

**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**  
**CONFIRMED minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

**Present:** C Symonds (Chair) B Dyer, R Chater, J De Vekey, J Freeman, J Gusman, K Fisher, R Rogers (Clerk), P Ryland, R Stafford, N Silvennoinen (Secretary)

**In attendance:** A Morrison, M Ridolfo (Agenda items 3 & 4 – Student exchanges)  
C Annear (Agenda item 5 – Mitigating circumstances)  
M Frampton (Observing)

**Apologies:** C Merrett, G Roushan

---

**1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014**

1.1 The previous minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

**2 MATTERS ARISING**

2.1 Minute 3.2.3 (17.10.13) – Student-Facing Rules and Regulations **Completed**

SUBU and Gillian Bunting were working together to develop a more transparent route to the Rules and Regulations section on the Student Portal. This has now been completed.

2.2 Minutes 3.3.2 & 3.3.5 (17.10.13) – Mitigating Circumstances: **Completed**

Exceptional Personal Circumstances and Additional Learning Support were considered at the May 2014 meeting of QASG as part of the 6J – *Mitigating Circumstances including Extensions: Policy and Procedure* annual review. See section 5.

2.3 Minutes 2.10 (26.01.14) - Aligning the new Student Records System with the standard assessment regulations: **Ongoing**

A number of changes to the assessment regulations would not come into effect until September 2015, but would need to be approved earlier by Senate to allow ease of implementation of the new Student Records System (SRS). Student Administration advised that these may need to be approved by the first Senate during 2014-15. Senate was scheduled to meet again in February 2015 prior to the SRS implementation which would better align with the annual review of standard assessment regulations undertaken by QASG in January.

(Update 06.05.14) The timing of this would be dependent on the volume of changes made for September 2015.

**Action:** The Chair of QASG to further discuss this matter with Student Administration.

2.4 Minute 8.1 (26.01.14) – Any Other Business: **Completed**

Midyear progress reviews for exchange students were considered at the May 2014 meeting of QASG.

2.5 Minute 3.5.4 (14.03.14) – Erasmus Funding for students failing Study Aboard: **Completed**

For the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme, the last year is 2013/14 and it is at the HEI's discretion to allow the student to keep their grant or not if they fail their assessments whilst abroad. For the new Erasmus+ programme (started Jan 2014, for Study Abroad 2014/15 onwards) this has not yet been finalised. The British Council will confirm in due course. A BU approach will then be agreed.

2.6 Minute 3.6.1 (14.03.14) – Streamlined approach to documenting Study Aboard: **Ongoing**

EDQ would develop this once approval (or otherwise) has been given from ASC (May 2014) to include the Study Aboard option within the 40 week placement.

- 2.7 Minute 3.7 (14.03.14) – Schools/Faculties including the Study Aboard option within the 40 week placement: **Completed**  
Some Schools had advised that the introduction of a Study Aboard option during the 40 week placement may be a challenge due to the requirements of their provision. QASG noted that this option may not be implemented by all Schools/Faculties, but could be considered in the future as required.
- 2.8 Minute 4.3.2 (14.03.14) – Implications of implementing levels 4-8 on the Student Records System (SRS) and for continuation students: **Completed**  
Work was currently underway on the new SRS implementation plan to include both Levels 4-8 and C-D for September 2015.
- 2.9 Minute 4.4.5 (14.03.14) – Developing a more streamlined approach for managing UK Credit transfer as part of the SRS implementation plan: **Ongoing**  
Policy and Procedural changes relating to this were still going through the deliberative committee structure for approval. EDQ and Student Administration would meet following committee approval.
- 2.10 Minute 6.1 (14.03.14) – The AAM representative was leaving QASG and a replacement would be required: **Completed**  
This was discussed under QASG Membership updates. See section 3.

### **3 QASG MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

- 3.1 The AAM (Academic Administration Manager) representative had left the University and a replacement was required. This was discussed at the Academic Administration Team meeting and it was agreed that existing QASG member Katy Fisher, who was currently on secondment as the acting Partnerships AAM, would also represent the AAMs on this committee for the remainder of the academic year.

