

**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**  
**Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013**

**Present:** P Rouse (Chair), M Barnard, B Dyer, J Edwards, J Freeman, A Guttridge, C Merrett, G Roushan, N Silvennoinen (Secretary), M Simpson, R Stafford, C Symonds

**In attendance:** J Hanson (agenda item 5 only), G Jordan, X Velay

**Apologies:** A Main

**1 Welcome and introductions**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and introductions were made.
- 1.2 The following non-members were in attendance: Gill Jordan to propose a change to the standard CPD registration period (agenda item 4); Janet Hanson to present the 2011-12 external examining annual report (agenda item 5); and Xavier Velay to represent the School of Design, Engineering and Computing.

**2 Minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

- 2.1 The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record.
- 2.2 The following were reported under matters arising:
- 2.2.1 Minute 3.1.7: Academic Standards Committee (ASC) had resolved that any future requests for exceptions to the University's standard Assessment Board and reassessment model should be considered by the Quality Assurance and Standing Group (QASG) on a case-by-case basis in order to recommend ASC approval (or otherwise).
- 2.2.2 Minute 3.2.2: ASC had resolved that new and revised part-time programmes should deliver up to a maximum of 2/3 of the credits delivered on equivalent full-time programmes. Any proposed exceptions to this should be referred to QASG for consideration on a case-by-case basis in order to recommend ASC approval (or otherwise).
- 2.2.3 Minute 4.2: Educational Development and Quality (EDQ) had included reference to the requirement to round formal element marks up to one decimal point in *6D – Marking, Independent Marking and Moderation: Policy and Procedure* and informed Schools of the change. EDQ had discussed with Library and Learning Support (LLS) whether this information should be displayed on myBU. This was not deemed necessary as the GradeCenter was not used universally to release marks to students. The previous Student Administration representative had informed the group looking to purchase a replacement for Unit-E of the QASG suggestion that presentation of marks on Board reports should be revisited as part of the process of acquiring a new student record system.
- 2.2.4 Minute 4.4: EDQ had clarified in *6L – Assessment Board decision-Making, including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* that in order to apply the profile rule (i.e. awarding a student a higher classification on the basis of 2/3 of their final level credits), the student's aggregate mark must not be lower than 3.0% below the classification boundary.
- 2.2.5 Minute 5.10: LLS had confirmed that the use of Turnitin for the purposes of identifying plagiarism was already comprehensively covered in staff training and guidance.
- 2.2.6 Minute 5.11: ASC had approved the proposed revisions to *6H – Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards* with effect from September 2012.
- 2.2.7 Minute 6.2: Members had been given an opportunity to send further comments on the draft external examiner report to the Chair.
- 2.2.8 There were no outstanding actions.

**3 Confirmation of terms of reference and membership**

- 3.1 The following changes to membership were noted: Pamela Rouse to replace Jennifer Taylor as Chair; Rick Stafford to replace Brian James as School representative for Applied Sciences; and Joanna Freeman to replace Kirsty Randall as Student Administration representative.
- 3.2 The Chair outlined the purpose of QASG. Members agreed that the existing terms of reference were fit for purpose and proposed no changes to the current remit.

#### **4 Annual review of Standard Assessment Regulations**

- 4.1 Members considered feedback from chairs, secretaries and independent members of Assessment Boards on the implementation of the standard assessment regulations during the 2011-12 academic cycle. In addition, feedback had been received from a small number of external examiners. It was noted that many of the comments had been put forward by individuals and that not all comments were supported by clear evidence.
- 4.2 Comments had been received in relation to six key areas of the regulations. In addition, a number of related concerns had been raised. QASG discussion relating to these issues is detailed below. The recommended changes to the University's current standard assessment regulations and associated procedural changes are summarised in a separate paper to ASC. If accepted by ASC and Senate, the changes will be implemented for 2013-14.

#### **4.3 Standard Assessment Regulations**

- 4.3.1 Section 5 – Period of registration: The School of Health and Social Care (HSC) had asked QASG to consider the length of CPD registration periods. Gill Jordan outlined the background to the School's CPD framework which was reviewed in June 2012. Prior to the review, the HSC registration periods had been calculated from first registration to a named award once a student had accumulated 60 credits. Students had been allowed up to six years to make the transfer. However, the standard assessment regulations which were introduced in June 2011, aligned CPD registration periods with the registration periods for named awards. It was argued that this did not support the Strategic Health Authority's expectations of flexible delivery for health care professionals or meet student expectations of 'step-on step-off' bite-sized learning.

