

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 27 February 2019 (2.00pm – 3.55pm).

Present: Professor E Hancock (Convener), Mr F Antoniazzi, Dr H Bain, Ms J Bolger, Ms M Buchan, Dr S Burgess, Ms E Cargill, Mr J Dunphy, Ms J Guest, Mr T Kouider, Mr T Lauterbach, Dr R McDermott, Ms F Roberts, Mr L Smith and Mrs V Strachan.

Apologies: Ms E Corry, Ms I Crawford, Dr N Emmison and Mr A Johnston.

In Attendance: Dr D Cockburn, Ms L Ginsberg, Ms L Jack, Dr S Maxwell, Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary) and Ms J Strachan (item 4 only).

1. MINUTE

Action

The Committee **approved** the *Minute of the meeting of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 26 November 2018*, reference QAEC/19/2, and noted an extract of the *Minute of the Academic Council meeting held on 6 December 2018*.

1.1 Employability and Professional Enrichment [QAEC/19/2/3]

The *eHub* had been successfully launched, and mobile apps were also available on iOS and Android. There had been a very successful visit to the Employability and Professional Enrichment Hub by the Board of Governors on 13 February 2019.

1.2 League Tables [QAEC/19/2/8]

1.2.1 *Review of Academic and Non-Academic Spend in UK League Tables*

The Planning Analyst had prepared the above report, which explored the measures used for academic and non-academic spend in the three main domestic league tables, and the implications of the University's performance on its position in the respective league tables.

It was noted that, for example, only DELTA, The Gatehouse, IT Services, Commercial Operations Support and Library Services were included in the 'non-academic' category. This omitted Governance and Academic Quality, ResLife, Student Finance, the Innovation Hub, the Counselling Service and administrators based in Schools, amongst others. It was **agreed** further work would be undertaken to explore if there was benefit to extending what was included in the 'non-academic' category, and whether this might have implications for the University's TRAC return.

Dr D Cockburn

1.2.2 *Student-Staff Ratios*

An analysis of the Student-Staff Ratio measure had been undertaken and would be considered by the Executive prior to completion of the next HESA Student and Staff Returns. More modelling work was required, and members were encouraged to contact the Director of Planning and Policy or the Planning Analyst with any queries. The Committee thanked the Planning Analyst for the detailed report.

QAEC Members
to
Dr D Cockburn &
Mr A Munro

2. INTERNAL QUALITY ISSUES

2.1 Annual Appraisal Process: Session 2017-18

2.1.1 *Actions referred to the Executive for immediate action*

The Executive had reviewed the detailed actions referred by Schools as regards marketing, IT, Estates and Timetabling. The Convenor gave a detailed update on the various issues that were raised and the actions that are now being progressed.

2.1.2 *Other Actions*

DELTA had completed a more detailed analysis of the NSS categories of *Teaching on my course* and *Academic support*, and this would be circulated to Committee members with the minute.

Mrs F McLean
Whyte

Although the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee had been asked to consider the implementation of a vexatious behaviour policy, it was **agreed** this should instead refer to 'unacceptable behaviour' as the burden of proof for establishing vexatious behaviour was very high.

Mrs V Strachan
& Ms L Jack

The Director of Planning and Policy confirmed:

- the analysis of equality monitoring data would be made available to the University Annual Appraisal meeting held in early autumn;
- development of analysis of the additional categories of students was also in progress and would be ready for the next cycle;
- the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) would be publishing the latest retention data on 7 March 2019 and the opportunity would be taken to analyse different measures of retention to determine if student achievement rates remained appropriate for the University's requirements. A report would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting (29 May 2019).

Dr D Cockburn

Dr D Cockburn

Dr D Cockburn
QAEC Holding
File [29.05.19]

2.2 **Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Review: *Nursing and Midwifery***

The Committee **approved** an interim response from the School of Nursing and Midwifery, in respect of the review of *Nursing and Midwifery* in November 2015, and thanked the School for the detailed and considered response.

