

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 18 May 2020 (2.00pm – 3.30pm).

Present: Professor E Hancock (Convener), Mr F Antoniazzi, Dr H Bain, Mrs L Binnie, Mrs J Bolger, Ms M Buchan, Dr S Burgess, Mr D Christie, Ms I Crawford, Dr N Emmison, Ms J Guest, Mr T Kouider, Mr S Matthew, Dr R McDermott, Ms U Ojiji, Mrs B Paver, Mr L Smith and Mrs V Strachan.

Apologies: Mr J Dunphy and Ms J Guest.

In Attendance: Ms L Barry, Dr D Cockburn, Ms L Ginsberg, Ms L Jack and Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary).

1. MINUTE	Action
<p>The Committee approved the <i>Minute of the meeting of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 12 February 2020</i>, reference QAEC/20/2, and considered a <i>Matters Arising Report</i>.</p>	
<p>1.1 Minute: Law School Action and Enhancement Plan [QAEC/20/2/1]</p> <p>Although at the Committee's last meeting it had been confirmed a competent <i>Action and Enhancement Plan</i> had still not been provided by the School it was evident from the School Academic Board Report [item 6(k) below] the actions were being taken to address issues raised in the <i>Annual Appraisal Process</i>. It was essential, however, for the <i>Action and Enhancement Plan</i> to be signed off by the Convener and Vice-Convener, and Mr Christie agreed to liaise with Professor Mackinnon to ensure this was forwarded to the Convener and Vice-Convener.</p>	Mr D Christie, Prof K Mackinnon to Prof E Hancock & Mrs V Strachan
<p>1.2 Gender Balance in the Student Population [QAEC/20/2/1.2]</p> <p>It had been confirmed consideration of the gender balance in the student population would be considered by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group at its next meeting.</p>	Ms V Nairn
<p>1.3 Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Review: Law [QAEC/20/2/2.2]</p> <p>It had been confirmed the School Academic Board and Course/Programme Management Teams comply with the requirements of the <i>Organisational Regulations O5 and O6</i>.</p>	
<p>1.4 Quality Enhancement Theme: Evidence for Enhancement [QAEC/20/2/2.5]</p> <p>Preparation of guidance to staff on the purpose and benefits of Panopto, as opposed to the existing user guide, had been deferred to the October meeting of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee in light of the current COVID-19 situation.</p>	

1.5 **Student Experience Questionnaires [QAEC/20/2/2.7]**

The Semester 1 SEQ was intended to supplement existing staff-student liaison mechanisms, and sought early feedback on the learning experience. Responses provided in-year information to Schools and Course Teams, enabling further dialogue and action as appropriate. In addition, the *Annual Appraisal Process* enabled commentary from a range of sources of student feedback on any significant results, trends and associated interventions.

1.6 **Wednesday Afternoon Teaching Policy [QAEC/20/2/2.9]**

Academic Council noted the Committee's reiteration of the University's policy that no teaching to undergraduate students should take place on Wednesday afternoons, except in the most exceptional circumstances.

Secretary's Note: In light of revisions to semester 1 of Session 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the delayed start to semester 1 to 28 September 2020 and the removal of the semester 1 reading week approved by the University Management Group, a degree of flexibility might be required in respect of timetabling activities on Wednesday afternoons.

1.7 **HESA Retention Performance Indicators 2018-19 [QAEC/20/2/2.10]**

The Director of Planning and Policy confirmed the LLB (Hons) and the BA (Hons) Law and Management were included in the retention figures separately, and that the integrated Masters courses were included. It was recognised there was often a number of internal transfers across these courses.

Retention data had recently been received from the Scottish Funding Council and would be incorporated into the *Insight Dashboards* within the next couple of weeks.

1.8 **Academic Regulations Seminar [QAEC/20/2/4.1.1]**

Consideration of concerns with capacity in the Study Skills team by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee had been deferred to the October meeting of the Sub-Committee in light of the current COVID-19 situation.

1.9 **School Academic Board Reports to the Committee [QAEC/20/2/7]**

Consideration of the best means of identifying and communicating committee actions promptly had been deferred in light of the current COVID-19 situation.

2. **EXTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES**

2.1 **Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2021**

The Vice-Convenor updated the Committee on preparations for the ELIR. Although the University had been offered the opportunity to defer the ELIR due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had been agreed it would proceed in February and April 2021 as planned. As a consequence, the *Reflective Analysis* and *Advanced Information Set* would be due for submission to the QAA in December 2020.

The ELIR Steering Group had continued to meet on a regular basis to review progress with, and evidence of, work done since ELIR 3 in 2016, and identify potential key themes to be highlighted in the University's *Reflective Analysis* and *Advanced Information Set*.