Members noted that the new regulation had been introduced to ensure currency of learning and expressed no support for a change in the standard regulation. However, QASG accepted the School's argument that the programme's practice-orientation and the requirement for students to be in relevant employment would help ensure currency and approved the extended registration period as a formal exception to the standard assessment regulations.

**RESOLVED:** to approve a non-standard registration period of up to 10 years for honours and masters degrees delivered within the HSC CPD framework.

- 4.3.2 Section 6 – Pass mark: Two external examiners had asked the University to consider whether the requirement for students to achieve an element mark of 36% or above in order for a formal element of assessment to constitute a pass was too harsh and whether a lower element mark could be accepted where the total unit mark is at least 40%. Members noted that the University exercised flexibility in terms of informal sub-element marks which make up the mark for formal elements of assessment and expressed no support for this proposal.
- 4.3.3 Section 8 – Progression: The Business School had asked Members to consider a proposal to allow Level C students who fail a single 20-credit unit to repeat the failed unit alongside Level I study. As a principle, the University did not allow the practice of 'trailing fails' and normally only students with mitigation were allowed to commence their studies at the next level although they could not formally enrol before making good the failed unit(s). Students were also able to proceed to an unofficial placement if they had failed up to 40 Level I credits. Otherwise exceptional progression arrangements between academic levels had been approved for two programmes.

The majority of Members expressed concern that allowing students to progress to the next level without the required underpinning could set them up to fail and did not support the proposed change. However, it was agreed that the current guidance should be relaxed for students with mitigating circumstances to allow some flexibility with regards to the timescales within which reassessments are

taken. The current procedure states that 'the student [with mitigation during a resit period] should be allowed a second attempt as soon as is reasonably possible and the outcome of the reassessment should be made known to the student within a month after the start of enrolment' (6L, Section 6.6.2). Members proposed that the reassessment should normally take place within a month of the commencement of the next level/stage. The student could not formally enrol before they have made good failure in the units for which they are being reassessed.

**RECOMMENDATION TO ASC:** to allow for greater flexibility with regards to the timing of reassessment between levels for those students who have mitigating circumstances during the resit period (normally up to one month after the commencement of the next level/stage). *6L – Assessment Board Decision-Making, including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* to be amended accordingly.

- 4.3.4.1 Section 9 – Submission of coursework, reassessment of late submissions: QASG received a proposal to allow work which is less than three weeks late and graded at a pass mark or above to stand as an automatic resubmission to help streamline the Assessment Board process. Members noted that reassessment decisions should be made in the context of students' overall assessment profile. Concern was also expressed that some students might see this simply as a '3-week extension' if achieving a mark of 40% would be sufficient for them. QASG did not support the original proposal but agreed that an outcome from an Assessment Board could be to carry a capped pass mark forward to the following Board as the resubmission mark if this was deemed appropriate.

**RECOMMENDATION TO ASC:** to agree that an outcome from an Assessment Board could be to carry a capped pass mark forward to the following Board as the resubmission mark if this is deemed appropriate. *6L – Assessment Board Decision-Making, including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* to be amended accordingly. A new Board decision to be added to the student record system (e.g. 'accept late submission as resit submission at the next meeting of the Assessment Board'.

- 4.3.4.2 Section 9 – Submission of coursework, non-attendance at examinations: Currently this regulation covers failure to submit a piece of coursework by the required deadline but makes no reference to examinations. QASG supported a proposal to include non-attendance at examinations in this section for completeness.

**RECOMMENDATION TO ASC:** to recommend to Senate that this section of the regulations be amended to include non-attendance at examinations and retitled 'Submission of coursework and attendance at examinations'.

- 4.3.5.1 Section 11 – Classification, calculating the award of Distinction: An external examiner had asked the University to consider whether, in order to obtain a Distinction a student should achieve both a credit-weighted aggregate mark of 70% (or above) and a mark of 70% (or above) for their research project/dissertation. Alternatively, the University was asked to consider whether a Distinction should be awarded to all students who are awarded a mark of 70% (or above) for their research project/dissertation and have a credit-weighted aggregate mark of over 69%. Currently the latter came under Board discretion (where less than 69.5%). Members noted that this suggested that some Level M units were more valuable than others and did not support this proposal.

- 4.3.5.2 Section 11 – Classification, discretion in reaching decisions on the awards: Two Schools had commented on the current level of Assessment Board discretion which applies to the credit-weighted aggregate mark. One commentator noted that the '1% rule' (i.e. Board discretion to award a higher classification if the aggregate mark falls more than 0.5% below the classification boundary but remains within 1.0% of it) introduces subjectivity into the process. The other one noted that QASG should consider whether the current level should be increased further. Members discussed these views but agreed that Boards operate well within the current guidance as demonstrated in positive external examiner comments and proposed no changes to current practice.

