UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Minute of the Meeting held on 28 January 2015

Present: Dr K Shennan (Convener), Dr P Bishop, Professor G M Coghill, Dr M-I Ehrenschwendtner, Dr B Harrison, Dr D Hendry, Mr R Henthorn, Dr M Hole, Dr S Lawrie, Professor D Lurie, Ms E Hay (Clerk), Ms C McWilliams (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Ms M Beaton, Ms K Christie, Ms E Beever, Dr D Comber, Professor P McGeorge

MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 3 DECEMBER 2014
(QAC/280115/001)

1.1 The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 3 December 2014 subject to a few minor typographical revisions.

Action: Clerk

MATTERS ARISING

2.1 With reference to QAC/280115/001, the Committee was informed that the Head of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine Graduate School had referred the proposal for Postgraduate Taught resit examinations to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL). The Convenor informed the Committee that the proposal as taken to the UCTL had been revised following feedback provided by the QAC. The Convenor informed the Committee that those students who have no previous experience of oral assessment will be required to speak to the relevant course co-ordinator in order to discover the process. Furthermore, resits would be scheduled later than originally proposed, in February alleviating the QAC’s concerns regarding the timeline between the initial examination and resit assessment being too short. The Committee noted the consensus of UCTL that the School should be permitted to pilot this for one year and report back to the UCTL detailing how the process went.

COURSE AND PROGRAMME APPROVAL
(copy filed as QAC/280115/002)

3.1 The Committee noted proposed revisions to the existing SENAS course and programme approval process are being explored, given the issues with the current process namely that it is repetitive, slow and not sufficiently flexible to meet the demands of a rapidly changing environment. The Committee noted that the process serves three main functions: Quality Assurance, Strategic Oversight and Curriculum and Timetabling. The view was expressed that Quality Assurance and Strategic Planning could happen at any time and the only aspect of the process that was time-limited was that of Timetabling.

3.2 The Committee was informed that it had been proposed that in order to streamline the process, instead of requiring two school sign-offs, currently that of the ‘School Scrutiny Group’ and ‘Head of School’, only one would be required, removing a layer from the process. The Committee also noted the proposal trialled this academic year, that minor changes would not be reviewed by the QAC but instead triaged by Registry and passed only to a member of the QAC in instances of a change requiring their consideration. The Committee acknowledged that this would reduce the volume of changes to be reviewed by the QAC and
would speed up the process. The Committee also noted the proposal that approval from the College Director of Teaching and Learning (DoTL) and QAC could be provided simultaneously. The Committee discussed how this may lead to QAC approving a proposal the College would not want to run. The Committee was informed that such a situation would be rare and should it occur, it would have only minor implications. The Committee was informed that SENAS would remain open for all proposals requesting amendments and withdrawals.

3.3 The Committee considered the timeline for the catalogue. The Committee noted that a course cannot currently be amended after a student has been registered on the basis of the information provided in the catalogue. The Committee recognised that to permit otherwise may have an impact on student appeals. The Committee agreed that it is necessary to determine whether it is the course manual or the course catalogue that is determinative where discrepancies arise.

*Action: Clerk*

3.4 The Committee was informed that changes to the SENAS form are also being explored. The purpose of this is to try and get more information about learning outcomes. The Committee discussed the quality of submissions at college level and suggested that a re-arrangement of the form might help eradicate problems.

3.5 The Committee discussed whether or not allowing proposals throughout the year would improve the flexibility of the process. It was suggested that there will still be a deadline due to timetabling. The Committee noted that while this was correct, new courses could be processed through SENAS at any time provided the time slot is unaffected.

**EXTERNAL EXAMINING**

*(QAC/280115/003)*

4.1 The Committee considered External Examiner (EE) Reports submitted by Heads of School following the 2013/14 academic year. The Committee agreed that new members of the Committee would be assigned subject areas after the workload of the Committee has been reviewed.

*Action: Clerk*

4.2 The Committee was informed, for the purposes of the new members of the panel, of the process for the consideration of EE reports. The Committee noted that EEs send reports in by October. The Registry then sends those reports to the Schools who respond and it is this response that is reviewed by members of QAC. The purpose of this review is to check that the response is appropriate, identify any issues and find areas of good practice.

