

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 26 November 2018 (1.00pm – 3.30pm).

Present: Mrs E Hancock (Convener), Mr F Antoniazzi, Dr H Bain, Ms M Buchan, Dr S Burgess, Ms E Cargill, Ms E Corry, Ms I Crawford, Mr J Dunphy, Mr A Johnston, Mr T Lauterbach, Dr R McDermott, Ms F Roberts, Mr L Smith and Mrs V Strachan.

Apologies: Ms J Bolger, Dr N Emmison, Ms J Guest and Mr T Kouider.

In Attendance: Ms L Ginsberg, Ms L Jack, Mr P Matthews (item 3 only), Ms S Maxwell and Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary).

1. ANNUAL APPRAISAL PROCESS: SESSION 2017-18	Action
<p>The Committee was required to report annually to Academic Council and the Board of Governors on the <i>Annual Appraisal Process</i> and, in doing so, provide a number of assurances regarding the quality and standards for award-bearing courses. The Committee's <i>Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2017-18: Annual Report</i> (see Appendix) would be presented to Academic Council on 6 December 2018 and the Board of Governors on 19 December 2018.</p>	
<p>1.1 Actions referred to the Executive for immediate action</p>	
<p>There were several common themes around <i>marketing, IT issues, estates issues, and timetabling</i>, as follows, which arose from the <i>School Academic Board Appraisal Reports</i> and/or the discussions with the Heads of School. Whilst there had been active engagement between the Schools and the Departments concerned, the Committee agreed to refer these for the attention of the respective members of the Executive for immediate attention and action. The Executive would be asked to monitor progress and report back to the Committee at its next meeting.</p>	<p>Executive QAEC Holding File [27.02.19]</p>
<p>1.1.1 <i>Marketing</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The Law School: failure to recruit was a considerable risk that had an impact on the quality of student experience. (ii) Scott Sutherland School: successful marketing and recruitment was essential for the School in order to attract applicants to the new course in a timely manner and to promote the gender imbalance initiatives in the construction industry. (iii) Gray's School of Art: marketing and recruitment was vital for the School, in order to promote the creative industries strength within Gray's and to avoid inconsistency in the style of marketing materials. (iv) School of Engineering: successful marketing and recruitment was essential for the School in order to attract applicants to the new Biomedical Technology and MSc courses and to promote the gender imbalance initiatives in engineering. (v) School of Computing Science and Digital Media: marketing and recruitment was vital for the School in order to promote subject-specific unique selling points and to investigate emerging markets where computing demand was strong 	

- (vi) School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences: appropriate marketing was essential to the successful recruitment and ongoing viability of course provision. However, there had been challenges in relation to the new University website and the accuracy, presentation and timeliness of marketing materials.
- (vii) School of Health Sciences: marketing and admissions were essential to the ongoing success of the course provision. However, there had been challenges in relation to the accuracy, presentation and timeliness of marketing materials, for example, courses being advertised in June/July for a September intake, and applications not being nurtured to conversion and the School was keen to develop the relationship with the relevant departments to resolve these issues.

1.1.2 *IT issues*

- (i) School of Creative and Cultural Business: until recently, IT and AV support was provided within the ABS building by a dedicated team with an appropriate skills base. This team has been subsumed into DELTA and the team has diminished in size. This presents a significant risk to core delivery of teaching, specifically in the areas of media and journalism (where there are already concerns with regards to student satisfaction). Where other Schools have created related in-house positions, CCB requires three media technologists with a variety of skills to support delivery needs, and does not have sufficient budget to cover this independently. (There are 1499 students in the School, 922 of which are taught on-campus – with Media, Journalism, Events, Fashion Management and Digital Marketing delivery all having specialised IT/AV support needs.) WiFi connectivity in the Aberdeen Business School building was problematic in some rooms used by the School.
- (ii) The Law School: online delivery of the Diploma Professional Legal Practice had been launched in September. There had been a number of technical problems associated with the new platform; this had been a risk to business particularly as it occurred at a critical stage of the new course delivery.
- (iii) School of Nursing and Midwifery: streaming of lectures between lecture theatres had been impacted by IT issues and had a detrimental impact on the student experience. As a result, dependency upon streaming had been reduced for Session 2017-18 and the School would continue to seek methods of ensuring a quality student experience for those lectures which continued to be streamed.
- (iv) Scott Sutherland School: the IT technical problems that remained outwith the control of the School were flagged as a threat to quality, including the focus on digitisation of construction and challenges with fixing hardware. A number of requests for support remained unresolved. The School was interested in resolving issues proactively and closing the loop with the Department.
- (v) School of Engineering: the IT technical problems that remained outwith the control of the School were flagged as a threat to quality, including students being unable to run software efficiently due to RAM reduction and staff being unable to teach effectively due to the timing of software updates. A number of requests for support remained unresolved.
- (vi) School of Computing Science and Digital Media: the IT technical problems that remained outwith the control of the School were flagged as a threat to quality, including staff experiencing connection issues with Blackboard Collaborate ULTRA (which the Graduate Apprenticeship courses heavily relied on) and there was a lack of control, consultation and flexibility regarding various IT platforms vital for effective teaching. A number of requests for support remained unresolved.

