

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 18 October 2018 (2.00pm – 3.35pm).

Present: Mrs V Strachan (Presiding), Mr F Antoniazzi, Dr H Bain, Ms J Bolger, Ms M Buchan, Dr S Burgess, Ms E Cargill, Ms E Corry, Ms H Douglas, Mr J Dunphy, Dr N Emmison, Ms J Guest, Professor J Harper (until item 2), Mr A Johnston, Mr T Kouider, Mr T Lauterbach, Dr R McDermott and Ms F Roberts.

Apologies: Ms I Crawford and Mr L Smith.

In Attendance: Ms L Ginsberg, Ms L Jack, Ms S Maxwell and Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary).

Welcome: Mr Johnston was welcomed to his first meeting of the Committee.

1. MINUTE	Action
<p>The Committee approved the <i>Minute of the meeting of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 30 May 2018</i>, reference QAEC/18/4, and noted a <i>Matters Arising Report</i>.</p>	
<p>1.1 Student-Facing Policies [QAEC/18/4/1.1]</p> <p>The Director of Student Life confirmed the review of policies, being undertaken from students' perspective and to determine what were policies, procedures or guidelines, had not been completed over the summer and was still in progress. Once complete, the policies would be accessible at a single location on the university's new website.</p>	<p>Mr F Antoniazzi & Dr D Cockburn</p>
<p>1.2 Annual Appraisal Process for Student-Facing Support Services [QAEC/18/4/2.2.3]</p> <p>The revised process had been incorporated into the current version of the <i>Academic Quality Handbook</i>, available at www.rgu.ac.uk/qualityhandbook.</p>	
<p>1.3 Retention Rates [QAEC/18/4/2.3]</p> <p>The Director of Planning and Policy was unavailable to attend the meeting, but would update the Committee at its next meeting on the most concise and effective data-mining and analysis that should be undertaken to permit timely interventions, and whether there was more that could be done to proactively monitor retention data on an annual basis.</p>	<p>Dr D Cockburn QAEC Holding File [26.11.18]</p>
<p>1.4 University Policy on Personal Tutoring [QAEC/18/4/2.6]</p> <p>Academic Council approved the <i>University Policy on Personal Tutoring</i> at its meeting on 20 June 2018 [AC/18/3/4.1.1].</p>	
<p>1.5 Organisational Regulation O7 [QAEC/18/4/2.8]</p> <p>Academic Council approved the revised <i>Organisational Regulation O7</i> at its meeting on 20 June 2018 [AC/18/3/4.1.2]</p>	

1.6 Academic Regulations Sub-Committee [QAEC/18/4/4.1]

Academic Council approved amendments to the *Academic Regulations* at its meeting on 20 June 2018 [AC/18/3/4.1.4] in relation to the following:

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);
- Timescales for the Submission of Appeals;
- Communications of Outcomes/Decisions;
- Contract Cheating;
- Student Misconduct Procedure – Appeals and Penalties;
- Viva Voce Examination;
- Additional Assessment Opportunities.

1.7 Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee [QAEC/18/4/4.2.1]

The Head of Employability and Professional Enrichment had been added to the Sub-Committee's membership for Session 2018-19.

1.8 Student-Facing Support Services Review of Alumni Services/Engagement [QAEC/18/4/4.2.2]

A final report on the *Student-Facing Support Services Review of Alumni Services/Engagement* would be submitted to the 30 October 2018 meeting of the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Convener advised the Committee that the new Vice-Principal for Academic Development and the Student Experience would, from the next meeting, assume convenership of the Committee. He wished to thank all the members for their valuable contributions to the Committee's very significant work which had helped to make it very enjoyable.

The Vice-Convener, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Professor Harper for his valued and respected convenership.

The Committee noted an extract from *Organisational Regulation O4* concerning the remit and composition of the Committee and its Sub-Committees. Amendments had been made to two of the Sub-Committees' compositions and memberships:

- the membership of the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee had been revised to permit staggering of members' terms of office, and to extend its academic membership. The ResLife and Student Help Point Manager would also now be in attendance at meetings;
- Teaching Fellows would be in attendance at meetings of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee.

In noting the current *Membership List* for the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee for Session 2018-19 the Committee was advised the terms of office of Committee members had been revised to ensure a staggered membership, following the initial commencement of all members' terms in 2016.

The Committee also considered proposals for a revised remit for the Committee, aimed at ensuring it more accurately integrated the work of its Sub-Committees.