### **4 MANAGEMENT OF MID-LEVEL ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES FOR INCOMING INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE STUDENTS**

- 4.1 The University's incoming student numbers are currently small; however it is not possible for the University to confirm cohort results without holding a formal Assessment Board. BU therefore adopted a process whereby exchange students receive provisional marks, but no official transcript, within the timescales outlined in the Erasmus Charter for the current academic year.
- 4.2 QASG heard that this process is managed with a degree of local variation within Schools. For instance, one School provided a letter (equivalent to a 'transcript') with a caveat that marks remain unratified until the Assessment Board. Another School reported that a letter would be produced only if requested by the student. It was also not clear whether all Schools informed exchange students' home institution as well as the students, of the results.
- 4.3 Sector research for other institutions which operate end-of-year Assessment Boards was undertaken which confirmed they also seek to meet the revised Erasmus requirement through provisional results. Eight institutions included reference to an interim or provisional transcript in their student-facing information, whilst two institutions operated on the basis of an interim grade report which was similar to the model adopted by BU for the 2013-14 cycle.
- 4.4 QASG supported a consistent provisional transcript to be managed via the new SRS but was mindful that an interim approach would need to be implemented prior to the rollout of the new SRS for current incoming students during 2014-15. EDQ and Academic Partnerships would develop the process and circulate to QASG members for feedback.

**QASG made the following recommendations to ASC:**

- i. to formalise the production of provisional transcripts for the 2014-15 academic year for all incoming exchange students (Erasmus and non-Erasmus);
- ii. to standardise the processes that support the management of mid-level assessment outcomes, also for the 2014-15 academic year.

**Action:** EDQ and Academic Partnerships to develop the process for managing mid-level assessment outcomes for incoming students and to circulate this to QASG for feedback.

## **5 OUTGOING EXCHANGE STUDENTS' AWARD CLASSIFICATION**

- 5.1 BU considered some years ago whether to convert marks, as well as credits, gained during study exchanges into BU grades. Sector research carried out at the time indicated that most institutions then transferred credits on a pass/fail basis using the principles generally applied to the accreditation of prior learning (APL). Further sector research was undertaken during March 2014 which confirmed that threshold judgements continue to prevail in the sector.
- 5.2 A number of issues were brought to the attention of QASG which were raised by the sector and within the University. QASG considered these and concluded that, at present, conversion of marks could not be done in a way that would ensure accurate and fair assessment outcomes for exchange students whilst retaining parity for all students. Concern was also expressed regarding students' perception of the purpose and value of the study exchange and QASG recommended that any credit-based contribution towards BU awards continue to be based on a threshold judgement.

**QASG made the following recommendation to ASC:**

- i. To consider and endorse this recommendation that any credit-based contribution towards BU awards continue to be based on a threshold judgement.

## **6 REVIEW OF 6J – MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES: POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

### **6.1 Short-term sickness notification**

- 6.1.1 During September 2013, a review group met to discuss the inclusion of a short-term sickness notification process within *6J - Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure*. The review group proposed to ASC that a self-certification route be permitted for short-term sickness notification (up to and including 5 days). ASC endorsed, in its September 2013 meeting, the proposed principles recommended by the review group and QASG was tasked to agree an operational process.
- 6.1.2 Short-term sickness notification was included within the policy and procedure (version 2.1) and introduced from November 2013. A communication and implementation plan was devised to inform staff and students of the introduction of short-term sickness notification and this was overseen by QASG. It was agreed at ASC that following implementation, the process would be reviewed by QASG prior to the 2014-15 academic year. An oversight of the process was provided to QASG for the period November 2013 until the end of March 2014.
- 6.1.3 Feedback from Schools and Partners indicated that the volume of students requesting mitigating circumstances via short-term sickness notification has been much lower than originally anticipated. QASG noted the process had not yet been through an entire academic cycle and a further assessment period was due, as well as Dissertation submissions. QASG agreed that it was too soon after implementation to recommend any changes to the process. However to support this review, QASG advised that further feedback should be received from Schools/Faculties prior to the republication of *6J* for the 2014-15 academic year to allow any new issues that may be identified following the summer Assessment Boards to be considered.

