UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 March 2011

Present: Professor W F Long (Convener), Dr R Bernard, Professor J Geddes, Dr D Hay, Dr D C Hendry, Ms M McHaney, Dr L Philip (for part of the meeting), Dr K Shennan, Mrs S Vigers (Clerk)

Apologies: Dr D Comber, Dr I Edwards, Professor P McGeorge, Mr R Parker

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 December 2010
   (Copy filed as QAC/090311/017)

   1.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2010 were approved as an accurate record, subject to some typing errors being amended.

2. Matters Arising

   2.1 The Committee noted that the online SCEF is being piloted initially with the six week courses. (Item 2.6 refers)

   2.2 The Convener noted his discontent with the term ‘compensatory credits’ in the report of the CAS Working Group. The Convener suggested that the term ‘unnamed specified credits’ might be better and perhaps reference to General Regulation 21(c) for undergraduate degree programmes and to Schedule B, Regulation 12(c), with regard to postgraduate programmes. Representatives from the Working Group agreed that there should be no problem in principle with such an amendment. (Item 4 refers)

   Action: Clerk to pass on this amendment to the CAS Working Group

   2.3 Dr Hay asked about the Postgraduate and Undergraduate strands of the Quality Assurance Committee. Registry has arranged meetings later this month for these two strands. Dr Hay would like to see these clerked. Dr Hay also noted that the PGO from CLSM is unable to attend the meeting and suggested that a substitute be brought in so all Colleges are represented. The Committee agreed with this suggestion.

   Action: Clerk to organise these meetings and to find clerks

   Action: Clerk to discuss a replacement PGO with Dr Hay

3. Delivery of the Safety and Reliability Engineering MSc in Egypt

3.1 The Committee were informed that this item had been removed from the agenda and that a paper will be prepared for the next meeting.

4. Provision for Resits in the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (DPLP)
   (Tabled paper filed as QAC/090311/028)

4.1 The Committee noted that according to the University regulations resits are only allowed at postgraduate level on conversion courses and only up to a maximum of 60 credits. Currently one resit opportunity is allowed in all modules of the DPLP. The Law School has asked the
Law Society Scotland for reaccreditation based on the existing circumstances. The Committee were of the view that if this is a requirement of reaccreditation then it should be allowed. However, they requested that the Law School explore with the Law Society of Scotland whether such a position is necessary. The Committee also wished the Law School to report annually to the Committee on the number of students taking resits on the Diploma.

Action: Clerk to contact the Law School

5 Internal Teaching Review
(Paper filed as QAC/090311/019)

5.1 The Convener introduced the one-year follow-up report on the ITR received from the School of Social Science. The Committee identified four outstanding issues which did not seem to be covered in this report. The Committee agreed that the School should be asked for a response on these issues, and additionally be requested for an update on progress on partnership with the Careers Service.

Action: Clerk to liaise with the School

5.2 The Committee noted the move from tutorial teaching to student-led groups and discussed the implications of this. It was agreed that members might raise the issue at the UCTL as an example of a modification of the student learning experience resulting from financial pressure on a School.

Action: Convener and Ms McHaney to raise issue at the UCTL

(Paper filed as QAC/090311/020)

6.1 The Convener explained that the University has an accreditation agreement with UHI enabling them to validate research degrees in certain areas. There are a suite of Energy-related research degrees. The Panel has recommended the validation of these degrees with two attendant recommendations. The Committee requested that UHI is asked about the progress of these two recommendations.

Action: Clerk to contact UHI to ask about the progress of the recommendations

7 College Postgraduate Officers
(Paper filed as QAC/090311/021)

7.1 The Convener noted that this was not an official University paper and advised against circulation. The Committee were not in favour of the proposals but welcomed the idea that the roles of College Postgraduate Officer be reviewed. The Committee asked the Postgraduate Strand to look further at this issue.

Action: Clerk to put on the agenda of a Postgraduate Strand meeting

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

8 PhD Examiners Joint Report Form
(Paper filed as QAC/090311/022)

8.1 The Committee noted the amended form and suggested that the words ‘to the satisfaction of one of the examiners’ might be removed from 2(b)(ii). It was felt that the library could advise on the satisfactory binding of a thesis.
8.2 It was also noted that the third sentence below the Yes and No tick boxes in point 2 seemed repetitive and might be deleted, with the bracketed word ‘(above).’ being moved to the end of the previous sentence.

