

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 3rd April, 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 Academic Planning, Registry Services
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
Dr Neneh Rowa-Dewar	School Representative of CMVM
Professor James Hopgood	Dean of Quality and Enhancement, CSE
Callum Paterson	Academic Engagement and Policy Coordinator, Students
Dr Emily Taylor	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Validation, CAHSS
Dylan Walch	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Professor Patrick Walsh	Senate Representative
Sinéad Docherty	Committee Secretary, Academic Quality and Standards, Registry Services
Apologies:	
Professor Nazira Karodia	Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of Learning & Teaching, Edinburgh Napier University
In attendance:	
Fiona Buckland	Learning Technology Team Manager, Educational Design and Engagement
Suzanne Holland	Academic Policy Officer (Complaints), Registry Services
Nichola Kett	Head of Academic Quality and Standards, Registry Services

2. Minutes of February meeting (SQAC 24/25 4A)

Two amendments were agreed to the February minutes. It was agreed that page 6 should reference School annual monitoring reports for clarity, and reference should be made on page 9 to the recommendation concerning academic staff promotions. The minutes were approved pending the noted changes.

Action: Committee Secretary to update February minutes with two edits and publish on the Committee webpage.

Members discussed the timeframe for drafting and consulting upon Committee minutes. It was highlighted that in receiving the minutes with the papers one week ahead of the next meeting, members who did not attend the prior meeting only had one week to catch up on the record. It was commented that members' recollection of the discussion is impacted as more time passes, and to make use of accurate and effective input into the minutes it is preferable to have them circulated for consultation shortly after the Committee meeting.

The Committee were informed that the timeframe for drafting minutes is dependent upon the workload within the Academic Quality and Standards (AQS) team. Committee Secretaries endeavour to turn the minutes around quickly, but the task is considered alongside other priorities within the team. Internal Periodic Reviews (IPRs) are a particular demand on AQS resource in semester two each year, and as an external requirement this is a priority area of work. It was emphasised that AQS review their processes and look to balance workloads appropriately, but there remain peak times of year when demands on resource are especially high. Consultation on draft minutes has been introduced as an additional stage as good practice and this can be done when there is capacity to facilitate the process within a short timeframe.

There was discussion of how to approach minute writing and expectation management within the resources available. It was suggested that communication could be sent to members to inform them of minutes being deprioritised in the immediate weeks after a meeting to better set expectations of the timeframe. There was also a suggestion of issuing a quick note of the actions, to be followed by the full minutes within an agreed timeframe.

3. Matters Arising

- **Annual Monitoring Templates 2024/25**

Members were informed that the final templates were approved by Convener's action after consultation with the College Deans of Quality. The templates were presented to the School Directors of Quality network meeting which had been held earlier in the day.

- **Self- Evaluation Action Plan (SEAP)**

The Convener shared that the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) have identified the University's 2023/24 SEAP submission as an exemplar of good practice. Mature reflection and evaluation and the use of multi-year trend data were praised by the SFC. The Convener noted thanks to EUSA representatives and the Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement for their work on creating the SEAP report.

4. Complaints Annual Report 2023/24 (SQAC 24/25 4B)

Colleagues from AQS and the Complaints team presented this paper to the Committee. It was highlighted that the complaints handling procedure must map to the clearly defined sector model. This model, with key performance indicators (KPIs) set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), has been in place for two academic years. It is expected that the third year's report will be able to identify any trends. It is understood that the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is interested in trends in complaints and understanding what can be learnt from sector wide trends.

The Committee were informed that the complaints team are looking to enhance awareness and understanding within Schools of their complaint reporting responsibilities. Some Schools report quarterly whereas others are less consistent, and some have reported no complaints received. The central team are looking to ensure that stage 1 reporting is accurate. It was reported to the Committee that the complaints team are confident in the accuracy of stage 2 reports.

The discussion considered the risk of under-reporting, and considered measures which may help to improve stage 1 reporting. The SPSO have introduced a category of resolved, and it was suggested that this category should be highlighted as good practice within the process. It is possible that Schools are not reporting cases which they have resolved locally, but these should be logged to demonstrate the work that has been done. The central complaints team have held information briefings with Schools and offer refresher sessions on how to report complaints. Some Schools have experienced a turnover of area contacts for the complaints process, and new members of staff may benefit from briefing sessions. The Committee were advised that an escalation process has been put into place this year, which escalates areas not making returns to the University Executive. This will feature in the 2024/25 report.

It was noted that no more than 5% of stage 1 complaints should remain open beyond 10 working days. The complaints team did not identify any clear, recurring themes for cases which take longer to resolve at stage 1. The complaints team routinely advise areas that they can be consulted for cases which look like they will go over 10 days but areas have not been forthcoming in contacting the complaints team for their assistance.

