ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 24 November 2022 (2.00pm – 4.00pm).

Present: Professor L Kilbride (Convener), Dr B Addison, E Akerele, F Antoniazzi, Dr I Arana, S Bamigbola, D Blyth, J Bolger, M Buchan, D Christie, Dr K Cross, Professor E Gammie, J Innes, F McLean Whyte, F Roberts, J Strachan, V Strachan and D Wilson.
Apologies: P Daly, J Guest, Dr I Iyalla, A Smart and A Watson.
In Attendance: L Barry (Secretary), L Ginsberg, F Hall (for item 3.2.2), Professor S Olivier (for item 3.3) and L Jack.

Action

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Convener welcomed the members to the first in-person meeting of the session, and members introduced themselves.

1. MINUTE AND MATTERS ARISING

The Committee **approved** the *Minute of the meeting held on 13 October 2022, reference QAEC/23/1* and noted the *Matters Arising Report* outlining an update that had been made to the minute prior to the meeting.

2. ANNUAL APPRAISAL PROCESS

The Committee noted the requirement to report annually to Academic Council on the Annual Appraisal Process and, in doing so, provide a number of assurances regarding the quality and standards for award-bearing courses.

It was **agreed** that the revised process, involving the inclusion of the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience, Prof L Kilbride, at the School Academic Boards (SAB), had been beneficial for all concerned.

The Committee was reminded that an *Enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Action Plan* had been collated last year following the Annual Appraisal Process that pulled together actions from last year's *Action and Enhancement Plans* across the institution and incorporated the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment projects; the Teaching Excellence Fellow projects; the Student School Officers' projects; DELTA projects; and the actions arising from the Annual Appraisal Process [refer QAEC/22/3/5.1.1].

It was envisaged that this *Action Plan* be taken forward this session as a live working document to keep track of all enhancement activity. It was advised that any ongoing enhancements would be retained, and any achieved/completed actions were removed.

The following aspects were noted: -

- Some actions which had been highlighted in the SAB Annual Appraisal reports had already been implemented or actioned since the meetings of the School Academic Boards.

- It was important to incorporate comments and input from the External Examiners.

- It was important to ensure there was a good cohesion with input from the professional services and the effective implementation of this into the next appraisal cycle in order to ensure more effective links to the SAB Annual Appraisal reports.

The *Enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Action Plan* would be revised and taken to the next meeting of the Committee.

Professor L Kilbride / Professor E Gammie

2.1   Appraisal Reports

The Committee **noted** the *Annual Appraisal Overview Report* and the appended *Summary of External Examiner Annual Reports and Link Coordinator Annual Reports 2021-22* and considered it along with the *School Academic Board Annual Appraisal Reports* and *Student-Facing Support Services Annual Appraisal Report*. These documents informed the discussions as captured in item 2.2 below.

2.2   Committee Consideration of Appraisal Reports and Analyses of Source Evidence

The Committee was required to report annually to Academic Council and the Board of Governors on the *Annual Appraisal Process* and, in doing so, provide a number of assurances regarding the quality and standards for award-bearing courses. The Committee's *Annual Report on the Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2021/22* (see **Appendix 1**) would be presented to Academic Council on 15 December 2022 and the Board of Governors on 9 March 2023.

The Committee **agreed** that the *Annual Appraisal Overview Report* was comprehensive, picking up on all aspects from the individual reports, however, it was highlighted that there were some areas that had not been explicitly reflected in the report: -

- issues/concerns across the Schools regarding the implementation of automated exam timetabling; and

- equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)-specific issues arising from the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee/Forum.

GAQ

The positive feedback received from *External Examiner Annual Reports* was noted and it was **agreed** that these be shared back to the relevant Schools with a view to highlighting these comments to the students.

