The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 15th May 2025, 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
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, EUSA
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 Matthew Bailey	Dean of Quality, CMVM
Professor Nazira Karodia	Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of Learning & Teaching, Edinburgh Napier University
In attendance:	
Robin Gay	Student Voice Manager, EUSA
Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education, CSE
Vivian So	Senior Analyst, Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling, Registry Services

2. Minutes of April meeting (SQAC 24/25 5A)

The minutes of the April meeting were approved by the Committee.

Action: Committee Secretary to publish April minutes on the Committee webpage.

3. Matters Arising

- **Committee membership updates 2025/26**

The Convener noted thanks to the outgoing members of the Committee; the EUSA VP Education, IAD Co-Director and the three Senate elected members. Contributions from these members has been welcomed and appreciated during their time on the Committee.

- **University workstreams**

The Convener shared an update on the new groups formed within the five institutional workstreams to review the size and shape of the University. Members were informed that the Learning and Teaching (L&T) workstream has a key focus on the L&T Strategy and its delivery, and a subgroup for this is being chaired by the Convener of SQAC. Elements of the L&T Strategy and delivery will include taking forward aspects of the Curriculum Transformation Programme and include governance of Short Courses. The other groups operating within the L&T workstream are an Enabling Initiatives sub-stream, a Future Students sub-stream and a Portfolio Review sub-stream.

The Convener advised that the L&T Workstream has met twice to date and so far has discussed but not finalised terms of reference, workload and activities it can take forward. The Convener will provide relevant updates on the subgroup activity to the Committee as work progresses.

4. Degree Award Outcomes 2023/24 (SQAC 24/25 5B)

Colleagues from Academic Planning, Registry Services presented this paper to the Committee. It was explained that this is an annual report which analyses degrees awarded to students. Due to external reporting changes managed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), benchmarking data for other institutions has not been included. The available data from HESA has been reviewed by the Governance and Strategic Planning (GASP) team and they have reported concerns with the quality of the data.

The Committee were informed that the report includes 6 years of degree award data in order to better illustrate the fluctuation in the years most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additional categories have been added to the report for 2023-24 at the request of the Student Data Monitoring Task Group (a subgroup of SQAC) including all degree classifications and exit awards, and student outcome analysis on gender, ethnicity, domicile and disability status.

The Committee noted that the reports show the same gaps which have persisted over a number of years and noted that the disparity is similar for Widening Participation (WP) students and ethnic minority students at around 10%. There was discussion of drilling further down into the degree awards data, and the value of undertaking benchmarking activity against Russell Group universities and other institutions to be clearer about gaps in the sector. However, it was also stated that the gaps have existed for a long time and comparative data has previously shown that awarding gaps exist across the sector. Some colleagues have already undertaken work to explore the experience of WP and

ethnic minority students with the recent work of the Dean of Students and Alumni, CMVM given as an example. The Committee were supportive of working with colleagues in this area to avoid duplication of work and combine activities where possible.

It was commented that a key part of the awarding gap work will be understanding the qualifications that students arrive with and what they gain whilst they are here. This will require analysis of progression between years, especially the early years, to understand what can be done to make a difference. The 2+2 programmes within CSE were noted as a key transition point which requires the Schools and College to think about the progression of their students. Relating to this discussion of entry points and requirements, a member noted caution around creating a narrative of lower tariff requirements as entry into the University is not set at a low tariff point.

The Committee discussed the value of existing EDI practices, including the annual EDMARC data for students, and the advantages of strengthening connections with both the new University lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC). It is hoped that expertise and activities elsewhere can help with the QA strand of work to address the awarding gap. In addition to colleagues working in EDI, it was felt that it would be useful to connect with colleagues working on the WP Strategy to understand how the strands are brought together. It was also suggested that the Convener of the WP Strategy Committee be invited to speak to the task group and/or SQAC to contribute to this.

Action: Convener to contact University EDI lead and Convener of WP Strategy Committee to discuss how we might coordinate activities and align with wider University strategies in this space.

In providing feedback with the views of Senate elected members, a question was raised as to how the University can integrate this degree award analysis with qualitative feedback from students. It was felt that other mechanisms for feedback may be informative as well as the data. It was also raised that the focus on gaps may be problematic when objectives should be to support learning for all our students and aim for universal high attainment rather than no gaps. It was commented that there is evidence to show small class sizes improve attainment baselines and reduce gaps.

