PROPOSED CHANGES TO SENAS COURSE/PROGRAMME APPROVAL PROCESS

1.1 The Committee received an overview of the new SENAS process from Professor Peter McGeorge, Vice Principal (Teaching and Learning). Flow diagrams outlining the new processes for the approval of courses and programmes were given to Committee members for review. Professor McGeorge summarised the challenges of the current SharePoint based process, specifically highlighting its inflexibility and lack of version control. Professor McGeorge informed the Committee that the aim of the new process would be to capture information in a way that is meaningful and usable, for students and the University as a whole. The Committee was informed that as opposed to the free text options that the current system allows, the new process would be list driven, requiring schools to enter information in a consistent and valuable manner. The Committee noted that schools will be required to complete different sections, including a section for review by the QAC.

1.2 The Committee was informed that the new process would be significantly more flexible, allowing schools to submit proposals for amendments to courses or programmes throughout the academic year. The Committee was informed that it is anticipated that the new process would remove the need for repeated communication with a school and would allow for version control. The Committee noted that the information gathered would be used to populate the course catalogue and in doing so remove inconsistencies between SENAS forms and the course catalogue. Dr Mackintosh advised the Committee that the intention was to deliver the first part of the process, including that of the gathering of data for consideration by the QAC, by the end of September 2015.

1.3 Professor McGeorge discussed the role of the QAC in the course and programme approval process. Professor McGeorge stated that as an institution, improvements could be made in the alignment of learning outcomes with observable activities, allowing students to better understand what is required of them in order to achieve success in a particular course. Professor McGeorge further explained that new process would be designed to specifically tackle this issue and in turn alleviate ambiguity in the direct correlation of failing to achieve learning outcomes as a reason for the monitoring of students. The Committee noted that, currently, where a student has been identified as one who is experiencing difficulties with his/her studies, this is often wrongly perceived to be the result solely of a lack of attendance as opposed to failing to satisfy the requirements of a particular course.

1.4 Professor McGeorge discussed the next stage of the process and informed the Committee that, in correlation with learning outcomes, users will be required to input information relating to assessment. The Committee noted the requirement that methods of assessment will be mapped to learning outcomes, making it clearer to all, including members of the QAC, which piece or pieces of assessment is assessing a particular learning outcome. The
Committee noted that such a process could also be used to allow users to map graduate attributes to learning outcomes.

1.5 The Committee enquired about the possibility of training for staff in relation to the process. Professor McGeorge informed the Committee that the possibility for this was being explored. The Committee discussed whether or not there would be an expectation for information to be inputted for old courses. The Committee agreed that such an expectation would not be fair or feasible.

1.6 The Committee discussed the determination of learning outcomes and what the institutional expectation for those would be. The Committee agreed that the nature and number of the learning outcomes will vary depending on a particular course. However, the Committee also agreed that the quality assurance aspect of the process should help with this in ensuring that what is being proposed by the School is appropriate.

1.7 The Committee discussed the implications for attendance if students were to be of the belief that this was not required in order to achieve learning outcomes and therefore successfully pass a course. Professor McGeorge advised that attendance must be linked to learning outcomes (although not necessarily credit bearing) so to constitute a need for attendance, using lectures as an example of an observable activity in relation to a given learning outcome.

1.8 The Committee discussed concerns relating to the workload such a change in process may incur for schools, particularly in relation to setting deadlines for assessments which may not be easily determined early on. Professor McGeorge advised that it would not be required for a definitive date to be set for assessments but that students should at least be aware that the School is not in a position to set a date for that particular assessment. Professor McGeorge informed the Committee that such information can easily be updated and the new system should automatically update the course catalogue with that new information.

1.9 Professor McGeorge discussed how programmes are to be approved as part of the new process. Professor McGeorge advised that individual courses (comprised of assessments) would be aligned to the learning outcomes of a programme. Professor McGeorge advised the Committee that the providers of the new system, Crimson, fully understood the Institution’s requirements and that he is confident and positive about the new system that they will be providing.

1.10 Professor McGeorge invited any further comments from the QAC on the proposed system. The Committee was, on the whole, very positive regarding the proposals and acknowledged the benefits the new system could bring, specifically noting that of version control and of providing all information on a course in one place. Professor McGeorge thanked members for their attendance and, in noting the need for the immediacy of approval regarding the proposals, informed the Committee that further correspondence may be issued by way of circulation.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

2.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 23 September 2015 at 2.00pm in the Court Room, University Office.