1.1.3 *Estates issues*

- (i) School of Creative and Cultural Business: the name of the building where the School was located (Aberdeen Business School) was regarded negatively by Creative and Cultural Business School students as it was 'not theirs'. A name that was acceptable to all three Schools based in the building would be welcomed.
- (ii) Gray's School of Art: it was acknowledged that the current Gray's estate remained a challenge and confirmation would be sought on progress.
- (iii) School of Engineering: lack of estates maintenance affected teaching practice due to essential classrooms not receiving the repairs they required.
- (iv) Aberdeen Business School: engagement of central departments in supporting non-standard course provision was essential to the student learning experience. Specifically, greater flexibility for out-of-semester car-parking and sports centre fees. These changes would enable distance learning students on block weeks to park on campus and use the sports centre at a discounted rate like other students can. The outcome would be that these students would feel more connected to the wider University environment with the result that it could impact positively on student feedback.
- (v) School of Health Sciences: the general poor state of maintenance of the Ishbel Gordon Building did not reflect well at open days and selection visits when trying to sell state of the art facilities. It was also not conducive to a positive learning/working experience. The School would welcome engagement with Estates to address these issues.
- (vi) School of Nursing and Midwifery: the general poor state of maintenance of the Ishbel Gordon Building did not reflect well at open days and selection visits when trying to sell state of the art facilities. It was also not conducive to a positive learning/working experience. The School would welcome engagement with Estates to address these issues.

1.1.4 *Timetabling*

- (i) Scott Sutherland School: there were timetabling issues with teaching rooms not being large enough, which resulted in double teaching or a last minute change in delivery method. It was noted the School were already quite self-contained so these requests were for what the School could not accommodate. The equity of room allocations was unclear.
- (ii) School of Health Sciences: disparate timetabling of back to back classes at opposite ends of the campus where one was a practical class plus issues around the timetabling of block teaching for part-time provision was impacting on the delivery of courses but also on the student experience. It was hoped that these issues could feed into any 'smart' timetabling project with a view to improving these aspects for future cohorts.

1.2 **Observations and Actions**

The Committee received assurances that its recommendations from the 18 October 2018 meeting relating to the *Annual Appraisal Process* had all been addressed. In doing so, it **agreed** DELTA would be asked to report to the Committee's next meeting on its investigation into effective practice with regard to the *NSS* categories of *Teaching on my course* and *Academic support*.

Mr J Dunphy
QAEC Holding File
[27.02.19]

A number of areas for improvement had been highlighted and appropriate action had been identified:

- the data needs for the appraisal of student-facing support services, including services' effective utilisation of equality monitoring data in the appraisal process (action: Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee);
- student-facing support services liaison with Schools as part of the appraisal process (action: Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee);
- means of improving students' understanding of the questions in the *National Student Survey* relating to the *Student voice* (action: RGU: Union).

Learning
Infrastructure
Sub-Committee

Learning
Infrastructure
Sub-Committee

Mr A Johnston

In considering the *Equality Monitoring 2018* report from the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group, the Committee observed that the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) would be introducing, in 2019-20, additional flags for a number of other categories of students such as British Sign Language (BSL) users, veterans/service leavers and carers. At this point it might be helpful to extend the monitoring to include such access categories.

Dr D Cockburn

The Academic Regulations Sub-Committee would be asked to consider again the implementation of a vexatious behaviour policy in the context of the recently approved *Dignity at Work and Study Policy*.

Academic
Regulations
Sub-Committee

The Committee also **agreed** that, once this *Annual Appraisal* cycle was complete, the revised process would be reviewed for effectiveness and lessons learned, with any consequent recommendations being submitted to the Committee. This would include additional data needs, and whether the recent practice of the Academic Development Committee reviewing data relating to the university's performance in terms of demand and enrolment inhibited the Committee's consideration of the impact of students numbers on the student experience. It was also **agreed** the analysis of equality monitoring data should be made available to the early meeting of the *ex officio* members of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and Academic Quality Officers, in order that it might better inform oversight of institutional issues.

Governance and
Academic Quality

Dr D Cockburn

The Committee thanked the Academic Quality Officers for their efforts in compiling detailed and considered reports that captured the executive consideration of *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports* and discussions with the Heads of School.

Academic Quality
Officers

The collection of examples of good practice appended to the *Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2017-18: Annual Report* would be shared with School Academic Boards.

Academic Quality
Officers

The Committee was informed that the *Assessment Charter* introduced by the School of Health Sciences had made a positive impact on students' expectations in relation to assessment and feedback, and the School of Nursing and Midwifery had adopted a similar approach. It would not be appropriate, however, to require all Schools to adopt it, as it would only be effective if it was relevant to the respective Schools' own context, was fit for purpose, and was implemented in partnership with students.

2. MINUTE

The Committee **approved** the *Minute of the meeting of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 18 October 2018*, reference QAEC/19/1.

3. EMPLOYABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL ENRICHMENT

The Committee received a very interesting and informative presentation from the Head of Employability and Professional Enrichment, Mr Paul Matthews, regarding the ongoing development of the Employability and Professional Enrichment area in *CampusMoodle*, including the very extensive range of tools available via the technology platform provided by *Abintegro*, and the impending launch of the *eHub* application. Forthcoming developments included a placement preparation module.

