

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 FEBRUARY 2025

Present: Steve Tucker **(Chair)**, Will Barras, Selma Carson, Nadia Degama, Isa Ehrenschwendtner, Lois Gall, Mark Grant, Flora Groening, Faye Hendry, Alex Menshykov, Piotr Niewiadomski, Gareth Norton, Miles Rothoerl, Rachel Smith and Thanga Thevar, with Darren Comber, Ann Simpson, Emma Tough, and Kyra Lamont **(Clerk)** in attendance.

Apologies: Isla Callander, Debbie Dyker, Jacqui Hutchison, Chukwuadinula Kachikwu, Lucy Leiper, and Fiona Stoddard.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

(copy filed as QAC/190225/001)

- 1.1 The Committee approved the minute of the previous meeting held on 11 December 2024.

MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION LOG

(i) ACTION LOG

(copy filed as QAC/190225/002)

- 2.1 Senate Vacancies (Minute point 5.1 refers): **Partially Complete:** The QAC noted that one vacancy remained on the Senate, and any expressions of interest should be made to the Clerk to QAC. Action point complete with regards to APRG.
- 2.2 Entry Requirements Approval Routes (minute 3.2 refers): **Complete:** Members were advised that a dynamic process has been devised to manage changes to entry requirements; small-scale changes will be dealt with via circulation to Chair and Vice-Principal (Global Engagement) (e.g. adding another qualification to the list of accepted qualifications), whereas, larger scale changes would be considered via Committee meetings. The Committee was content to approve the approach.
- 2.3 Malaysian Unified Examination Certificate (MUEC) (minute 3.3 refers): **Complete:** An overview was provided regarding the proposal to accept the Malaysian Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), which is offered by private Chinese High Schools, and which the University's competitors are accepting. The MUEC qualification route was thereafter approved by the Committee.
- 2.4 Dissemination of Good Practice in regard to ITRs (minute 4.2 refers): **In-progress:** Members were advised that discussions had taken place with Quality Enhancement Steering Group and MyAberdeen User Group regarding the dissemination of good practice. Chair to conduct further discussions with regards to effectively sharing good practice identified by QAC (through ITRs, APRs, Partnership reports etc) across the broader UoA community.
- 3.4
- 2.5 Implementation of PGR Progression Proposals (minute 6.4 refers): **Complete:** Members were advised that PG proposals would be dealt with via agenda item 6: Omnibus Resolution 25/26.

ARTICULATION PATHWAYS 2026/27

(copy filed as QAC/190225/016)

[Clerk's Note: Megan McFarlane joined the meeting for this item]

- 3.1 The Deputy Director of Student Recruitment provided a brief outline of the paper, noting the importance of colleges in terms of recruitment. The Committee discussed the paper and raised the following points:

- It was noted that there appears to be an articulation pathway missing in relation to the Business School.
- There is information missing from the proposal: the notional target of 75% has not been defined and the details of graded units were not specified.
- There appears to be an error regarding the number of credits and type of awards accepted in respect of BSc Engineering (Year 2) programme, currently listed as 140 credits, and BA Music (Year 2) programme, currently listed as 120 credits. The number of credits and level of qualification (HND vs HNC) must be clarified as 120 credits only equates to HNC level.

Action: MM

3.2 The Committee approved the proposal subject to the amendments above.

COMPUTER-BASED AND ONLINE ASSESSMENTS TFG

[Clerk's Note: Jason Bohan and Kirsty Kiezebrink joined the meeting for this item]

4.1 The Chair of Computer-Based and Online Assessments Task and Finish Group provided members with a brief outline of the purpose and progress to date of the Group. Members were advised that the Group had been established following discussions within the Exam Planning Group and students who were subject to adjustments. It was noted that students were not always clear in terms of assessment arrangements, and that Schools would appreciate guidance on how best to apply accessibility adjustments to Digital Assessments. Members were advised that invigilator guidance had become outmoded, and an Assessment Taxonomy would help to provide clarity and consistency across Schools.