4.3 The Committee noted with concern the number of EEs who do not meet the national standard with a number of EEs not having any Higher Education Institutional experience. The Committee acknowledged that while exceptions can be made particularly for those subjects that are industry-specific, this should not become the norm. The Committee agreed that this is to be raised with the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning. The Committee discussed whether it would be possible to arrange EE reports so the reports could be sorted more easily. The Committee agreed that this is to be explored.

*Action: Clerk*

4.4 The Committee was informed that no Undergraduate (UG) reports and all Postgraduate teaching (PGT) reports were received from the School of Natural and Computing Science.
The Committee noted this was also the case with English and Geosciences. The Committee was informed that the reports may be at the College and the College is to be contacted regarding these.

Action: Clerk

4.5 The Committee noted with concern reports received from the School of Law which indicated that the University is changing to the Common Grading Scale in order to increase the number of First Class marks awarded. The Committee agreed that this should be brought to the attention of the School of Law so that it is clear that this was merely a subjective view that was being expressed.

Action: Clerk

4.6 The Committee noted the responses from Geosciences where two EEs expressed dissatisfaction with not having received responses in previous years. Other issues that were identified included resources and hardware particularly since the numbers of students is expanding. The Committee agreed that this needed to be raised at College level.

Action: Clerk

4.7 The Committee noted the response from an EE for the School of Psychology in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine where concerns were raised about the level of moderation. It was noted that this EE found the level of moderation to be high compared to the examiner’s own institution. The Committee noted that the School’s comments that the view expressed by this EE mirrored similar comments made by EEs in the past. As a result, the School expressed the view that the University’s policies for moderation were not fit for purpose and that this is particularly evident for courses with very high student numbers.

4.8 The Committee noted issues concerning double marking for dissertations and asked that it be verified whether or not this is part of University regulations.

Action: Clerk

ANNUAL COURSE/PROGRAMME REVIEW

5.1 The Committee discussed the proposed changes to the Annual Course Review Report and Discipline Summary Course and Programme Review Form. The Committee was informed that the changes have been proposed in an attempt to make the process more reflective.

5.2 The Committee discussed the prospect that Annual Course Review Reports would be made public. The view was expressed that the form has to be clear that the form will be public. The Committee noted concerns that if reports were to be made public course co-ordinators may overcompensate to be positive. This issue is to be raised with the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching.

Action: Clerk

5.3 The Committee noted with concern the possibility that students may place a high emphasis on the rate of return without knowing what the statistics mean. The Committee discussed whether it would be necessary to include the rate of return in the Annual Course Review Report. The view was expressed that if numbers were not included this could be construed as discounting student feedback.
5.4 The Committee discussed proposed changes to the Discipline Summary Form. The Committee was informed that the form is there to be indicative and to highlight potential problems and it is hoped that the changes proposed will reflect this.

**REVIEW OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION PAPER**
*(copy filed as QAC/280115/004)*

6.1 The Committee was asked to consider the consultation paper noting the strengths of the current approach as well as new perspectives on QEF’s approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

6.2 The Committee was asked to explore in particular the Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process, Quality Assurance Agency processes, outcome agreements as well as issue surrounding public information.

6.3 The Committee was informed that the University is required to submit a response. The Committee is asked for any comments relating to the consultation paper to be forwarded on to Katja Christie, Deputy Academic Registrar at katja.christie@abdn.ac.uk

*Action: Members of Committee*

**AOCB**

7.1 The Committee was informed of problems encountered by the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy in relation to provisions for research students. Regulation 18 has created a barrier in that it requires students on Masters by Research programmes to be in Aberdeen for 3 months. The Committee was informed that any amendment to regulations concerning Postgraduate students must go through the Postgraduate Committee.

*Action: Clerk*

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

8.1 The next meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee will be held on Wednesday 11 March 2015 at 2pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.

**ITEMS UNDERTAKEN BY CIRCULATION**

9.1 The Committee noted the approval of the following items by Convener’s action since the December meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee.

Collaborative Proposal: **Università degli Studi di Milan Janiero** *(QAC/280115/005)*

**COURSE AND PROGRAMME PROPOSALS**

9.2 A list of all Undergraduate courses and programmes approved since the December meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee can be found at the following link: [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/ascreport/undergraduate.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/ascreport/undergraduate.php).

A list of all Postgraduate courses and programmes approved since the December meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee can be found at the following link: [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/ascreport/postgraduate.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/senastracking/ascreport/postgraduate.php).