It was confirmed *My Career Toolkit* would not be replaced immediately but would be migrated to *Abintegro*. It would also serve as an alternative to the *Mahara* software. Staff were encouraged to liaise with Ms Catriona Beverley, Employability Information and Communications Manager, for any technical queries.

QAEC Members

Staff would also be encouraged to incorporate links to the tools into all *Student Handbooks*.

Governance and Academic Quality

4. SUB-COMMITTEES

4.1 Academic Regulations Sub-Committee

The Committee considered a report from the meeting held on 4 October 2018.

4.1.1 *Composition of the Sub-Committee*

The Committee **agreed** the Sub-Committee's composition be extended to include:

Governance and Academic Quality

- two additional academic representatives (taking the total academic representation up to seven);
- one Student Officer;
- one representative from Student Life.

In addition, a member of staff from the Student Life Inclusion Team to be 'in attendance'.

Recommended to Academic Council:

Academic Council Report
[06.12.18]

Organisational Regulation O4: Standing Committee of Academic Council, Annex 4.1, paragraph 1.1: Academic Regulations Sub-Committee, be revised as follows with immediate effect:

Ex Officio

Assistant Chief Academic Officer (Convener)
Deputy Academic Registrar
Director of Academic Administration
RGU Union Administrator
University Solicitor

Ordinary Members

Up to ~~six~~ seven academic representatives, with no more than one from each School

One Student Officer

One representative from Student Life

In addition

The Convener(s) of the *Student Appeals Committee* shall attend as appropriate.

4.1.2 *Items for Noting*

The following additional items were noted:

- the pilot of the *Draft Medical Evidence Form*; and
- discussions on honours degrees and degree algorithms.

4.2 **Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee**

The Committee noted a report from the meeting held on 30 October 2018 and, in particular, the following:

- *Appraisal and Enhancement of the Student Experience*: the Sub-Committee considered the completed Student-Facing Support Services Annual Appraisals (see item 1 above).
- *Review of Student-Facing Support Services 2017-18: Alumni Services/Engagement*: the Sub-Committee considered the final report from the 2017-18 theme. It was noted that further actions were planned to interrogate the data gathered from the Alumni Survey undertaken in June 2018.
- *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*: the Sub-Committee considered the SPA objectives for Session 2018-19.
- *Personal Tutor System*: the Sub-Committee considered a draft *Annual Report Proforma* for completion by School Academic Boards.

The Committee was concerned to learn of a perceived increase in *timetabled activity on Wednesday afternoons*, which was contrary to the policy approved by Academic Council. The Sub-Committee had considered a report by the Timetabling Manager on data pertaining to Wednesday afternoon 'teaching or related activities'. There were concerns that the agreed policy on Wednesday afternoon activity was not being adhered to. Further analysis and liaison with Heads of School was being undertaken prior to further discussion by the Sub-Committee.

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

The Committee noted a report from the meeting held on 25 October 2018 and, in particular, the following:

- *IT Services Planned Enhancements and Priorities*: as part of the institutional enhancement work highlighted to the Sub-Committee, representatives from IT Services (ITS) were invited to discuss the planned enhancements and priorities for the IT estate. Nobody was able to attend the meeting so it was agreed a briefing would be organised to showcase the positive work being scheduled as members were keen to engage with the Department, and the Sub-Committee wished to highlight the intention to work together with ITS.

- *Academic Honesty Materials*: the revised Academic Honesty pages had been launched on CampusMoodle and were well received by members for the new design and inclusion of current topics such as contract cheating. It was agreed a briefing note would be drafted and sent to both staff and students.
- *Key Strengths in Online Learning*: eight key strengths were noted from the discussions and further work would be undertaken to explore this institutional learning and teaching priority. A separate session would be organised to continue the conversation.
- *Assessment Policy*: there had been a minor revision to the *Assessment Policy* to correct inconsistent information. The Sub-Committee recognised the need for a holistic review of the *Policy* and *Assessment Guidance*, which would be undertaken over the next few months. The revised information would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

5. INTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

5.1 Quality Events

The Committee noted:

- *Quality Event Outcomes* since the Committee's last meeting, for onward reporting to Academic Council and the Board of Governors; and
- *Programme of Quality Events: Sessions 2018-19 – 2023-24*.

Academic Council
Report
[06.12.18]

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (QAA)

6.1 Focus on Project

QAA Scotland had launched a new *Focus On* topic for 2018-19, *Graduate Skills*¹. The *Focus On* projects were based on findings from Enhancement-Led Institutional Reviews (ELIR). The project would consider the skills students develop in higher education, including digital skills, to ensure they were ready to contribute in a global society.

6.2 Data Matters Conference

*Data Matters: Using Data to Improve the Student Experience Conference*², a conference jointly organised by the QAA, JISC and HESA, on Wednesday 16 January 2019, in London.

