UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE  

Minute of the Meeting held on 27 March 2024

Present: Steve Tucker (Chair), Will Barras, Qiang Cai, Selma Carson, Isabel Crane, Nadia DeGama, Isa Ehrenschwendtner, Lois Gall, Mark Grant, Faye Hendry, Jacqui Hutchison, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Rhiannon Ledwell, Laura McCann (from Item 3(iv)), Colin North, Gareth Norton, Thanga Thevar, Jo Vergunst (from Item 3(ix)) with Darren Comber, Lucy Leiper, Gillian Mackintosh, and Liam Dyker (Clerk) in attendance.

Apologies: Sanaa Al-Azawi, Scott Carle, Morag MacRae, Ann Simpson, Fiona Stoddard.

UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENGLISH SKILLS (AES) PROGRESSION REQUIREMENTS (ABERDEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDY CENTRE)  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/025)

[Clerk’s Note: Clare Watson was in attendance to present this item.]

1.1 The Committee heard a summary of the proposed changes in respect of Undergraduate Academic English Skills (AES) progression requirements for the Aberdeen International Study Centre, operated by Study Group. In summary, it was highlighted that previously agreed progression requirements were misaligned with the University and the proposed changes brought them back into line. It was noted that no students had been disadvantaged as a result of these proposals. Clarity was sought in relation to whether the proposed changes would make a difference for applicants and recruitment. It was confirmed that it would not, and that it was ensuring parity across programmes.

1.2 The Committee was content to approve the proposed changes.

OVERVIEW OF PARTNERSHIPS REPORTING

2.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual partnerships reporting exercise, noting that reporting is required as part of the agreements to ensure that academic standards are being maintained. Additionally, the Committee noted that the Total UK report is not required as the course delivered by the partnership did not run in 2022/23.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIVE PROVISION ANNUAL REPORTS FOR 2022/23

(i) AL FALEH GROUP FOR EDUCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC SERVICES  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/007)

[Clerk’s Note: Lyn Batchelor and Steve Pearce were in attendance to present this item.]

3.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Al Faleh Group for Educational and Academic Services (AFG College) report. In summary, it was noted that there were mandatory changes requested by the Qatari Government in relation to the hosting of the World Cup in 2022. Additionally, it was noted that the partnership had been relicensed to deliver provision in Qatar, which was successful. The departure of two senior members of staff was highlighted, as was the requirement for University staff to travel to Qatar for Undergraduate teaching. It was noted that Postgraduate teaching will also commence in country. The student recruitment and admissions data was noted, noting a fall in student numbers.

3.2 Concerns were raised in respect of the lack of student engagement as part of the postgraduate SSLC process. It was clarified that the report related to 2022/23, while there had been work
undertaken in 2023/24 to further improve the engagement of postgraduate students. It was noted that many postgraduate students are also employed full-time which is challenging to arrange scheduled SSLC meetings. It was agreed that work would be undertaken with AUSA in this regard.

3.3 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(ii) UNIVERSITY OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

(copy filed as QAC/270324/001)

4.1 The Committee heard a summary of the University of the Highlands and Islands report. It was highlighted that the main actions centred on quality assurance; and training and development support available for students and staff. The Committee noted the reapproval of the sustainability subject area. It was suggested that more work requires to be undertaken in respect of supervisor training, but noted the risks in relation to academic staff time to deliver the training. In discussion, it was noted that there remains only one student on the validated programme and the partnership will conclude when they complete their course of study. It was suggested that further information was sought in relation to deadlines for this, and clarification that the UHI are mapping against the recently introduced UKRI Core Offer. Action: Clerk

4.2 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(iii) STUDY GROUP LTD.

(copy filed as QAC/270324/002)

5.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Study Group Ltd. report, noting the partnership agreement is currently in renegotiation. In summary, the Committee was advised that the key actions related to recruitment and registration, retention, and student success for onward study at the University. Issues pertaining to obtaining visas was noted. It was further noted that work is being undertaken regarding retention, with ongoing monitoring. In relation to retention, the Committee was advised that personal circumstances appear to be the primary reason for withdrawal. Attention was drawn to a particular issue with students who fail to meet the requirements for the Medical (MBChB) programme, with few students taking up the alternative degree opportunity in life sciences. It was noted that the Study Centre is affected by RAAC which has caused some disruption.