Prof I Murray

2.3 **Institution-Led Subject Review: Interim Review: *Biomedical Sciences, Forensic and Analytical Sciences, Pharmacy and Nutrition***

The Committee **approved** an interim response from the School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, in respect of the review of *Biomedical Sciences, Forensic and Analytical Sciences, Pharmacy and Nutrition* in October 2015, and thanked the School for the detailed and considered response.

Prof D Cairns

2.4 **Quality Events**

The Committee noted the agenda for the QAA/RGU Annual Engagement meeting being held on 5 March 2019.

The Committee's attention was drawn to a *Focus On: Graduate Skills Sharing Practice* event being held on 5 June 2019 in Glasgow. A number of resources had also recently been published:

- *Employability and Graduate Attributes: Thematic Report update 2018* (published 5 November 2018);
- *Employability and the austerity decade; What is topical/emergent in Employability?; Thinking strategically about employability and graduate attributes: Universities and enhancing learning for beyond university; Enhancing research-teaching linkages as a way to improve the development of employability attributes* (published 17 January 2019);
- *Employability: Analysis of materials on Student Transitions Map* (published 21 February 2019).

The *Programme of Quality Events: Sessions 2018-19 – 2023-24* was noted. In light of the revised Student-Facing Support Services Review process that would focus on University-wide themes/topics based on the University's strategic priorities and/or the *Annual Appraisal Process*, it was **agreed** these would be added to the *Programme* in future.

Governance &
Academic Quality

An error was noted with the timing of the School of Health Sciences Institution-Led Subject Review.

Ms L Jack

2.5 Academic Quality Handbook: Section 3

Consideration was given to a paper detailing proposed revisions to Section 3 of the *Academic Quality Handbook: Institution-Led Subject Review and Course Re-approval*.

The Section had historically included reference to the Student-Facing Support Services Review (SFSSR) but had lacked specific detail about the process, including responsibilities, documentation requirements and outcomes. To address this, it was agreed that the SFSSR should be more closely aligned with the Institution-Led Subject Review process. Key points of note included:

- a three year programme of themes for the Review would be identified based on the University's strategic priorities and/or the Annual Appraisal process;
- the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience would be responsible for identifying a Head of a Professional Support Department to lead preparations for the Review;
- the Assistant Chief Academic Officer would convene the Review Panel, which would consist of internal and external members;
- a Reflective Analysis document would be prepared in support of the Review;
- a formal one day event would be held;
- action against event outcomes would be monitored through the Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee, with regular reports to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. An interim response to the Review outcomes would also be required;
- Section 3 would be re-titled to *Institution-Led Subject Review, Course Re-Approval and Student-Facing Support Services Review*.

The Committee **approved** the proposed revisions to Section 3 of the *Academic Quality Handbook*.

Governance &
Academic Quality

Development would be required to provide appropriate data analysis to support the Student-Facing Support Services Review, and it was **agreed** this would be added to the Insight workstream.

Governance &
Academic Quality
to BI Team

2.6 External Examiners

The *Profile of External Examiners*, identifying examiners' occupational and geographical origin, was noted.

2.7 Academic Session 2018/19: Semester 2 Enrolments

A paper summarising Semester 2 Enrolments was tabled, which demonstrated that it was unlikely the University would meet its targets. As noted above (item 2.1.1) a revised marketing strategy was in development and would shortly be presented to Heads of School.

3. SUB-COMMITTEES

3.1 Academic Regulations Sub-Committee

Consideration was given to a report from the meeting held on 1 February 2019.

3.1.1 *Items for the attention of Academic Council*

Recommended to Academic Council:

(i) *Course Transfer and Temporary Suspension of Studies*: with effect from September 2019, *Regulation A2: Admission* be amended as follows:

- re-titling of *Regulation A2: Admission* to *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment*;
- restructuring of *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment*;
- relocation of the regulations relating to transfer between courses and temporary suspension of studies from *Regulation A1: Courses* to *Regulation A2: Admission and Enrolment*.