Recommended to Academic Council:

The remit of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee be revised as follows (new text underlined):

- (i) To consider policy matters relating to teaching, learning and assessment, and the student experience, to formulate appropriate procedures relating to these, and determine appropriate actions for implementation to be considered through the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee.
- (ii) To develop and appraise the effectiveness of the University's quality assurance processes, and appropriate mechanisms for maintaining the academic standards of the University.
- (iii) To maintain a strategic oversight of the development and implementation of the University's enhancement of the student learning experience.
- (iv) To maintain oversight of specific institution-level performance indicators that relate to learning and teaching and the student experience.
- (v) To consider and recommend revisions to the Academic Regulations to Academic Council, as proposed by the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee, and consider recommendations from the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee.
- (vi) To report and make recommendations to Academic Council as appropriate.

3. EXTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

3.1 Higher Education Sector Developments

The Vice-Convener updated the Committee on discussion at a recent Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee, which had focused on the UK Government's concern with grade inflation. Evidence suggested grade inflation was not a current concern within the Scottish sector, although it would be important to maintain a watching brief on developments UK-wide for potential implications for Scottish institutions.

The sector was also awaiting the imminent publication of the substantially revised *Quality Code*. The Committee would be kept apprised of its requirements following its publication.

The University would not be participating in the subject-level Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (*TEF*). It was understood the majority of Scottish institutions would not be taking part in the subject-level *TEF*, due for implementation in 2019 once the current second year of pilots were complete.

The current Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) at the University of Dundee, Professor Karl Leydecker, had been appointed Senior Vice-Principal at the University of Aberdeen, commencing in March 2019.

3.2 Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council

The Committee noted the *Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council: 2017-18 – Institution-Led Reviews of Quality*, that had been endorsed by the Board of Governors on 10 October 2018 prior to its submission.

3.3 Quality Enhancement Theme: Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

Consideration was given to the following:

- an information leaflet on the Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience theme;
- Evidence for Enhancement: Year One End of Year Report; and
- Evidence for Enhancement: Year Two Plan.

Institutions worked in collaborative clusters as a means of exchanging practice across the three strands: *optimising the use of existing evidence; student engagement; and student demographics, retention and attainment*. The focus of all three strands was “the information (or evidence) used to identify, prioritise, evaluate and report on what is good and what could be better about the student experience”.

The University had established an Enhancement Theme Leadership Group that was coordinating project work across the three strands. The *End of Year One Report* highlighted work completed on, amongst other things: the implementation of the *Tableau* tool and launch of *RGU: Insight* to support core quality assurance and quality enhancement processes, including the *Annual Appraisal Process*; the *Student Voice* objective of the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)* in 2017-18; and the establishment of a physical hub for *Employability and Professional Enrichment*, and the *What's Next Conference* for students and alumni.

Activity planned internally in 2018-19 included: *supporting course leaders* by developing an effective evidence-base to inform practice; development of *online 'borderless learning' provision* informed by active student engagement; and evaluating the *graduate apprentice student experience* from students', employers' and staff perspectives. Participation in external projects would include *learning analytics, enhancing programme leadership support*, and a student-led project *responding to the student voice: communicating the impact*.

The importance of closing the feedback loop, by advising students both of the impact of their feedback and the actions taken into response their feedback, was emphasised and was a critically important element of the *Annual Appraisal Process*.

DELTA, in liaison with the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee, was organising an informal workshop to bring staff together to discuss the quality enhancement theme in more detail. Committee members were encouraged to consider inviting DELTA to School meetings if this was considered more useful.

4. INTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

4.1 Annual Appraisal Process: Session 2017-18

Consideration was given to a report from a meeting held on 1 October 2018 that was convened to enable early consideration of high level analysis of annual appraisal data, from a university-wide perspective. The meeting provided an opportunity to ensure prompt remedial action was taken to address any identified risks or issues, and enabled identification of strategic actions and enhancements that could be undertaken during Session 2018-19.

Analysis of the qualitative comments from the 2018 *National Student Survey (NSS)* had highlighted two prominent positive themes:

- *Staff*: over five hundred comments in the *NSS* referenced staff positively, and for all Schools positive comments outweighed negative. In particular, guidance and support students received from staff had the highest volume of positive comments. By way of example: "The staff that are specific to our field are amazing. They are so supportive and reassuring. There have been plenty times when I have needed guidance and always received it to a high standard." The Committee acknowledged the commitment and investment of time by staff in order that such a result was achieved.
- *Placements and work-related experiences*: respondents commented favourably on placement opportunities, links with industry and focus on skills for employment. For example, "I feel that the opportunity to take a semester abroad and secure a year in industrial placement has definitely maximised my experience as a student and has added value to my degree, both by expanding my learning opportunities and improving my employability prospects. Further, all modules have been up-to-date with current state of affairs in the business world, making the gained knowledge more relatable and valuable."

Although *Assessment and feedback* remained a cause for concern amongst respondents, with the clarity and timing of assessments and the quality and timeliness of feedback all being referenced, an unprecedented 5% improvement in satisfaction had been reported in the *NSS* from the previous session. A number of strategic actions had been initiated to enhance students' experiences of the assessment cycle and an initial improvement in *Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)* results had been evident this session.