It was **agreed** that a lot of work done around the Schools Annual Appraisals had taken place, however, this did not dovetail with student-facing Support Services and their respective appraisals. As such, they were not able to support the process as well as they could have. It was highlighted that Support Services had felt separate from the process and that their involvement would be more beneficial early on in the process. There was

F Antoniazzi/GAQ

discussion on how the process aligned to allow Student Support Services to be involved in providing the necessary support, whether it be solely academic or in regard to student support enhancement. It was **agreed** that the next steps would be to pull activities together in the overarching report, discuss how best to operationalise the alignment of the process, ascertain what the key aspects were that needed discussion, and identify the appropriate forum where these discussions would take place.

The Committee recognised the good practice that was evident across the Schools and it was queried how best to disseminate this effectively across the University. It was suggested that this be broken down by type of good practice/theme rather than by School.

AQOs

The Teaching and Learning Conference currently enabled each School to give a presentation, and this would be a good opportunity for good practice to be rolled out to the other Schools.

J Strachan

It was also **agreed** that Schools could make use of the Staff Bulletin which could include a good practice aspect each week under a specific theme.

Professor E Gammie

3. INTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

3.1 Quality Events

The Committee considered the *Annual Report on Quality Event Outcomes*. No comments were noted.

3.2 Update on Quality Enhancement Activities

3.2.1 *Attendance and Engagement Project*

The Committee received an oral update from Filippo Antoniazzi, Director of Student Life and Julie Strachan, Head of the Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA) on the Attendance and Engagement Project.

The Committee noted the project had been running steering group sessions and discussions were ongoing to determine activities over the next session and how to optimise attendance and engagement in 2023/24.

Key activities of note were the implementation of the 'pause and reflect week' and the University-wide roll-out of the AttendR app.

There had been three streams of work underway, overseen by Professor Lynn Kilbride: Julie Guest and Dr John Isaacs were leading the Technical Development group; Julie Strachan and Filippo Antoniazzi were leading on Implementation; and Lucy Jack was leading the group on Policy Development.

As previously reported to the Committee, the Student Experience Sub-Committee's Attendance and Engagement Seminar had been held on 5 September 2022 to support the launch, to raise awareness of the activities that had taken place over the past 12 months,

what was currently happening, and how that activity would help students stay at the University and succeed.

Connectivity issues involving Wi-Fi and Bluetooth had been addressed by the Technical Development group to help find solutions and determine how the data gathered was used and interpreted.

Student Voice sessions had revealed that student feedback suggested the app was easy to use apart from some noting connectivity issues. It was noted that students appeared to be interested in their own attendance to enable them to self-assess. It was queried how Moodle analytics could allow this data to be utilised by the students. School-level work around Moodle analytics, by the School of Computing and School of Applied Social Studies, in particular, had looked manually at data patterns for attendance and engagement. However, in future it was hoped that this data could be shared with students to help inform the management of their performance and engagement.

School Operations Managers (SOMS) had been involved and engaged with the projects and had provided detailed feedback around workload issues. From this it was highlighted that clarity was needed around what the trigger points for intervention/touch points were and whether this should be at School-level or University-level.

In general, it was noted that the AttendR app had been well received across the Schools. Where there had been some functionality issues, these had now largely been resolved. It was heard that real time data was now available, allowing for quicker analysis and earlier intervention where issues around attendance had been identified.

L Jack

The Committee heard that the benefits of AttendR was starting to be seen across the Schools now, with issues being rectified more quickly and new identified issues, such as students falsifying attendance records by registering as present outside the door but not actually attending the class.

It was ascertained that policy development needed more student feedback over the next few months. In addition, the following points were made: -

- build and expand the process to ensure parity in student support across the University;

- use the data to address declining student progression and retention rates;

- the gathering of accurate analytics to ensure correlation on retention, student motivation, and student achievement rates; and

- The importance of the data 'talking' to other University systems.

Committee members were asked to feed any comments/feedback to the Director Student Life and the Head of DELTA to help inform the project.