8.3 The Committee also noted a reference to the ‘Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate)’ in the note section following point 2 which needed to be amended.

8.4 The Committee approved the form subject to these changes and referred it to the Postgraduate Strand to make the corrections.

Action: Clerk to put on the agenda of a Postgraduate Strand meeting

9. Amendments to Appendix 8.8 of the Academic Quality Handbook  
(Paper filed as QAC/090311/023)

9.1 The Committee noted the Amendments to Appendix 8.8 of the AQH. It was noted that the second inserted section on page 2 makes no reference to the MPhil. The Committee discussed the second insertion in the section entitled ‘The Oral Examination’ on page 4 and wondered if some clarification was needed as the context could be broader than the ‘natural sciences’. The Committee noted a reference to ‘ASC(Pg)’ on page 7 which needs to be amended. The Committee also noted on page 7 that the last paragraph in the section entitled ‘Resubmission of a Thesis’ appears to contradict the final sentences of the previous paragraph. The Committee decided to refer these points to Mr Findlay to look again at the wording, following which the Postgraduate Strand would discuss and pass to the Convenor.

Action: Mr Findlay to look at the wording and then pass to the Clerk

9.2 It was suggested that when a candidate receives a letter congratulating them on the successful completion of their thesis the candidate should be addressed as ‘Dr’. However there was some discussion as to whether the candidate only receives their title on graduation.

Action: Dr Bernard to enquire

10. Postgraduate Regulatory Change  
(Paper filed as QAC/090311/024)

10.1 The Committee noted that there had been long discussion at the Postgraduate Committee meeting on 7 March 2011 about the terminology used in the Regulation. It had been agreed that students should have more than one person attached to them and that they should have one particular person who is their normal identified point of contact. The Convenor suggested that the wording used by the ‘QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education - Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes - September 2004’ should be adopted: ‘Each research student will have a minimum of one main supervisor. He or she will normally be part of a supervisory team. There must always be one clearly identified point of contact for the student.’ He further suggested that the word ‘normally’ should be removed.

10.2 The Committee agreed with the use of this wording in the regulation.

Action: Clerk to contact Dr Connolly to advise her of this agreement.

10.3 The Committee suggested further guidance was needed on what constitutes a ‘team’, bearing in mind that each team is unique. It was suggested that the University Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Students should offer some supporting description and clarification. It was agreed to refer this to Mr Findlay to draft some text to be discussed by the Postgraduate Strand.
Action: Mr Findlay to draft some text for the Code of Practice and then pass to the Clerk

11. UHI Restructuring

(Paper filed as QAC/090311/026)

11.1 The Committee noted and approved the proposal to amend the terminology in Appendix 3 of the UHI accreditation agreement following their committee restructuring.

Action: Clerk to inform UHI and amend agreement

12. Proposal to Allow for the Appointment of Internal Examiners below Grade 7 / Lecturer Status

(Tabled paper filed as QAC/090311/027)

12.1 The Committee discussed the proposal, and had concerns that the quality of Research Fellows currently on Grade 6 might be very diverse. Some might have vast experience in teaching and marking and be very capable of undertaking this role, but others might have little or no experience. The Committee noted that being a good researcher did not necessarily qualify someone to be a good teacher. The Committee were not sure if a Research Fellow contract would allow them to do this work and decided to request Mr Findlay to contact HR on this point.

Action: Mr Findlay to contact HR
Action: Clerk to inform College

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

13. QAA Academic Infrastructure Consultation

(Paper filed as QAC/090311/025)

13.1 The Committee noted the response from the University to the Academic Infrastructure Consultation.

14. Postgraduate and Undergraduate Strands of the QAC

14.1 The Committee noted that efforts are being made to strengthen the roles of the Postgraduate and Undergraduate Strands of the QAC. These strands are both meeting later in the month to primarily discuss External Examiners Reports and SCEF responses.

Action: Clerk – see 2.3 above

15. Course Proposals

15.1 The Committee noted the electronic links to all Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses and programmes approved by Convener’s Action since the December meeting.

16. Date of Next Meeting

16.1 The next meeting of the Committee will take place at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 11 May 2011 in the Videoconference Suite, University Office.