**QASG made the following recommendation to ASC:**

ASC approves that Short-term sickness notification continues in its current format for the 2014-15 academic year unless serious concerns are raised following the summer assessment boards.

**Action:** EDQ to obtain feedback on the short-term sickness notification process from Schools/Faculties prior to republication of 6J.

- 6.1.4 As part of the short-term sickness notification process, students must ring up and speak to a designated person e.g. Programme Administrator or leave a voicemail. QASG agreed that clarification should be made within 6J advising students that this person is not responsible for making the decision to approve (or otherwise) the request for mitigating circumstances.

**Action:** EDQ to update 6J to advise the designated person receiving the call does not approve (or otherwise) the request for mitigating circumstances.

**6.2 Retrospective consideration of Additional Learning Support (ALS)**

- 6.2.1 The process for identifying students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) lies within the ALS department. Students are referred to ALS (or they self-refer) as a result of struggling or failing on their programmes. If a student fails and subsequently comes to ALS for diagnosis and is found to have a SpLD, it has never been formally documented within the *Academic Regulations Policies and Procedures* (ARPP) or within existing guidance from ALS whether the ALS diagnosis can be applied retrospectively or not .

- 6.2.2 QASG noted that students routinely collect marked coursework and therefore the University may not have copies of their work to consider retrospectively. This could lead to inconsistency across the University whereby some students may have all their assessments marked retrospectively but others may not. Students who are in the process of being diagnosed with an ALS are often in the system for a period of time until a diagnosis is made, this could then impact upon any following assessments. QASG agreed that once a diagnosis had been made the Assessment Board may, where appropriate, make the decision if work is to be assessed as though for the first time. It was suggested that this should be for the current academic level only. QASG agreed that this would also need to be included in the ALS guidelines and other relevant documentation.

**QASG made the following recommendations to ASC:**

- i. ASC approves that when a student is diagnosed late with an ALS they may, where appropriate, be allowed the opportunity by the Assessment Board to be assessed as for the first time for the current academic level only, in line with 6J - *Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure*.
- ii. Subject to approval of recommendation 1 above, the current ALS guidelines and other relevant documentation also reflects this.

**6.3 Sporting commitments**

- 6.3.1 BU has a number of students with sporting commitments, of which many represent at a national or international level. Some of these athletes may be required to participate in performance/training camps and have to organise their University work around them. However, it has always been at the School's discretion to manage students with sporting commitments. Sector Research was undertaken for QASG which demonstrated that at least nine other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) accepted and supported students with sporting commitments.

- 6.3.2 QASG acknowledged the University's strategic aim to enhance extra-curricular activity, which sporting commitments would be part of. QASG agreed that sporting commitments could be an acceptable mitigating circumstance although student's expectations would need to be managed as it was noted that with coursework students may have the opportunity to submit their work before the deadline although examinations may need to be taken during the following resit period. Students aware of their

sporting commitments in advance would be encouraged to advise their Schools/Faculties so this could be taken into consideration.

**QASG made the following recommendation to ASC:**

- i. ASC approves that students with sporting commitments will be allowed to seek consideration under *6J - Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure*.

**6.4 Religious and cultural holidays**

6.4.1 *6J* does not currently identify religious and cultural holidays as a potential mitigating circumstance for students whose assessment performance may be affected by them. Sector research demonstrated a mixed approach to managing this.

6.4.2 QASG acknowledged the University's strategic aim to be a multi-cultural institution and agreed that religious and cultural holidays should be an acceptable mitigating circumstance although students' expectations would need to be managed through the provision of student-facing guidance (e.g. Handbooks, induction and myBU). It was noted that with coursework, students may have the opportunity to submit their work before the deadline although examinations may need to be taken during the following resit period. Students who knew of religious and cultural holidays in advance would be encouraged to advise their Schools/Faculties so this could be taken into consideration. The sector research demonstrated that the Chaplaincy at another HEI produced a schedule of key dates for the year ahead which was provided to their staff. This idea was supported by QASG.

