

The University of Edinburgh Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Monday 6th March 2023 10am-12pm

Meeting held via Microsoft Teams

Present:	
Professor Tina Harrison (Convener)	Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement)
Professor Matthew Bailey	Dean of Quality, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Marianne Brown	Co-opted member with expertise in Student Systems
Brian Connolly	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, Academic Services
Dr Anne Desler	Director of Quality Assurance & Curriculum Approval, Edinburgh College of Art
Sinéad Docherty	Committee Secretary, Academic Policy Officer, 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
Dr Jeni Harden	School Representative (School of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences), College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Dr Pia Helbing	Programme Director, Business School
Dr Meryl Kenny	Deputy Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Social and Political Science
Professor Leigh Sparks	Deputy Principal, University of Stirling
In attendance:	
Professor Ella Ritchie	Member of the Senate External Review Panel
Lynsey Dinwoodie	Academic Administration and WP Manager – College Governance, Quality Assurance and Enhancement
Morag Fairlie	Projects and Quality Officer, College of Science and Engineering
Sam McCallum	VP Education, Edinburgh University Students' Association Representative
Tom Ward	Director of Academic Services

Apologies:	
Dr Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, College of Science and Engineering
Dr Paul Norris	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener noted that Lynsey Dinwoodie and Morag Fairlie are in attendance on behalf of Paul Norris (CAHSS) and Linda Kirstein (CES) respectively.

The Convener welcomed back Brian Connolly as Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, Academic Services.

The Convener noted that Professor Ella Ritchie, who is leading the Senate External Review, is also present.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 8th December 2022.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved, subject to slight amendment to correct attendance record.

3. Matters Arising

Conveners Update

3.1 Senate Committees External Review

The Committee were reminded that this review is taking place, led by Ella Ritchie, and that Olivia Hayes (Clerk to Senate) is looking for volunteers to participate in focus groups. These groups are aiming to encompass more academic voices and better representation from across the University.

Professor Ella Ritchie introduced herself to the Committee and explained that she is undertaking this review on behalf of AdvanceHE. Some of their work will focus on how Senate and its committees interact, and explore the extent to which committees provide a useful forum. ER has prior experience in these types of reviews, and noted that whilst institutions may be unique there are often similarities in the issues they are facing.

ER confirmed that a survey had already been circulated to Senate members and is now closed, but members are invited to volunteer for the focus groups. The Convener also urged colleagues to participate in these groups.

3.2 Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR)

A new enhancement-led institutional quality review method is currently under development in Scotland as part of a tertiary quality framework. The new method is being delivered across two phases. Phase 1 comprises a QESR. Our QESR is scheduled for 16th November 2023 and will comprise a one-day visit from a small external panel but no self-evaluation report is required for the review. More information will be shared by Nichola Kett (Interim Director of Academic Services) in due course as preparation for the review begins.

3.3 Enhancement Themes

The Committee were informed that two interns have been appointed for 3 months, on a part-time basis, to contribute to the work for the theme (Resilient Learning Communities). This theme is coming to the end of the 3 year time span, and no theme has been set by QAA for 2023/24.

For Discussion

4. Annual Reports 2021-22:

4.1 Academic Appeals CLOSED PAPER

This paper is closed; disclosure would constitute a breach of the Data Protection Act.

Tom Ward (Director of Academic Services) presented this paper to the Committee. The volume of appeal submissions has continued to increase, with higher numbers compared to this point last year, although numbers overall remain at a very low proportion of the student population and the number of upheld appeals is not growing.

The increase in appeal submissions is associated with student population growth, especially with regard to PGT students and overseas students, and the ongoing impact of Covid and industrial action. It is possible that the “no detriment” approach taken by the University during the pandemic may have created a culture of appealing.

The Committee were informed that appeal turnaround times remain challenging and there is a significant backlog. To address this, more staff have been allocated to appeals work, and the subcommittee membership has been expanded to avoid a bottleneck at this stage. Academic Services are also exploring “bank” staff who can be deployed at peak times to work on appeals, and can respond to the peaks and troughs of appeal submissions.