(ii) *Decisions on Admission*: with effect from September 2019, *Regulation A2: Admission* be amended to provide further guidance around the admission process, particularly in relation to the implications of failing a course on future application to the same/similar courses, as follows [new text underlined, deleted text struck through]:

- 1.12 The ~~admissions policy of the~~ University seeks to ensure equality of opportunity for all applicants.

Academic
Council Report
[12.03.19]

1.24 The principal academic criterion for determining a candidate's suitability for admission to a course within the University is that there is a reasonable expectation that he/she will be able to fulfil the learning outcomes of the course, meet any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements, and achieve the standard required for the award. In making judgements regarding admission, both positive and negative indicators will be considered. In cases where an applicant has previously failed to complete the same/substantially similar course then positive and negative indicators may include any additional qualifications and/or experience gained in the interim period and the level/stage at which failure occurred.

(iii) *Clarification around terminology and students' status:* with effect from September 2019, a *Glossary of University Terms* be incorporated into the *Academic Regulations*.

(iv) *Simultaneous Double Counting of Credits:* with effect from September 2019, *Regulation A2: Admission*, paragraph 5.2.4, be amended to provide further clarity around the simultaneous double counting of credit whilst enrolled on two or more awards of the University, as follows [new text underlined, deleted text struck through]:

5.3 (ii) The simultaneous double-counting of credit for the same module towards two or more awards of the University shall not be permitted. ~~Therefore, once credit has been counted towards one award of the University, it cannot be used towards another award of the University.~~ In such circumstances where exemptions cannot be granted, alternative modules may be selected on the advice of the Course/Programme Management Team.

3.1.2 *Self-Certification by Students*

The opinion of the Committee was sought on whether it would, in principle, support the adoption of a self-certification process for students in support of the *Fit to Sit Policy*. The Sub-Committee had considered the following points:

- whether other institutions permitted self-certification;
- the potential for students to abuse a self-certification process and the need to ensure that this could not be used to a student's advantage;
- there were perceived benefits to using self-certification for examinations and other types of 'on the day' assessments; this might usefully provide the basis for a pilot;
- some members queried how such a system would be more useful than the current deferral system;
- letters from doctors were often brief and considered to be of little benefit when obtained sometime after the event. It was pointed out that such letters should include a diagnosis and a statement on the likely impact on the assessment, and that Assessment Boards could reject these letters if they were not believed to provide sufficient evidence.

The Committee shared the view it would be of particular value for acute rather than chronic conditions. It would also reflect what graduates would typically experience in the workplace and so would be an opportunity to encourage professionalism and taking responsibility for their own well-being. Whilst there would always be the opportunity for students to exploit the system, students would learn that effectively deferring assessment unnecessarily had consequences. Furthermore, it was believed the *Fit to Sit Policy* encouraged students to engage early with staff when problems arose. It was acknowledged, however, that students would require very clear guidance in order to avoid abuse of the system due to alleged ignorance of its requirements.

The Committee was, in principle, supportive of the introduction of a self-certification system for students as part of the *Fit to Sit Policy*.

Academic
Regulations
Sub-Committee

3.2 Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee

The Committee noted a report from the meeting held on 5 February 2019 and, in particular, the following items:

- *Library Opening Hours*: the Sub-Committee had considered feedback from representatives of the Garthdee Medical Practice regarding the 24/7 opening hours of the Library during the exam period. A number of issues were highlighted and it was agreed that the Director of Student Life would draft a response to the Medical Practice on behalf of the University. It was **agreed** the Sub-Committee's Convener and Secretary would assist with preparation of the letter.