5.2 Clarity was sought regarding whether there were any plans to expand the programmes to cover humanities subject areas. It was agreed that clarification would be sought from the relevant party. Additionally, clarification was provided in respect of student numbers on the programmes. Action: Clerk

5.3 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(iv) TRINITY COLLEGE BRISTOL

(copy filed as QAC/270324/003)

6.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Trinity College Bristol report. The Committee noted that the pattern of recruitment is improving, with the impression that the students are very active. The practical teaching experience provided to PhD students was highlighted, as was the funded conference attendance for students. In relation to student satisfaction, pastoral support was highlighted as positive. The Committee noted that the action plan details positive steps to address each action.

6.2 In discussion, it was noted that some students sought clarification of the mandatory training which is required by the PGR School. It was clarified that this issue would be raised at a
Partnership Board meeting by the PGR School. Additionally, supervisor training will be flagged to colleagues at Trinity College to ensure the full process is duly followed.

6.3 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(v) INTERACTIVE DESIGN INSTITUTE LTD.  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/004)

7.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Interactive Design Institute (IDI) Ltd. report, noting that the agreement had terminated and as such, this report was the final. The transition from IDI to in-house provision was highlighted, noting MyAberdeen is used for delivery and overseen by a Project Board. It was noted that recruitment to the programmes was paused as a result of the transition and would recommence in September 2024. The Committee was advised that the Business School intends to amend the delivery model to include online face-to-face sessions and the move to a three-term framework.

7.2 Clarity was sought as to whether the transition to in-house delivery meant the Business School had more flexibility regarding the format, delivery and content of provision. To that end, it was confirmed that this was the case. The role of the Centre for Academic Development was noted in the transition.

7.3 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(vi) UNIVERSITIES OF GLASGOW AND STRATHCLYDE  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/005)

8.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde report. The Committee noted the partnership delivered a postgraduate programme with a small cohort of students. The pass rates were noted as high and students felt supported by all institutions. The Committee noted concerns in relation to project options and the ability to join lab-based projects. Further concerns were raised in relation to organisation and communication between centres. The high turnover of staff was noted. Additionally, the positive feedback from students was noted. However, timetabling clashes in particular were highlighted as a result of the structure of the programme.

8.2 The Committee discussed the potential discrepancies between the marketing of the programmes and the actual situation. It was agreed that clarification would be sought from the School to confirm this. Additionally, it was agreed that clarification would be sought in relation to project options.  

Action: Clerk

8.3 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(vii) SOUTH CHINA NORMAL UNIVERSITY (SCNU) – ARTICULATIONS  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/008)

9.1 The Committee heard a summary of the South China Normal University (SCNU) report, pertaining to articulation agreements. The student numbers were highlighted, noting the articulation agreements included a 2+2 and 2+2.5 programme. The combination of quota and non-quota students was highlighted, with the quota students appearing to perform better. The transition to a 2+2.5 programme was highlighted. Aspects of good practice, including a Q&A session with key staff and to meet peers, development of a student guide, and allocation of personal tutors were highlighted. Ongoing issues in relation to Online Registration and MyCurriculum were noted. The introduction of feedback surveys particularly in relation to orientation and induction was noted.
9.2 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(viii) SOUTH CHINA NORMAL UNIVERSITY (SCNU) – JOINT INSTITUTE
(copy filed as QAC/270324/009)

10.1 The Committee heard a summary of the South China Normal University (SCNU) report, pertaining to the Aberdeen Institute of Data Science and Artificial Intelligence. The student numbers were noted, noting increased recruitment with good performance by students. The challenge in relation to a lack of face-to-face teaching in Term 1 of 2022/23 was highlighted, but recognised that this is now rectified. The student exchange period to the Aberdeen campus was noted. The Committee noted the positive relationship between the University and SCNU. The plans for English Language Support and development of computing labs in China were highlighted as ongoing. In discussion, the Committee noted that discussions regarding English Language support were at an advanced stage with support of the Language Centre.

