UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Minute of the Meeting held on 28 November 2016

Present: Professor K Shennan (Convener), Dr D Auchie, Dr E Bain, Dr M Beaton, Dr P Bishop, Dr D Comber, Professor J Geddes, Professor D Lurie, Dr W Harrison, Dr A Oelsner, Dr M Pinard with Ms E Hay (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Mr C Anucha, Mr L Fuller, Dr M Hole, Dr S Lawrie and Ms K Christie

MINUTES OF MEETINGS
(copy filed as QAC/281116/001, QAC/281116/002 and QAC/281116/003)

1.1 Members of the Committee acknowledged the minutes of the meetings held on (i) 14 September 2016, (ii) 27 September 2016 and (iii) 10 October 2016. Members of the Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 21 April 2016 subject to one or two minor typographical revisions.

Action: Clerk

Clerk's Note: The minutes the meetings have now been updated as required.

MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Committee noted that the Convener was to meet with the former Head of the Life Sciences and Medicine Graduate School with regards to receiving a follow-up report to their Internal Teaching Review (ITR). Members of the Committee noted that the Life Sciences and Medicine Graduate School had since been replaced by the University Graduate School but agreed the importance of receiving this report, to close the ITR process.

Action: Convener

SENAS AND DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

3.1 The Clerk provided the Committee with a presentation on the SharePoint system for the consideration and approval/rejection of course or programme proposals ahead of the requirement for members to consider proposals in December 2016 and January 2017.

Action: Committee to undertake the consideration of SENAS forms following the deadline for submission, on the 30 November 2016.

Clerk's Note: The system has now closed. Members are encouraged to consider the forms for the School(s) for which they have responsibility as soon as is possible.

ANNUAL PROGRAMME REVIEW
(copy filed as QAC/281116/004)

4.1 The Committee discussed the undergraduate Summary Course and Programme Review Reports for academic year 2015/16 as provided by Heads of Discipline/School. Members of the Committee were reminded that a summary of the Annual Programme Review(s) received from the School(s) for which they have responsibility should be returned to the Clerk as soon as possible. Members were reminded that summaries are sent to the appropriate Head of School.

Action: Committee

Clerk's Note: APR summaries have now been received for the Schools of (i) Engineering, (ii) Geosciences, (iii) Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, (iv) Natural & Computing Sciences, (v) Education and (iv) Divinity, History & Philosophy
4.2 Members of the Committee were asked to raise any general issues of concern as noted by way of the consideration of Annual Programme Review (APR) forms. A discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Members of the Committee noted that some Disciplines/Schools are returning APRs by half session and not by academic year. Members of the Committee noted the importance of looking at a discipline or programme year as a whole across an academic year and members agreed to feed this back to their Schools.
- The Committee noted concern that some forms had been submitted without Head of School or Discipline signature. The QAC noted the importance of this.
- The QAC acknowledged their role in feeding information from the APRs to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL). The Committee noted the role of the Convener in collating information and reporting this at the next meeting of the UCTL.
- Members of the Committee again acknowledged the issues associated with return rates for Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEFs). The Committee were reminded that SCEFs should form only one of many feedback mechanisms referred to when compiling an APR.
- The Committee noted that the summary as received from the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition did not include review of Medical Sciences.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: Medical Sciences have been contacted with regards to the submission of their APR(s).

EXTERNAL EXAMINING

(copy filed as QAC/281116/005)

5.1 The Committee discussed the responses to undergraduate External Examiners reports as provided by Heads of School. Members of the Committee were reminded that a response to each External Examiner for the School(s) for which they have responsibility should be returned to the Clerk as soon as possible. Members were reminded that responses are sent to the appropriate External Examiner.

Action: Committee

Clerk’s Note: External Examiner feedback has now been received for the Schools of (i) Engineering, (ii) Geosciences, (iii) Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, (iv) Natural and Computing Sciences, (v) Business and (vi) Divinity, History & Philosophy.

5.2 Members of the Committee noted concern regarding confusion evident amongst some External Examiners regarding the ability of Examiners to exercise discretion when a student is on the borderline between two marks. Members of the Committee noted concern as to the wording in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH) regarding this issue. The Committee agreed that while policy was likely to remain unchanged, further clarity should be sought in this regard and the AQH updated accordingly.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: The AQH is currently being updated in this regard to ensure clarity for all Examiners.

5.3 The Committee acknowledged that it may be beneficial for a member of Registry staff or a member of the QAC to attend each Examination Meeting, to provide regulatory advice when required. The Committee noted that legislation may prevent the attendance of non-examiners at such a meeting but that investigations into the possibility should be pursued.

Action: Convener
The Committee noted the recurring issues of (i) the new Grade Point Average (GPA) method of degree classification and (ii) Enhanced Study throughout reports. The Committee agreed that these issues should be addressed by way of a generic response to all External Examiners. The Committee further noted the issue of a lack of staff on courses affecting the quality of provision. The Committee agreed that such issues raised should be acknowledged and passed to the UCTL.

