

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

## QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 12 February 2020 (2.00pm – 4.20pm).

**Present:** Professor E Hancock (Convener), Mr F Antoniazzi, Dr H Bain, Mrs L Binnie, Mrs J Bolger, Dr S Burgess, Mr D Christie, Ms I Crawford, Dr N Emmison, Ms J Guest, Mr T Kouider, Ms U Ojiji and Mr L Smith.

**Apologies:** Dr M Bailey, Ms M Buchan, Mr J Dunphy, Mr S Matthew, Dr R McDermott and Mrs V Strachan.

**In Attendance:** Ms L Barry, Dr D Cockburn, Ms L Ginsberg, Dr S Maxwell, Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary) and Ms K Walsh.

**Welcome:** Ms Barry was welcomed to her first meeting of the Committee.

### 1. MINUTE

Action

The Committee **approved** the *Minute of the meeting of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 8 November 2019*, reference QAEC/20/1, subject to an amendment to item 1.4, as follows, to clarify that, although the Law School had provided a *School Academic Board Appraisal Report* with an *Action and Enhancement Plan*, this had been deemed insufficient as the *Plan* had not covered the School's courses:

Ms F McLean  
Whyte

The Law School: the *School Academic Board Appraisal Report* had been referred back to the School Academic Board, as ~~no~~ the Action and Enhancement Plan had been provided was deemed inadequate and there was insufficient evidence of the School's full engagement with the messages evident from the appraisal data.

The Convener confirmed a competent *Action and Enhancement Plan* had still not been provided by the School.

Prof K Mackinnon

The Committee also noted a *Minute extract from Academic Council meeting 19 November 2019* and a *Matters Arising Report*.

#### 1.1 Policy Compliance: Student Handbooks [QAEC/20/1/1.3.2]

As part of the audit of *Student Handbooks*, the Academic Quality Officers had issued templates for *Self-Assessment: compliance with Student Handbook Guidance on Minimum Composition* to all course leaders, with a request these be completed and returned by 5 March 2020.

#### 1.2 Gender Balance in the Student Population [QAEC/20/1/1.3.5]

This would be considered by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group at its forthcoming meeting.

Ms V Nairn

#### 1.3 Annual Appraisal Process [QAEC/20/1/1.3.6]

The *Action and Enhancement Plan* template and appraisal forms would be considered as part of the annual update of the *Annual Appraisal Process*, prior to the next cycle covering Session 2019-20. The first meeting had been scheduled for 25 February 2020.

Governance &  
Academic Quality

#### 1.4 **Wednesday Afternoon Teaching Policy [QAEC/20/1/6.2.1]**

At its meeting on 19 November 2020, Academic Council had approved the following two recommendations:

- (i) From September 2020, no formal timetabled teaching be permitted within the *Semester 1 Induction/Freshers' Week*;
- (ii) From September 2020, the semester 1 and semester 2 *Reading Weeks* be standardised across the University, and not be at the Heads' of School discretion to determine which week would be designated Reading Week for their respective School/courses.

See also item 2.9 below.

## 2. **INTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES**

### 2.1 **ANNUAL APPRAISAL PROCESS: SESSION 2018-19**

The Committee considered a detailed report providing updates to actions arising from the *Annual Appraisal Process 2018-19*.

In respect of marketing, slides from a recent presentation summarising achievements and an extensive list of short-term actions were **tabled**. It was highlighted that different approaches were now being taken to the marketing of undergraduate and postgraduate provision, with the former focusing on the University brand, and the latter promoting the value of courses to individuals. This had led to the differentiation of messages and campaigns. The University had also competed successfully in the clearing process and the majority of recruitment targets had been achieved. Demographic challenges, including low participation in STEM subjects, were also impacting on recruitment, although greater use was being made of live data analysis provided by RGU Insight and Penna to inform campaigns. Significant improvements had been achieved with the processing of UCAS applications, including the nurture track, and efforts were also being made to ensure the smooth handling of non-UCAS applications.