7. TEACHING EXCELLENCE AND STUDENT OUTCOME FRAMEWORK (TEF)

The Committee noted the Department for Education response to the recent *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: subject-level* consultation, including next steps in the implementation of subject-level *TEF*.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/focus-on/graduate-skills

² www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/news-events/news/data-matters-conference-using-data-to-improve-the-student-experience

8. **LEAGUE TABLES**

The Committee considered *The Times Good University Guide 2019: Analysis of Main and Subject Tables*. The University had seen its overall position in the league table decline in the last few years and this had coincided with a similar pattern witness in both the *Student:Staff Ratio (SSR)* and *Services and Facilities Spend*.

The University's *SSR* was 20.6:1, compared to 18.1:1 in the previous year. Further analysis was required of the implications of placements, and also how students on graduate apprenticeships were treated. There was also concern how the ratio might be viewed by some professional, statutory or regulatory bodies. The Committee **agreed** a more detailed analysis of the *SSR* would be submitted to its next meeting. (Further commentary was contained in the **Appendix** to the Minute).

Dr D Cockburn
QAEC Holding File
[27.02.19]

It was also **agreed** further analysis would be undertaken of the *Services and Facilities Spend*.

Dr D Cockburn

9. **SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS – SESSION 2017/18**

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

Mrs E Hancock, C
27 November 2018

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

6 December 2018

Annual Appraisal Process for Session 2017-18: Annual Report

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1. The Process

This report provides a summary of the university's consideration of the *Annual Appraisal Process* of credit-rated taught provision for Session 2017-18.

The *Annual Appraisal* of teaching and the broader learning experience is central to the university's quality assurance processes. It is the process whereby the delivery of all courses, programmes and output standards are monitored. It is also designed to encourage the identification and dissemination of enhancement activities.

It is informed by a number of key sources including: feedback from students obtained through staff/student engagement/partnership liaison meetings and through feedback received from the *National Student Survey*, *Student Experience Questionnaires* and *External Examiner Annual Reports*, as well as performance indicator data produced by the university.

Reflecting on the aforementioned sources, Course/Programme Management Teams complete the appraisal of all courses. Once complete, the School Academic Board is required to produce a *School Academic Board Appraisal Report*, including an integral *Annual Enhancement Plan (AEP)*, the latter having been introduced for the first time in this cycle of appraisal. School Academic Boards have responsibility to ensure delivery of actions identified in the AEPs.

The process is overseen by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). The Committee reviews the *Annual Appraisal Process* at two points:

- The *ex officio* members of the Committee, with the Academic Quality Officers, meet at the start of the session to consider high level analyses of key appraisal data. This early meeting provides an opportunity to ensure prompt action is taken to address institutional-level issues or risks where necessary, to identify strategic actions and enhancements that could be undertaken during the session, and also the opportunity to highlight key actions already completed or started.

- At its November meeting, and following the consideration of annual appraisal data at course and School levels, the Committee considers summary outcomes from meetings involving the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience and the Assistant Chief Academic Officer, convener and vice-convener of QAEC respectively, and the relevant Academic Quality Officer with each of Head of School. The focus of discussion at these meetings is the respective *School Academic Board Appraisal Report* and *Annual Enhancement Plan*. The Committee also considers reports from the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee on the appraisal of student-facing support services, and the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group which overviews equality monitoring data.

Since the *Annual Appraisal Process* for Session 2016-17, the Academic Development Committee has assumed responsibility for reviewing the university's performance in terms of demand and enrolment.

2. Early consideration of Annual Appraisal metrics on 1 October 2018

2.1 Data and Analysis

The *Annual Appraisal Process* was informed initially by a meeting held on 1 October 2018. Discussion was informed by a high level summary of key annual appraisal indicators by course and reported by QAA Subject Benchmark:

- Student Satisfaction:
 - *Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)*; and
 - *National Student Survey (NSS)*;
- Student Achievement:
 - student achievement rates (first assessment diet only);
 - 'good honours' (achievement of class 1/2.1 honours degrees);
 - employability: graduates progressing to employment or further study, and professional-level employment, as reported in the *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)* survey.

The Academic Quality Officers also provided a summary of *External Examiner Annual Reports* and *Link Coordinator Annual Reports* across all Schools.

2.2 Key Observations

▪ Student Satisfaction

At an institutional level:

▫ Student Experience Questionnaires

Undergraduate

- *overall satisfaction*: target = 90%; achieved = 81.5% (up 2%);
- *assessment and feedback*: target = 77%; achieved = 72.4% (up 4%).

Postgraduate

- *overall satisfaction*: target = 90%; achieved = 82% (unchanged);
- *assessment and feedback*: target = 77%; achieved = 76% (up 5%).

Assessment and Feedback was identified as an institutional enhancement priority for Session 2017-18, and it was commendable that the question category had increased by four percentage points at undergraduate level, to 72.4%. Facilitated by the *DELTA Step Change Team*, actions were undertaken within Schools to increase the consistency of assessment practices based on an institutional standard and using our existing supported toolset. A key feature of this federated roll-out was the involvement of students as full partners within project teams. In addition the online submission, marking and feedback project commenced and will continue to be rolled-out during Session 2018-19.

SEQ results demonstrated improvements for each individual question.