QAEC Members to F Antoniazzi & J Strachan

3.2.2   National Student Survey (NSS)

The Committee received an update from Fiona Hall, Learner Insight Manager, on changes to the National Student Survey (NSS). (See also item 6.1 below)

The Committee **noted** that in July 2022, the Office for Students (OfS) published a consultation seeking views on proposals for changes to the National Student Survey (NSS) between 28 July and 1 September 2022. Changes were then published on Friday 28th October 2022.

Full details of these changes could be found at Office for Students

Six questions had been removed from the core question set and six had been added, in particular, specifically on mental wellbeing. As in previous years, providers were able to choose to append up to six additional 'bank' questions to the main NSS questionnaire from a range of options, along with a maximum of two provider-specific questions. In the past, the University selected to add five additional modules of questions and one provider-specific question equating to twenty additional questions within the survey that covered the following topics: -

- Students' Union (Association or Guild);

- Work Placements;

- Course Delivery;

- Welfare Resources and Facilities;

- Employability and skills.

The following question selections for 2023 were proposed in order to reduce student survey fatigue, remove repetition of survey data information, provide the relevant information to ensure continual enhancement of learning and teaching, and ensure the ability to measure against strategic goals. This would result in a maximum of eleven additional questions RGU will be using following questions for 2023: -

B9 Welfare Resources and Facilities
There is sufficient provision of welfare and student services to meet my needs.
When needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and student services has been helpful.

B15 Employability and skills
My Higher Education experience has helped me plan for my future career.
My institution offered activities and resources designed to prepare me for the next step in my career.

B16 Environmental sustainability
My institution encourages good environmental practice.
My course has encouraged me to think about environmental sustainability.
I have had opportunities to take part in activities supporting environmental sustainability.

Internal consultation was currently underway with a view to adding the following question for 2023: -

B17 Student safety
> I feel safe to be myself at university/college.
> My institution takes responsibility for my safety.

It was also proposed that the University retain the following additional provider-specific question: -

I would recommend my course to someone else

It was noted that survey dates would not change. Committee members was asked to support the communication of this information within their Schools and Departments.

It was noted that working on closer relationships with the student union was needed to help encourage participation in the surveys. The implementation of a Student Working Group would help facilitate this.

QAEC Members

It was acknowledged that a lot was being done around mental wellbeing in the University to support students and the importance of clear signposting to ensure students were aware of the support available.

It was suggested that mechanisms were put in place for placement students, such as focus groups to run at the same time as the NSS.

It was noted that consideration should be given to the inclusion of a bank of questions on sustainability. Although in some areas, there was substantial work being done in this space by the University. This would help ensure the student community had an awareness of the work that was being done and that the University had a clear strategic focus on sustainability.

Prof L Kilbride

It was noted that the Welcome Week would provide a good opportunity to raise these key messages.

The Committee noted the proposed changes as detailed in the report.

3.3   Assessment Policy

The Committee considered proposed changes to the Assessment Policy to encompass the Future of Teaching and Learning changes, embedding of the RGU Standards and the Word Limit Statement, as well as updates to terminology.

The Principal attended for this item and shared his thoughts on the Policy. The following points were noted: -

- Historically, it was felt that most institutions across the sector tended to over-asses, however, it was felt that this had been addressed with the changes implemented as part of the FTLA project.

- Across the Schools there was great concern regarding the long hours and growing responsibilities on top of the existing workload of academic staff.

- The importance of rigour and an awareness of what was happening elsewhere in other institutions.

- There was a general confusion amongst staff and students what was meant by double-marking, second marking and moderation.

The Committee **agreed** that dissertations at both postgraduate and undergraduate level were pivotal, and the potential risk of getting the marking process wrong could have a significant impact on the student outcome. It was felt that students took comfort in the fact that work was blind/double marked. It was not felt that it would be appropriate to take away double marking at this level.

The implementation of the double-marker only completing in the rubric and making no comments was found to be beneficial in Aberdeen Business School. Where there was a grade difference, the two markers would get together to discuss this, as per the Assessment Policy.

