

The University of Edinburgh Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Thursday 8th December 2022 2-4pm

Meeting held in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and via Microsoft Teams

Present:	
Professor Tina Harrison (Convener)	Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance
Brian Connolly	Committee Secretary, Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services
Sinéad Docherty	Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services
Olivia Eadie	Assistant Director and Head of Operations and Projects, Institute for Academic Development
Dr Meryl Kenny	Deputy Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Social and Political Science
Nichola Kett	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, Academic Services
Dr Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, College of Science and Engineering
Sam McCallum	VP Education, Edinburgh University Students' Association Representative
Present via Teams:	
Professor Matthew Bailey	Dean of Quality, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Dr Anne Desler	Director of Quality Assurance & Curriculum Approval, Edinburgh College of Art
Dr Pia Helbing	Programme Director, Business School
Dr Katherine Inglis	School Representative (Literatures, Languages and Cultures), College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Dr Paul Norris	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Professor Leigh Sparks	Deputy Principal, University of Stirling
In attendance:	
Lisa Dawson	Academic Registrar
Apologies:	
Marianne Brown	Co-opted member with expertise in Student Systems

Dr Gail Duursma	School Representative (Engineering), College of Science and Engineering
Dr Jeni Harden	School Representative (School of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences), College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed the three new members to the committee: Anne Desler, Pia Helbing and Meryl Kenny.

The Convener extended particular thanks to Katherine Inglis, outgoing member, for her contributions to the committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13th September 2022.

The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Business via correspondence: External Examiners

Paul Norris, Convener of APRC, informed SQAC of the reflections of APRC in relation to the External Examiners policy. The EE policy is unusual in that it sits with both SQAC and APRC and requires concessions from both committees. PN emphasised that the policy needs to include a mechanism to allow concessions. This is covered by regulations but also needs to be addressed and understood in the policy.

PN highlighted that the role of External Examiners is to oversee a process and ensure it is working effectively. Moderation happens internally and earlier in the process; External Examiners are not the first line of defence.

The committee discussed the importance of having a timely process in place that can respond to the pressure of an emergency situation; the nature of a concession is to address something that is not working as intended. However, scrutiny and rigour are still required, and the academic scrutiny of EEs is an important part of their role. OFS changes in England to the perception and role of External Examiners may impact on the role of EEs in Scotland and the availability of EEs from within the UK.

For discussion:

4. Student Support: Monitoring and Evaluation

Lisa Dawson attended SQAC to give an update as the Programme Implementation Lead

LD outlined that the consultation for this project began in 2019, and it led to the preferred model of implementation. The committee were reminded that the ELIR report asked for demonstrable progress in the student support model.

The new model has been implemented for all incoming students, and the School of Economics have piloted the model and have implemented the system for all students in years 1-3 of their UG studies. In total, 8000 students are now supported by the new model.

To monitor and evaluate the model so far, focus groups have been consulted and feedback gathered. LD cautioned that it is expected to take 3-5 years for the new system to be working fully, but early feedback has identified consistency, roles, boundaries and workload challenges (i.e. course enrolment, timetabling) as areas to monitor. The project board is committed to continuing to learn and develop as the model is implemented, and is also mindful of how best to transfer that continuation to SQAC in due course, when the involvement of the project board will cease.

LD noted that the model needs to be underpinned with software and data; there is a pilot with the Solution Path tool, which looks at students who move into a negative trajectory.

The committee questioned how the success of this project will be evaluated. They identified the need for baseline measures to allow for comparison and monitoring; some quantitative measures will be required to achieve this. There will be methodological challenges but the support of Student Analytics, and the changes to EUCLID tools which will gather more student information, should assist in ways to i) evaluate the student support model and ii) evaluate the outcomes of the model. This evaluation should also aim to smooth out any variation in how the model is being implemented.

LD will present to the board in January 2023 on the progress so far, and establish if the University is ready for the full roll out in academic year 2023/24. Consideration will be given to how staff are coping with the new system, and if enough Professional Services staff are in place to properly support students. Results from the Pulse survey will also inform the next phases of implementation; LD is to confirm the number of questions in the survey. Leigh Sparks informed the committee that Stirling University has 4 questions in their survey and are building an engagement dashboard to monitor and support students.

Action: updates on the Student Support model to be added as a standing item to the SQAC agenda. LD will provide an update for each meeting.