A member questioned whether there is relevant engagement data that can be pulled in to better understand the gaps. It was cautioned that there is a risk of making assumptions about certain groups of students and their circumstances, whereas use of engagement metrics in a targeted way may be informative. These could pinpoint specific interventions to be made, such as access to hardship funds or timetable prioritisation for certain groups of students.

There was discussion of other factors which may impact awarding gaps. Competing priorities within the University, for example in assessment and feedback, was suggested as a factor with a member commenting that where assessment diversity is low, the awarding gap may be small because all students become well trained in the assessment type. There may be a risk that the gap can be greater in diverse assessments and the variation should not negatively impact student experience. It was queried whether making use of the full band up to 100 may help to address gaps, and questioned whether the University's use of marks at 75% is too restrictive. Finally, the change in student support

and move away from Personal Tutor roles was suggested as a factor which may have an impact on student success. It was noted that some areas are reverting back to an Academic Advisor role, in additional to the Student Advisor and Cohort Lead roles within the Student Support Model. The 1:1 engagement, as with mentoring programmes already in place in the University for some groups of students, was felt to be advantageous to student belonging and success.

Attention was drawn to the cohort of students identified in the report who are not awarded honours degrees and it was asked whether specific subgroups of students make up this cohort. It was acknowledged that it is a small number of students but an important group to consider because when the students are admitted to the University, they must be supported to succeed.

The Committee agreed that granular analysis is needed to dig into the identified gaps. There was Committee support for interventions at School-level to address awarding gaps and for Schools to be aware of the fluctuation for students within their communities. It was confirmed that Schools have access to this data through the Annual Monitoring dashboard. Noting that the awarding gap was the subject of a QAA recommendation in the 2021 ELIR and 2023 QESR, there is a need for focus to be given to this at School, College and University level and it was accepted that the institutional level data gives a clear mandate to undertake activity to reduce the gaps.

Action: College Deans of Quality to table this paper at next round of College Committee meetings for discussion.

5. Data Task Group Update (SQAC 24/25 5C)

This paper was presented by the Dean of Education (CSE) who is also co-convener of the Student Data Monitoring Task Group. The group is concerned with how to narrow and eliminate awarding gaps, and is looking at both the data required to achieve this and the intersectionality between student groups. The group has identified two particular areas of focus, which are final awards and progression between years. A concern is whether there are particular milestones and transitions at which point the University can do more to support certain students.

The Committee were informed that the data spans many services and is held in different systems with different formats. This creates a challenge in establishing a way forward that is data and evidence-based. Colleagues in GASP have assisted with gathering information on the different systems and how they interact with each other. The group now have a better understanding of the challenges and how the data is stored and presented. Admissions data was given as an example of data that is shared with the University in a particular format, especially when coming in from UCAS, and is not presented in a way that is easily compatible with University managed data. This is one aspect which presents a challenge in tracking student journeys from entry point to exit, which is currently a manually intensive process. Suggested improvement to this process were included in the paper.

There was a question as to where the University is on the EUCLID lifecycle. The Committee were informed that the Academic Registrar is looking into business needs and the EUCLID system. Members acknowledged that replacing systems is challenging,

and also highlighted that the University must think holistically about its use of systems and how to best enhance its understanding of students. The Head of Academic Planning assured members that the University is looking to align data and formats as systems change, and suggested that the Student Data Monitoring Task Group demonstrate the value of being able to access and evaluate student data in a particular way, in order to better inform the procurement of data systems.

Action: Student Data Monitoring Task Group to consider data and systems recommendations to be made to Registry Services, with the intention to inform business needs and procurement when systems are reviewed for upgrade.

Data relating to a student's WP status was raised as another area which presents challenges. SIMD, POLAR and ACORN are tools to measure socio-economic areas in the UK, but all have different nuances. Furthermore, the markers which apply to these tools are redefined almost annually and students can move in and out of the criteria depending on how conditions change. The group will explore the use and definitions of WP markers to try to develop more accurate and simple metrics to be used within the University. There was a comment to flag the expectation that students should self-report their lived experience in order to share their WP status, and it questioned what the incentive is for students to do this. It was agreed that the group must be mindful of unintended consequences when reviewing the WP baseline and how it applies to students and the existing awarding gap. It was confirmed to the Committee that the group is only looking at the data for undergraduate students at present, although it was recognised that PGT and PGR students would require different measures.