The Committee noted the discussion at the meeting on 1 October 2018, and **endorsed** the following recommendations arising from the meeting held on 1 October 2018:

- (i) Where threshold targets had not been met, evidence of remedial action to be demonstrated within *Action and Enhancement Plans (AEPs)*. In particular this should be ensured for the following:
 - the courses identified as below threshold in Table 2 of the report.
 - the following subject areas which had ten or more modules below threshold:
 - Accounting
 - Business and Management
 - Law
 - Nursing
 - Pharmacy [9].

- (ii) Given that all subject areas had achieved the threshold, targets to be reviewed for future iterations of the process.
- (iii) *DELTA* and the *Employability and Professional Enrichment Hub* identify and deliver opportunities for information, advice and guidance to be targeted to wider access students.
- (iv) *Employability and Professional Enrichment Hub* initiate further dialogue to enhance performance against national medians in specific subject areas.
- (v) Given the University's ambitions to deliver excellence in learning and teaching, Schools to specifically address declines in *NSS* performance within their *Action and Enhancement Plans (AEPs)*. In particular, this should be ensured for the following subject areas with declines of greater than ten percentage points:
- Sports science
 - Media Studies
 - Electronic and Electrical engineering
 - Management Studies
 - Architecture
 - Pharmacology, toxicology and Pharmacy.

QAEC Holding File

Mr J Dunphy & Mr P Matthews

Mr P Matthews

School Academic Boards

The roll-out of the *Semester One SEQ* would assist in monitoring in-year satisfaction.

- (vi) The *LISC Student-Facing Support Services Appraisal Process* should address declines in *NSS* questions relevant to aspects of service (e.g. Q16, 18 and 19).
- (vii) *DELTA*, Student Life and *RGU: Union* continue to progress the recommendations of the Student Voice partnership objective undertaken in 2017-18, including the development of materials to assist colleagues in 'closing the feedback loop'. In addition, it should be noted that *School Academic Boards (SABs)* had been requested to consider the latest iteration of the *Student Partnership Agreement*.
- (viii) To inform preparations for the next *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)* cycle, *DELTA* undertake a piece of work to better understand effective practice with regard to the *NSS* categories of *Teaching on my course* and *Academic Support*.

Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee

Mr J Dunphy, Mr F Antoniazzi & Mr A Johnston

Mr J Dunphy

The Committee noted the Academic Quality Officers' report on *External Examiner Annual Reports and Link Coordinator Annual Reports* deliberately focused on summarising issues and concerns raised by the external examiners, although this was in the context where the majority of views expressed were extremely positive.

4.2 Quality Events

The Director of Student Life updated the Committee on preparations for the Student-Facing Support Services Review for Session 2018-19. Development of a scope for the one-year review, covering *Delivery of Support Services Offsite*, was currently in progress. It would focus on non-traditional learners across all subject disciplines, and take cognisance of the academic support requirements, the technical support requirements, and the wellbeing of such students.

One aspect of the review would involve re-visiting the recommendations of a previous review, *Enhancing services for off-campus students*, that had been undertaken over two sessions, in 2010-11 and 2011-12. This review had not, however, consulted with or received input from students. International practice, particularly from sector leaders, would also be considered and the Vice-Principal for Commercial and Regional Innovation was leading on this aspect of the review. The *International College at Robert Gordon University (ICRGU)* would also be involved.

Development of online provision was a strategic priority for the University in order to facilitate sustainable growth and it would be vital to ensure the appropriate infrastructure, support and resources were in place to support such growth, taking cognisance of the differing needs of types of online students and also for staff, such as the mentors supporting the graduate apprenticeships. As experience grew across Schools, opportunities would increase to share and develop consistent practice.

Alongside DELTA, the Employability and Professional Enrichment Hub would play a critical role in supporting the expansion of online provision and the graduate apprenticeships, particularly utilising its close working partnership with employers. A significant investment had been made by the Hub to launch new software and applications, and staff awareness events were being organised.

The Committee noted:

- Review, Validation and Professional Body Event Outcomes;
- Programme of Quality Events: Sessions 2018-19 – 2024-25;
- List of internal conveners and second internal members for quality events.

The *Event Outcomes* report listed the outcomes of the recent validations of five graduate apprenticeships, with named qualifications such as “Graduate Apprenticeship in BA (Hons) Business Management”. This had been done at the request of Skills Development Scotland, but there was strong opposition to this approach across the sector. It was possible, therefore, that the practice of naming graduate apprenticeships might evolve.

It was noted the Master of Occupational Therapy qualification had been erroneously described as ‘MOT’ rather than ‘MOccTh’ in the *Event Outcomes* report, and it was **agreed** this would be amended prior to the report’s submission to Academic Council and the Board of Governors.

