UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Minute of the Meeting held on 11 March 2015

Present: Dr K Shennan (Convener), Dr P Bishop, Ms K Christie, Dr M-I Ehrenschwendtner, Dr B Harrison, Dr D Hendry, Dr M Hole, Dr S Lawrie, Ms E Hay (Clerk), Ms C McWilliams (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Ms M Beaton, Professor D Lurie

MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2015
(copied filed as QAC/110315/001)

1.1 The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) approved the minute of the meeting held on 28 January 2015 subject to a few minor typographical revisions.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s note: The typographical errors in QAC/110315/001 have now been appropriately amended.

MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Committee members were asked to send any outstanding summaries of Schools’ responses to External Examiner (EE) reports as soon as possible. The Committee discussed issues relating to the late submission of Schools’ responses to EE reports and agreed that this hinders the ability of QAC members to submit summaries of Schools’ responses to EE reports within the requested timeframe.

Action: Committee

2.2 The Committee considered the review of the existing EE process and the requirement for EE reports to be considered by the appropriate College before being sent to the QAC for consideration. Members of the Committee agreed that it would be more sensible for the College and the QAC to consider reports simultaneously to ensure reports can be considered and responded to in a timelier manner.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: The appropriate section of the AQH has now been amended appropriately to allow for this.

2.3 With reference to section 3.3 of QAC/110315/001, where the Committee sought clarification as to whether it is was course handbooks or the course catalogue that is determinative in providing information on a course, such as assessment weighting, the Committee was informed that it is the catalogue of courses which is definitive in this regard. The Committee agreed that this should be highlighted to Schools.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: Work is currently ongoing regarding updating the course catalogue for 2015/16. Through this process, Colleges and schools are reminded of the importance of the Catalogue and the requirement for information held to be accurate.

2.4 With reference to section 4.3 of QAC/110315/001 where the Committee expressed concern at the number of EEs who may not have Higher Education Institutional experience, the Committee noted existing process, where the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning approves the level of Higher Education Institution experience for all External Examiner nominees. The Committee agreed that EE’s without Higher Education experience were
legitimately recruited in areas where industry experience was preferential. The Committee noted that the process could be amended to allow QAC members to approve External Examiner nominations if considered appropriate. The Committee agreed that the workload implications of QAC members approving EE nominations should be explored.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: Sarah James has been asked to provide a summary of External Examiners by School.

2.5 The Committee discussed the EE nomination and report sign off process for postgraduate research (PGR) degrees. The Committee agreed that it is necessary to determine the specific process for EE nominations and the consideration of EE reports at PGR level to ensure consistency of approach.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: Robert Findlay has confirmed that only members of the QAC are undertaking work in this regard.

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

3.1 There were no matters arising pertaining to this agenda item.

COURSE AND PROGRAMME APPROVAL

4.1 The Committee was informed that there are still some SENAS proposals waiting to be processed at Level 4 of the SharePoint system by members of the QAC.

Action: Committee

4.2 The Committee discussed two level 4 course proposals from the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, with varying assessment processes and contact hours proposed for each course. One course’s assessment included a dissertation of 10,000 words while the other course’s assessment included one piece of written work of 5,000 words, or two pieces of written work of 3,500 and 1,500 words respectively. The Committee discussed whether these varying degrees of assessment should give any cause for concern, given both courses were proposed at the same level and with the same credit value of 30. It was suggested that where the written submissions are (or total) 5,000 words, these courses are often more labour intensive in terms of their requirement for seminar preparation and interaction. The Committee acknowledged this, noting that it was currently very difficult to determine such required interaction from the SENAS proposal.

4.3 The Committee acknowledged a review of the SENAS forms was currently underway and that this issue would be appropriately fed into discussions.

Action: Clerk and Convener

Clerk’s Note: This issue will be fed into ongoing discussions regarding amendments to the SENAS process and the proposed revisions of existing forms.

4.4 The Committee was informed that a Geophysics programme proposal and its component course proposal appeared to be missing from the SENAS system. The Committee asked that this be looked into.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: The programme and course proposals for BSc Geophysics have been passed to the Director of Teaching and Learning for the College of Physical Sciences for consideration.
EXTERNAL EXAMINING

5.1 There were no matters arising pertaining to this agenda item.

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

6.1 The Committee was informed that, due to a large increase of the number of partnerships the University is undertaking, a new process for collaborative provision is being developed which includes the creation of a Virtual Partnerships Unit. The purpose of the new process is to make processing collaborative provision proposals more efficient and to ensure Quality Assurance matters are addressed early in the process. The QAC’s involvement is required to assure the quality of these partnerships. The proposed process will be considered for approval and implementation by the Senate and the University Management Group (UMG).

