The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 20th February, 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
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
Professor Nazira Karodia	Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of Learning & Teaching, Edinburgh Napier University
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 Laura Bradley	Doctoral College Representative of CAHSS (PGR)

2. Welcome and apologies

The Convener welcomed members to this meeting of the Committee. Apologies were noted for Professor Laura Bradley.

3. Minutes of December meeting and e-business (SQAC 24/25 3A)

The draft of the December minutes had been made available for consultation ahead of this meeting. Edits were incorporated into the final draft by the Committee Secretary.

A query had been received in relation to the moderation policy review, referenced in section 7 of the December minutes, where it was started that CAHSS seek commitment from the University to address concerns around the moderation policy within the academic year 2024/25.

The Convener clarified that the updated moderation policy and guidance will not be implemented until 2025/26. It is due for discussion at the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group and subsequently Senate Education Committee (SEC). It was noted that CAHSS have experienced particular issues with conflation of secondary marking and the requirements of the Taught Assessment Regulations (TAR), and an interim review of the policy to address current issues would be helpful to resolve these issues and take effect from the next academic year.

Action: Committee Secretary to update December minutes to note ongoing work on the moderation policy this year and implementation next academic year.

The minutes were approved pending the above changes.

A note of the December e-business was also approved by the Committee.

4. Matters Arising

- **IPR – SPS 14-week response**

Following review of the IPR 14-week response from the School of Social and Political Science (SPS), the Dean of Quality CAHSS raised a question to the Committee around assessment deadlines falling within the easter break period. It was flagged that assessment deadline bunching is an issue within CAHSS, as SPS had highlighted, and avoiding the easter break is a contributing factor. Staff continue to mark assessments during that period and the University does remain open, unlike the winter closure.

The Committee recognised the distinction between the formal closure period and other times of year when deadlines are to be avoided. It was commented that even if deadlines were permissible in the easter break, Schools would have choice as to when to set their deadlines and can seek to protect the breaktime of students whilst looking to smooth out clusters of deadlines.

The Committee were informed that the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) is undertaking some work and consultation on this issue. The value of APRC leading on this matter, as part of the review of the Taught Assessment Regulations (TAR), was recognised by the Committee. There was discussion of the quality assurance consideration needed, and noted that the strategy for Learning and Teaching is relevant to SQAC and it remains important that there is a QA voice included in the consultation and discussions.

- **School Director of Quality Network**

The Committee were informed that invites have been sent to the Directors of Quality network. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 3 April 2025 at the Playfair Library, Old College. The meeting will focus on this year's annual QA reporting process. Alastair Duthie, Quality Assurance

Agency (QAA) Head of Scotland will be in attendance to discuss Scotland's new Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) and other QA developments across the sector.

The Committee are supportive of efforts to increase understanding amongst colleagues as to the framework developments in the broader sector. It was noted that the Convener is planning to circulate communication to all colleagues and Senate in relation to the sector changes and their effect on quality processes.

5. Student Support Services Annual Review 2023/24 (SQAC 24/25 3C)

The Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Quality and Standards presented this paper and outlined the process which had taken place within the Student Support Services Annual Review (SSSAR). The Committee were informed that a newly appointed external member from the University of Glasgow participated in the review activity, in line with sector expectations of external input to QA practices. Detailed feedback was provided to each of the services on their individual submission.

The key themes identified across the reports were highlighted to the Committee:

- Staff concern around the financial context of the University;
- Services looking for strategic guidance on the activities which should be prioritised;
- Employment opportunities for students;
- The use of KPIs;
- Collaborative work across services, and the concern around capacity to look for new collaborative opportunities.

Members observed that the key themes mirror concerns and questions across the University. It was noted that the SSSAR is a process for surfacing examples of good practice and culminates in a good practice event for the services to attend, and therefore the tone of the report is positive. Members requested that key themes and concerns are amplified in the report before it is shared with University Executive, in order to ensure that appropriate focus is given to these areas. It was noted, as an example, that the Chaplaincy Service had made a strategic decision to reduce some of its activities as a result of reduced resource. Members of the Committee agreed it would be helpful to have more detail on examples such of these, to understand clearly the changes that have been necessitated and what the expected impact will be. There is a concern that the student experience will be affected by inconsistency if local areas try to bridge gaps left by reduced central services.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to surface specific impact examples from the service reports and include in report to University Executive.

It was emphasised to the Committee that the service reports are written in the first semester of the academic year and take a retrospective look against the year that has passed. It was acknowledged that the next set of reports will include the content reflecting on the current University circumstances and their impact on student services.