A EUSA representative informed the Committee that separate discussions had been held with the Advice Place, who sometimes have a role in directing students toward the University's Complaints Procedure. Colleagues in the Advice Place reported their agreement with concerns around under-reporting and non-compliance with timeframes. There was also concern that there is not the right differentiation between a contact and a complaint, and some complaints are not being reported as a result.

Action: Complaints team to enquire with Communications and Marketing (CAM) about getting their guide to complaints and contact featured in all staff emails.

There was discussion of complaints submitted by postgraduate research students (PGR) and the complexities that may occur when a PGR student has both a staff and a student role. The complaints team routinely deal with complaints from PGR students and highlighted that these

can often come at the end of the programme, particularly when the case involves a complaint against a supervisor. It was noted that it is difficult for the complaints team to conduct a meaningful investigation for historic matters, and complaints are supposed to be received within 6 months. The complaints team reported that they have received complaints up to 5 years after the event.

The Committee were informed that it is standard practice for anyone named in a complaint to be contacted with details, and this is a possible explanation for late PGR complaints when the student does not wish for their supervisor to know. It was proposed that it may help PGR students to be aware of informal mechanisms for resolving complaints and issues, and support should be in place for these instances.

Action: All members to encourage awareness and reporting of complaints within their area, and share the resources that are available.

Action: Committee Secretary to share Complaints Annual Report with College Deans of Quality for circulation within their College Quality Committees.

5. Student Voice Update (SQAC 24/25 4C)

This paper was presented by the Head of Academic Planning and provided an update on the work that has been undertaken over the last year to learn about the student voice activity within each School. The Committee were informed that this work has identified the need for greater clarity and consistency in student voice activities, and in communicating responses back after gathering student feedback.

Therefore, a student voice framework is to be developed, which will offer structure and guidance for Schools in their student voice activity. This framework and associated guidance will be developed in partnership with EUSA and will focus on taught students in its initial phase. It was recognised that different feedback mechanisms are in place for PGR students.

It was emphasised that this framework is looking to encourage innovation, as student voice activity benefits from sharing ideas and approaches without being prescriptive. A student voice PTAS project from the School of Mathematics was cited as an example of good practice at a local level. It is intended that the framework will offer a tool-kit with evidence-based interventions that Schools can use, and will facilitate consistency and common principles across the University.

The Committee discussed the importance of responding to feedback and how this is an integral aspect of student voice activity. It was proposed that “feedback spiral” is the preferred term amongst students rather than “feedback loop” as it better indicates that progress is expected as a result of feedback. Setting expectations is a key part of this, with clear communication needed to explain when change cannot happen.

Discussion also addressed the importance of understanding how effective different mechanisms are, to ensure that resource and workload is focussed in appropriate areas. The Committee were informed that the Student Analytics and Insights Modelling team is constructing a PowerBI data

dashboard which will capture student voice data and effective mechanisms. This will support colleagues in monitoring activity and effectiveness. Benchmarking with Russell Group institutions and the wider sector is also underway, in order to learn from different methodological approaches.

The Committee were assured that there will be plenty of opportunities for members and other colleagues to feed into the student voice work. It was also highlighted that the project can use some of the information we already have, such as data from mid-course surveys and NSS results, to inform the framework development. This area of work will not require all new initiatives to be developed but can draw from existing models. This aligns with the intention to pull together efforts across the University and be more efficient with the resource and information that we already have.

6. Closing the Feedback Loop (SQAC 24/25 4D)

This paper, presented by the Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Validation CAHSS, set out a proposed University wide-commitment to responding to student feedback and a guarantee on closing the feedback loop. The objective is to have clear baseline expectations for responding to feedback within a set timeframe and for all areas to be accountable for providing feedback. This is motivated, in part, by Schools receiving feedback for issues outside of their control and consequently needing a response from central services to close the loop. It was highlighted that no part of the University is mandated to respond to feedback within a certain timeframe, and this leads to a lack of timely or forthcoming responses.

It was explained that students often raise the same issues year-on-year and new students are not aware of previous updates or context. It is reasonable for services to continually explain progress, or otherwise, on key issues for the benefit of all students. It was recognised that in many areas this is happening, often facilitated by the Student Support Model, and it would be beneficial for this to be formalised and evaluated. It was noted that appropriate questions already exist in University and sector-wide surveys which would evaluate the feedback loop and avoid the need for further surveys to be developed as an evaluation tool.

There was discussion of how a feedback system would operate and be monitored. The ticketing system used by areas such as Information Services (IS) was cited as a responsive and timely service, but it was acknowledged that there is not enough resource to implement this on a University-wide basis. Therefore, it is expected that clearly defined reporting lines would be set between Schools and central services, with key points of contact identified, and ownership clearly understood and communicated. There is a sense that informal mechanisms are in place in some parts of the University, but this must be formalised with a clear escalation route for acquiring a response. A core part of the system will be central student services having someone responsible for responding to student feedback.