The Committee were informed that the number of upheld appeals remains static at around 10%. The overall increase in submissions is not reflective of wider/systematic process issues. It is possible that Schools need better instruction on how to advise and direct their students who are unhappy with results/outcomes, rather than falling back on academic appeals. The Committee also discussed the relationship between ESC and appeals to consider whether process improvements at ESC stage might assist students then and negate the need to later appeal.

A member of the Committee highlighted Taught Assessment Regulation 64.1 which sets out the Convener of the Board of Examiners’ ability to review a decision if there is any significant new information or evidence of an error. It was suggested that increased awareness of this regulation, and more guidance for Schools on using the BoE mechanism rather than the appeals process, may serve to reduce the volume of appeals and facilitate early resolution where appropriate.

Action: Colleges/Schools to remind Boards at BoE training that they can re-convene in light of new evidence.

The Committee queried what learnings are taken from the cases where the appeal is upheld.

Action: Academic Appeals to consider this and include learnings in future annual reports.

It was noted during this discussion that it is imperative the appeals process remains open and accessible to students.

4.2 Student Discipline CLOSED PAPER

This paper is closed; disclosure would constitute a breach of the Data Protection Act.

Tom Ward (Director of Academic Services) presented this paper to the Committee. The paper focusses on the number of breaches rather than investigations subsequently carried out. Cases of academic misconduct, which are of most relevance to this Committee, account for much of the growth in case numbers, with instances of plagiarism and collusion skewed towards the PGT population and overseas students.

It was noted that the investigation practices are not scalable as cases increase and this is challenging for the conduct team. The Committee discussed ways to combat academic misconduct, including a greater focus on authentic assessment, development to forms of assessment and not an automatic return to in-person exams, and the value of co-creating assessment with students to deter from the use of essay mills and Chat GPT-type platforms.

A Committee member highlighted that there can often be misunderstanding by the student around collaborative working and collusion e.g. using shared notes as a resource in open book exams. Increased student awareness of academic integrity may serve to combat these instances where there is no intent by the student to plagiarise/collude. A LEARN module on academic misconduct and academic integrity is under development; a Committee member questioned whether this module can be designed to allow subject areas to add some content that is specific to their types of assessment.

The Committee discussed the inconsistencies present in reported cases of academic misconduct across departments, Schools and Colleges. All staff need to be aware of what, when and how to report to avoid inconsistency in the interpretation of the policy. It was suggested that more conversations are needed at local level in Schools, in the context of assessment, to better communicate the importance of academic integrity.

4.3 Complaint Handling

Tom Ward (Director of Academic Services) presented this paper to the Committee. The paper details an outlying year (2021/22) still impacted by Covid and showing an upward trend in complaints. It was highlighted to the Committee that there are zero returns from certain areas, which shows problems with data collection.

An internal audit of complaints is almost complete; this process will make recommendations around collecting and reporting data.

It was highlighted to the committee that challenges include limitations on data collection and therefore analysis, uncertainty around what constitutes a complaint and crossover in the relationship between complaints and academic appeals. It was also noted that individuals may use other routes, instead of complaints, in an attempt to obtain a quicker result.

Tom Ward asked the Committee to consider whether there is a need for a formal reporting/recording system across the institution to best manage the process. Focus needs to be on valuable outputs if a system were to be introduced.

Action: Going forwards, and following the internal audit, the Complaints team will seek to make the process more useful and insights more valuable. Lynsey Dinwoodie has previously worked in a complaints role and volunteered to help the Complaints team improve the process.

5. Annual Monitoring and Reporting:

5.1 Annual Review of Student Support Services (SSAR)

This paper was presented by Brian Connolly. This annual review is the last under the streamlined process which was introduced during the pandemic, and is the last that will include reflections on the pandemic. Annual reports will be moving out of the interim process and returning to a more detailed level of reporting.

The key themes and issues identified in the SSAR were hybrid working (including concerns around balancing this model and staff resilience), digital provision and the implementation of People and Money. This system, in particular, has caused significant concern around staff workload, time and support. The Committee noted that these themes are service/process focussed rather than student experience focussed, and also noted that Student Support Services have encountered strain in both staffing and workload.