▫ **National Student Survey**

The University remains equal to or above the Scottish average in the majority of question categories. Within the context of the Scottish sector, seven subject areas performed exceptionally well and were highest amongst institutions delivering the subject: *Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology* (joint); *Fine Art*; *Others in Subjects allied to Medicine*; *Medical Technology*; *Others in Biological Sciences* (joint); *Publicity Studies*; and *Building*. Moreover, of these *Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology* and *Fine Art* were joint first among UK institutions and a further three ranked second: *Nutrition*; *Accounting*; and *Sociology*.

Nursing and *Art and Design*, which were the two largest subject groupings in the NSS, demonstrated significant improvement. Where performance had not improved, actions to address this would be identified within *School Action and Enhancement Plans*.

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.
- *Placements and work-related experiences*: respondents commented favourably on placement opportunities, links with industry and focus on skills for employment.

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 *Student Experience Questionnaires* 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.

▪ **Student Achievement:** At an institutional level:

Undergraduate

- Student achievement threshold targets were met for:
 - first sitting pass rate [target = 80%; achieved = 91.46%, with all QAA Subject Benchmark areas meeting the target];
 - overall employability [target = 97%; achieved = 97.6%]; and
 - graduate/professional level employment [target = 80%; achieved = 81.1%].
- The percentage of good honours achieved at first sitting had increased by five percentage points to 75%.

Postgraduate

- Student achievement threshold targets were met for:
 - first sitting pass rate [target = 80%; achieved = 90.4%]; and
 - graduate/professional level employment [target = 80%; achieved = 89.3%].

2.3 *Initial conclusions*

The meeting provided assurances that no significant concerns had arisen that required immediate intervention at University level, and that all actions were predominantly focused at School and course level. Discussion at the meeting also led to a number of transitional recommendations being made to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee relating to guiding appropriate action at School and Department level, and these were endorsed at the Committee's first meeting later in October 2018.

3. **Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee meeting on 26 November 2018**

Building on discussions at the 1 October 2018 meeting the Committee considered reports from various sources at its meeting on 26 November 2018:

- notes of the meeting held on 1 October 2018;
- a report of the executive consideration of the *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports* and incorporating Academic Quality Officer Reports for each of the Schools;
- analyses of External Examiner Annual Reports;
- an analysis of quality event outcomes;
- a report from the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group relating to a variety of student data within the context of seven protected characteristics;
- a report from the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee on the appraisal of the student-facing support services.

The report which follows describes, in more detail, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's key observations arising from the *Annual Appraisal Process*.

4. **Key Observations**

4.1 *Executive consideration of School Academic Board Appraisal Reports*

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee was advised that, from their meetings with Heads of School to discuss the *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports*, the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience and Assistant Chief Academic Officer had been very satisfied with the demonstrable engagement in the *Annual Appraisal Process* by the Heads of School. The meetings had been robust, informative and constructive, and had proven reassuring that Heads had ownership of issues and shown a readiness to respond to issues in real time. This included evidence of consideration of equality and diversity data. The *Annual Enhancement Plans* would serve as sessional agendas for Schools in relation to teaching and learning activities.

There were several common themes around *marketing*, *IT issues*, *estates issues*, and *timetabling*, which arose from the *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports* and/or the discussions with the Heads of School. Whilst there had been active engagement between the Schools and the Departments concerned, the Committee agreed to refer these for the attention of the respective members of the Executive for immediate attention and action. The Executive will monitor progress and report to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.

4.2 External Examiner Annual Reports

Given the significance of the external examiner system, the Committee was extremely reassured that, based on an analysis of 168 *External Examiner Annual Reports*, comments from external examiners have overall been very positive. The following three areas were most frequently commended by external examiners:

- course organisation and management/administration of Assessment Board process;
- assessment practices/innovation/range of methods;
- feedback to students.

There has been a notable increase in the number of positive comments received for *staff support of/commitment to students/student engagement*, which is admirable given the level of institutional change and restructuring that has occurred over the past couple of sessions.

At the time of the executive review, two *External Examiner Annual Report* had been outstanding. One had subsequently been received. As regards the outstanding report, whilst the external examiner had engaged in part of the duties the final report had not been submitted. The School would, therefore, be seeking to replace the external examiner and, on securing a replacement, would remove the current examiner from office.

4.3 Quality Events

Most of the outcomes from validation and course re-approval events/activities tend to be specific to the discipline concerned and often involve specific amendments to course documentation. There were, however, some generic issues emerging including:

Areas of good practice

- course content/relevance;
- placement/practical skills opportunities;
- clarity and comprehensiveness of the course documentation;
- enthusiasm/commitment of staff;
- partnership working/engagement with industry/stakeholders;
- cross-school collaboration;
- facilities.

Areas for further development

A common issue referred to in several events was clarity of documentation, notably in relation to assessment and learning outcomes. The Committee noted initiatives to improve the quality of the University's course documentation, and the process for supporting course development teams prepare course documentation, were currently ongoing by DELTA and the Department for Governance and Academic Quality.

The Committee also agreed to set up a short-life working group to explore several aspects relating to teaching and learning, and pedagogy.