The Assistant Chief Academic Officer had presented to Academic Council on 11 March 2020 on the ELIR preparations and proposed the University's themes and strengths remained the same as those identified in ELIR 2016: use of data to enhance the student learning experience; widening access; employability; and student representation and partnership working. The University's resilience during the current COVID-19 pandemic was also worthy of reflection. Academic Council members had been encouraged to forward further suggestions for themes. It was **agreed** the presentation would be circulated with the Committee's minute.

Mrs F McLean
Whyte

The intention was to involve Committee members in the preparations, including development of the case studies.

2.2 **Quality Code**

Consideration was given to an update report on preparation of mappings to the *Quality Code 2018*. Due to the current situation, work had been delayed but would progress over the summer in order that draft mappings were completed by early August 2020.

Although the mappings were being coordinated by staff in the Department for Governance and Academic Quality in liaison with colleagues in Schools and Support Departments, it was **agreed** it would be valuable to have academic scrutiny of the drafts. The Committee **agreed** to establish a short-life working group, involving Dr Bain, Ms Binnie and Mr Smith, to review all of the *Quality Code* mappings on behalf of the Committee, and that would meet in the latter half of August 2020.

Mrs F McLean
Whyte
Dr H Bain,
Ms L Binnie &
Mr L Smith

3. **INTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES**

3.1 **Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Review - Computing**

The Committee **approved** the interim response from the School of Computing Science and Digital Media in respect of the Review of *Computing*, held 17-19 January 2017, and thanked the School for the comprehensive and considered response.

Dr J Isaacs

3.2 **Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Review - Business and Management; Accounting and Finance**

The Committee **approved** the interim response from the Aberdeen Business School in respect of the Review of *Business and Management, and Accounting and Finance* held 16-18 May 2017, and thanked the School for the detailed response.

Prof E Gammie

3.3 **RGU Learning and Teaching Framework**

The Committee noted an *RGU Learning and Teaching Framework – Revised Implementation Plan*. This had been issued to Schools to advise that, due to the work undertaken by Schools in response to COVID-19, it had been decided to extend the date for submission of *School Learning and Teaching Framework: Analysis and Enhancement Plans* by four weeks to 8 June 2020. The *Plans* would describe the

measures taken by Schools to embed the *RGU Learning and Teaching Framework*, and confirmation of related enhancement objectives for Sessions 2020-21 and 2021-22. A Teaching Excellence Fellow had been assigned to each School to assist. The delayed timeframe would ensure momentum in activities was not lost, and would enable the considerable amount of successful cross-School and Department collaboration to continue.

Schools had also been asked to reflect on "Planning for uncertainty, developing resilience and being mindful of wellbeing, developing technological capabilities, problem-solving, collaboration, expanding methods of effective communication, and so on; these are all attributes that are hugely valuable in the 21st Century workplace, and relate directly to the notion of 'whole person' learning and the future professional."

3.4 **Response to COVID-19**

The Committee noted the [Supporting Online Learning and Assessment](#) resources on *CampusMoodle*, including:

- updated guidance and procedures;
- advice on supporting learning and support remotely, including on how to best use technology at this time; and,
- selected resources produced by colleagues from across the sector.

The Department for Governance and Academic Quality had just updated the *Summary of COVID-19 Guidance* to reflect recent communications.

The Committee discussed the impact of the situation on student and staff wellbeing, not least in respect of the remote support of students by staff in Schools and Support Departments. There was substantial evidence of increased cohesiveness of student cohorts, and their engagement in tutorial sessions, although smaller numbers of students were less well-equipped. The Teaching and Learning Group that was meeting weekly, and convened by the Committee's Convener, included Mr Emmanuel Akerele, Student President for Education and Welfare, and this was helping ensure the student perspective was considered.

The Counselling Service and SilverCloud had witnessed increased cases of anxiety and depression, as well as cases of gender-based violence, and issues relating to the caring responsibilities of some students, as well as some staff. The Counselling Service was offering virtual face-to-face sessions, but had observed some students were having difficulty getting privacy for sessions. An increase in demand was anticipated as the current lockdown was eased and new anxieties arose, and the number of counsellors had been increased.

The Committee **agreed** it wished to commend all staff in Schools and Support Departments for their efforts in supporting students during this very challenging period.

The Committee was advised that, at its meeting on 11 March 2020, Academic Council had reiterated the need to ensure assessment feedback was provided within the normal 20 working day timeframe in order to reduce students' anxiety. If the timeframe could not be met Schools were required to engage and consult with the students concerned.