The current lack of formal reporting structure within feedback was highlighted as reason why issues can be so difficult to resolve where they are referred to a different area. It was recognised that a prescriptive approach would not be effective when there are so many different scenarios that can require feedback; however, a commonly understood reporting structure and

obligation to respond within a defined period is expected to have a positive impact on the feedback loop and on student voice satisfaction. There was agreement that students should only have to give feedback once and the University, as a whole, is responsible for responding to that. It is not the responsibility of students to have to chase up a response or to approach multiple areas to ensure the right service is looped in.

The Committee articulated their endorsement of the approach and standards set out in the paper. There was concern over the timeframe set out, with some hesitation on whether the mechanisms can be implemented within the timeframe given. It was agreed that the Colleges and Academic Planning would consult with their own areas and with each other to ensure alignment with ongoing work and to develop a timeframe in which this proposal can be realistically implemented. After these discussions, the item will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee.

Action: College Deans of Quality and Head of Academic Planning to liaise on implementation of this proposal.

7. Student Data Monitoring Task Group: Sector Analysis (SQAC 24/25 4E)

The Convener presented the update from the Student Data Monitoring Task Group, a subgroup of SQAC. The update outlined sector analysis work undertaken by the group, and it was communicated that a further update on data collection and analysis would be forthcoming from the task group. It was emphasised that the interventions detailed in the paper are examples of promising practice within the sector, although they often do not have robust evaluations attached. The biggest awarding gap within the University of Edinburgh has been identified as that which affects Black students, and this is also reflected in the sector. The paper suggests some measures to be piloted and evaluated for impact in reducing the awarding gap.

The Committee were informed that the task group wish to recommend interventions which can be measured for impact. It was recognised that data and evidence is vital in selecting interventions and evaluating their success, and it was also acknowledged that the evidence base can be informed by more than just data sets. There was agreement that evidence-based interventions are important, but also recognised that some of the suggested interventions may run counter to current evidence and therefore it is vital to pilot and evaluate these mechanisms to establish their impact on our student community.

During the discussion, it was suggested that there would be value in the task group contacting School Directors of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) to establish whether any of the proposed interventions are already in place locally. It is important to effectively share knowledge and resources, where possible, and avoid duplicating work that may be happening elsewhere.

The Committee were supportive of utilising mechanisms already in place, such as the EDI Committee and the Principal's Teaching Award Scheme (PTAS). It was noted that senior leadership has a role in highlighting this work at the top of the University, and that explicit messaging around KPIs and commitment to reducing the gap would be another effective means in furthering this workstream. It was commented that no members of the senior leadership team

are measured on awarding gaps and this may indicate a gap in University strategy which should be addressed.

Action: IAD representative to liaise with PTAS colleagues to explore opportunities for the Student Data Monitoring Task Group and related activity.

Comments were received on the terminology used in the paper and labelling of particular student groups. The Committee agreed that it would be appropriate for this to be an institutional level discussion with the involvement of the new University lead for EDI.

The Committee were informed that this area of work aligns with sector initiatives connected to Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP). Using data and evidence to respond to student outcomes is an area of focus, and there will be opportunities for the University to work with other institutions and develop sector practice.

8. Digital Badges Governance (SQAC 24/25 4F)

A colleague from the Educational Design and Engagement team was in attendance to speak to this item, which has been brought to the Committee for approval. It was explained to members that the paper outlined the proposed changes to the approval process for digital badges. A key change would be the role of Boards of Studies (BoS) approving new or revised short courses which seek to issue digital badges to their learners. It is not expected that this will create additional work in the BoS approval process, who are already responsible for approving credit and non-credit bearing courses.

The Committee discussed the proposal, and questioned how the proposed approval process would work for professional areas which do not have BoS. In response, it was explained that Boards of Directors can take on the role, and that this is the case within Information Services Group (ISG), as an example. It was suggested that there may be opportunities for collaboration between services as they develop their digital badges offering.

There was discussion of the criteria that Boards would need in order to consider the approval of badges. The Committee were informed that criteria is outlined on the badging profiling website, which details the earning and assessment criteria. It was emphasised to the Committee that digital badges relate to non-credit bearing provision and as such does not have the same criteria as credit-bearing. The proposed approval process is intended to provide consistency throughout different areas of the University responsible for badges and to assure the quality of the University of Edinburgh's offering.