6.2 The Convener informed the Committee that the number of collaborative provision proposals has hugely increased. This has proved difficult to manage given each proposal needs to be looked at in detail from a quality assurance perspective. The Committee discussed whether another member of QAC should assist the Convener in assuring the quality of these proposals or whether the QAC, as a whole, should assist with each member reviewing those proposals that fall in their area of responsibility. The Convener asked whether any members would be willing to assist in monitoring the Quality Assurance of collaborative provision proposals. Dr M Hole and Dr B Harrison agreed to assist the Convener.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: The appropriate contact for Collaborative Provision has been informed that Drs Hole and Harrison will now undertake review work on behalf of the QAC. Professor Shennan will provide Drs Hole and Harrison with appropriate training as proposals are received.

6.3 Members of the Committee noted the approval by way of Conveners action of the collaborative proposal with the University of Kansas (QAC/110315/004 refers). The Committee noted that although the school of Law had submitted the proposal, there was no evidence to suggest the proposals contained therein had been discussed with other schools or departments who may be affected by the proposals. The Committee noted schools such as the school of Language and Literature who taught students undertaking Law and a Language could helpfully be included in discussions. The Committee agreed that the inclusion of a section for such a purpose should be proposed to those undertaking the Collaborative Provision review.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: The appropriate contact for Collaborative Provision has been informed of this proposal.

PSB REPORTS

7.1 There were no matters arising pertaining to this agenda item.

MARKING AND MODERATION

(copy filed as QAC/110315/002a QAC/110315/002b QAC/110315/002c QAC/110315/002d)

8.1 The Committee was asked to consider the existing University policy on marking and moderation as well as practice at the Universities of Edinburgh, St Andrews and Glasgow. This
The discussion was brought about as a result of some EEs who had raised concerns about the level of moderation in the University. With reference to section 4.7 of QAC/110315/001, the Committee was informed that some EEs had raised concerns about the level of moderation which they found to be high compared to other institutions.

8.2 The Committee noted current marking and moderation practices at the University whereby all borderline scripts and a minimum of 10% of marker’s scripts, including all significant borderline grades, are double marked [Academic Quality Handbook section 7.8.2]. The Committee also noted the current marking and moderation practices of other institutions appeared to adopt a more liberal approach affording schools within their institutions more flexibility. The University of St Andrews’ policy was discussed. The policy sets out minimum requirements for the institution which schools are expected to determine how best to operate, according to the needs of their discipline [University of St Andrews Policy on Assessment: Marking & Standard Setting].

8.3 Discussion ensued as to the implications of the current marking and moderation practices within different areas of the University. The Committee noted several schools are currently operating beyond the minimum requirements as laid out in the AQH. For those subjects whose assessments contain no subjective elements, double marking was reported to be useful in ensuring that marks were counted up correctly. The Committee accepted therefore that assessments that are purely quantitative need not be second marked but all such scripts should be checked to ensure accuracy of the final mark. In other areas, varying practices were reported with both double and double blind marking being used as well as discrepancies in the number of scripts being moderated.

8.4 The Convener asked Committee members whether stronger guidelines were needed. It was suggested that given there are different practices of moderation going on in schools, there would be a requirement for consistency. The Committee agreed therefore that for levels 3, 4 and 5 a minimum requirement would be necessary. The minimum requirement for second marking proposed and agreed by the Committee included all borderline fails and 10% (random sampling) of all work (continuous assessment and exams scripts) that contributes to the final grade for a course. The Committee discussed whether to require schools to carry out double marking or double blind marking. It was suggested by some members that Schools ought to be given the choice given the varying requirements of different disciplines. The Committee also discussed what the requirements should be for dissertations and projects. It was agreed by the Committee that all major pieces of independent learning coursework, comprising 15 credit points or above, should be second marked, by way of double or double blind marking, at levels 3, 4 and 5.

8.5 The Committee agreed that for non-honours subjects there should be some form of moderation of marks and should always occur if a single assessment constitutes 20% or more of the final course grade. The Committee also agreed that where there are a number of different markers involved in marking an assessment, a moderator should sample each marker’s scripts to assess for consistency in standards. The sample should consist of all borderline fails in addition to 10% of the remaining scripts. The Committee further acknowledged the need to consider the impact this may have on timing particularly in relation to feedback for students.