The Committee noted the very positive outcomes from the recent *Staying Well Student Pulse Survey*, that closed on 21 April 2020. The Library Service was following-up low scores within three Schools.

3.5 **Quality Enhancement Theme: Evidence for Enhancement**

The QAA had announced, on 28 April 2020, a six-month extension to the submission of institutional reports and institutions' Theme evaluation reporting. Consequently, there would be an explicit transition phase between Themes to allow the QAA to complete reporting on the current Theme without losing time to plan and conduct detailed scoping for the new Enhancement Theme. The University's Theme report and plans for developing the legacy of the *Evidence for Enhancement* theme would be discussed at a future meeting of the Committee.

Mr J Dunphy &
Ms K Campbell
QAEC Holding File
[17.11.20]

The new Enhancement Theme would be *Resilient Learning Communities* and would run from 2020 to 2023. The Theme would focus on diversity in the student population and increasing flexibility in provision.

3.6 **Student Engagement and Partnership**

The Committee considered a report on *Student Partnership, Engagement and Representation*, that provided an overview of the development and implementation of the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) 2020* as well as activity in support of student engagement in the life of the University, including core quality assurance and enhancement processes. It also confirmed the [Partnership in 2020](#) video was now available and accessed through Vimeo.

As part of the current partnership objective exploring expectations relating to equality, tolerance and respect, the three Student Presidents had organised several *Chat, Comment, Change Forum* sessions for staff and students to share perspectives and join discussions. The sessions were accessible via the [RGU:Union Facebook](#) and the [RGU Union site](#). The first, on equality, had been held on 13 May 2020 and had been very well received and a couple of issues raised had been incorporated into the action plan being taken forward by the sabbatical officers; the sessions on tolerance and respect would be held on 21 May 2020.

Following the departure of the general manager in December 2019, the Director of Student Life assumed operational oversight of the Union. Ms Hannah Leslie, Head of Sport, and Ms Kirsty Campbell, Learning Analytics and Partnership Lead, were committing one day per week to support the sabbatical officers in developing and implementing the Union's own strategic plans as well as meeting the needs of the University's strategy.

Plans were already in place to progress training of student representatives and Student School Officers online pending a return to campus.

The Committee thanked the Director of Student Life and the Learning Analytics and Partnership Lead for the detailed report that demonstrated, amongst other things, the excellent engagement of the sabbatical officers and their efforts to ensure the engagement and participation of the student community. It was **agreed** the paper could usefully be updated to capture the levels of engagement by students with online activities.

Mr F Antoniazzi &
Ms K Campbell

The Committee also wished to congratulate the Union which was successful in winning *NUS Scotland Officer Team of the Year*, and Mr Ross Leven who won *Student of the Year* for his work with the Duke of Edinburgh Society.

Mr E Akerele,
Mr R Leven &
Ms U Ojji

3.7 Annual Appraisal Process

The Committee **approved** proposals for amendments to the *Annual Appraisal Process* covering Session 2019-20. The key changes included:

- *Annual Course Appraisal Reports:*
 - addition of the *Student Exchange Partner Institution – Annual Check* to be appended for courses which offer an Erasmus or other student exchange programme;
 - clarification included on the two student achievement rates (SARs) targets; 80% at modular level for all stages at first sitting and 90% at course level overall post-resit diet;
 - addition of a COVID-19 disclaimer for the *Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)* and a new question on other student questionnaire data sources to consider; *SEQ Semester 1* results and *Staying Well* pulse survey;
 - addition of a signature box for the Head of School to complete post-School Academic Board (SAB);
 - development of the *Action and Enhancement Plan (AEP)* to more clearly separate actions and enhancements, and references added for considering in relation to course enhancements; the University's Learning and Teaching Framework and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Enhancement Themes;
- *School Academic Board Appraisal Report:*
 - addition of new questions on evaluating the effectiveness of the School's *Personal Tutorial System*;
 - addition of a COVID-19 disclaimer for the *Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)* and a new question on other student questionnaire data sources to consider; *SEQ Semester 1* results and *Staying Well* pulse survey.
 - a request for the School's *Learning and Teaching Plan* to be appended with the Report;
 - development of the *Action and Enhancement Plan (AEP)* to more clearly separate actions and enhancements, and references added for considering in relation to subject enhancements; the University's Learning and Teaching Framework and the QAA Enhancement Themes.
- *Data Enhancements:* the following areas would be addressed by the Business Intelligence Team ahead of the Workbook releases:
 - integration of the new *Graduate Outcomes* survey data;
 - resolution of the difficulty in filtering SEQ by School;
 - proposal to develop a Definitions Sheet at the end of Dashboards to provide definitions of recurring terms, e.g. MD20 student;
 - provision of course SARs data to Course Leaders;
 - addition of a filter for online learning/on campus in SAB Workbook.

