UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 May 2011

Present: Professor W F Long (Convener), Dr R Bernard, Dr D Hay, Dr D C Hendry, Ms M McHaney, Dr L Philip, Mr R Parker, Dr K Shennan, Mrs S Vigers (Clerk), Ms Emma Hay (Registry)

Apologies: Dr D Comber, Dr I Edwards, Professor P McGeorge, Professor J Geddes

1. DLitt Candidate – Proposed Panel Membership

1.1 The Committee approved the proposed composition of the DLitt Candidate panel, subject to all those members still being available. The Committee noted there was no indication of when the panel would meet.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

2. Delivery of the MSc in Safety & Reliability Engineering in Egypt

2.1 The Convener informed the Committee that Professor McDonald was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting to deliver an oral report on the Delivery of the MSc in Egypt. In Professor Mc Donald’s absence, a single page memo had been circulated to the Committee for consideration. The Committee noted that the memo addressed the modularisation of the ‘in-house’ Integrated Petroleum Geoscience MSc and provided responses to concerns raised when the issue was put before the QAC in September. The Committee had noted in September 2010 issues of uneven credit-points and unclear exit routes and acknowledged that the revised memo had now taken steps to address these.

2.2 The Committee noted that the programme is to be introduced for the 2011/12 Academic Year and to date no SENAS forms had been submitted. As such, the Committee agreed, as no further meetings of the QAC will occur before September, that QAC members would consider the SENAS forms on submission by circulation.

Action: Clerk to liaise with Robert Findlay

2.3 The Committee noted that while issues of exit routes had been addressed, there was still no note of an examination at the end of the first half session to allow students to exit with a PGCert.

2.4 The Convener informed the Committee that a memo received (but not circulated to the group) outlined the corresponding degree in Egypt. A copy of the existing agreement was also provided. The Convener explained that the memo described plans which were similar to the in-house structure. However, the detailed relationship between Aberdeen and Egypt was still not completely clear.

2.5 The Committee acknowledged receipt of both memos and noted that they would be happy to consider further information as it became available.
Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 March 2011

(Copy filed as QAC/110511/029)

3.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2011 were approved as an accurate record.

4. Agreement with Bostonweb College, Malaysia

(Paper filed as QAC/110511/030)

4.1 The Convener introduced the proposed agreement with Bostonweb College for a BSc Computing Science Degree Programme. While welcoming the agreement, the Committee noted with concern that there were parts missing from the agreement which would need to be addressed. The Committee was assured that the agreement would be scrutinised in detail at an Institutional level by both Registry and Research and Innovation. Once this had been completed, the agreement would be returned to the Convener for consideration. The Committee concluded that while they were enthusiastic about the agreement, it would need considerable refinement.

5. Response to ITR Report from the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy

(Paper filed as QAC/090311/028)

5.1 The Convener introduced the response to the final ITR received from the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy and invited Dr Hay, who had convened the ITR, to summarise the panel’s findings to the Committee. Dr Hay noted that the panel’s impression had been that teaching and learning were of a high quality and standard with lots of innovative practice. The panel did, however, note that the good practice evident often relied on the School’s committed and able members of staff and not the structure of the School. As such, the panel had felt that it would be reassuring if more structure could be developed, for example, if good practice were disseminated between departments and across the School. Dr Hay noted that he was largely satisfied by the School’s response to the panel’s recommendations.

5.2 The Committee noted that the School would be required to submit a follow-up report in one year, at which time the Committee could review whether or not the actions stated in the response had been taken forward.

5.3 The Committee noted the attention given to student involvement in School Teaching and Learning Committees, and that this might not always be possible during vacations.

5.4 The Committee identified the issue of blind-double marking raised within the response. The Convener confirmed that while blind marking is a requirement, double blind marking at Undergraduate or PGT level is not. The Committee acknowledged that some Schools are continuing the practice of double blind marking; however, clarification that this process is unnecessary is available within the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH).

5.5 The Committee noted the School’s request for QAC to communicate to the relevant parties regarding points 5.4, 20.4, 12.4 of the ITR report. The Committee agreed that it was appropriate to contact Estates regarding accommodation and the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) regarding staff induction and training. The Committee noted that the 2-day course may not be appropriate for more senior staff.

Action: Clerk to contact Estates and CLT

3.3 The Convener noted that the point labelled as addressing 3.3 was addressing 3.5. As such, the Committee requested that the School be asked to address 3.5.

Action: Clerk to contact School
5.6 Dr Hay, the Convener of the DHP ITR panel, noted the following points relating to the ITR process as a whole.
- More guidance should be provided for the Schools being reviewed
- The time allowed for the review should, in some cases, be extended.
- The timing of a review should be considered carefully. The DHP review took place in November and, as such, first-year students had only just begun their studies.

5.7 The Committee was informed that a review of the ITR process is currently underway.

6 Professional Doctorates and MRes at UHI  
(Paper filed as QAC/090311/019)

6.1 The Convener informed the Committee that UHI had approached the University to make initial enquiries with regards to awarding Professional Doctorates and MRes. The Committee noted that the current agreement with UHI essentially allows students to be awarded any degree listed in the Aberdeen regulations.

6.2 The Committee considered the MRes enquiry and concluded that there would be no problem with the University receiving an application from UHI to award this degree. The Committee would, however, seek clarification on which areas UHI would wish to award the degree. The current agreement would only allow the award of those currently offered by the University. The Committee agreed that they would be happy to hear more detail from UHI on this issue.