(i) ASSESSMENT TAXONOMY

(copy filed as QAC/190225/003)

4.2 Members were advised that work is still underway to fine-tune the proposal which is the first of its kind – noting that input has been sought from students and AUSA in regard to additional support requirements. Members were informed that the proposal focuses on two key elements; the format of the assessment (seen/unseen, timed/untimed) and the activity (objective assessment/extended writing etc), and it is subject to a Delphi study which may assist with sector-wide adoption/agreement eventually.

4.3 As part of the discussion, the following key points were raised for further consideration/amendment as necessary:

- Part A: Would it be possible to simplify the categories further? Could 'lockdown' be considered a subcategory of closed.
- Part A: 'Non invigilated' should be hyphenated.
- Part B: it was noted that objective and performance-based assessments are discrete categories and that MCQs/SAs can't be easily separated as everything is practical and objective. Members were advised that assessments should be categorised by the predominant type of assessment.
- Part B: it was brought to the attention of members that it would be beneficial to include 'recorded audio' to differentiate between assessment types (i.e. pre-recorded asynchronous submissions).

Members were advised to forward any additional points to Kirsty Kiezebrink and that an updated proposal will return for approval in due course.

Action: KK

(ii) ONLINE ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

(copy filed as QAC/190225/004)

4.4 Members were informed that a set of guidelines has been drafted regarding invigilated/un-invigilated and timed/untimed online assessments. It was brought to the attention of the Committee that practices regarding the specification of upload time may be inconsistent. Members were advised that the standardised use of lockdown browsers may help to guard against academic misconduct. It was noted that whilst it was not felt appropriate to create a

strict policy, it may be appropriate to house said guidance within the Academic Quality Handbook.

- 4.5 As part of the discussion, the following points were noted for further consideration:
- Appendix A appears to refer to itself – please see 2.1 of Appendix A for details.
 - There were inconsistencies noted regarding “upload times”.
 - It may be beneficial to consider adding guidance surrounding the use of students’ own devices (lockdown browser etc).

Action: JB

- It was agreed that it might be helpful to include wording along the lines of ‘if there is a scenario that doesn’t fit these categories, please seek advice’ to cover all eventualities.

Action: SS/ET

Members were advised to forward any additional points to the Dean for Student Support & Experience and that an updated proposal will return for approval in due course.

TRANSFORMING THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS THROUGH ASSESSMENT (TESTA): PRESENTATION

[Clerk’s Note: Mary Pryor joined the meeting for this item]

- 5.1 The University’s Senior Academic Skills Adviser gave a presentation on the work undertaken as part of the Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment (TESTA). Members were advised that a student survey was issued to obtain feedback surrounding patterns of assessment, the provision of feedback and whether the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were clear. Academic staff and teaching teams were also consulted as part of this exercise. The Committee were informed that it was possible to establish the pattern of assessment and feedback across an entire degree programme (joint vs single honours). Members were advised that this internal exercise may be helpful for re-accreditation purposes as well as a way of identifying any areas of overlap and over-assessment. Following this activity, five or six recommendations were made (mindful of time and resources), and staff were invited to attend a two-hour meeting in order to discuss the key findings and obtain staff perspective. The Committee were informed that final reports are thereafter circulated to the TESTA Lead, Head of School and Director of Education for the relevant disciplines.

- 5.2 Members were advised that the associated infographic will be circulated by the Clerk to QAC.

Action: LD

OMNIBUS RESOLUTION 2026/27

(Copy filed as QAC/190225/005)

- 6.1 Members were advised that the main change is to the regulations relates to undergraduate degree programmes. Specifically, progression and consideration of these cases by the Student Progress Committee (SPC). Following a brief discussion, the Committee was content to approve the changes.