10.2 The Committee was content to approve the report.

(ix) CHONGQING INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN STUDIES (CFIS)
(copy filed as QAC/270324/010)

11.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Chongqing Institute of Foreign Studies (CFIS) report. The Committee noted that the articulation arrangement included a 3+1 model, with students completing a year of PGT study at the University. It was noted that student numbers were small. The student experience was highlighted as positive. The Committee noted the potential for growth with the partnership and the desire for CFIS to offer more programmes with the University. It was noted that students will meet twice a year with Aberdeen staff in order to provide necessary support and information.

11.2 The Committee discussed the content of the report and noted that the report was not too detailed. It was agreed that further clarity would be sought in terms of quality enhancement and future plans, before approval will be granted. Action: Clerk

(x) SHANDONG NORMAL UNIVERSITY (SDNU)
(copy filed as QAC/270324/011)

12.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Shandong Normal University (SDNU) report. The Committee noted the articulation agreement with a 2+2 model at undergraduate level. The Committee noted the fall in student numbers, but that grade distribution and pass rates appeared to be in order. The pastoral support provided was highlighted, with administrative staff monitoring progress of students as part of this partnership. In discussion, it was highlighted that future plans included development of a 4+0 model which might offer an alternative means of delivering joint provision. It was noted that discussions were still ongoing.

12.2 The Committee discussed the content of the report and noted that the report was not too detailed. It was agreed that further clarity would be sought in terms of quality enhancement and future plans, before approval will be granted. Additionally, clarity was sought regarding a definitive response as to whether any appeals had been received. Action: Clerk

(xi) HARBIN ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY
(copy filed as QAC/270324/012)

13.1 The Committee heard a summary of the Harbin Engineering University (HEU) report, noting the partnership consisted of a 3+1 agreement leading to a double degree in Civil Engineering. The student numbers were noted, in particular a concern regarding the number of students requiring a resit assessment. It was noted that plans are in place to support students including
extra English language provision. The induction programme was noted, as was the instances of academic misconduct. The provisions in place to support student learning, such as reducing the speed of delivery and providing a glossary of terminology was noted. Additionally, the Committee noted the ongoing programme changes to ensure better prerequisites for students. It was highlighted that the SSLC and engagement with students in terms of University processes would be enhanced. It was agreed that this should be included on the action plan.

13.2 The Committee noted the ongoing renewal of the agreement and agreed that the Partnership Group should continue to meet to ensure the new agreement is appropriate. Additionally, the Committee discussed the steps taken to address academic misconduct, and agreed that the wording in the report should be reconsidered in line with current academic integrity guidance.

Action: Clerk

13.3 The Committee was content to approve the report.

13.4 In general discussion, the Committee agreed that the report should be reviewed to include an Executive Summary and better guidance for authors of reports to ensure the information provided is relevant and appropriately covers all required areas. It was agreed that this would be taken away and an appropriate course of action sought.

Action: Chair / Clerk

OVERVIEW OF INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW FOLLOW-UP REPORTING

14.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual follow-up reporting exercise for Internal Teaching Reviews. In particular, the Committee noted that all Schools are required to submit a follow-up report annually, unless a School has recently undergone or will undergo an Internal Teaching Review in the academic year in which the reports are considered. For 2023/24, the Schools of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture; and Biological Sciences do not require to submit a report due to having recently undergone an Internal Teaching Review. As such, the first report for these reviews will be submitted in January 2025.

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW FOLLOW-UP REPORTS

(i) BUSINESS SCHOOL

(copy filed as QAC/270324/013)

15.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual Internal Teaching Review Follow-Up Report for the Business School. In summary, the Committee noted that many actions are complete, with others ongoing. It was highlighted that work was ongoing in relation to the enhancement of communication across the School and the student experience, and in relation to development of internships and placements. The Committee noted the move from block to linear taught provision. Additionally, the recently achieved EQUIS accreditation was highlighted.