It was **agreed** the COVID-19 disclaimer on the SEQ might usefully be added to the *National Student Survey* and *Graduate Outcomes* data given the conversations in the wider sector regarding the situation in which the data was collected and finalised.

Ms L Ginsberg

The revised Annual Appraisal report templates and guidance would be issued to Schools in early June 2020.

Governance and
Academic Quality

The Committee thanked the Academic Quality Officers for their efforts in refining and enhancing the *Annual Appraisal Process*.

Academic Quality
Officers

4. SUB-COMMITTEES

4.1 Academic Regulations Sub-Committee

The Vice-Convener updated the Committee on the Academic Regulations Seminar held on 11 May 2020. Approximately 40 staff had participated in the Seminar run in Microsoft Teams, and the focus was providing guidance on the remote operation of Assessment Boards.

Of particular value was discussion of the University's position on 'no disadvantage', an approach taken to reflect the fact that the University had, where necessary, re-designed its assessments to meet the learning outcomes' requirements. In making decisions on award and progression Assessment Boards were encouraged to consider a range of data, including previous performance compared with recent performance, thereby ensuring no student was disadvantaged. Boards would also be expected to exercise leniency and latitude as appropriate, and this had been explored in discussions of various scenarios. Changes to students forms, to reflect self-certification, and to the quorum for Assessment Boards were also highlighted.

It was **agreed** the presentation used during the Seminar would be circulated to Committee members with the minute.

Mrs F McLean
Whyte

4.2 Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee

The Committee noted a report from the meeting held on 27 April 2020 and, in particular, the following:

- *Welcome and Convener's Opening Remarks:* members were given the opportunity to speak about how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them. Key points highlighted: the efforts to move to off-campus delivery; the acceleration in the development of off-campus student support; and the importance of involving the student body in decision-making processes;
- *Substantive Discussion: Student Communications:* Ms Anna Duthie, Communications Manager, presented on plans to enhance student communication as part of the University's communications strategy, and in light of COVID-19. This highlighted the University's desire to use two key channels to engage with students: the weekly Student Bulletin; and the MYRGU mobile app. There was a desire to avoid Schools and Departments sending 'all student' emails. Engagement with students as part of these developments had been vital. It was noted that in the region of 6,500 students were regularly using the MYRGU app.

The Director of IT and Digital **agreed** to liaise with Mr Colin Jones, Web and Applications Team Lead, regarding the targeting of communications to students.

Mr S Matthew

- *Appraisal and Enhancement of the Student Experience:* Heads of Service had been asked to submit updated *Appraisal Action and Enhancement Plans*. Members were satisfied with the responses received and that no 'blockages' to service delivery had been reported.

Members noted feedback from Heads of Service following a review of the qualitative comments received under Q6 (a) in the Semester One Student Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ). The intention was to identify any 'quick wins' and/or actions to improve that could be taken mid-session. It was once again noted that it was not easy for services to interrogate this data. It was likely that the Director of Planning and Policy would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Sub-Committee to discuss potential enhancements in this area.

- *Student Partnership Agreement 2020:* The Convener gave an update on activities in relation to the Partnership Objective 2020. Once again, the significant input from the Sabbatical Officers was noted.

In respect of the Review of Student-Facing Support Services, it was confirmed the review event for the *2019/20 Theme: Academic Transitions* had been postponed for at least three months.

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

The Committee noted the report from the meeting held on 15 April 2020 and, in particular, the following:

- *Sharing Effective Practice:* ahead of the Sub-Committee meeting, members were asked to engage with colleagues (within and outwith their relevant School/ Departments) in order to share effective teaching, learning or assessment practice(s) implemented as a result of the COVID-19 situation and highlight areas of support that would be of valuable assistance;
- *Assessment Policy and Guidance:* the paper outlined work undertaken by the Assessment Policy and Guidance Review Working Group of the Sub-Committee, which met on 12 March 2020 and detailed changes that had been proposed to documentation for approval. It also included specific queries which the Working Group had highlighted for further discussion and clarity. All further discussions would be put on hold until the October meeting due to the current COVID-19 situation;
- *Digital Estate Project:* a paper was provided to the Sub-Committee with an overview of the staff photograph service and course welcome video-recording service offered to academic and support staff as part of the Digital Estate Project.

5. **COMMITTEE EVALUATION – SESSION 2019-20**

The Committee's *Annual Report – Session 2019-20*, containing an analysis of responses from the *Committee Evaluation Questionnaire* and of members' attendance, was noted together with the *Annual Report on the Evaluation of the Sub-Committees – Session 2019-20*. There were no items it wished to bring to the attention of Academic Council.