STUDENT CASEWORK DATA 2023/24

(i) APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

(Copy filed as QAC/190225/006)

- 7.1 Members were reminded that data is presented annually to the Committee (and SMT) for review. The Committee was advised that the number of appeals and complaints had remained largely in line with previous years. Members were informed that next year’s report will reflect the changes made to the appeals procedure (i.e. competency panels).

(ii) ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

(Copy filed as QAC/190225/007)

- 7.2 The Committee were advised that the overall number of cases had lessened with no major areas of concern – noting that misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was being monitored.

EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW

(i) UPDATE ON TERTIARY QUALITY ENHANCEMENT REVIEW (TQER)

- 8.1 The Committee heard an update on the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER), noting that the University's review is scheduled to take place in February 2026. As noted previously, additional resource has been requested to support the review. Members were advised that the Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP), aimed at collating all quality activity across the previous academic year, had been issued to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). It is hoped that SEAP feedback will be made available to the Committee following the SFC Engagement Meeting on 2nd April 2025.

(ii) UPDATE ON SCOTLAND'S TERTIARY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME (STEP)

- 8.2 The Committee heard an update on Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) which involves colleges and universities. The QAC was advised that a four-year theme had been identified as Supporting Diverse Learner Journeys. Members were advised that the Chair and Vice President for Education (AUSA) had recently attended a discovery day in Inverness. It was noted that more information would be provided in due course.

UNDERGRADUATE ANNUAL MONITORING

- 9.1. Members of the Committee discussed the responses to the Annual Programme Reviews (APRs), and highlighted areas of good practice and areas of enhancement for wider dissemination:

- (i) **Biological Sciences** (QAC/190225/008a)
Members were advised that the Course Feedback Forms (CFF) returns were low. However, there were no major areas of concern identified, and students appreciated the use of field-based and practical activities (e.g. advanced lab skills course) as well as the involvement of guest speakers. The Committee was informed that support was being provided for direct entry students and in response to the more challenging statistics courses.
- (ii) **Business** (QAC/190225/008b)
Members were advised that Course Feedback Forms (CFF) returns were also low. However, student feedback was predominantly positive – noting that the University was ranked first for 'Business Studies' in the NSS. The Committee was informed that a number of awards (e.g. Academic Excellence Awards) had been introduced in Qatar. TNE partnerships continue to function well in the main – albeit a slight drop in recruitment with regards to SCNU. Members were advised that the School will address the areas where there are engagement concerns. In terms of good practice, the Development Economics course is an excellent example of Decolonising the Curriculum.
- (iii) **Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History** (QAC/190225/008c)
The Committee was advised that External Examiners were very satisfied, and the University was ranked 1st overall in Scotland for Divinity and 1st for 'Student Satisfaction' with regards to History. The Committee was notified that the School had recently undergone TESTA review with a view to identifying any potential areas of over-assessment. The School has seen a rise in the number of cases of academic misconduct and the misuse of GenAI – guidance welcome.
- (iv) **Education** (QAC/190225/008d)
The Committee was advised that the University is ranked 8th in the UK and 1st in Scotland for MA Education following the latest NSS. Additionally, TQFE programme has been ranked first of its kind with regards to APUC tendering exercise. The Committee was advised that there is a good sense of community with respect to students and staff, and that structural changes have been positively received and implemented.
- (v) **Engineering** (QAC/190225/008e)

The Committee was informed that recruitment is healthy overall, and that the first cohorts from Harbin have now completed their fourth-year studies. Members were advised that there were some positive examples of decolonisation – including a new third year course that address key EDI concerns. It was noted that there were a number of level three courses that had significantly lower than expected pass rates which may be linked to lower levels of student engagement. Members were informed that a specific NSS action plan will address the low NSS scores and visibility of “You said, We did” actions.