In respect of estates issues raised by the Gray's School of Art, the Committee was advised the Board of Governors had approved a detailed programme of capital and long-term maintenance, and replacement of the porta cabin annex, measures that were already impacting positively on the student experience and staff morale.

It was confirmed that Schools scheduled student contacts, and the Timetabling team assigned rooms to these schedules. Therefore, it was vital Schools liaised closely with the Timetabling team to address issues. A project had commenced to introduce auto-scheduling, and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee would be discussing the pedagogical implications of this at its next meeting.

An initial planning meeting for the *Annual Appraisal Process* of 2019-20 was being held on 25 February 2020.

In summary, the Committee was satisfied issues referred from the *Annual Appraisal Process* had been appropriately addressed, and it thanked the authors for the comprehensive responses it had received. [Ms K Bullock, Mr W Somerville, Mr S Matthew, Ms J Guest, Ms E Corry, Mrs V Strachan, Mr J Dunphy, Dr D Cockburn and Ms D Beaton].

Mrs F McLean  
Whyte to  
Authors

As noted by the Committee at its last meeting, the three actions recorded in the *Action and Enhancement Plan* that accompanied the *School Academic Board Appraisal Report* from the Aberdeen Business School were related to historical discussions at Executive level and so were no longer pertinent in the form presented. The Academic Quality Officer **agreed** to check if the *Plan* had been revised and ensure it was considered by Convener's Action.

Dr S Maxwell/  
Ms L Barry

## 2.2 Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Review: Law

The Committee **approved** an *Interim Response* from the Law School, in respect of the review of *Law* in January 2017, subject to the following:

The Review Panel had strongly recommended the School comply with the requirements of the *Organisational Regulations O5* and *O6* in respect of organising the School Academic Board and Course/Programme Management Teams. It was not clear from the updated response whether these were now operating in accordance with the respective remits, and the memberships accorded with the required compositions, as defined in the *Organisational Regulations*.

It was **agreed** confirmation on these matters would be sought from the Head of School.

Prof K Mackinnon

It was observed that there had been contradictory guidance offered by the Review Panel: it had encouraged the School to "stop engagement with marginal activities in order to provide the scope to invest in areas of strength", whilst also stating that "service teaching to other Schools was an area the Law School could consider expansion" as a means of increasing interdisciplinarity.

## 2.3 Quality Events

The Committee noted:

- the agenda for the *QAA Annual Engagement Meeting: 24 February 2020*;
- *Review, Validation and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body Event Outcomes*, for onward reporting to Academic Council and the Board of Governors; and
- *Programme of Quality Events: 2019-20 – 2024-25*.

AC Report  
[11.03.20]

## 2.4 RGU Learning and Teaching Framework

The Committee considered and welcomed the recently-launched *RGU Learning and Teaching Framework*. Schools had been asked to prepare their *Analysis and Enhancement Plans: 2020-22* by 11 May 2020 in order that these could be submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 18 May 2020. The Teaching Excellence Fellows, who had been appointed as 'critical friends' to each of the Schools, would also provide oral updates on their engagement with the development of the *Plans* to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee on 15 April 2020.

QAEC Holding  
File [18.05.20]

The *RGU Learning and Teaching Framework: Analysis and Enhancement Plans: 2020-22* would be a standing item on all School Academic Board agendas.

A number of briefing sessions on the *RGU Learning and Teaching Framework* had been organised for staff, including an *Open Staff Briefing* on 18 February 2020, a *CPD Session – Collaborative Practice* on 27 February 2020, and the *RGU Learning and Teaching Conference* on 28 April 2020.

## 2.5 Quality Enhancement Theme: Evidence for Enhancement

The Director for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access had provided the following update.

Under the auspices of the Enhancement Theme, the University had progressed a range of projects which had:

- enabled greater understanding of the University’s core evidence-base and further developed capacity to deliver actionable insights;
- empowered colleagues, both academic and support, as enablers of evidence-based enhancement within their own contexts; and
- engaged learners to ensure that projects had real and meaningful impact.