5. College Annual Quality Reports

5.1 College of Arts and Humanities – presented by Paul Norris

CAHSS report highlighted Special Circumstances, assessment and timetabling as areas of concern. PN also noted the report lacked comments on PGR students and the PGR experience. There is a challenge in obtaining PGR information, possibly due to the terminology of the report being more aligned with taught programmes, or possibly because the report is completed at a time when staff are working on research rather than teaching/administrative tasks. Discussion around whether summer is the best time to undertake these QA processes.

PN queried whether there are any other/further aspects which need attention in College reports e.g. exemplars for promotion. The Committee noted the ELIR recommendation made in 2021 for teaching focussed promotions.

Action: Academic Services to review template for College quality reports, either to include specific questions relating to PGR students and experience or to create a separate template for PGRs.

The Committee considered whether Schools feel disconnected from PGR/QA information and whether this information can be more visible to academic/quality staff. Quantitative data is more often held by professional services; are the correct mechanisms in place for this to be shared?

The Committee discussed the role of the Doctoral College and its Deans. It was suggested that a representative from the Doctoral College could join SQAC and help to strengthen the quality processes and mechanisms around PGR experience.

Action: SQAC to identify who would be suitable to join the committee from the Doctoral College. Olivia Eadie will contact Fiona Philippi at DC to begin this conversation.

5.2 College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine – presented by Matt Bailey

CMVM report highlighted the Student Voice policy and overall response rate by students. The lack of centralised questionnaires is proving a challenge in receiving feedback from students. Furthermore, in instances of a minority of students making comments, how best should the College respond?

EUSA VP asserts that if something will significantly impact even just a few students, it is important for the College/University to do something to facilitate this.

In relation to Student Voice, the College has been holding focus groups and is aware that more work needs to be done to close feedback loops. Major concerns felt by students are around workload and the return to in-person exams.

Leigh Sparks confirmed that the University of Stirling are not automatically going back to in-person exams and are exploring different methods of assessment.

A concern raised by MVM was how to invigilate online/digital exams. Instances of collusion in exams shows this needs to be a consideration of curriculum redesign and programme assessment. The Committee noted that there must also be discussion around AI and its increasing prevalence in higher education. This is causing concern around what is the right type of assessment for programmes, and how to achieve authentic assessment.

5.3 College of Science and Engineering – presented by Linda Kirstein

CES report detailed a positive response to the implementation of the new Student Support model. A particular concern is around Academic Misconduct – there has been a notable increase in cases and the process to deal with cases may need strengthening. It is also suggested that training new/short-term staff will be required.

LK highlighted to the Committee that there are five actions which CES has requested from the University (detailed in Paper E). LK emphasised that there is imbalance between student numbers in recent years and institutional level supports.

LK has attempted to establish who will take these actions forward and how will progress be explained to the School.

Action: SQAC and Academic Services to consider how best to track and escalate recommendations that are made to University services.

6. Annual Monitoring and Reporting

This item was moved to the February meeting. The template will be reconsidered in the context of monitoring PGR students and their experience.

7. External Examiner Reporting System (EERS):

This item was for noting. Further report is due at a later meeting.

8. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs):

The Committee recognised that these are not credit bearing courses but SQAC continues to have oversight (there is a reputational element to these courses).

The Committee considered whether the Senate Education Committee (SEC) should review the MOOC Annual Report and have it inform projects such as Curriculum Transformation. SQAC noted that the MOOC Strategy Group has no representatives from Colleges and consideration needs to be given to where the reporting goes and how actions are taken forwards.

9. Senate Committees Internal Review Report

The internal review will be an ongoing discussion and SQAC members are encouraged to continue giving their feedback.

For Information and Formal Business

10. Enhancement Themes and 3 Year Plan

Item noted by the Committee. NK highlighted the importance of themes informing the output of activities and evaluation.

11. Internal Periodic Review – Reports and Responses

The Committee were satisfied with the report and responses, with the exception of the response from Clinical Education. The Committee noted that the School has not noted any progress against an urgent recommendation of the IPR.

The Committee discussed how best to manage recommendations that are directed outside of the School/College and towards the University. Clarity is required on how feedback is gathered and returned.

Action: Academic Services to formalise the process for directing IPR recommendations outside of the School/College subject to the IPR.

12. Any Other Business

The Convener noted thanks to Brian Connolly for his role and work as SQAC secretary. BC is due to leave the University in February 2023 and his SQAC responsibilities will be taken on by Sinéad Docherty in Academic Services.

13. Date of next meeting: Monday 6th March 2023