4.4 *Protected Characteristics*

The Equality and Diversity Advisory Group annually undertakes a review of a variety of student data within the context of seven protected characteristics (age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion/belief and sexual orientation). For the first time, the data this year was provided through the new RGU: Insight analysis and reporting system. The following data sources were reviewed:

- demographics of the student population;
- withdrawal rates and reasons for withdrawal;
- student satisfaction rates (the overall satisfaction question was asked in the internal *Student Experience Questionnaire* and the external *National Student Survey*);
- student achievement rates and, for undergraduate degrees, honours classifications;
- student *employability* rates (using the Destination of Leavers from High Education (DLHE) survey of graduates from 2016-17);
- single year comparative analysis of *National Measures*, provided by the Scottish Funding Council; and
- a trend analysis provided by the Scottish Funding Council of retention trends by protected characteristics.

In respect of retention rates, the Committee observed that, although the University was performing reasonably well, several competitor institutions had notably improved their performance. Given the importance of this measure to league tables, the Committee agreed to establish a short-life working group to further analyse the data, determine appropriate targets, and explore how the University could further enhance its support of students to improve its retention rates.

4.5 *Student: Staff Ratios (SSR)*

Although monitoring of the SSR was not formally part of the *Annual Appraisal Process*, the Committee did consider a detailed analysis of data that had informed the recently published *Times Good University Guide 2019*. Part of this data referred to the SSR, perceived as an indicator of a standard of student experience. The SSR was calculated on the basis of the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students divided by the number of FTE staff, as reported through the HESA Staff and Student Return. The University's SSR reported through the *Times Good University Guide 2019* was 20.6:1, compared to 18.1:1 in the previous year.

Committee requested a more detailed analysis of the SSR be submitted to its next meeting to fully explore the method of reporting student numbers, specifically in relation to students on placement.

4.6 *Student-Facing Support Services*

The *Annual Appraisal Process* for student-facing support services encourages Departments to reflect upon delivery and impact on the student experience. The process also encourages a look forward to further enhancements, as well as requesting examples of good practice around student involvement in the design, delivery and appraisal of services. The process had been slightly revised for the current appraisal cycle

Overseen by the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee, the process enabled the Sub-Committee to conclude that it could provide the Committee with a statement of assurance in respect of the quality of services available to students on the basis of appraisal evidence. The Committee was, in turn, reassured that there had been no issues that required immediate intervention, and that appropriate and proactive developments were taking place as evidenced in, amongst other things, the initiatives happening under the auspices of the *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*.

The Committee endorsed a proposal from the Sub-Committee that it would be helpful to have a centrally-organised student focus group which could elicit more detail to help with service enhancement, especially where services did not gain very much insight from wider University sources of data. The Committee also asked the focus group to particularly reflect on issues affecting the experience of students that had non-standard modes of attendance.

5. Good Practice and Innovations

The Committee welcomed the significant number of achievements and examples of good/innovative practice identified by the School Academic Boards in their *Appraisal Reports*. Those considered worthy of wider dissemination across the university community are contained in the [Annex](#), and the Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access would assist with their effective dissemination.

6. Conclusions

The Committee is of the opinion the *Annual Appraisal Process* provides a sound evidence base for Academic Council and the Board of Governors to have confidence in, and be satisfied with the quality and standards of award-bearing courses. Given the recent period of significant institutional change, the Committee was of the view that this was a highly commendable performance.

The Committee wishes to highlight to Academic Council and the Board of Governors the following in respect of the completeness of the quality assurance processes of the 11 Schools:

- all required *School Academic Board Appraisal Reports* have been submitted to the satisfaction of the Committee;
- all *External Examiner Annual Reports* have been received and responded to, with the exception of one, and the Committee was satisfied appropriate action was being taken to obtain this outstanding report.

The Committee acknowledges the effectiveness of the engagement of Schools and Departments undertaking the *Annual Appraisal Process* that has led to demonstrable evidence of extensive improvement actions that are either already complete or well advanced. Furthermore, the Committee was satisfied the *Annual Appraisal Process* had confirmed these actions were adequate and appropriate.

Mrs Elizabeth Hancock, Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience
Convener, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee
27 November 2018

Annex: Good Practice and Innovations

Employment/Professional Skills Development

- The Architecture pilot mentor scheme to prepare students for their Stage 3 professional year out in practice. Local alumni practitioners were paired with Stage 1 students in Semester 2 to include four interactions including a visit to their office and a visit to a building site. This model increased employability skills and students felt they were shaping their course. The School would be rolling it out to other disciplines. *[Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and the Built Environment]*
- Implementation of both DART drilling simulators (6000 Cyber system and old 5000 model) learning facilities into several modules. *[School of Engineering]*
- Through the use of active learning, Dundee Evening Telegraph digital editor delivered a hands-on workshop in which he took Stage 4 Journalism students behind DC Thomson's analytics, to explore the demographic profiles and likes and dislikes of its readers, and demonstrated how social media posts could be used to boost page-views for stories and other content that initially attracts little interest. *[School of Creative and Cultural Business]*
- Effectiveness of the placement model which results in 100% of students finding placements. *[School of Applied Social Studies]*
- Further to the road maps created for each undergraduate course, this was rolled out for all courses. In addition, the School were working towards creating a map specifically for professional skills so students would be clear on how they were building on these particular types of skills. *[Gray's School of Art]*
- The delivery of a Leadership Week within the MBA programme was highly valued by students and praised by industry members. It was an opportunity for students to network and some of the key activities had been transferred to other areas of the School's work e.g. Leaders of Tomorrow (Jeddah cohort) and Connect to Business (undergraduate Management courses). *[Aberdeen Business School]*
- The support for graduates within the region to continue with creative practice was identified as one of the objectives for the new Cultural Strategy for the City (2018). *[Gray's School of Art]*