The Convener thanked colleagues who contributed to the paper and data analysis work to date, and thanked Committee members for their useful comments and pointers during the discussion which will be referred back to the Student Data Monitoring Task Group. It was agreed that whilst there is further data analysis to undertake, it is also important to take action based on the gaps that have been identified over a number of years. A next step will be to consider the trial and evaluation of some of the interventions that the group has proposed, although it was recognised that the University does not have the resource and capacity to take forward all of the suggested recommendations at this time, especially those related to system improvements. Where WP work is happening via its own strategy, the group and the Committee can seek to engage with that workstream and benefit from the expertise of colleagues working in that area already.

Action: Task Group Co-Conveners to feed back to group on the Committee's discussion and take data analysis work forward.

Action: Task Group Co-Conveners to liaise with colleagues working closely with the WP Strategy to combine activity and review use of markers.

6. Thematic Review Proposal: Support for LGBTQ+ Students (SQAC 24/25 5C)

This paper was presented by Student Voice Manager, EUSA. The Committee were informed that the paper was being presented on behalf of the student community and is seeking to look holistically at the LGBTQ+ student experience through the thematic review process. It was reported that the thematic review process is considered as a real opportunity for dialogue between students and the University, as evidenced in the

previous review of the BAME student experience which highlighted best practice and areas of work.

It was emphasised to the Committee that the proposed review into support for LGBTQ+ students
is needed for this cohort as there is not much data available on these students. It was highlighted to the Committee that the experiences of this group do not necessarily get picked up in the awarding gap data or Student Support Services Annual Review (SSSAR). It was also noted that this proposed thematic review would be timely in relation to the recent Supreme Court gender ruling.

The Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement noted support for this review. It was confirmed that the Academic Quality and Standards (AQS) team would work with EUSA to co-ordinate and undertake the review, in line with the requirements set out by the external quality framework. Whilst thematic reviews are within the AQS QA activities, it was emphasised that consideration does need to be given to AQS resource and availability; clarity is expected on this by September 2025 and this will, in part, inform the approach to the thematic review.

A member raised a question about the usual process for agreeing a thematic review, having noted that SQAC was being presented with one option. In response to this, the Committee were advised that review themes are usually informed by the SSSAR or EUSA following student consultation. EUSA proposed the topics for the previous two thematic reviews.

The Committee noted their support for the thematic review and approved the proposal. It was agreed that the item would return to the Committee in September 2025 to provide further detail on resource, scope and particular areas of focus.

Action: EUSA and AQS to develop more detailed paper to be brought to Committee in September 2025.

7. Scotland's Rural College (SRUC): Accreditation Committee Annual Report 2024/25

The Committee were reminded that this report is an annual item provided for their information. The Accreditation Committee meets annually with SRUC to reconfirm the arrangements and the two programmes which SRUC delivers as University of Edinburgh awards. The Accreditations Committee confirmed their satisfaction with the QA arrangements and delivery of the programmes by SRUC.

In relation to SRUC's need to replace their external examiner, it was flagged that the deadline for having someone in place is the end of May 2025. It was agreed that the CSE College Office and AQS will follow up with this to ensure arrangements are in place at SRUC.

Action: CSE College Office and AQS to liaise on external examiner replacement for SRUC programmes.

It was commented that the University of Edinburgh may be able to learn from SRUC practices and their experience as a small-scale institution, and also questioned what QA is informing the example of students using Generative AI to draft their research proposal idea. The Committee recognised that SRUC is very much practice-based and has different governance measures in place to the University of Edinburgh.

8. Annual Monitoring and Internal Periodic Review Themes 2023/24: University Level Actions (SQAC 24/25 5E)

This update on University level actions in response to themes identified in 2023/24 was presented to the Committee for information. It included updates of activities in relation to the themes and it was confirmed that the update will be shared with School Directors of Quality as they complete the annual monitoring reports for 2024/25.

In relation to the Assessment and Feedback update, the Convener had further information to share with the Committee. It was communicated that the internal audit activity has resulted in a toolkit for assessment and feedback but it has been agreed with the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDAMOB) that Schools will not be asked to engage with the toolkit whilst their focus on rubrics is prioritised.

Action: Convener to update paper with further assessment and feedback information before it is shared with School Directors of Quality.