The Committee were supportive of this position but questions remained around the strength of the current criteria, and the appropriate area of responsibility for approvals within professional services areas. There was also a concern raised around this oversight not applying to existing courses and the potential for inconsistency to arise as a result. There was a suggestion that a governance or steering group might be needed to monitor consistency in the provision of digital badges across the institution, in addition to the proposed approval process. It was agreed that conversations would continue to address these concerns and the paper would be brought back for decision by the Committee at a later date.

Action: Convener, AQS colleagues and College Deans of Quality to meet with Educational Design and Engagement team to further discuss approach to digital badges governance before retuning to full Committee.

9. Taught External Examiner Reports: Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Thematic Analysis 2023/24 (SQAC 24/25 4G)

This paper provided an analysis of data from the External Examiner Reporting System (EERS). Key points highlighted to the Committee were the high number of commendations and low number of issues reported, and that the major themes identified in the analysis had already been pulled out through annual monitoring and internal periodic review reporting.

The Committee discussed feedback consistently received from External Examiners (EEs), which raised issues with the timeliness and amount of information given to them in order to perform their role well. This indicates the need for focus across the University on ensuring EEs are provided with the correct information in a timely manner. It was noted that there is University guidance to facilitate this, but engagement between Schools and EEs is believed to be an issue. Provision of training for EEs was proposed as another mechanism to help set out the role and expectations of those acting as EEs.

There was discussion of how to escalate this recurring concern and feed it in to the University EE practices. The Convener advised the Committee that there is an ongoing Board of Examiners workstream and related projects, and will therefore feed the QA voice into that process. It was also recognised that there is a role for the Colleges in sharing relevant information locally and setting expectations in their area.

Action: Convener to highlight EE feedback and themes to Board of Examiners workstream to help inform future direction.

Some comments were received on the production of the report. It was highlighted that it would be best practice to use mixed bar graphs to illustrate the points made in figure 2. It was also noted that CAHSS colleagues question the accuracy of the figures, as an EE may enter the same comment into multiple boxes and this creates duplicate entries. It was requested that future EERS analysis reports clearly state how many reports were received from EEs and how many had comments attached which are then reflected in the analysis. Colleagues from CSE shared that they noticed disparity in comments across Schools and College, and highlighted that one CSE School does not use the EERS system and are therefore not reflected in the overall analysis.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to incorporate requested changes into future iterations of EERS analysis report.

10. External Examiners: Exceptional Appointments Report 2023/24

The Committee formally noted the report which detailed the exceptional External Examiner (EE) appointments made during 2023/24. The College Deans of Quality shared brief reflections on the appointments relevant to their College.

On behalf of CAHSS, the Dean of Quality noted that the College has experienced a high number of exceptional appointments. The College has sent communications to Schools and created a SharePoint page which sets out the role and expectations for an External Examiner. It is hoped that the number of exceptional appointments will drop as a result of these clarifications.

The Dean of Quality, CMVM noted that their cases of exceptional appointments have decreased. It was highlighted that, as an enhancement to the EE process, a vet in practice was brought in as an EE alongside another EE affiliated with a University.

On behalf of CSE, the Dean of Quality reflected that the College's exceptional appointments are in line with University policy and the College and Schools are working well together to manage nominations.

11. Committee Priorities 2025/26 (SQAC 24/25 4I)

An updated version of the Committee Priorities was presented for discussion and approval. It was noted that the priorities from the current year have been taken forward into the next year with language updated to reflect change in focus or objectives, where required. It was proposed that student voice should be added as a priority, in light of this being an area of focus for the next year. The Committee agreed that this should be included as an additional priority.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to liaise with EUSA and Academic Planning representatives to shape student voice priority.

There was a query as to why the priorities applying to all Senate Standing Committees from 2024/25 were not brought forward into 2025/26. In response, it was explained that the Task and Finish Group working on the Senate external review recommendations are taking forward those areas of work.

There was discussion of factors which may impact on quality processes and it was commented that there is a risk to quality assurance if it is affected by the financial environment of the University. It was suggested that financial context should be included as a theme which cuts across all of the priorities. To counter this, it was emphasised that the University must meet the external requirements set by the QAA and quality processes will continue to run in a way that meets the requirements. It was anticipated that the existing quality processes, including annual monitoring, will surface any concerns around impact on quality. After discussion, the Committee agreed that it is preferable for any quality concerns to be surfaced organically through existing processes, rather than setting an explicit priority which may have the effect of leading towards issues.

It was noted that priorities for all Senate Standing Committees will be discussed by full Senate. The priorities were approved by the Committee, with one member adding their approval on the basis that the priorities are subject to final approval at Senate, rather than an item for noting.

Committee Secretary's Note: A review of Senate Standing Orders and of the Committees' terms of reference identified that formal Senate approval is not required for priorities. However, the priorities will be presented to Senate and Senate may propose amendments or additions to the priorities.

12. AOB

There was no other business to consider.

13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 15th May 2025, 2-5pm.