Members reported that they found the virtual format of committee meetings worked well in Microsoft Teams, particularly the use of the 'chat' function during meetings, and it was suggested this might be continued in some format following the return to campus.

The Committee was advised that the Convener and Secretary of the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee had met with the student members and it had been apparent they tended to lack confidence to actively contribute in meetings. In future, they would meet with the student members at the start of the session and before each meeting to support their participation in meetings.

The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee had taken the approach of bringing student-specific agenda items to the top of the agenda.

6. SCHOOL ACADEMIC BOARD REPORTS TO THE COMMITTEE

The Committee noted the *School Academic Board Reports* from the eleven Schools the majority of which provided, amongst other things, updates on *Action and Enhancement Plans* and the operation of their respective *Personal Tutorial Systems*. The following was highlighted:

- within the Aberdeen Business School, a concern had been raised that there might be too much pressure on the Student School Officer to manage School Representatives, and that views presented by the School Representatives did not reflect the cohort feedback subsequently expressed in the *Student Experience Questionnaires*. Consideration would be given to developing an online facility to support the Student School Officer;
- the School of Applied Social Studies had sought clarification on the timeframe for planning Session 2020/21, semester 1 activities, and it was confirmed guidance would be issued following consideration of the Heads of School reports that were due by 22 May 2020;
- Gray's School of Art had focused on embedding *Personal Professional Development (PPD)* in all of its courses, and it was noted the Board of Governors had been very impressed with these activities during its recent Board visit. This included the integration of the SISA (Scottish Innovative Student Award) programme within the curriculum, led within the School by Mr Iain Morrison and supported by Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE) and by Mr Chris Moule (Convener of the University's SISA steering group);
- proposals had recently been agreed by the Executive to change the names of the School of Computing Science and Digital Media to the *School of Computing*, and School of Nursing and Midwifery to the *School of School of Nursing and Midwifery and Paramedic Practice*;
- the School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences had sought guidance on how to address concerns with inappropriate comments being made by students in the *Student Experience Questionnaires*, and the Committee was reminded the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee was in the process of reviewing the *Dignity at Work and Study Policy*;
- as noted above, the Law School Academic Board Report reported progress with six actions taken to address the issues in the Action and Enhancement Plan.

7. INTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

7.1 Quality Events

The Committee noted:

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

The Committee was advised that a number of validation events had been held successfully through Microsoft Teams since the closure of the campus.

7.2 Student Handbooks

The Committee considered a report on an internal audit of Student Handbooks undertaken by the Academic Quality Officers. A self-assessment tool was developed for Course Leaders to complete against the criteria outlined in the *Student Handbooks: Guidance on Minimum Composition*, and samples of Handbooks for subsequently checked by the Academic Quality Officers.

The Committee **agreed**:

- (i) The current *Student Handbooks: Guidance on Minimum Composition* be reviewed and consideration be given to whether there would be benefit in updating the *Guidance* to allow for a School-wide approach with course-specific sections incorporated into the same Handbook/CampusMoodle page.
- (ii) Schools continue to be strongly encouraged to provide electronic-based Student Handbooks hosted on *CampusMoodle*, thereby ensuring currency of information.
- (iii) Schools be reminded of the importance of adhering to the *Student Handbook: Guidance on Minimum Composition*, including the provision of detailed assessment schedules/calendars and personal tutor information.

8. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)

The 2020 NSS closed on 30 April and achieved an overall response rate of 73.49% (NB: subject to data cleansing). It was anticipated results would be provided in July, however implications of COVID-19 on engagement, and results, would be assessed by the external provider. DELTA would continue to monitor sector guidance in this respect.

9. RGU LEARNING AND TEACHING CONFERENCE 2020

The University's *Learning and Teaching Conference: RGU Professionals 4.0* had been postponed and would be replaced with a series of webinars organised by the Teaching Excellence Fellows.

10. **DATE OF MEETINGS: SESSION 2020-21**

Tuesday 17 November 2020, 2.00pm via MS Teams

Wednesday 3 March 2021, 2.00pm in room N204, Sir Ian Wood Building, Garthdee

Wednesday 26 May 2021, 2.00pm in room N204, Sir Ian Wood Building, Garthdee.

11. **VALEDICTORY**

The Committee wished to record its appreciation of the considerable efforts of Ms Ojiji during her term as Student President for Communications and Democracy to positively impact the student experience, and for her contributions to the work of the Committee. The Committee wished her all the best for the future.

Professor E Hancock, C

2 June 2020