Employability

- 'Meet the Professionals' careers event attracted excellent attendance from BA (Hons) Media, BA (Hons) Journalism and BA (Hons) Public Relations students. The format was developed in conjunction with RGU Careers and included PetchaKucha presentations with leading industry professionals and speed networking with employers. Recordings of the presentations were shared on the year group Moodle pages for those who were unable to attend, and edited into a promotional video for the School highlighting alumni/industry partnerships and employability. *[School of Creative and Cultural Business]*
- In Pharmacy, the employability data for the MPharm and MSc Clinical Pharmacy Practice courses achieved 100% for the second year running. *[School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences]*
- PG Insights Conference for all PG POP/Management students and masterclasses. Industry speakers were invited to provide an insight into career opportunities and this was an important networking event. *[Aberdeen Business School]*
- The Stage 3 Digital Fashion Event saw BA (Hons) Fashion Management students using filming, editing, design skills to create a contemporary online event, which in Session 17/18 incorporated a live client brief. This was the third year that this has been incorporated into

delivery and graduates have found it useful and appealing on CVs when applying for jobs. *[School of Creative and Cultural Business]*

Enhancing Student Engagement

- A 4th year Masterclass was held at the beginning of the students' final semester to motivate and inspire students prior to graduation. This event was also used as a launch pad for NSS. *[Aberdeen Business School]*
- Engagement with professional practice and extra-curricular activities, which were important aspects to students as it offered a sense of belonging. Initiatives included the 57°10 Student Society, Lunch and Learn lecture series by surveying and construction management students and a series of CPD sessions by Architectural Technology professionals. *[Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and the Built Environment]*
- Staff working closely with the student physiotherapy society who have been recognised by the University for innovation and student development in 2017-2018. Working in partnership with students, external courses such as massage diplomas, taping courses and seminal speakers have been organised and delivered, benefitting not only physiotherapy students but students from across the School of Health Sciences. *[School of Health Sciences]*
- Student Hackathons remained a successful event over the past few years. These were gaining in size with a series of mini-hacks planned for this coming year. They attract participation from student teams from a variety of Scottish universities, and projects and prizes were sponsored by industry. *[School of Computing Science and Digital Media]*
- The continued development of interaction with online learning students was evident from success in student satisfaction and student module achievement rates for this group of students. The School had a dedicated Online Learning Coordinator who helped with promoting best practice, for example, all modules were currently meeting the Baseline+ standard. These standards had also been found to benefit campus-based courses. *[Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and the Built Environment]*
- The creation of a Mobile Art School in conjunction with the LookAgain team and schools. Whilst being a positive example of collaboration with opportunities to showcase in museums, schools, libraries and community venues, it will serve as an opportunity to address gender imbalance. *[Gray's School of Art]*
- The employment of a School Articulation Tutor, a proven success in increased student satisfaction, and the proposal to use student mentors for new articulating students. *[School of Engineering]*
- There were two student led conferences in Session 2017-18 along with a Midwifery insight day all of which had significant student involvement and was excellent evidence of student partnership working. *[School of Nursing and Midwifery]*

Assessment and Feedback

- All written assessments were now being submitted and returned electronically. *[The Law School]*
- Choice of assessment within a module, for example either an oral examination or field diary and video. This approach allowed students to choose which type suited their learning styles and needs. *[School of Health Sciences]*
- Greater variation in assessment methods, such as the use of video presentations, and teaching methods, such as the use of actors in role play scenarios. *[School of Applied Social Studies]*

- Increase in satisfaction around assessment and feedback across many courses. This could be attributed to the development and implementation of the School-wide Assessment Charter, and modular assessment guidance through articulate presentations and a varied approach to assessment feedback. *[School of Health Sciences]*
- Rollout of Grademark across the School has been a factor in the overall improvement in teaching and assessment results. *[School of Applied Social Studies]*
- Service enhancement proposals developed within Stage 4 have been shared with clinical colleagues from practice and some have now been implemented in practice and were having a positive impact on patient care. This evidences the benefits of authentic assessments. *[School of Health Sciences]*
- The unique design and use of personalised parameters for coursework and making these available to students on CampusMoodle, such as providing different dimensions and loads for different students. *[School of Engineering]*
- Use of a discipline specific podcast on academic honesty appeared to have reduced plagiarism on the course where it was trialled. This was being adopted elsewhere in the School. *[The Law School]*
- Using MyPortfolio to track students' progress through the Main Event project, within BA(Hons) Events Management, was a particularly useful tool in Session 17/18. This ensured individual accountability from students working in groups during the process, but also provided a valuable tool for assessment. *[School of Creative and Cultural Business]*