In respect of progress to date for Year 3:

- *Priority 1 – Dissemination, and driving outcomes from previous years:* a range of mechanisms continue to be used to raise awareness of the work of the theme, for example:
  - *Communication channels:* relevant sector resources, webinars and events continue to be promoted via various internal communication channels such as The Bulletin;
  - *Committees:* updates on sector-wide activity and internal projects had been provided to both the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee. In addition, a specific update was provided for the first meetings of School Academic Boards (held in October 2019) including direct links to webpages and Student Voice resources;
  - *Showcase Event:* on 3 December 2019 a showcase event was hosted by DELTA. Representatives from each project demonstrated outcomes of activity and considered what had changed, as well as the impact on staff and student experiences. The 30 participants included Heads of School, Services, Student Leaders and members of the Sub-Committees.
  - *Project Evaluation:* each project would undertake an impact evaluation prior to the end of session, which would allow for individual and collective consideration of outcomes and impact on staff and student experiences.
- *Priority 2 – Longitudinal reflection:* the University wished to take the opportunity to reflect on its longitudinal, strategic approach to evidencing quality enhancement. An initial scoping workshop had been scheduled and, thereafter, discussions would involve wider stakeholders.
- *Priority 3 – Review of the Online Learning Baseline:* it had recently been agreed that a Teaching Excellence Fellow would engage in the review. The re-development of the *Baseline* would seek to apply an evidence-based approach drawing on insights from learners, staff and systems analytics.

It was **agreed** the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee would be asked to prepare guidance to staff on the purpose and benefits of Panopto, as opposed to the existing user guide.

Mr J Dunphy &  
Ms L Ginsberg  
(TLASC)

## 2.6 Quality Code

The Committee noted an update on the status of mappings to the *Quality Code 2018*. Using a uniform template work was progressing, in liaison with key staff across the University, to complete draft mappings for initial consideration by the Department for Governance and Academic Quality in March 2020, prior to the submission of finalised mappings to the Committee at its next meeting.

QAEC Holding  
File [18.05.20]

The Director of Planning and Policy offered to assist in the preparation of the *Monitoring and Evaluation* mapping.

Ms L Ginsberg &  
Dr D Cockburn

## 2.7 Student Experience Questionnaires

The Committee considered an *Overview of the Semester 1 Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)*, issued to full-time undergraduate students. A 42% response rate had been achieved and, whilst this was admirable, there was still a need to ensure students on placement or studying abroad engaged with the *SEQ*. Improvements were evident across all five categories, and overall satisfaction had increased in eight of the 11 Schools, although one School was an outlier and the causes would be investigated.

Ms K Campbell

## 2.8 External Examiners

A *Profile of External Examiners*, identifying their geographical and occupational origin, was noted.

## 2.9 Wednesday Afternoon Teaching Policy

The Convener confirmed she had spoken with each Head of School regarding teaching on Wednesday afternoons. It was apparent that large cohorts were often scheduled for Wednesday afternoons due to the lack of availability of large lecture rooms.

The School of Creative and Cultural Business, Aberdeen Business School and the Law School had a considerable amount of shared teaching which improved efficiency. A significant amount of work was being undertaken within the Schools to refine the timetable, avoiding Wednesday afternoons as far as possible, prior to forwarding to the Timetabling team.

The Committee wished to reiterate that the University's policy was that no teaching to undergraduate students should take place on Wednesday afternoons, except in the most exceptional circumstances.

Academic  
Council Report  
[11.03.20]

## 2.10 HESA Retention Performance Indicators 2018-19

A paper from the Director of Planning and Policy was **tabled**, relating to the University's performance in the most recent retention performance indicators; this data was embargoed and should not be shared outwith the University. It was evident from the analysis completed so far that the University's performance for non-continuation had worsened, as has its corresponding performance for continuation. The University's benchmark had also declined suggesting this was a trend in the whole UK sector. The University's performance for transferring to another institution had, however, improved.