**QASG made the following recommendations to ASC:**

- i. ASC approves that where a student's assessment performance may be affected by religious and cultural holidays they will be allowed to seek consideration under *6J - Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure*.
- ii. Subject to approval of recommendation 1 above, BU Chaplaincy makes available a schedule of key religious and cultural holidays throughout the academic year to Schools/Faculties to aid assessment submission and examinations dates.

**6.5 Length of coursework extensions**

6.5.1 QASG was advised that one School currently only allows coursework extensions up to three weeks so feedback can be given to other students to align with the three week assessment turnaround and students with the extensions do not benefit from hearing about other students' feedback before they submit. Other Schools do not do take this approach and routinely give feedback to students when other coursework with extensions are still pending submission.

6.5.2 QASG discussed this and agreed that a more consistent approach across the University was beneficial to students. Schools/Faculties should still maintain the flexibility to determine the length of coursework extensions, but the current wording in *6J* be clarified to say: All extensions approved for coursework hand-ins must have a specific hand-in date which is set to reflect the nature of the mitigating circumstance.

**QASG made the following recommendation to ASC:**

- i. ASC approves that the current wording in *6J - Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure* is clarified further to say: All extensions approved for coursework hand-ins must have a specific hand-in date which is set to reflect the nature of the mitigating circumstance.

**6.6 Carer support**

6.6.1 Through a staff development session, it was identified that *6J* does not specifically apply for students who may also be Carers for family members or their children. QASG noted that longer-term Carer support would be easier to manage, but short-term emergency care of an unexpected and serious

nature was not. Whilst QASG acknowledged that Schools/Faculties were potentially already receiving circumstance request forms for this type of scenario, it was agreed that this should be recognised as a potential mitigating circumstance subject to being supported by appropriate evidence to ensure consistency across the University.

**QASG made the following recommendation to ASC:**

- i. ASC approves that short-term emergency care of an unexpected and serious nature can be taken into consideration in line with *6J - Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure* if supported by relevant supporting evidence.

**6.7 Fit to sit policy**

6.7.1 QASG discussed a *Fit to sit policy*, whereby if a student sits an examination under a *Fit to sit policy* then their performance counts. Whilst it is a useful document for large HEIs which have more students than BU sitting examinations at the same time, the current process outlined in *6J* allows for students to submit circumstances up to the day of the examination or afterwards for Board consideration.

6.7.2 There is a varied sector approach to this and some HEIs have implemented it and then retracted it because the Policy has been difficult to defend successfully at the Appeals stage and under scrutiny from the OIA. In addition, a diligent student may attend an examination when they are experiencing severe mitigating circumstances, and to discount them could be seen as unreasonable even if it is following the process.

6.7.3 QASG considered the introduction of a *Fit to sit policy* and agreed this was not required. *6J - Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure* and *11J - Fitness to Study: Procedure* were both deemed appropriate mechanisms for students in these situations.

6.8 QASG discussed enhancing student facing information through (for example) SUBU induction and Handbooks. The Programmes Administrator representative advised that some of the information within Appendix 3 of *6J* (Mitigating Circumstances - Guidance Notes for the Student) would benefit from some restructuring and agreed to work with EDQ to make the existing information more accessible for document users.

**Action:** EDQ and the Programmes Administrator representative to consider the structure of existing information within Appendix 3 of *6J*.

6.9 In addition to those listed above, QASG received some further clarifications which would be made to *6J* as part of the annual review. These were all supported.

**7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

7.1 There was no any other business.

7.2 This would be John Gusman's last meeting and QASG thanked him for his involvement with the committee. John had attended QASG as the Vice President Education. His replacement: Ellie Mayo-Ward would now attend future QASG meetings.

**8 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2014.