After a full discussion the Committee **agreed** that: -

– clarity was needed regarding what constituted second marking, double marking and moderation;

– all dissertations should be double marked, i.e. blind marking;

– Grade Fs be removed from being second marked/moderated;

– Grade Es be second marked/moderated on a sample basis (it was good practice to have a range of markers);

– second marking/moderation to take place at Stage 3-4 on a sample basis, 50% of small module cohorts of 10 and 10+2 for larger cohorts;

– second marking/moderation would be undertaken in Stages 1-2 (it was apparent that this practice was happening in Schools already) on a sample basis.

It was **agreed** that the *Assessment Policy* and *Glossary of Terms* be updated to reflect these changes and reference be made to all stages rather than "at award stage". | Prof E Gammie, J Strachan & L Barry

An updated *Impact Assessment* might be required in relation to the changes proposed. | L Barry

Secretary's Note

Following the discussions at QAEC, a review of the wording specifically around moderation and double marking within the *Assessment Policy* was carried out and together with accompanying guidance a draft was prepared. Guidance has been circulated to various members of staff regarding the revision to the marking and moderation process and the revised *Assessment Policy* will be uploaded to the website in due course. | L Barry

4.   SUB-COMMITTTEES

4.1   Academic Regulations Sub-Committee

The Committee considered a report from the meeting held on 12 October 2022.

4.1.1   Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment

The Committee was asked to **approve** revisions to Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment, Schedule 2.1: Appeals Procedure for Applicants to include:

- an additional five working days for the provision of a response to an applicant following receipt of the Admissions Appeal Form, which was considered a more realistic timescale and would help manage applicant expectations;

- a specific timescale for the submission by an applicant of the Admissions Appeal Form – Continuation of Appeal;

- provision for acceptance of a late appeal where verifiable, evidenced circumstances were provided and accepted.

These changes will both manage applicant expectations but also more closely align the procedure with other appeals procedures within the Academic Regulations.

The Committee advised that Regulation A2, Schedule 2.1, be revised as follows [new text underlined] for implementation Session 2023-24:

Regulation A2, Schedule 2.1: Appeals Procedure for Applicants (Extracts)

4.1 Stage One: Appeal

4.1.1 Any applicant seeking to appeal the outcome of an application should submit an Admissions Appeal Form. The form, with any accompanying evidence, should be submitted to the Head of Student Admissions Service, normally no later than ten working days following receipt of the feedback (paragraph 1.2 of this Schedule). Only exceptionally would an appeal be accepted beyond that period and only where the Head of Student Admissions Service is satisfied that there are verifiable, evidenced circumstances which were outwith the control of the applicant.

Where the Head of Student Admissions Service determines that there are no such circumstances then the *Admissions Appeal Form – Continuation of Appeal* will not be considered and the Head of Student Admissions Service shall advise the applicant accordingly.

4.1.2 Receipt of the *Admission Appeal Form* will be acknowledged, by email. If no email address is available then a letter acknowledging receipt will be sent to the applicant by first class mail.

4.1.3 The *Head of Student Admissions Service* and a representative from the School relevant to the application will consider the *Admission Appeal Form* and will provide

the applicant with a response to the appeal normally no later than ~~five~~ ten working days following receipt of the *Admission Appeal Form.*

4.2 Stage Two: Continuation of Appeal

4.2.1 If an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage One Appeal then they may choose to continue with the Appeal by submitting the *Admissions Appeal Form – Continuation of Appeal* to the Head of Student Admissions Service normally no later than 10 working days following receipt of the outcome of the Stage One Appeal.

4.2.2 Receipt of the *Admission Appeal Form* will be acknowledged, by email. If no email address is available then a letter acknowledging receipt will be sent to the applicant by first class mail.

Recommended to Academic Council: that it approve, for implementation Session 2023/24, a revision to *Academic Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment, Schedule 2.1: Appeals Procedure for Applicants,* to incorporate/adjust timescales relating to elements of the appeal procedure and to include provision for the submission of a late appeal.