The sector's data would be issued at the end of February 2020 and this would allow comparative analysis to be undertaken.

The Committee was also advised that further analysis of the impact of clearing on admissions would be available in a couple of weeks' time, the detail of which would be helpful for the *Annual Appraisal Process*. Schools were encouraged to request the analysis from the Director of Planning and Policy.

The Director of Planning and Policy **agreed** to confirm how the LLB (Hons) and the BA (Hons) Law and Management were recorded, and also whether integrated Masters courses were included.

QAEC Members  
to  
Dr D Cockburn

Dr D Cockburn

## 3. EXTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

### 3.1 Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2021

The Convener informed the Committee that she, together with the Assistant Chief Academic Officer and members of the Department for Governance and Academic Quality, had attended a QAA briefing on ELIR 4 in September 2019. The University's ELIR Steering Group had met on 21 January 2020, and would be meeting monthly thereafter.

The Steering Group had agreed that the University would request an ELIR Panel with the following composition: a Panel of five consisting of three academic reviewers, one student reviewer and one coordinating reviewer. An international reviewer would not be required as collaborative provision would not be included, and it was considered unnecessary to request an additional student reviewer.

A briefing note on ELIR 4 had been issued by the Academic Quality Officers to School Academic Boards for their first meeting of the session.

## 4. SUB-COMMITTEES

### 4.1 Academic Regulations Sub-Committee

The Committee considered a report from the meeting held on 15 January 2020.

#### 4.1.1 *Academic Regulations Seminar*

The Committee's attention had been drawn to the Sub-Committee's discussion of the Academic Regulation Seminar held on 6 December 2019, a significant part of which was dedicated to both contract cheating, and the activities of RGU:Union relating to student misconduct and academic honesty that had been presented at the Seminar.

Feedback from students had identified concerns with capacity in the Study Skills team, in terms of availability of appointments and space at workshops, and it was **agreed** the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee would be asked to consider this further. It was confirmed by the Student President for Communication and Democracy that information leaflets outlining where to access support were issued to new students as part of the Freshers' pack.

Mr J Dunphy &  
Ms L Ginsberg  
(TLASC)

#### 4.1.2 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- *Graduate Apprenticeships and Academic Regulations*: a meeting had taken place with the Head of Learning Teaching Development and the Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) course leaders to discuss the *Academic Regulations*, their relevance and applicability to the GA courses. It was confirmed that the *Academic Regulations* in their current form were appropriate to the GAs and no amendments were proposed at this time;
- *Assessment and Recommendations of Assessment Boards – Honours Classifications and Academic Appeals*: the Sub-Committee had discussed:
  - the profile of honours classifications following the introduction of the revised criteria for honours in Session 2017-18; and
  - the number of academic appeals following the introduction of the *Fit to Sit Policy* in Session 2016-17;
- *External Examiner Annual Reports*: the Sub-Committee had considered comments raised by external examiners concerning regulatory issues;
- *Dignity at Work and Study Policy*: the Sub-Committee had deferred its discussion of the *Policy* until its meeting on 25 March 2020.

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[11.03.20]

## 4.2 **Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee**

Consideration was given to a report from the meeting held on 21 January 2020.

#### 4.2.1 *Student Communications*

The Committee noted the Sub-Committee's discussion of communication with students. This included a report from the Communications Manager on plans to enhance student communication, and discussion of the concern with the volume of emails sent to students, that was reported by the School of Computing Science and Digital Media in the *Annual Appraisal Process*. The Sub-Committee would be discussing this further at its next meeting on 27 March 2020.