The Committee were informed that some Senate elected members had enquired into the status of the internal audit, and reported confusion with the governance pathway between SEDAMOB and Senate Education Committee (SEC). It was suggested that the information cascaded down throughout the University should include clarification of the governance.

In response, the Convener explained that some elements of SEDAMOB will dissolve and be picked up elsewhere in the University workstreams. It was recognised that the relationship between workstreams, groups and Senate committees will be of interest and will be communicated when the structures are in place.

9. Principal's Teaching Award Scheme: April 2025 report (SQAC 24/25 5F)

This paper was provided to the Committee for information on the Principal's Teaching Award Scheme (PTAS). It detailed funding, completed projects and outcomes relating to projects in 2024/25.

During discussion, it was highlighted to members that there can be strategic calls for certain projects and information sessions are offered by the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) to help with writing proposals. The IAD also have a role in sharing good practice and the outcomes from PTAS projects which can be useful in other areas of the University. Members were informed that PTAS is funded by the Development Trust and the IAD makes an application each year to the Development Trust for PTAS funding. The Student Experience grants were also highlighted as another source of funding which may be helpful to colleagues.

10. Committee Membership and Terms of Reference 2025/26 (SQAC 24/25 5G)

The Convener highlighted the changes to the membership that will apply in 2025/26, with the incoming EUSA VP Education to join the Committee as well as a new IAD representative. The Senate elected members will be confirmed once the nominations and elections processes have concluded.

It was commented that there is appetite within Senate to have a greater role in informing the remits and Terms of Reference of the standing committees. Whilst it was acknowledged that this is not required by Senate Standing Orders, some Senate elected members would like to see this as an item for annual consideration and discussion within full Senate. It was relayed to Committee members that there has been consistently expressed interested within Senate for greater discussion of the delegated authority and Terms of Reference for its subcommittees.

In response to this, it was shared that the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group have been reviewing the remits and Terms of Reference for the standing committees. It was reported that the Group have come to the conclusion that is difficult to set Terms of Reference for the standing committees when Senate itself does not have a defined remit or its own Terms of Reference. The approach, therefore, being proposed by the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group will be to begin with establishing Terms of Reference for Senate before reviewing those of the standing committees. It was noted that Court will have input into setting the Terms of Reference for Senate.

It was reported that Senate elected members are dissatisfied with the way things stand with Senate and subcommittees Terms of Reference. The Committee noted this feedback.

11. Senate and Standing Committees Annual Internal Effectiveness Review (SQAC 24/25 5H)

The Committee noted the paper which had been presented for information. It was acknowledged that the paper had been submitted to all three Senate Standing Committees to provide the same update on the approach to evaluation.

12. Internal Periodic Review: Reports and Responses

Three reports had been submitted to the Committee; the final IPR report for School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures (PGT and PGR), and the year-on responses from the Deanery of Clinical Sciences (PGT) and the Deanery of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences (PGT).

The Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Validation, CAHSS drew the Committee's attention to the LLC report and specifically the issue of PGR scholarships. It was flagged that the reduction in available scholarships is becoming an issue more broadly throughout the College, and will have implications for a number of Schools. Factors affecting available scholarships include the sector-wide funding crisis and the sector changes to funding models which affects research intensive Universities. There is expected to be disparity between students on arts and humanities programmes and

those on social sciences programmes, and the College will endeavour to manage this. However, the College cannot continue to fund scholarships at the previous rate.

The Committee were informed that there is work underway by the CAHSS finance team to review School spending, fee waivers and endowments, with Schools being encouraged to see this as a time to spend their reserves. In terms of alternative funding methods, there has been instances of success with external investments and there is the option to target countries which are funding places although consideration is needed for the impact on the student demographic. It was noted that WP targets would be affected by the reduction in scholarships. There is also the risk to guaranteed hours budgets which will affect PGR students who teach to top up their funds and this is another concern for the College.

In relation to the year-on reports, the representative from CMVM noted that the responses reflect on the changes being implemented through the College modernisation plan. Plans made by the individual Deaneries have changed as a result of the wider strategy and workload has become even more stretched with some activities now on pause as a result. Once the modernisation plan is implemented and the Schools and Deaneries are in their new structure, it is expected that further enhancements can be made and the College will track progress on the outstanding IPR recommendations.

Action: CMVM Dean of Quality and IPR team to track outstanding recommendations for updates post-modernisation within the College.

13. AOB

There was no other business.

14. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 30th September 2025.