Action: Clerk

Clerk’s Note: A paper, detailing the proposals as determined by the Committee has been prepared for consideration at the UG, PG, and UCTL Committees.
8.6 The Committee discussed section 7.7.17 of the Academic Quality Handbook. This section relates to the compensation which should be applied in an instance where an obtained grade has been impacted through illness or other good cause. Concerns were raised regarding the possibility that students who have completed all assessed coursework comprising a given percentage of a course, but due to mitigating circumstances are unable to sit the exam are deemed not to have completed enough of the course to be awarded a mark and are awarded a Medical Certificate (MC) or Good Cause (GC) as appropriate. Members of the Committee noted this in contrast to a student who has not completed all assessed coursework proceeding to undertake the examination and, as a consequence of the assessment weightings of the course, obtains a pass. The Committee acknowledged a scenario such as this as being unfair and emphasised the importance of the monitoring process to ensure students who do not complete assessed work as required, are removed from the course. Members of the Committee noted that appropriate monitoring is not always straightforward, particularly in instances where a student has ongoing medical difficulties. The Committee agreed that section 7.7.17 should remain under review, to ensure the wording of the AQH remains appropriate and fit for purpose.

Action: Clerk

Clerk's note: The monitoring deadlines can be found at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/key-dates.php

POSTGRADUATE STUDY REGULATIONS

(copy filed as QAC/110315/003a
QAC/110315/003b
QAC/110315/003c)

9.1 The Committee considered the proposed PhD in Creative Arts in Education from the School of Education which would require a change in regulation 19 A to allow PhD students to carry out Artwork based practice in Education research. The Committee agreed that this should not be permitted given concern that supervisors may not have the specialist expertise or background experience.

Action: Clerk

Clerk's Note: Robert Findlay has been provided with this outcome for communication to the School of Education

9.2 The Committee considered and agreed to the proposal for change to limits for credit regulations by the School of Education to allow the University to accept 30 credits based on specific agreed learning outcomes from PGDE programmes. The Committee expressed concern however with the possibility of 60 credits being transferred internally from level 4 to level 5. Its members concern was based on the requirement for students at level 4 to have at least 90 credits at level 4. With students undertaking an additional 60 credits at level 5 this would go beyond the standard 120 credit amount for students at this level.

Action: Clerk

Clerk's Note: Robert Findlay has been provided with this outcome for communication to the School of Education

9.3 The Committee considered and approved the recommendation by the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy that the regulations concerning off-campus study be amended. It was requested that Regulation 18 of Schedule A – General Regulations for Research Degrees be amended to remove the requirement for students to appear on campus. This is to enable full time research degrees to be taken entirely at a distance. The University Regulations regarding
off-campus study currently requires students undertaking research programmes to study in
the University of Aberdeen for not less than six months. This is to be amended to enable full-
time students to conduct their entire programme by distance learning.

**Action: Clerk**

*Clerk’s Note: Robert Findlay has been provided with this outcome for communication to the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy*

**ITEMS UNDERTAKEN BY CIRCULATION**

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

Collaborative Proposal: **University of Kansas** *(copy filed as QAC/110315/004)*

**COURSE AND PROGRAMME PROPOSALS**

10.2 A list of all Undergraduate courses and programmes approved since the January 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 January 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).

**SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENTS** *(copy filed as QAC/110315/006)*

10.3 The Committee is invited to note the publication of the revised Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmark statements for the areas of Anthropology, Business and Management, Engineering, English, Politics and International Relations and Philosophy. The Committee is advised that the statements have also been sent to the relevant Heads of School for comment.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

11.1 The next meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee will be held on Thursday 20 April 2015 at 2pm in Committee Room 2, University Office.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY CONSULTATION: CHARACTERISTIC STATEMENTS** *(copy filed as QAC/110315/005)*

12.1 The Committee considered the consultation as published by the QAA on three Qualification Characteristic Statements: Foundation Degree Characteristics (formerly known as the Foundation degree qualification benchmark), Master’s Degree Characteristics, and Doctoral Degree Characteristics, and on the development of a new Statement: Qualifications Awarded by two or more Degree-Awarding Bodies. The Committee was informed that the University is required to produce a response. Members of the Committee were asked to consider and feedback by a date that will be communicated to them by the Committee Clerk.

**Action: Clerk**
**Clerk's Note:** Members of the Committee were reminded by way of email for the requirement for feedback.

**AOCB**

13.1 The Committee discussed the possibility of spot-checking Annual Course Review forms and noted that this will be required to be considered by Committee members shortly.

*Action: Clerk*

**Clerk’s Note:** A proposed schedule for ACR checking has been prepared and sent to Professor Shennan for review.