PSB REPORTS

The Committee were content to note the following Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSB) Reports, confirming re-accreditation for the following degree programmes:

(i) Bachelor of Arts in Childhood Practice  
   (copy filed as QAC/281116/006)
(ii) Bachelor of Laws with English Law  
    (copy filed as QAC/281116/007)
(iii) Degrees in Accountancy  
     (copy filed as QAC/281116/008)
(iv) Degrees in Real Estate  
     (copy filed as QAC/281116/009)

With regards to (i) the Bachelor of Arts in Childhood Practice, the Committee acknowledged a recommendation from the reviewing panel regarding the circulation of information and notification of meetings more widely to employers and mentors to further enhance engagement within course delivery and evaluation. The QAC recommended that the programme team make contact with the University’s Careers Service with regards to addressing this recommendation and agreed to contact the School to this effect.

**Action: Clerk**

_Clerk’s Note: An email has been prepared and sent to Catriona Macdonald, BACP Programme Director._

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

(i) TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE) UPDATE

Members of the Committee were updated on the recent approvals of partnerships with the Interactive Design Institute (IDI) and Transnational Education (TNE) by the University Senate. The Committee noted that the specific delivery of an online MBA by IDI had been agreed, however, the proposal that the University enter into an agreement with TNE in Rwanda would return to the next meeting of the Senate for further scrutiny.

(ii) STUDIES IN MINDFULNESS

Members of the Committee noted the communication from the School of Education to the concerns as raised by the QAC in response to the Studies in Mindfulness annual report. The Committee again expressed concern over issues including, but not limited to, staffing, student attrition rates the academic rigour and religious content of the programme.

The Committee were, for the first time, provided with a more detailed overview of the Programme and its interaction with the School of Education. The Committee noted the involvement of University staff in the teaching provided. The Committee also noted the recent appointment of a new programme director, providing a new strategic direction for the programme.

Taking into account the new report as received and its robust nature, the QAC agreed with the proposal that the member of the QAC from the School of Education liaise with the
new Programme Director to explain the work and responsibilities of the QAC in reviewing partnerships such as this and the importance of clear communication and honest, reflective reports in the future. The Committee noted the importance of the Annual Report to be submitted in 2017.

Action: Dr Beaton

7.5 Members of the Committee discussed the role of the QAC in considering for approval the growing number of proposed partnerships for the University. The Convener noted that this work is currently undertaken by way of Conveners action and asked other members of the Committee to undertake roles in this regard. The following distribution of responsibility was agreed:

- Dr Harrison would undertake the scrutiny of Study Abroad or Student Exchange Partnerships;
- Dr Bishop would undertake the scrutiny of College Articulations.

The Committee were reminded of the importance of the Committee in acting on validation panels and that Committee members would be called to act on these as and when required.

MEDICAL STUDENTS INTERCALATING ONTO MASTERS PROGRAMMES
(copy filed as QAC/281116/010)

8.1 The Committee acknowledge the proposal from the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition seeking approval to allow MBChB students, if qualified, to apply to intercalate onto Masters Programmes. The Committee noted that this practice is exercised at other Universities. The Committee had no concerns and agreed to approve the proposal.

APPROVAL OF EXAMINERS’ REPORTS FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS

9.1 Members of the Committee considered the use of SharePoint for the approval of Examiners’ Reports for Research Students, as described below:

Examiners’ reports for research students, submitted following a viva examination or resubmission of thesis, require approval from a QAC member. These are currently dealt with in the Graduate Schools who will use a particular QAC member to approve all reports that get submitted. The proposal is to expand the approval of reports to all QAC members, with QAC members assigned an area in the same way that they are for, for example, SENAS approval. Currently QAC members will sign off forms within the Graduate School. It is proposed to use a SharePoint system where Examiners will upload the forms for approval. After discussion with IT, it is hoped that QAC members will only receive notification that a report is awaiting their approval, when it is for their particular area.

9.2 Some members expressed concern that they were not currently called upon to approve PGR Examiners’ Reports. Members of the Committee agreed the importance of streamlining all processes for which they hold responsibility and noted that members should approve reports for the School(s) for which they hold responsibility.

9.3 The Committee agreed to ask Robert Findlay, Assistant Registrar and Head of the Postgraduate and Fees Team to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss processes in regards to Postgraduate Students.
REGULATORY CHANGES

10.1 The Committee noted that the proposed undergraduate and postgraduate regulatory changes for 2017/18 would follow by way of circulation.

ITEMS UNDERTAKEN BY CIRCULATION

11.1 The Committee noted the approval of the following items by Convener’s action since the September 2016 meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee.

- Composition of the Students’ Progress Committee (Education) (copy filed as QAC/281116/013)
- MBChB Level 5: Clinical Assessment Changes (copy filed as QAC/281116/014)

COURSE AND PROGRAMME PROPOSALS

11.2 The Committee noted that a list of all Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses and programmes approved since the September 2016 meeting of the Committee can be found on SharePoint.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday 22 February 2017 at 2pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.