

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

**Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28 April 2022
at 2pm via Microsoft Teams**

Present:

Professor Tina Harrison (Convener)	Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance
Marianne Brown	Co-opted member with expertise in Student Systems
Brian Connolly	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team (Interim), Academic Services
Dr Gail Duursma	School Representative (Engineering), College of Science and Engineering
Olivia Eadie	Assistant Director and Head of Operations and Projects, Institute for Academic Development
Tara Gold	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Dr Katherine Inglis	School Representative (Literatures, Languages and Cultures), College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Professor Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, College of Science and Engineering
Stuart Lamont	Edinburgh University Students' Association Representative
Dr Paul Norris	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Dr Claire Phillips	Dean of Quality Assurance, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Professor Leigh Sparks	Deputy Principal, University of Stirling

Apologies:

Dr Jeni Harden	School Representative (School of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences), College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
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In attendance:

Professor Sarah Cunningham Burley	Convener, University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC)
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1. Welcome and Apologies

2. Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 24 February 2022

The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Senate Comments

The Convenor reported that there had been a comment from a Senate member, in response to the paper circulation, suggesting that Senate could be made more aware of quality processes both internal and external to the University. The Committee noted that the Convenor had responded to the comment.

For Discussion

4. Undergraduate Degree Outcomes: Degree Awarded Analysis

The Committee discussed the annual report on degree classification data. The report included an analysis of the proportion of First class and higher classification degrees awarded by the University of Edinburgh in the 2020-21 academic year. The statistics were presented by school, including attainment gaps for key student groups, and benchmarked against the Russell Group at subject group level. Whilst trends were considered the Committee agreed that it was important to note that both 2019-20 and 2020-21 were exceptional years and so trend data should be interpreted in that light.

It was noted that nearly all Russell Group members saw an increase in the proportion of First class degrees awarded for 2019-20, and this pattern continued for 2020-21 although with generally smaller increases. For both sessions there were smaller changes in the proportion of high classification degrees awarded. The increase in first class awards at Edinburgh was again greater than the Russell Group average (5.8 percentage points between 2019-20 and 2020-21 compared with 2.8 percentage points), so that Edinburgh's proportion of Firsts was 50.5% and the 5th highest in the Russell Group. Prior to 2019-20 Edinburgh's proportion of Firsts broadly matched the Russell Group average.

Action: In next year's report Strategic Planning/Student Systems to include a trend analysis excluding data from the 2019-20 and 2020-21 pandemic years. The analysis should also include a comparison of entry qualifications to exit qualifications both at subject area level and institutional level to understand the trajectory of students and the value added by the University. The report should also include analysis of failure rates to understand which groups may need enhanced support.

The Committee agreed that subject areas with a significantly higher (or lower) proportion of Firsts than comparator institutions or those with the greatest uplift (or reduction) during the pandemic should be invited to reflect in detail on the possible causes (for example, changes to assessment, the application of Special Circumstances, academic misconduct etc.) in their annual quality assurance (QA) reports. It was agreed that the outcomes of these reflections should be passed onto the Curriculum Transformation Programme for further consideration, particularly in relation to assessment design which is vital to ensuring the quality of Edinburgh qualifications.

Action: Academic Services to share the Degree Awarded Analysis with schools and invite significant data outliers to provide a more in-depth reflection on the issues in their annual quality assurance reports.

The Committee noted that the UK black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) attainment gap for First class degrees (-10.3 percentage points) widened markedly for 2019-20 but for 2020-21 had returned to a smaller though still material gap (-4.0). It was also noted that disabled students continued to be less likely to achieve a First class degree but the gap was also narrowing. In regard to gender, male students continued to be less likely to achieve a First class degree and that gap was widening.

5. Awarding Gap Monitoring

The Convenor of the University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) joined the meeting to discuss the roles of SQAC and EDIC in addressing the awarding gaps across the institution.

It was noted that SQAC has driven work to identify awarding gaps across the University via the Thematic Review process (and the Data Task Group established to progress the recommendations of recent reviews) and the annual QA processes. Schools and Deaneries have increasingly engaged with widening participation (WP) and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data to identify any gaps in attainment for different groups of students. However, they have struggled to understand the underlying causes of these gaps or what good practice should be encouraged and cultivated to address them.

The Convenor of EDIC reported that work is being undertaken to understand the underlying causes of awarding gaps and that the EDIC is seeking linkages with areas of similar activity across the University, in particular the Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP). The Convenor of EDIC, supported by the co-convenors of the EDIC Race Equality and Anti-Racist (REAR) subcommittee, is in discussions with Strategic Planning to review the collection of data for black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) students to provide more granular and accessible data. The Convenor of EDIC suggested that the CTP is fundamental to addressing the underlying causes of the

awarding gaps. It was noted that the CTP will host a secondment post focused on mainstreaming decolonising the curriculum within the curriculum.

The Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture in the College of Science and Engineering (CSE) reported that a task group had been established to drive forward work related to rewarding gaps across CSE. The group will hold focus groups with students to seek to understand what the underlying issues are and the group will also explore linkages between entry qualifications and attainment. It was noted that similar work will be undertaken in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in an effort to address awarding gaps. The Committee was in agreement that the University needs to establish a set of expectations or baselines in relation to WP and EDI data (based on the findings of the EDIC work to understand the causes of gaps and share good practice) to allow schools to gauge their relative performance. These expectations/baselines should in turn be monitored by the SQAC as part of the annual QA reporting processes. It was also noted that schools and deaneries want help to identify and share good practice and more granular EDI data (e.g. who is applying/what applications convert into places/who is progressing/where do they go after Edinburgh?) to fully understand the issues and address awarding gaps.

Action: The Convenor of SQAC and the Convenor of EDIC to determine the work streams for each committee to help address the awarding gaps across the University.

6. Annual Monitoring: Reporting Templates

The Committee noted that the Convenor, College Deans and Academic Services met in March 2022 to consider plans for the next QA reporting cycle. It was agreed that the light touch, interim approach would be maintained for a further year, with the same streamlined reporting templates.

The Committee noted that there had been minor changes to the reporting templates to reflect the following key institutional reporting priorities: the new Student Voice Policy (including consideration of the approach and effectiveness of student voice activities in line with the move to locally managed course level feedback), student progression and outcomes (focussing on the difference in attainment of groups of students with in year, rather than comparing against other years); and student support (in relation to the current Personal Tutor system and wider support for students). Also, whether the industrial action has impacted the quality of provision and student experience, and, if so, how this has been mitigated. It was noted that the

amended templates had been discussed at the School Directors of Quality Network on Monday 4 April 2022.

The Committee approved minor changes to the annual monitoring, review and reporting templates for 2021-22 to reflect the decision to extend the interim reporting process and amend the key reporting priorities.

7. Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) Accreditation Committee: Annual Report 2020-21

The Committee considered the annual report of the Accreditation Committee of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).

The Committee commended SRUC on the quality of the report and noted that the Accreditation Committee had affirmed continued accreditation of its programmes. It was noted that SRUC's application for Degree Awarding Powers (DAP) had been approved to progress to the scrutiny stage by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Advisory Committee. SRUC has now entered a period of scrutiny which will continue for a minimum of a full year, and there may be an indication of the outcome in Summer 2023.

The Committee noted that SRUC Students' Association (SRUCSA) had been commended on the Gender Based Violence Project, aiming to raise awareness of what forms gender-based-violence takes, increase reporting of incidences and highlight support available to students. The Committee agreed that this initiative should be implemented across the whole King's Buildings campus.

Action: University of Edinburgh Students' Association to liaise with SRUCSA in order to coordinate the gender-based-violence initiative across the whole King's Buildings campus.

It was noted that the report included an action for the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance to explore options for barring access from the University network to essay mill websites. The Committee noted that this was in relation to SRUC blocking student access to essay mill websites from its campus network after increasing instances of plagiarism. The Committee discussed the implications, noting possible unwanted impacts such as filters inadvertently blocking access to legitimate academic sites and infringement of Civil Liberties as currently the sites are not illegal in Scotland. However, it was also noted that plagiarism has been identified as the main driver in the growth of academic misconduct cases and that students are increasingly vulnerable to the poor practices of essay mill organisations.

Action: The Convenor to explore options for addressing the impact of essay mill websites with the University's Chief Information Officer and the QAA.

8. Senate Committee Planning: SQAC Priorities 2021-22

The Committee discussed and agreed the following priorities for the 2022-23 academic year:

- Oversee the implementation of a plan of action in response to the 2021 Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR).
- Implement the recommendations from the Digital Maturity report and consider how quality processes and the data that they produce can support the Curriculum Transformation Programme and other areas.
- Continue to examine data and methodological options for the systematic monitoring of retention, progression, and attainment data.
- Continue to monitor the implementation of the Student Voice Policy via annual quality assurance processes.
- Engage with the QAA and Universities UK review focused on strengthening the external examining system.

Action: Committee Secretary to submit the Committee's priorities for 2021-22 to Senate.

For Information and Formal Business

9. Internal Periodic Review: Reports and Responses

The Committee confirmed that it was content with progress in the year-on response given the context of the pandemic. However, it was agreed that, as the University and wider society emerges from the pandemic, expectations of the speed of progress with IPR recommendations will need to be reassessed.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date of Next Meeting:

Thursday 19 May 2022 at 2pm in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and via MS Teams.