges with their planning.

The Committee noted the PGR provision working group had been unable to progress much this year, as they were impacted with the delay in recruiting a new PGR Dean and overall workload pressures. It is not expected that the group will progress much before the College-wide PGR IPR in March 2025. However, there will be the benefit that the review will provide specific recommendations for the new Dean to take forward.

External accreditation providers and the NHS were also highlighted as areas of ongoing focus. A working group is in consultation with the NHS, and updates and progress reports on external factors are expected through the IPR responses process, as all CMVM Deaneries and Schools have had an IPR within the last two academic years.

Metrics and student analytics were noted as a final point from the CMVM report. It is challenging to report overall PGR completion times as the method to do so does not take into account an Authorised Interruption of Study (AIS). Schools and Deaneries must check individual student records for this information. The Committee agreed that enabling the data systems to accurately reflect completion times, taking into account AIS information, should be a priority area of work. It was noted that improving the quality of data will require additional resource.

College of Science and Engineering (CSE)

The Dean of Quality and Enhancement CSE noted that the College report reflected themes and actions that have been highlighted and remitted through the School reports. The key themes in the College report highlighted the success of the feedback monitoring process, ongoing assessment rubrics work, challenges around resources and consistent use of data, and pressures due to staff turnover. The report also highlighted PGR community concerns; activities such as KingsFest were intended to make the Kings Buildings campus more attractive to students, but feedback received from PGR students through SSLCs was that the event felt more targeted to the UG community due to the time at which it fell.

CSE was impacted by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) issues, and this has been identified as having negatively impacted the student experience. There is felt to be a lack of student community space for CSE students, as the intended space is being used for other purposes, due to the RAAC impact, and this is causing tension in the CSE community. It was recognised that it will take a significant amount of time to address the ongoing estates and available space issues.

The College reported that every School QA report had highlighted the success of Student Advisors. This role was well received in CSE, although the Cohort Lead role has proven more difficult to successfully implement. The College Student Support Oversight Group is reviewing the role, and the College request the provision of more guidance from the central University on the Cohort Lead role.

Another area for development noted by the CSE report was training for staff on Generative AI. There are questions around which regulations need consideration in relation to Generative AI. The Committee were informed of a new training module in development by the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) which will form part of the online, self-paced offer to staff and students on AI ethics and integrity. It is being designed in consultation with the AI task group.

The Convener noted thanks to the College Deans and respective teams for their work on their reports.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to review formatting of report templates with the College Deans.

8. Short Online Courses Annual Update (SQAC 24/25 2E)

This paper provided an update on activities relating to Short Online Courses, formerly known as MOOCS. The University has built up a strong profile in this provision of these short courses, with 11 million learners having participated in a short course over the last 11 years. The upskilling courses developed with the School of GeoSciences were highlighted as examples of recent, successful activity.

The Committee were informed that the University has procured a platform to bring together all non-credit bearing courses. This academic year, a project is running to bring all Centre of Open Learning (COL) courses on to the new platform. The presenters emphasised that a key focus, and area of interest for SQAC, is the quality assurance of this platform, including the policies and processes relevant to non-credit bearing provision. There is also attention on the QA of getting courses onto the platform and continuous enhancement of the courses and the learning experience.

It was confirmed that the courses can be available on two platforms, and this helps the University in reaching a wider audience. It is of strategic importance to the University to maximise the reach of this provision, to provide an offering that can have a wider social impact and provide a pathway to Masters level study for some learners. The Committee were supportive of these objectives, and noted interest in future reporting which would measure the social impact and reach of these courses.

Discussion considered the value of KPIs for this project and the conversion rate from enrolment to certificate for learners, which is around 5%. The short courses team noted that the conversion rate is considered as good, although this is not the primary motivation for investing in the provision. It was also noted that tracking learners from short courses to further study can be challenging, as individuals may go on to partner institutions or use different details (i.e. email address) at different stages. The Governance and Strategic planning team are helping the short courses team with data matching activity to better track learner journeys.

The Committee discussed the alignment between the short courses portfolio and Masters programmes. It is for course teams to strategically consider their short course offering and postgraduate programmes. However, a short course proposal does have to demonstrate how it aligns with University Strategy. Proposals can rise out of research proposals and can be delivered as part of a research plan for impact. The dashboards from the short courses are shared with course teams and include useful feedback from students which can inform future iterations.

The process for approving a short course was clarified; proposals are considered through a process including School committees, the EDI committee, the sustainability committee, the short courses strategy group and the relevant Board of Studies. This level of oversight is intended to ensure that due consideration is given to strategy and resource for each proposal. The Committee stressed the importance of the role of the Boards of Studies being properly understood and communicated across the University.

9. Learn Ultra Evaluation (SQAC 24/25 2F)

The Assistant Principal and Director of Learning, Teaching and Web was in attendance to present this item. The Committee were informed that the Learn Ultra Project has been subject to several evaluation activities since implementation. There was in-project evaluation, evaluation by Internal Audit and an external evaluator. There is a drive to understand what can be learnt from this large project to implement Learn Ultra, and a drive to increase the awareness of the evaluation reports to share learnings and practice across the University.

It was noted that wider Senate had asked questions of the oversight of internal platforms and systems and the evaluation of projects, and this report responds to this. The Convener invited the Committee to consider where to direct focus in relation to the priority requested by Senate around internal systems and whether a report such as the Learn Ultra evaluation addressed the QA questions around these types of projects.

It was agreed that this kind of review and evaluation addresses the ask from Senate. Comments from Senate members were shared with the Committee; many had a positive experience of the implementation but there are some colleagues who had a negative experience with the transition. There were reports of adjustments needed after the implementation, and functionality concerns after the shift to the new platform. Senate members are looking to understand how lessons are learned from projects, and how both positive and negative experiences feed into the lessons learned to reflect the full range of experiences.

The Committee discussed the workload allocation that is relevant to a change project. When a new course is developed, there is a tariff in the workload allocation. However, migrating an existing course to new platform is not covered by the workload allocation model. It was also noted that colleagues would have found an “important changes” document to be a valuable tool in the transition.

The presenter responded to the points raised by the Committee. Communication around the project indicated from the start that functionality would change in the new version of Learn. The platform belongs to the vendor and it is not within the control of the University to change the functionality. The project team sought to emphasise the importance of training for the new model, which would require colleagues to learn the differences between the platform. It was felt that lots of detail had been shared around the differences between the two.

Lack of engagement with training and the transition was cited as a reason for the difficulties experienced in some areas of the University. It was felt that Schools which did not have a learning technologist in place had a more difficult transition to Learn Ultra, as well as those School which had opted out of Learn foundations. Those who had opted in could make more use of the automations available to them.

The Committee recognised the importance of the role of learning technologists, and highlighted that this role requires professional development and competitive conditions. Contracts for learning technologists can be short and support levels in Schools can vary. The Committee also recognised the importance of training for colleagues in all roles using Learn Ultra, and the need

for training to be available after implementation for those Schools who are late adopters with new systems.

10. Self-Evaluation Action Plan (SEAP) (SQAC 24/25 2G)

Due to time constraints, it was agreed that this item would be considered by e-business.

11. Committee Priorities 2024-25 (SQAC 24/25 2H)

The Committee were informed that Senate approved additional priorities for the standing committees in its October meeting and therefore the priorities paper has been updated.

Due to time constraints, it was agreed that this item would be circulated by e-business for any further comments by the Committee.

12. Internal Periodic Review: Reports and Responses (SQAC 24/25 XXX)

Due to time constraints, it was agreed that this item would be considered by e-business.

13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 20th February 2024, 2-5pm.