(vi) Geosciences *(QAC/190225/008f)*

The Committee was informed that although CFF returns were low, the School received excellent NSS scores in a number of areas as well as positive feedback from External Examiners. Most notably, Archaeology was ranked 1st in Scotland and 2nd in the UK for ‘Student Satisfaction’, and Geology was ranked 1st in the UK. Members were advised, however, that Geology field courses would be restructured due to low student numbers. The School reports being concerned with the increased number of extensions associated with poor mental health.

(vii) Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture *(QAC/190225/008g)*

Members were advised that despite it being a challenging year, Externals were very impressed, and student satisfaction was notably high. Namely, Spanish & Latin American studies achieved 1st place in Scotland for 23/24 NSS whilst Linguistics achieved 1st place in the UK. Additionally, Film and Visual Culture obtained 1st in Scotland in the Complete University Guide. It was noted that attendance at lectures (particularly level 2 & 3) was poor, however, this was a sector-wide concern.

(viii) Law *(QAC/190225/008h)*

The Committee were informed that academic standards had been maintained and, although CFF returns were low, student feedback was positive in general. Members were advised that the School recently conducted an assessment review (level 1-3) and online examinations have been standardised following recommendations from the School’s regulatory body (Law Society of Scotland).

(ix) Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition *(QAC/190225/008i)*

Members were advised that MBChB was rated 1st in UK by the Guardian. It was noted that the discovery of RAAC disrupted teaching, however, pass rates for levels 2-5 were relatively stable. L1 pass rates were poorer than expected but may be linked to factors associated with widening access. The Committee were advised that the Medical Licensing Assessment (MLA) was implemented with favourable results, and the Clinical and Procedural Skills Assessment (CPSA) will be introduced AY24-25. Members were advised that the relationship with NESCOL with respect to the Gateway to Medicine (GtM) programme works well. In terms of the Certificate in Pre-medical Studies, it was noted that pass rate could be better, however, the cohort was small and there were some issues identified with the sixth century course (SX1023) which is now under review.

(x) Natural and Computing Sciences *(QAC/190225/008j)*

The Committee learned that the NSS results were mixed, however, the action plan will address these concerns – noting that External Examiners support the return to in-person examinations and poor attendance is a sector-wide concern. Members were advised that TNE partnerships continue to function well and that a Computing student was shortlisted for Scotland’s Young Software Engineer of the Year Award 2024. Members were informed of the involvement in Project Juno (flagship gender equality award in Physics) and the nominations of two Physics lectures for teaching awards. In terms of good practice, the use of lockdown browsers to protect against misconduct was noted.

(xi) Psychology *(QAC/190225/008k)*

The Committee was notified of the high levels of student satisfaction and excellent approach to EDI – noting the innovative approach towards neurodiversity inclusion. Members were advised that the School had raised some concerns regarding the misuse of AI and academic misconduct. However, it was noted that following QAC review of PGT materials, the School now has AI guidance and a declaration in place for students.

(xii) Social Science *(QAC/190225/008l)*

The Committee was advised that Anthropology was ranked 1st in Scotland for ‘Overall Satisfaction’ in NSS 2024. Members were advised that External Examiners were pleased

with academic standards – noting several innovative assessment types (e.g. podcasts). Members were advised that a Decolonising the Curriculum working group meets regularly and changes were made to assessments following recent TESTA engagement. The reliance on non-subject specialists due to staffing difficulties in Sociology was noted.

SUMMER GRADUATIONS 2025

(copy filed as QAC/190225/014)

- 10.1 The Vice President for Education (AUSA) highlighted that other institutions provide more notice with regards to graduation dates and explained that greater notice would assist the international student community with arranging cost-effective travel arrangements. It was agreed that this could be looked into further and the suggestion would return to the Committee for further consideration. The Committee was otherwise content to approve the Summer Graduations 2025 schedule.

Action: ET/Clerk

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 11.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on **Wednesday 5 March 2025 at 2:05pm** at Committee Room 2, University Office and via Microsoft Teams.