The Committee was reassured by the rigour of the measures in place to support Library users outwith normal working hours. It was understood many higher education institutions opened their libraries 24/7 for 365 days a year, whereas the University had, to date, only opened 24/7 for nine weeks leading up to the assessment period. This also raised more general issues relating to requests from students to get 24/7 access to other facilities, such as labs and studios, and the consequential issues relating to security, and health and safety, and the need for individual risk assessments.

- *Semester One Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) results*: the Sub-Committee had considered the Semester One SEQ results and received an overview of the data in RGU: Insight;
- *QAA Enhancement Theme Plan*: the Sub-Committee had considered an update report on activity in relation to the *Institutional Plan - Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience*;
- *Review of Student-Facing Support Services 2018/19: Delivery of Support Services Offsite*: the Sub-Committee received a presentation on progress;
- *Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)*: the Sub-Committee received an update on progress with the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) objectives for Session 2018/19;
- *Commercial and Regional Innovation*: the Sub-Committee received a detailed presentation from the Vice-Principal for Commercial and Regional Innovation on key new initiatives in this area.

3.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee

The Committee noted a report from the meeting held on 29 January 2019 and, in particular, the following:

- *Enhancement of the Online Learning Experience Project*: a debriefing workshop had been run by DELTA to share experience from the 2018 project, and this had highlighted the project had been well received and had resulted in significant enhancements, whilst also recognising that further work was required;
- *RGU Pedagogy Statement*: the Sub-Committee had received an update on the establishment of a short life working group to develop a succinct *Pedagogy Statement*;
- *Borderless Learning*: two updates had been received in relation to the key priority of borderless learning:
 - the digital estate review aimed to analyse what major technical components made up the estate, explore the effective assembly of these components as a whole and evaluate and enhance the support for staff and students in using the estate effectively;
 - the plan for the Student-Facing Support Services Review, “Delivery of Support Services to Off-Campus Students”, and the final Review report would be brought to the Sub-Committee at its first meeting of next session.

4. WORKING GROUP ON PEDAGOGY

The Head of Learning and Teaching Development provided an update on the short life working group, with representatives from all of the Schools and chaired jointly by herself and the Head of the Scott Sutherland School, to develop a succinct *Pedagogy Statement*. The working group’s membership had been split into four teams to progress activities and, following consultation with students, the aim was to have a *Statement* approved for September 2019. It was recognised this would be a valuable resource for course teams preparing for quality events, and also for the University’s submissions to the *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)* and the *Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)*, by providing a common framework that would underpin the variations in practice across Schools.

5. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)

The Director for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access provided an update on current NSS response rates, which were 11% behind last year’s response rates at the same point in time. There was ongoing liaison with the respective Heads of School and NSS Coordinators to maximise response rates prior to the 30 April 2019 deadline.

There was evidence of difficulties with securing student engagement with the *National Student Survey*, as well as securing re-engagement with their studies, following the prolonged break over the festive period and prior to the start of semester 2.

6. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

29 May 2019, 2.00pm in room N204, Sir Ian Wood Building, Garthdee

7. **INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE AT ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY (ICRGU):
ACADEMIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The *Minute of the meeting held on 13 November 2018* was noted.

8. **GRADUATE APPRENTICE STUDENT EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SEQ)**

The Committee considered a report providing an analysis of responses to the *Graduate Apprenticeship Student Experience Questionnaire*. A 53% response rate had been achieved, with 91% reporting they were "Overall ... satisfied with the quality of my Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) course". Focus groups were being organised by DELTA to enable further examination of the data, particularly in respect of the questions related to work-based learning.

The Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee had considered students' understanding of some of the questions in the *Student Experience Questionnaires* and had suggested a 'not applicable' category should be added.

9. **LEARNING WITHOUT BORDERS CONFERENCE 2019**

The university's [Learning and Teaching Conference: Learning Without Borders](#), chaired by Ms Julie Strachan, Head of Learning and Teaching Development, Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access, would be held on 2 May 2019. Registration was currently open.

Professor E Hancock, C

6 March 2019