#### 4.2.2 *Items for Noting*

The Committee also noted the following items:

- *Semester One Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) Results:* the Sub-Committee received a presentation that providing an overview of Semester One SEQ results and the data in *RGU: Insight*. The Sub-Committee noted that Q6(a) “When needed I have received appropriate advice and support in relation to other aspects of university life” had received by far the lowest percentage score of ‘agree’ responses at 64%. A number of actions were discussed and agreed to further understand how improvements might be made in accessing and receiving appropriate support;
- *Student-Facing Support Services Annual Appraisal Process:* the Sub-Committee would be asking all Heads of Service to provide updated *Appraisal Action and Enhancement Plans* for consideration at its next meeting;
- *Review of Student-Facing Support Services:* the Sub-Committee considered the response to the recommendations arising from the 2018-19 *Student-Facing Support Services Review: Delivery of Support Services to Off-Campus Students* and received an update from DELTA on progress with the theme for Session 2019-20: *Academic Transitions*;
- *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) Objectives for Session 2019-20:* the Sub-Committee received an update on SPA objectives for Session 2019-20 which, for the first time, were being communicated in the form of a video, that was still under production;
- *Healthy Universities Update:* the Sub-Committee had received an update from the Head of Sport on the Healthy University Steering Group and associated activity;
- *Support for Mental Health at RGU:* the Sub-Committee received a detailed presentation from the Disability and Inclusion Manager, including an overview of further enhancements to counselling provision following receipt of £87,000 in funding from the Scottish Funding Council. The *Mental Health Strategy and Plan* were nearing completion and would be submitted to the Executive shortly;
- *National Student Survey (NSS):* the Sub-Committee received an update on preparations for *National Student Survey 2020*, which would be launching in February 2020.

#### 4.3 **Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee**

The Committee noted a report from the meeting held on 16 January 2020 and, in particular, the following items:

- *Sharing Effective Practice:* an informal session was again held at the beginning of the meeting, which was facilitated by the Teaching Excellence Fellows (TEFs) whereby members were asked to share practice in the areas of assessment, feedback, technology and workshops/face-to-face teaching. The examples were then shared with members, and this was a valuable means of identifying collaboration opportunities;
- *Digital Estate:* the phase 1 of the *Digital Estate Project* was considered, which included the impact from the *CampusMoodle* upgrade, the new *CampusMoodle* institutional welcome space, the *CampusMoodle* ‘at desk’ advisory service for staff and the *LinkedIn Learning* pilot. The work on an online learning vision was welcomed and it was noted there was an opportunity for members to get involved with the project;

- *Referred Business*: three items were referred to the Sub-Committee from the Committee for consideration: an investigation into satisfaction of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students, the adoption of the *Outcome Classification Descriptions for FHEQ Level 7 and FQHEIS Level 10 Degrees*, and a review of the *Guidance on Recording of Lectures* and associated policies. Proposed actions were discussed and members agreed with the Committee's recommendations. Subsequent work was required to fulfil the recommendations and an update would be sought at the April Sub-Committee meeting.

## 5. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)

The Director for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access had provided the following update:

- The *National Student Survey (NSS) 2020*, issued to final stage undergraduates, would launch in the week beginning 10 February 2020. During the fieldwork, eligible students would receive a sequence of communications from the external survey provider encouraging completion. In addition, there would be a range of centrally-coordinated promotional activity, in both electronic and hard copy formats.
- NSS guidance required that all staff communicating the survey to students should do so clearly and impartially. Communications should:
  - inform students that the survey was run by an independent research agency, on behalf of all higher education funding bodies; and,
  - encourage students to complete the survey, inviting honest and constructive feedback on their experience.
- 'Inappropriate influence' was defined by the funding bodies as "any activity which may encourage students to reflect anything other than their true opinion of their experiences during their course in their NSS responses".
- Promotional materials and detailed guidance were available via [Campus Moodle](#). This provided access to a range of e-materials, for example: PowerPoint slides, poster and banner images, and a video link.

## 6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18 May 2020, 2.00pm in room N204, Sir Ian Wood Building, Garthdee.