Pastoral Support

- In Biomedical Science, both External Examiners highlighted the supportive, open and friendly attitude of staff delivering the three courses. *[School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences]*
- The employment of two student centre receptionists had provided consistency of engagement with students at the 'front-desk', enabled triage of issues and speeded up responses to student queries as well as providing a friendly welcoming face for students. This had meant that back-office staff had had less interruptions to their work. The key was enhancing the student-centred approach and supporting consistency. *[School of Nursing and Midwifery]*
- The introduction of a student/staff newsletter which is produced on a monthly basis and provides easily accessible information relevant to both staff and students on a wide range of matters. The newsletter, called PULSE, is produced electronically and delivered to all staff and student email accounts as well as via CampusMoodle. As it is targeted at both staff and students its neutrality is its appeal and the content has grown significantly over the year that it has been in production. It was used to update and provide a wide range of information on what was happening across the School. *[School of Nursing and Midwifery]*

Course Design

- A professional Top Up masters course was introduced – MSc Accounting and Finance. This course is aimed at professionally qualified accounting students who wish to 'convert' their existing masters level professional qualification into a PG degree. The offer of the Capstone module with its flexibility of a Business Consultancy route appeared attractive to this market, and together with some targeted marketing there has been an increase in numbers when compared to the previous course MSc Strategic Accounting. *[Aberdeen Business School]*
- Course changes were implemented that rationalised the delivery of modules and ensured, where appropriate, that modules were not delivered in more than one semester. This review exercise was undertaken for all PG courses within ABS to ensure that the delivery of course

dedicated modules was minimised as far as possible and that there was maximum opportunity to deliver common modules across courses. *[Aberdeen Business School]*

- Delivering the final year BSc (Hons) Forensic and Analytical Science project as a block (rather than a day a week) received a number of positive comments from Stage 4 students. Delivering the project as a block also allowed data collection to take place 'off campus', including sites in Europe. *[School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences]*
- During Session 2016-17, all 'Life Science' courses in the School were re-approved and re-accredited. This work resulted in a portfolio of modern, 'fit-for-purpose' courses across all of the 'Life Science' provision. During the re-approval process, the opportunity was taken to re-inforce the links between the School and the relevant Professional Bodies through placements, site visits, external speakers, appointment of e-tutors and creation of stakeholder groups. These improvements have been reflected in increased recruitment for Session 2018-19. *[School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences]*
- Near peer teaching which involved students in the later stages of BSc (Hons) Diagnostic Radiography teaching radiography techniques in the x-ray suite to students in earlier stages of the course. *[School of Health Sciences]*
- Pilot of thesis chapter deadline programme for UG final year students. This kept students on track towards thesis completion and was well received. *[Aberdeen Business School]*
- The delivery of context-based teaching at Peterhead Prison for BA(Hons) International Tourism Management, BA(Hons) Events Management, MSc International Tourism and Hospitality Management students within the Leisure Tourism module, which received very positive feedback. It involved the delivery of two pieces of teaching content side-by-side – heritage and dark tourism. Delivery in this style provided an interesting learning experience, but also enabled lecturers to work together and demonstrate the connection between content. *[School of Creative and Cultural Business]*
- The introduction of lecture capture had benefited evening class students and a proposal for all future evening class modules in Session 2019/20 to include this facility was in the process of being actioned. A new approach Video-Enhanced Teaching (VET) for the delivery of evening class modules was in development, and in addition, 80% of students surveyed in Session 2017/18 favoured this new proposal. *[School of Engineering]*
- The new Capstone module was introduced this year for all PG courses in ABS. This module is the final 60 credit project and offers the opportunity for students to meet the masters level requirements of ABS courses through either a traditional dissertation or a business consultancy project. Both routes allow students to undertake activities that integrate taught elements of the course via a substantive independent piece of work assessed as a dissertation report or as a project report with presentation (consultancy project route). The RGU Employability Hub has liaised with industry contacts to provide a number of consultancy projects for these students, while online students have taken the opportunity to develop a project relevant to their current work place. (Module results and feedback are not yet available.) *[Aberdeen Business School]*
- The online courses in the School received a strong rating in DELTA's Baseline+ project and that would be used to ensure similar quality in the Moodle pages of face to face modules. *[The Law School]*
- The two new undergraduate courses and one postgraduate course in Biomedical Technology, jointly delivered with the School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences and the School of Health Sciences, was a good example of collaborative working. *[School of Engineering]*
- The use of real-world projects and the early integration of project management and teamwork into the curriculum. This included an entrepreneurial aspect with the Vice-Principal for

Commercial and Regional Innovation delivering part of the module. *[School of Computing Science and Digital Media]*

Organisation and Management

- A very high proportion of academic staff were Fellows of the Higher Education Academy and a high number had achieved or were working towards Senior Fellowship; a positive drive from the School to encourage this development for all staff. *[School of Engineering]*
- The introduction of a School Teaching Committee, an operational meeting specifically charged with scrutinising current practices and enhancing quality in learning and teaching. It provided a mechanism to respond quickly and effectively to problems, for example, modules that did not achieve the threshold target at first sitting would be identified at the Assessment Boards, and a formal referral to the Teaching Committee noted. *[School of Computing Science and Digital Media]*
- The School engaged an external consultant to work with mixed academic and support staff groups to explore barriers and enablers to effective team working. This has enhanced the understanding of staff roles and improved the quality of communication between staff and with students. *[School of Nursing and Midwifery]*