UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

DRAFT Minute of the Meeting held on 14 September 2016

Present: Professor K Shennan (Convener), Dr E Bain, Dr P Bishop, Mr L Fuller, Professor J Geddes, Dr W Harrison, Dr M Hole, Dr S Lawrie, Dr A Oelsner, Dr M Pinard with Ms E Hay (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Dr D Auchie, Dr M Beaton, Professor D Lurie and Mr C Anucha, Ms K Christie and Dr D Comber

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 APRIL 2016
(copy filed as QAC/140916/001)

1.1 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 minute of the meeting has now been appropriately revised and saved.

1.2 Members of the Committee noted minute point 5.2 regarding course capping. The Committee expressed concern regarding the actions of some schools in capping courses and agreed to monitor these closely. Members of the Committee acknowledged the need to cap some courses, such as sixth century courses, and agreed that the solution to this would be the delivery of more sixth century courses and therefore, a greater choice of provision and consequent availability of provision to the student population.

1.3 The Convener noted that a response to the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) had still not been received from the College of Life Sciences and Medicine (CLSM) Graduate School. Members acknowledged that although the CLSM Graduate School was no longer an entity in its own right, a response would still be required in order to appropriately close the review exercise.

Action: Convener

MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Convener thanked all members of the Committee for their attendance at the first meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for academic year 2016/17. The Convener acknowledged the new members of the Committee and confirmed that all schools would now be represented on the Committee. Members of the Committee acknowledged that the representation of all schools should provide better links to and from the QAC to the wider University community.

2.2 The Committee were reminded that the QAC is a working Committee and that tasks including the consideration of External Examiner reports, Annual Programme Review reports and SENAS forms would be required of members throughout the academic year. The Committee noted the meeting scheduled for Monday 19 September 2016 to further discuss these responsibilities.
1.4 Members of the Committee approved the remit and composition of the QAC for 2016/17 subject to one or two minor typographical revisions.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: The remit and composition document has now been appropriately revised and saved.

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW (ITR)

4.1 The Committee noted the response from the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy (DHP) to their ITR report. The Convener informed new members of the Committee of the role of the QAC in convening ITR visits to Schools, providing reports on provision and giving appropriate consideration to both (i) initial school responses to ITR reports and (ii) one year follow up reports from schools on how the recommendations of the report have been implemented.

4.2 Members of the Committee confirmed that the response received from DHP was as expected and those comments made in response to the recommendations of the panel were good. The Committee noted 9.4 was incomplete and asked that the School be contacted for clarification.

4.3 The Committee noted that the school was experiencing difficulty in delivering some courses as consequence of Voluntary Severance. Members of the Committee were pleased, however, to acknowledge the approval given to the school to recruit new staff in areas where the ITR panel felt resource was sorely needed.

4.4 Members of the Committee were informed that the representatives of the student body with whom the panel had met were affected directly by the loss of staff through voluntary severance. The Committee noted the recommendation as made to the school that steps to communicate with and protect students affected by such change was of the utmost importance.

4.5 The Committee noted report point 6.17 regarding the use of TurnitinUK for anonymous marking and the response of the School to confirm that as part of an online marking pilot, SafeAssign would be trialled. Members of the Committee noted that the software, provided by Blackboard, was an alternative to TurnitinUK. The Committee discussed online marking and the positive and negative experiences of members in using it as a means of providing feedback.

4.6 The Committee noted the school response to recommendation 6.4 and the request that the QAC raise the issue of difficulties experienced by students in completing MyCurriculum to senior management. The Committee discussed their experiences of MyCurriculum and expressed concern that staff were unaware of how the system worked and that registration for 2016/17 had appeared chaotic. Members of Committee noted concern that they had not been more involved at the development stage of the system.

4.7 Members of the Committee noted the provisions for students regarding the clashing of compulsory courses. The Committee expressed concern that this be allowed to happen when a student had been admitted to a named degree. Furthermore, the Committee did not agree that course coordinators should be permitted to provide students with waivers to permit clashes.
ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW (ACR) SAMPLING
(copyright filed as QAC/140916/004)

5.1 The Committee noted the Annual Course Review (ACR) forms as sampled, noting that further instruction on how feedback on these would be prepared would be provided. The Convener reminded the Committee that responsibility for the ACR process lies with schools, however, the QAC undertakes to sample forms to assure the quality of the process. The Committee noted that the courses for which forms are requested are selected at random. Members of the Committee agreed that should concern existing regarding a course, specific forms could also be requested. Where such instances occur, this should be communicated to the clerk.

5.2 Members of the Committee noted concern regarding the completion rates of Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEFs) and raised concerns regarding the lower return rates received since the system was moved from being paper based to being electronic. Members of the Committee were reminded that electronic SCEFs can be completed on a students’ mobile device. The Committee discussed the importance of other means of obtaining feedback to ensure the student population have the opportunity to feedback on their courses.

5.3 Members of the Committee discussed means of encouraging students to complete SCEFs and agreed that demonstrating how feedback is used to influence teaching is the best means of doing so. The Committee acknowledged the role class representatives could play in obtaining feedback for a course and noted that the work of other Universities, such as Heriot Watt University, may be helpful in improving practice.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: ACR feedback to be provided by the appropriate members of the Committee.