## 7. SCHOOL ACADEMIC BOARD REPORTS TO THE COMMITTEE

The Committee noted reports from the following Schools:

- *School of Applied Social Studies*: the School had introduced a 10-point grading grid, incorporating a Grade A+, for feedback purposes only. This had been discussed by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee, which had not been minded to recommend the University's *Grading Scheme* be formally amended, and there would be further discussion at the Sub-Committee's next meeting on 15 April 2020.
- *School of Creative and Cultural Business*: the School was taking measures to address student dissatisfaction with the 'closing the loop' aspect of the 'student voice' category.

- *School of Engineering*: the School provided a detailed update on its *Action and Enhancement Plan*, and described measures taken to ensure students were aware of their personal tutor.
- *School of Nursing and Midwifery*: the School confirmed the *Action and Enhancement Plan* was being closed monitored and was driving activities.
- *School of Pharmacy and Life Science*: the School confirmed that due to urgent business, discussion of the *Action and Enhancement Plan* had been deferred until its next meeting.
- *Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment*: the School provided a detailed update on the status of its *Action and Enhancement Plan* and it was using a traffic light system to monitor progress through course leaders at four-weekly intervals.

In respect of the remaining Schools:

- *Aberdeen Business School*: no report had been provided;
- *Gray's School of Art*: the School Academic Board was meeting on 12 February 2020;
- *School of Computing Science and Digital Media*: the School Academic Board was meeting on 26 February 2020;
- *School of Health Sciences*: the School Academic Board was meeting on 15 April 2020;
- *The Law School*: the School Academic Board was meeting on 19 February 2020.

Schools would be guided to schedule School Academic Boards to reflect the Committee's calendar in future sessions.

Committee members indicated they would welcome guidance on the appropriate dissemination of information received through the Committee. It was **agreed** that the working assumption would be all information received through the Committee could be disseminated, unless otherwise notified. It was also **agreed** consideration would be given, by Committee conveners and secretaries, on the best means of identifying and communicating actions promptly, and proposals would be brought to the Committee for consideration.

Prof E Gammie &  
Dr M Bailey/  
Mrs B Paver

QAEC Members  
Conveners &  
Governance and  
Academic Quality  
QAEC Holding  
File [18.05.20]

## 8. **RGU LEARNING AND TEACHING CONFERENCE 2020**

The University's *Learning and Teaching Conference: RGU Professionals 4.0*, chaired by Professor David McClean, Head of Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment, would be held on 28 April 2020. Registration would open shortly.

## 9. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT THEME EVENTS

### 9.1 Enhancement Theme Guest Session: Intangible Assets

Facilitated by guest speaker Dr Alastair Robertson, Director of Teaching and Learning Enhancement, Abertay University, the workshop would explore the increased focus on metrics and quantitative measures, and describe the outcomes of a project that sought to provide a renewed understanding of contributory aspects to the success of higher education that were deemed important, yet were not easily measurable or quantifiable - so-called 'intangible assets'. 13 February 2020, 12.00pm-2.00pm, N342 (Innovation Centre), Sir Ian Wood Building.

### 9.2 Evidence for Enhancement: Upcoming Sessions

A list of internal events in the forthcoming semester was noted.

### 9.3 QAA 4<sup>th</sup> International Enhancement Conference

The *QAA 4<sup>th</sup> International Enhancement Conference: 'Beyond Measure?: exploring what counts in higher education'* would be held on 3 and 4 June 2020, at Radisson Blu, Glasgow.

## 10. QAA FOCUS ON PROJECT: 2019-20

The *Focus On* project for 2019-20 drew on outcomes from ELIR 3 and 4. *Focus On: Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)* would emphasise connections between strategy and practice. An event would be held on 1 April 2020 at the studio in Glasgow.

## 11. ERASMUS MOBILITY 2018-19: FINAL REPORT

The Committee noted the *Erasmus Mobility 2018-19: Final Report – Assessment Conclusion*.

## 12. VALEDICTORY

The Committee wished to record its appreciation of Dr Sandra Maxwell, who would shortly be retiring from the University, for her considerable efforts and contributions to the Committee, its Sub-Committees and academic quality in general, and wished her well for the future.

Professor E Hancock, C  
4 March 2020

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