The Committee discussed student employment opportunities within the University. There was a concern that student employment is seen as a solution to financial hardship experienced by some students. In response to this, it was noted that job opportunities are not intended to replace University hardship funds, and can provide valuable experience to students within better pay and conditions than general employment elsewhere. Information Services was highlighted as a particular area with varied and valuable opportunities available to students.

There was a comment from EUSA representatives that the collaboration between EUSA and ACE as detailed in the report is not reflective of the current working arrangements and it was requested this be removed. It was also noted that the Information Services Group (ISG) section would have benefited from further detail. The presenter acknowledged the challenge of reporting on a large service such as ISG and welcomed suggestions for how departments and services can be better reflected in reporting activities.

The Committee discussed the different approaches for sharing annual review report. There was recognition that it is important for services to be transparent and candid during the process, and encouraged to identify areas for development as well as good practice. The Committee were informed that Napier University shares their equivalent report in SSLCs with the aim to share good practice, involve student representatives in the discussions and help to develop partnerships throughout their institution.

It was noted during discussion that the services review is an element of the QA framework, but the framework does not mandate a specific approach to the review. Some institutions have incorporated the services review into their Internal Periodic Review process. However, the University of Edinburgh has taken the approach of the SSSAR running as a standalone process that has student experience at the forefront. This approach is aligned with the QA framework, and Academic Quality and Standards will monitor the process to ensure continued alignment as the sector framework develops.

6. Annual Monitoring: Reporting Templates 2024/25 (SQAC 24/25 3D)

The Committee were asked to discuss and approve the Annual Monitoring templates for the 2024/25 reporting cycle. Minor changes had been agreed at the September meeting of the Committee when the previous cycle was discussed. These changes were incorporated and highlighted in the drafts of the templates. It was acknowledged that annual monitoring activity is time sensitive, and agreed that the revised templates would be approved via e-business to allow for circulation to Schools ahead of the next full meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Academic Planning noted that the student support question has a role in informing the evaluation of the Student Support Model, and proposed that the language used in this section be refined.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to agree updates to Student Support section with the Head of Academic Planning.

In relation to the student voice section, it was suggested that the question should refer to the effectiveness of student voice opportunities, as well as insight into the opportunities themselves. This would align with Committee's support for shifting the emphasis to effectiveness and evidence within quality processes. It was also proposed that the section should include reference to student voice culture within Schools and how that operates. It was felt that the feedback loop references allude to this but it could be more clearly articulated in the questions.

It was requested that the guidance within the programme templates refer only to assessment challenges, in order to keep the question open and to encourage greater reporting in response to this. The guidance should also clearly outline the need for analysis of student surveys to gather greater insight and evidence for the assessment section of the reports. Additionally, it was proposed that the student outcomes section be revised to include a prompt about PGT students from the previous academic cycle, to ensure that the cohort which has most recently graduated is not overlooked.

The Committee discussed the proposal to include a section on Generative AI as an institutional priority. There was agreement that this should be included, although the templates should be amended to clarify that the Generative AI Guidance for Staff and Students is not policy but guidance. It was agreed that it would be appropriate to ask Schools and programmes to reflect on how useful they have found the Generative AI Guidance to be.

The views of Senate elected members were shared with the Committee. There was a request for the financial context of the University to be referenced in the templates, to allow Schools to provide comment as to where financial constraints have had an impact. It was felt that the proposal to remove the industrial action question was premature, and Senate elected members would propose to keep the question. As a final point, Senate elected members had noted that there is much variation in how different areas engage with the student voice, and they would be supportive of a question to explore staff voice and governance, with a view to creating a staff opportunity to establish priorities and processes in their area.

The Committee recognised that the financial context and other challenges have an impact across the institution. It was agreed that an additional question be included to directly ask about the challenges which have impacted delivery of quality teaching in the past academic year. This will allow for reporting on a range of challenges and recognises that some Schools may be impacted to a greater or lesser degree. Further additions to the template include a box for Head of School sign-off and their commentary on the process, specification that roles of contributors should be included as well and names and a question within the assessment and feedback section to ask whether assessment criteria and rubrics are now applied across all courses.

It was highlighted that the templates and guidance must be in line with accessibility requirements. It was agreed that all templates would be reviewed and updated to be made reader accessible, prior to circulation throughout the University.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to update the templates with the edits agreed during the discussion and circulate to Committee members as e-business.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to update all templates and guidance to ensure alignment with reader accessible standards.