4.1.2   Fitness to Study

The Committee was asked to approve new Regulation A3 – Section 4: Student Fitness to Study Procedure. This is a new section to Regulation A3 and specifically relates to an enrolled student's fitness to undertake their course of study. If approved, the intention would be to implement the Regulation mid Session 2022-23. In considering the new Regulation, the Committee's attention was drawn to paragraph 9.2 of the Regulation (highlighted in yellow) and whether there was an alternative process to the Student Appeals Committee which would be adopted for this particular Regulation.

Recommended to Academic Council: that it approve new Regulation A3 – Section 4: Student Fitness to Study Procedure, for implementation Session 2022-23 refer **Appx 2**.

4.1.3   Academic Regulations Seminar

The Committee noted the date of the Academic Regulations Seminar has been confirmed for 9 December 2022 and that registration was available on CampusMoodle.

4.1.4   Grade Inflation

The Committee was asked to **note** that the protection of academic standards had been discussed as part of this item, including the issuing of cease-and-desist notices to websites posting/selling RGU assessments and teaching materials.

4.1.5   Referrals and Assessment Boards

The Committee was asked to **note** that the timing of resit assessment opportunities had been discussed as well as the Academic Calendar and the need to develop a calendar which more easily accommodated all intakes.

4.2   Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee

The Committee had previously received the Sub-Committee's minute of its last meeting, EDSC/22/1. The Committee **noted** the minutes from the Equality and Diversity Forum meeting which had been held on 28 September 2022 highlighting the actions and activities that were happening in this space.

4.3   Student Experience Sub-Committee

The Committee considered a report from the meeting held on 5 October 2022 and noted that there will be some recommendations coming from SESC for approval at a future meeting of QAEC.

The Committee noted in particular the items highlighted below.

- *Annual Appraisal Process: Session 2021/22:* The Sub-Committee considered Annual Appraisal Reports completed by the relevant Heads of Service, alongside a report from the Convener on the outcomes of the process. Subject to no substantive relevant issues being raised through QAEC as part of the School appraisal process, a general statement of assurance can be provided on the basis of the appraisal evidence considered by SESC.

- *Student-Facing Support Services:* A report on the outcomes of the Student-Facing Support Services Annual Appraisal was considered at the QAEC meeting on 13 October 2022.

- *Student Welcome*: The Sub-Committee received an update from Daniel Massie, Project Co-ordinator, Student Life, providing an overview of Welcome Week 2022. The Welcome had been very successful, communications had been excellent, including the connection between staff and students. The work of the team was commended in designing and delivering a well-received offering.

- *Attendance and Engagement*: The Sub-Committee considered a report, alongside feedback from the Convener and Vice Convener, on the first Student Experience Sub-Committee Seminar, held on 5 September 2022, regarding Attendance and Engagement. This report had also been considered at the QAEC meeting on 13 October 2022.

- *Student Communications Short Life Working Group:* The Sub-Committee considered a paper and oral update from Anna Duthie, Communications Manager. The group would report back to the SESC meeting in February 2023 with recommendations, with a view to finalising a new framework for everyone to follow by March 2023.

- *Student Evaluation Questionnaires*: The Sub-Committee received a presentation from Lorraine Illingworth, Learner Insight Analyst, which provided a detailed overview of the proposed revised structure, which aimed to streamline the process whilst still gathering useful insights, and would be rebranded as the Student Voice, which was believed to be a better way to describe the process

5.   SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS – SESSION 2022/23

Tuesday 28 February 2023 at 2.00pm N204, Sir Ian Wood Building

Tuesday 16 May 2023 at 2.00pm, N204, Sir Ian Wood Building

6   EXTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

6.1   National Student Survey

The Committee **noted** a publication outlining arrangements for the National Student Survey (NSS) 2023 and the actions required from participating institutions.

6.2   Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Membership Event Calendar

The Committee **noted** the current QAA events that were available at News & Events (qaa.ac.uk)

7.   QUALITY EVENTS

The Committee **noted** a paper outlining the *Programme of Quality Events* for the coming sessions, 2022/23 – 2027/28.

Professor L Kilbride, C