Action: Academic Services to escalate comments from SSAR reports to relevant project teams. Hybrid working and digital provision to go to the hybrid working team, and P&M theme to be referred to that project group.

5.2 Annual Monitoring, Review and Reporting Policy

This paper was presented by Brian Connolly and proposed minor changes to the policy. The paper was approved (with minor additional amendments).

5.3 Reporting Template Enhancements

- Programme Annual Monitoring Template
- School Annual Report Template
- College Annual Report Template

Brian Connolly presented the updated annual monitoring templates to SQAC, which had been presented already in the December 2022 meeting. Changes had been incorporated to add emphasis to monitoring the PGR experience as well as the taught experience. It was raised that there are discrepancies between the Schools and Programme template re PGR and student support questions and this needs to be refined before the templates are circulated to Schools and Colleges.

There was some discussion with regard to the Assessment and Feedback question in the programme template. The Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities were published in September 2022, and it was suggested these are too new for Schools/Colleges to report back on. However, given the emphasis placed on this in the recent ELIR, other members of the Committee felt it would encourage focus on this topic, and provide an opportunity to surface any concerns, challenges or good practice.

The Committee agreed to keep the question in the template, but amend the language to allow Schools to report on activities to date and not infer all changes had been fully implemented.

Action: BC to refine templates and update language on Assessment & Feedback to ask about activities *to date*. BC to update information and templates on the Annual Monitoring webpage and send instruction to Schools & Colleges for this year's activity.

6. Student Support Model

This update was presented by Marianne Brown and, as agreed at the December 2022 meeting, is a standing item for SQAC. MB informed the Committee that a current focus of the project is on evaluating the implementation. The recommendations and actions set out in section 8 of the paper are already in motion with the project team.

The second phase of evaluation will be a longer term process and will involve SQAC. This process is at the early stage of discussions with Colleges. A robust method of year-on-year evaluation is required; it is suggested that SPS may be able to help with developing effective evaluation methods.

It was noted that measure and indicators have yet to be agreed for a method of evaluation. It was also noted that measures will need to track student engagement and not only reflect student satisfaction with the system.

Action: Academic Services to highlight this topic at the next Directors of Quality forum and facilitate discussion on how best to monitor the student support system through QA processes.

7. Coordinating Institutional Activities on Assessment and Feedback

Two new task groups have been proposed to support the work on Assessment and Feedback, and would report into all three of the Senate subcommittees. SQAC supported the proposals for the *Assessment and Feedback Guidance, Procedures, Data, Systems and Evaluation Group*, subject to establishing appropriate ways to involve a wider range of stakeholders where appropriate (either through participation in meetings or alternative ways of consultation).

It was recognised that input from current teaching staff, and IAD, is vital although this does not necessarily require additional members on the groups. It is important to keep the groups agile and of a manageable size in order to function effectively.

The Committee approved the establishment of the new group. Further work will be undertaken by SEC and APRC to agree the final membership and remit for the group.

8. Schedule for Review of Policies, Regulations and Guidance

Tom Ward presented this item and covered the plan for re-setting the schedule of policy, regulation and guidance review following the pandemic. Academic Services will prioritise and cluster where appropriate to effectively work through the review schedule.

The meeting was adjourned before discussion on this item concluded; this item was later circulated to the Committee as e-business.

It was highlighted that the *Programme and Course Design, Development, Approval, Changes and Closure Policy* is a key policy due to be reviewed, and that substantive changes may be informed as part of the Curriculum Transformation Project. A further comment was made that the proposed minor changes to *Programme and Course Approval and Maintenance Policy in 2022-23* may require thorough consideration in terms of the Subject Area level operationalisation and School-level approval of both CTP and the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities guidance.

9. Mid-year update on progress against SQAC priorities

SQAC did not reach this item before the meeting was adjourned. This item was later circulated to the Committee as e-business.

This item was for information only; no further comments were received from the Committee.

10. Internal Periodic Review: Final Reports

SQAC did not reach this item before the meeting was adjourned. This item was later circulated to the Committee as e-business.

The Committee then approved the final reports for The School of Divinity (PGT & PGR) and for The School of Economics (all provision).

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 27 April 2023 at 2pm in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House