The Committee discussed the appropriate level of transparency for the School annual monitoring reports. Requests to view and share the reports has ordinarily been managed on a case-by-case basis by either College Quality officers or Academic Quality and Standards. The Committee were supportive of making the School reports more widely available, and agreed that a SharePoint site would be the most suitable way to make the reports visible to colleagues. It was acknowledged that some reports are already shared as good practice within SSLCs and samples of the reports also are considered as part of the external review process. As such, the School reports do have a wider audience than the respective Colleges and this Committee.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards will develop a SharePoint site for storing and sharing the reports.

There was discussion of the timeline for the full annual monitoring process. It was highlighted that programme reports require reflection on data and survey results although some survey results are not available until mid-July, which impacts the timing for programme reports to feed into the School report. It was proposed that deadlines for each stage of the annual monitoring cycle be reviewed with the Colleges to ensure that the activity feeds into College cycles at the appropriate time.

Action: Academic Quality and Standards to liaise with College Deans of Quality on the Annual Monitoring timeline.

7. Internal Periodic Review: University Standard Remit (SQAC 24/25 3E)

The Committee were advised of the minor amendments proposed for the University Standard IPR remit, to ensure alignment with the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF). It was noted that an area with refined focus in the TQEF was that of student partnership and the emphasis on the continuous nature of student engagement.

The Committee discussed the non-credit bearing element of the University IPR remit and the requirements in the TQEF. The Committee were advised that the understanding within the sector is that non-credit bearing provision is aimed at Colleges and FE institutions. However, it was recognised that non-credit bearing provision is relevant to some areas within the University, such as the Centre for Open Learning (COL). The CAHSS Dean of Quality advised that COL wish to remain included in Internal Periodic Review activity and the correct terminology to capture their provision is "short courses". The Committee agreed that the standard remit should be updated to reflect the inclusion of all provision within the scope of the review.

There was discussion of the term "externality" after a question as to its definition in the context of the sector. It was clarified that this is a Scottish Funding Council (SFC) term and refers to external references and sector benchmarks.

Further edits to the standard remit were agreed by the Committee, which included the addition of "governance" within the strategic section, the removal of a bullet point referencing forward direction and the expansion of the learning environment point to include systems, processes and infrastructure.

Action: Academic Quality and Standard to update University Standard Remit with agreed changes and publish on the IPR webpages.

8. Mid-year update on progress against SQAC priorities (SQAC 24/25 3F)

This item was presented for information on the mid-year priorities updates and there was an additional request for the Committee to consider the priorities for the upcoming 2025/26 academic year.

The Committee were informed that this update had already been presented to full Senate at its February meeting and little feedback was received. There was discussion of which updates are of most value to Senate and what Senate would like to see and engage with. It was reported that Senate members find focussed discussion workshops to be useful, such as the Curriculum Transformation discussion held last academic year. It was commented that the Committee has not build the capacity in Senate for full engagement in QA matters, and it was suggested that this may speak to the broader challenges of engaging the staff body with QA processes, and the perception that QA happens elsewhere. The question was raised of how to shift the University culture at School/Deanery, programme and course level to embed QA as a core element.

Projects with the Student Experience programme board and the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB) were identified as areas where Senate and its committees would value the opportunity to enhance understanding of arrangements and effectiveness. The Convener agreed to approach the Deputy Secretary, Students to explore the possibility of a discussion workshop.

Action: Convener to discuss Student Experience and UIPD workshop(s) for Senate members with Deputy Secretary, Students.

In relation to the priority of Responding to the 2023 Quality Enhancement & Standards Review (QESR), the Convener provided an update of the various ongoing activities to meet each recommendation. The oversight group is focussing on the areas which require further progress and have not yet received full attention, including the recommendation around the promotion routes of academic staff based on teaching excellence. The Convener advised that a meeting is due to be held during the week of 3rd March 2025 to focus on this recommendation and an update will follow.

In relation to the Assessment and Feedback recommendation, it was recognised that progress has been made against turnaround times and now the focus is shifting to quality of feedback and use of rubrics. The Convener advised that the Data Monitoring Task Group is continuing in its work to address the recommendation about the awarding gap and has a focus on identifying improvements to the use of outcomes data.

In relation to the priorities detailed in point 10 of the paper, it was raised that the activities set out had been undertaken on behalf of the Committee, rather than by the Committee, and requested that the Committee itself be more involved in this work. In response to this, the Convener advised that each of the standing committee conveners have collaborated with the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group to draft revised Terms of Reference (TOR) with the objective to address the priority set out in 10.i. The work on TORs and committee remits is being driven by the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group, rather than by the standing committees.