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

6.1 The Committee noted the report as provided by the Mindfulness Association on the progress of the Master of Science in Mindfulness offered in partnership with the School of Education.

6.2 Members of the Committee raised concerns regarding the academic nature of Mindfulness as a discipline, however, were reminded that the role of the QAC was not to examine the discipline itself but the quality of the programme being delivered. The Committee were informed that a validation event had been held at which time the programme was agreed as being competent and appropriate for delivery. Members of the Committee raised strong concerns regarding the detail of the report provided and, in particular, the academic rigour of the programme and the qualifications of those teaching on it. The Committee noted concern that the programme appeared to be delivered entirely by a third party and this was not what the initial validation panel had been led to believe would happen.

6.3 The Committee agreed to prepare detailed feedback on the report to allow for appropriate correspondence to be drafted for both the Mindfulness Association and the School of Education.

Action: Committee and Clerk

Clerk’s Note: Committee feedback has been passed to Kath Shennan for review.
MARKING PROCEDURES

(i) Thesis Marking Procedures

7.1 The Committee noted the agenda item raised regarding the University regulation which prevents postgraduate taught students being awarded an overall degree qualification higher than that which they received in their dissertation. Members of the Committee acknowledged that the regulation states this as 'normally' the appropriate course of action and that exceptions can and should be considered in exceptional circumstances. The Committee agreed to refer this matter to a forthcoming meeting of the Postgraduate Committee.

Action: Clerk
Clerk’s Note: Agenda point passed to the Clerk of the Postgraduate Committee

(ii) Policy and Procedures on Degree Examinations

7.2 The Committee noted concerns as raised regarding the timetabling of resit examinations which may not be against the AQH ruling that students should not be expected to undertake more than two exams in one day, but still required up to 5 in 3 days. Members of the Committee acknowledge the pressure this placed on students but noted that schools have the opportunity to review the timetable (and request amendments to it) in advance of its publication. The Committee noted the importance of communication between schools and the timetabling team in scheduling all exams.

CURRICULUM CHOICE

8.1 Members of the Committee, in response to concerns raised regarding personal tutors and curriculum advice, were informed that schools were now permitted to determine whether or not their personal tutors would be permitted to provide advice in this regard. Members of the Committee noted concern that this approach may allow for inaccuracies in the information given by some tutors who are not familiar with University Regulations. The Committee were assured that the institutional position would be confirmed and provided to them.

Action: Clerk
Clerk’s Note: Gillian Mackintosh and Peter McGeorge have been contacted for comment.

STUDENTS’ PROGRESS COMMITTEE
(copied filed as QAC/140916/006)

9.1 The Committee approved the remit and composition of the Undergraduate Students Progress Committee.

STUDENTS’ PROGRESS COMMITTEE (MEDICINE & DENTISTRY)
(copied filed as QAC/140916/007)

9.2 The Committee approved the remit and composition of the Students’ Progress Committee for Medicine and Dentistry.

FITNESS TO PRACTISE COMMITTEE (MEDICINE & DENTISTRY)
(copied filed as QAC/140916/008)
9.3 The Committee approved the remit and composition of the Fitness to Practise Committee for Medicine and Dentistry.

FITNESS TO PRACTISE COMMITTEE (EDUCATION)
(copy filed as QAC/140916/009)

9.4 The Committee approved the remit and composition of the Fitness to Practise Committee for the School of Education.

FOR INFORMATION

10.1 Distribution of Responsibility

The Committee noted the distribution of responsibility for the QAC consideration of items such as External Examiners Reports and SENAS submissions for the 2016/17 Academic Year is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Member</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sciences</td>
<td>Dr Paul Bishop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Dr Steven Lawrie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divinity, History &amp; Philosophy</td>
<td>Dr Mhairi Beaton</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Support from Steven Lawrie as required)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Mr Derek Auchie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Professor David Lurie</td>
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<td>Geosciences</td>
<td>Professor David Lurie</td>
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<td>Language, Literature &amp; Visual Culture</td>
<td>Dr Andrea Oelsner</td>
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<td>Professor Jane Geddes</td>
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<td>Law</td>
<td>Dr Malcolm Hole</td>
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<td>Medicine, Medical Sciences &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>Dr Michelle Pinard</td>
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<td>Natural &amp; Computing Sciences</td>
<td>Dr Euan Bain</td>
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<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Dr Euan Bain</td>
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<td>Social Science</td>
<td>Dr Bill Harrison</td>
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*Responsibilities: External Examiners Reports (UG, PGT), Course and Programme Review (SENAS), Annual Course Review, Annual Programme Review

ITEMS UNDERTAKEN BY CIRCULATION

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

Omnibus Resolution
(copy filed as QAC/140916/010)

COURSE AND PROGRAMME PROPOSALS

10.3 A list of all Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses and programmes approved since the April 2016 meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee can be found on SharePoint here.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

11.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 28 November at 10am in Committee Room 2, University Office.