In respect of the *Programme of Quality Events*, it was noted that two of the Institution-Led Subject Reviews had switched, with *Nursing and Midwifery* being brought forward to Session 2019-20, and *Diagnostic Radiography, Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Public Health, and Sports Science* being deferred until Session 2020-21.

4.3 International College at Robert Gordon University (ICRGU)

The Committee welcomed the positive outcome of the *Educational Oversight for embedded colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas Holdings UK Ltd, April 2018 - International College at Robert Gordon University (April 2018)*, which stated: "From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the International College at Robert Gordon University (ICRGU) is making commendable progress with implementing its action plan from the April 2016 Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges). ... In the 2016 review, ICRGU received a commendable judgement for the quality of learning opportunities. Actions have led to improvements in the management of the provision; there is highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points and the information the College produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy." The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) observations regarding the positive collaborative relationship between ICRGU and the University was also welcome.

The Committee noted the *ICRGU Academic Advisory Committee: Minute of the meeting held on 5 June 2018*, and the *ICRGU: Navitas International Student Barometer (ISB) Summary Sheet 2017*, the results of which compared very favourably with elsewhere.

4.4 Student Partnership Agreement

Consideration was given to the outcomes of the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)* objectives for Session 2017-18, and the objectives for 2018-19, contained in a brochure entitled *Partnership at RGU: A student guide 2018-19*. This highlighted the following achievements in 2017-18:

- *Develop the Student Voice:*
 - increased engagement in the *Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)* and *National Student Survey (NSS)*, ensuring a rich evidence base to inform enhancements. 86% of students now indicate they have 'the right opportunities to provide feedback on their course';
 - strengthened *Partnership in Action* discussion opportunities with senior staff;
 - launched new School-based *Student Representative Training*, to provide greater context and networking opportunities. 98% of attendees indicated they would recommend the training to others.
- *Explore Resilience and Wellbeing:*
 - developed a new *Student Mental Health Agreement* to raise awareness and promote positive wellbeing amongst staff and students;
 - established a *Positive Wellbeing Group* – with strong student involvement - to support implementation of the *Agreement*;
 - introduced a series of new *Resilience Events* to support emotional wellbeing;
 - committed to increase resources for Counselling Support Services.

The objectives for Session 2018-19 were to explore and develop a better understanding of:

- students' experiences of distance and online learning;
- students' involvement in enhancements to campus services.

A *Student School Officer Action Plan* had been distributed to Heads of School, and the Student Union was encouraged to make this helpful document an annual reporting requirement.

Mr A Johnston

The Student President (Education and Welfare) was asked to remind the Student School Officers of the value of submitting their close-out reports at the end of their term, as this served as an effective record of achievement by the Student Union in partnership with Schools.

Mr A Johnston

Committee members were reminded that the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee was responsible for approving and monitoring the issue of surveys to students, in order to limit the likelihood of questionnaire fatigue.

QAEC Members

5. LEAGUE TABLES

5.1 Complete University Guide 2019: Analysis of Main and Subject Tables

Consideration was given to a *Complete University Guide 2019: Analysis of Main and Subject Tables*, that reported the results published in April 2018), in relation to the University's performance at institutional and subject level compared to the rest of the Scottish and UK sector. The *Guide* used ten separate measures to rank performance at an institutional level, with a subset of five of these measures used to rank performance at subject level.

The Committee also considered results of *The Guardian University Guide 2019* (published in May 2018), in relation to the university's performance at institutional and subject level compared to the rest of the Scottish and UK sector. This *Guide* used nine separate measures to rank performance at both an institutional and subject level, with the same weightings of these measures applied in each case. The only exceptions were different weightings applied to the subject tables for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Sciences, in which the Robert Gordon University did not feature.

It was acknowledged the University needed to fully understand how the more negative scores were generated and why, and ongoing development work within *RGU: Insight* would help progress this.

Mrs A Watson &
Dr D Cockburn

6. VALEDICTORY

On behalf of the Committee, the Vice-Convenor wished to record its thanks to Ms Hilary Douglas, Academic Registrar and Secretary to the Board, for her valuable contributions and extensive institutional knowledge, and who was leaving the University after 31 years' service.

7. **SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS – SESSION 2018-19**

Monday 26 November 2018, 1.00pm in room N204, Sir Ian Wood Building
Wednesday 27 February 2019, 2.00pm in room N204, Sir Ian Wood Building
Wednesday 29 May 2019, 2.00pm in room H230, Sir Ian Wood Building

8. **ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS**

The Committee noted an amendment to the English language qualifications accepted for admission to the University, and approved by Convener's Action.

Mrs V Strachan, P
16 November 2018