9. Self-Evaluation Action Plan (SEAP) (SQAC 24/25 3G)

It was noted that this item had returned to the agenda as there had not been time for discussion in the December meeting. The Committee were informed that the University is still awaiting feedback from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on the submitted SEAP. There will be a meeting between the SFC and the University in March as standard practice for external quality oversight, although it is not yet known who will be involved and the remit of that meeting.

The Committee were advised that the University had been involved in the pilot year of the new external reporting arrangements, but no feedback had been received following the pilot. It was recognised that there are concerns within the sector that adjustments to the reporting process will be made later in the academic year, which will prove to be a challenge if the requirements of the SEAP submission are changed at short notice. Whilst the intention is to work with students before the summer, late changes to the process may mean that newer sabbatical officers are asked to feed into the report when they are new to their role.

This was acknowledged as a risk to the reporting process, and a risk of student involvement becoming less meaningful as students will not have had the time to build up the relevant expertise in their role. The Committee agreed that it is important that student representatives have the opportunity and timeframe to feed in and shape the report. It was noted that the VP Education is working with the Senate Education Committee (SEC) to ensure the Student Partnership Agreement work feeds into the SEAP.

The Committee were informed by its external member that Napier University has proposed to its Student Association that a Learning and Teaching Student Consultant role be developed. The intention is that this role would act as a bridge for the new student representatives and sabbatical officers coming into their role. This would allow for continuity and ongoing experience within student representative roles, and would be a paid position.

The Committee were advised that Senate elected members provided positive feedback on the SEAP and acknowledged the strong account of Assessment and Feedback activity within the report. There were concerns from this cohort around the description of the Curriculum Transformation Programme governance which was felt to be misleading. It was clarified that Senate has not yet approved the full business case for the PGT framework and the approval process remains as ongoing business.

The Committee did question the percentage of students from SIMD backgrounds as identified in the report, and whether this referred to all UG students or SFC funded students. There was

concern that the statistic may be misinterpreted and it should be made clear whether it relates to the full UG population or a section of that population.

The Committee were advised of the variety of activities which feed into the report, including IPR and annual monitoring processes, institution led review and student outcomes data. The sections of the report are prescribed by the SFC and the University must respond accordingly. Progress against the actions identified in the 2023/24 report must be reported in the next SEAP and will be tracked going forward. The Committee endorsed the report submitted for academic year 2023/24.

10. AOB

On behalf of CSE, The Dean of Quality and Enhancement raised the matter of rubrics within the College. It was stated that CSE does not have the minimum standards document that CAHSS has produced for its Schools. The rubrics provided by the Institute for Academic Development have been helpful to some extent, but there are complexities in CSE relation to lab-based assessment and computerised marking assessment. The CSE Dean raised this item for discussion to better understand the implementation timeline and status for rubrics across the University.

The Convener shared relevant updates from the work of the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDaMOB) and the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group. These groups have also held discussions on rubrics and it was confirmed that the University is not looking to develop a single rubric to fit all Schools, but also recognises that a multitude of rubrics is not helpful to students. There is awareness that there is a need for different types and scales of rubrics, and more conversation is needed with colleagues to understand what is required. A small bank of rubrics with consistent format and information was felt to be an appropriate approach. It was acknowledged that the different stages of a programme of study must also be considered, with more detailed rubrics called for in early years.

The Committee were in agreement that different requirements will be needed for different subjects in and across Colleges. Benchmarking the use of rubrics across the University may be helpful but the rubrics themselves cannot be prescriptive and must allow flexibility for Schools to adapt the framework for their own specifics, such as technical competencies. It was proposed that grade descriptors at an institutional level would be helpful, with local levels then providing more detail and focus relevant to the subject.

The Committee were informed that CAHSS has its own minimum standards framework and their schools have been actively working on their own rubrics. A key message within this work is that the quality of information contained within the rubric is crucial. It was reported that CMVM faces challenges with aligning qualitative assessment of work to a scale that is quantitative, and so the College has the approach of using bandings to assign quality of work rather than percentage grade scale. The Dean of CMVM highlighted this as an opportunity for the University to consider its approach to marking assessments and moving towards a model with focus on graduate attributes and competencies.

The Committee went on to discuss the overall usage of the 70+ grade band and it was proposed that the University should have an institutional strategy on making better use of the full mark

scale. There was concern that it may have a negative impact on prospective students who compare the University with other institutions which make fuller range of the marking scale. It was also noted during this discussion that the University does not use consistent terminology when talking about the marking scale and the 70+ band, yet it was felt that consistency would aid university-wide understanding and use of the full mark scale.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 3rd April 2025, 2-5pm.