15.2 The Committee was content to approve the follow-up report.

(ii) SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, MEDICAL SCIENCES AND NUTRITION (HEALTHCARE)

(copy filed as QAC/270324/020)

16.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual Internal Teaching Review Follow-Up Report for the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (Healthcare Programmes). In summary, the Committee noted that many of the actions are complete. In particular, focus was drawn to academic and student support, noting the support provided to students, particularly those on placements. The concerns regarding resources were noted. It was noted that the evaluation of effectiveness of the Regent system was yet to be formally evaluated. The Committee noted the new accommodation in Elgin as well as the investment in CPD opportunities. The streamlining of processes was also highlighted. Further, the Committee was advised that timetabling
challenges persist as a result of the presence of RAAC at the Foresterhill Campus. The presence of Medical students on the Old Aberdeen campus, however, has improved a sense of belonging and integration.

16.2 The Committee was content to approve the follow-up report.

(iii) SCHOOL OF NATURAL AND COMPUTING SCIENCE  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/021)

17.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual Internal Teaching Review Follow-Up Report for the School of Natural and Computing Science. The Committee noted progress in relation to the School-wide workload model, including succession planning. In relation to staff development, it was highlighted that a process for peer observation is underway. It was agreed that it would be useful for details of this process to be shared when available. An issue was identified for further training and support for students. The transition to Blackboard Ultra was noted, as was participation in the TESTA programme which feeds a wider programme review.

17.2 Discussion ensued regarding postgraduate research training, noting the range of support available via the Centre for Academic Development. It was agreed that this support would be highlighted to the School.

Action: Clerk

17.3 The Committee was content to approve the follow-up report.

(iv) SCHOOL OF DIVINITY, HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY AND ART HISTORY  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/014)

18.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual Internal Teaching Review Follow-Up Report for the School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History. In summary, the Committee noted that many actions are complete or underway. In particular, the recent grant funding provided by the Development Trust for student community building was highlighted. The Committee noted the ongoing support for personal tutors and the work related to graduate attributes. The opportunities in relation to employability were noted. Additionally, the Committee noted the ongoing discussions between the School and the PGR School in relation to training opportunities, and the related opportunities for PGR students. Engagement with TESTA was noted, as was the engagement with artificial intelligence.

18.2 In discussion, it was clarified that the PGR School communicate with students by way of newsletter, as per the Student Communications Policy.

18.3 The Committee was content to approve the follow-up report.

(v) SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
(copy filed as QAC/270324/015)

19.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual Internal Teaching Review Follow-Up Report for the School of Education. In summary, the varying types of assessments used and any associated pressure points were noted, as was the support provided to students on placement. The communication between partnership schools and the University was highlighted. Further, the Committee highlighted the good practice in the development of fora for staff to share good practice. It was noted that many actions were complete or underway.

19.2 The Committee was content to approve the follow-up report.
20.1 The Committee heard a summary of the annual Internal Teaching Review Follow-Up Report for the School of Engineering. In summary, the Committee noted that many of the actions are complete or underway. It was noted that programme changes have been made as a result of the review, including a review of course credit values. The final project was noted to have been relocated to Term 2 in response to feedback. Additionally, the improved mechanisms for feedback were noted. The Committee highlighted the seminar series to share good practice within the School.

20.2 In discussion, clarity was sought regarding the highly weighted examinations. It was noted that this might be due to accreditation requirements. Additionally, it was noted that examinations are required due to the types of skills assessed. Further, the Committee discussed students carrying additional credits in each term. It was advised that progression codes entered into the student record system will allow a student to take a specified number of credits if they have a shortfall.

20.3 The Committee was content to approve the report.

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION REGISTER

21.1 The Committee noted the Collaborative Provision Register.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

22.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 9 May 2024 (Thursday) at 14:05 at Meeting Room 1, Floor 7, Sir Duncan Rice Library or via Microsoft Teams.