6.3 The Committee noted that an application to award Professional Doctorates would be more complex and might require either an amendment to the current agreement or the creation of a new agreement. The University currently awards the Ed D and the Eng D, but no other Professional Doctorates. As such, the Committee noted that more information would be required from UHI before the University could consider this request.

6.4 In concluding, the Committee agreed to go back to UHI to request further information.  
Action: Clerk to contact UHI

FOR DISCUSSION, APPROVAL AND/OR INFORMATION

7 Report from Postgraduate Strand  
(Oral Report)

7.1 The Convener invited Dr Hay to update the Committee on the meetings of the PG strand. Dr Hay tabled a paper to the Committee and the following points and recommendations were discussed.

7.2 It was noted that SCEF returns should be dealt with by the appropriate strand of QAC, unless the matters arising were controversial or relevant to the institution as a whole.

7.3 The Committee noted the PG strand’s concern over the lack of clarity on how exam boards should deal with extenuating circumstances. The Committee identified that the University should have clear guidelines on the matter and agreed to raise the issue at UCTL.  
Action: Clerk to raise with UCTL clerk

7.4 The Committee agreed with the PG strand’s recommendation that there should be no extension of resubmission opportunities.

7.5 The Committee endorsed the recommendation of the PG strand that the revised ‘Role of Moderators’ document should be accepted.
7.6 The Committee agreed with the PG strand’s recommendation that PGOs should be contacted for information on their role and that wider discussions should be conducted into the role of PGOs. The Committee recognised that PGOs may be doing far more than expected. The Committee was informed that this issue could feed into upcoming wider discussions on Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

Action: Clerk to liaise with Robert Findlay

7.7 The Committee endorsed the PG strand’s acceptance of the revised joint Examiners’ report form.

7.8 The amendments to Appendix 8.8 of the AQH were accepted by the Committee. The Committee noted the content had been expanded and clarified.

7.9 The Committee was informed that the most recent version of the paper on Supervisory Teams had been tabled at the PG Committee. The paper had been endorsed by those present and is due to go to UCTL for further comment.

7.10 In addressing the issue of changes to Regulation 4 and the maximum length of theses, Dr Hay reported that the PG strand agreed that the current maximum length should not be changed. The Committee noted that there was not much demand for a change to the regulation; however, students in this position could submit additional words in the digital version of their theses.

Action: Clerk to raise with UCTL clerk

7.11 The Committee agreed with the recommendation that class certificates should expire after two years.

7.12 The PG strand looked at the issue of the requirements for appointing examiners for members of staff submitting a PhD thesis. It was agreed that University policy did not need to be amended but that it could be made clearer to staff that Research Assistants and Research Fellows do not require to have two external examiners.

Action: Clerk to respond to the query raised by a member of academic staff.

7.13 Following the proposal from Social Science, the Committee agreed that while Turnitin UK is a useful tool, it should not be adopted as a University-wide policy. Its availability for use, however, could be communicated more widely.

Action: Clerk to respond to Social Science

7.14 In response to the proposal from Computing Science to introduce the award of ‘merit’ the Committee noted the strand’s recommendation that the two awards currently offered (with commendation and with distinction) were sufficient.

7.15 The amended Codes of Practice were accepted for 2011/12.

7.16 In addressing the Revalidation of Gaelic and Related Studies at UHI, the Committee accepted the report by the Validation Panel. In doing so, however, the Committee agreed to invite UHI to make reference to the progress made in the 10 observations referenced in the panel’s report.

7.17 Dr Hay raised the issue of the Physician’s Assistant Programme. In discussing the issue, the Committee noted that the current proposal is more appropriate for Undergraduate rather than Postgraduate award. The Committee agreed that the Convener, along with Dr Hay and Dr Bernard would take the issue forward with the appropriate parties.

Action: Convener to take forward

7.18 The Committee noted that the revalidation of Sustainability Studies visit to UHI had gone well and a number of recommendations, appended to the report, had been made. The
Committee was content to endorse the report but wished to see progress on the recommendations made.

*Action: Clerk to contact UHI*

8. **Report from Undergraduate Strand** *(Oral Report)*

8.1 The Convener invited Dr Shennan to update the Committee on the meeting of the UG strand.

8.2 Dr Shennan informed the Committee that the UG strand had looked at External Examiner reports from Engineering and CLSM. Dr Shennan confirmed to the Committee that issues surrounding the grade spectrum and double-blind marking were raised. The Committee were assured that the grade spectrum remains under review and is being taking forward by the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching.

8.3 The Committee noted points from the UG strand regarding low attendance on courses, raised by SCEF returns. In discussing low attendance, the Committee highlighted the importance of the issue in light of CREF. The Committee also noted concern over feedback received through SCEFs regarding staffing shortages. The Committee agreed to raise this issue at UCTL.

*Action: Convener to raise at UCTL*

**ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

9. **Closing Remarks**

9.1 The Convener expressed his thanks to those members of the Committee who will not be continuing into the next Academic Year. He also thanked all members of the group for their work over the course of the year. The Convener noted that Miss Emma Hay will take over the role of clerk to the Committee in 2011/12.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

10.1 The next meeting of the Committee will take place at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 28 September 2011 in Committee Room 2, University Office.