- 4.3.6.1 Section 12 – Provision for failed candidates, reassessment: QASG had been asked to consider whether formal element marks rather than the whole unit mark should be capped at the pass mark

where a student is required to take a reassessment in a unit which is assessed by a combination of formally defined elements.

The student body had expressed concern regarding the current practice through School and University level committees. Students argued that the penalty for failing one formal element of assessment was too high and did not allow students to be rewarded with good grades for those elements in which they had performed well. The Students' Union representative noted that students found this demoralising. The School of Tourism School Academic Standard Committee had submitted a paper regarding this, which also noted that capping whole unit rather than formal element marks did not encourage students to obtain good marks in other formally assessed elements in the same unit. Sector research carried out by EDQ indicated varied practice between institutions.

Members discussed the proposals and supported the change unanimously, noting that it could potentially advantage students by raising unit marks and possibly impacting on students' final classification. However, this would be based on the principle that students' marks should not be capped for other formal elements in the unit if the student has demonstrated achievement of the relevant intended learning outcomes. The Student Administration representative agreed to investigate what implications the proposed change would have for the student record system.

**RECOMMENDATION TO ASC:** to recommend to Senate that this section of the regulations be amended to cap formal element marks rather than whole unit marks at the pass mark following successful reassessment in one or more formal elements of assessment.

4.3.6.2 Section 12 – Provision for failed candidates, repetition of units: QASG had been asked to consider whether repeat students should always repeat all elements of assessment including those which they have already passed and whether a new assignment brief should always be required in each case. Members agreed that where units were repeated, all assessment elements should be retaken as per current practice. However, it might not always be necessary to set completely new assessments as students had not been awarded credit for the work previously submitted for the unit (see 4.4.3 below).

#### 4.4 Other related issues

4.4.1 Recommendations for the adjustment of marks: An external examiner had queried how a consistent approach is ensured across all units to identify which unit marks (if any) may require Board adjustment. It was noted that adjustment of marks was done on an exception basis based on information presented to the Board (e.g. unit statistics). Members emphasised that there was no evidence to suggest that the current system was not effective and proposed no changes.

4.4.2 Replacement for Unit-e: QASG had been asked to consider whether the future student record system should be set up so that it does not round up the credit-weighted aggregate. Classification would therefore be calculated from 50.0/60.0/70.0 (although Board discretion would remain). Members did not express support for this proposal noting that the practice was consistent across all Boards. However, it was recognised that many professional bodies did not accept unit level marks which fell less than 0.5% below the pass mark although the University considered this a unit pass. It was agreed to seek School views regarding this issue and discuss it further after this year's main round of Boards to feed into the process of acquiring a new student record system.

**ACTION:** EDQ to ask Academic Administration Managers to coordinate a response regarding Schools' views on the rounding of unit marks and/or level aggregates to the nearest full number and the estimated impact (if any) this would have for student achievement on the basis of the marks input into Unit-e this year. QASG to debate the issue again to assess the implication of potential changes to the current practice of showing two decimal points on Board report with a view to informing the process of acquiring a new student record system.

4.4.3 Definition and guidance on self-plagiarism: QASG had been asked to consider how the current guidance on self-plagiarism could be made more explicit to staff and students. It was noted that students could submit again previously submitted work (or elements of it) if they were specifically asked to rework a failed assignment for the purposes of reassessment and that this did not constitute self-plagiarism.

Members discussed the issue and noted that currently when a student repeats a unit, the expectation is normally to submit new work. However, it was now agreed that students could in principle utilise existing work also for repeat submissions (or resubmissions) because they had not yet been awarded credit for the failed unit. This was different from someone choosing to use previously credited work, or aspects of it, again to gain further credit which was seen as self-plagiarism. Similarly, Members agreed that students could quote their own work which they had already submitted previously for reassessment as long as this was clearly referenced.

**ACTION:** EDQ to liaise with Schools and LLS to identify which procedures and other related student facing guidance should be changed, including assignment briefs, and bring any draft updates to the April meeting of QASG for further consideration.

- 4.4.4 Generic assessment criteria: an external examiner had suggested in their report that the University's generic assessment criteria (outlined in 6F – *Generic Assessment Criteria: Procedure*) should be reviewed but had not indicated specific issues for revision. Members did not identify the need to review these.

## 5 External examining annual report

- 5.1 Janet Hanson (EDQ) outlined the scope of the annual review of the University's external examining arrangements. The review had been informed by 228 external examiner reports relating to the 2011-12 reporting cycle and relevant extracts from the School Quality Reports. Overall, the reports had been very positive with none indicating a 'NO' response in relation to academic standards for the award, comparability of student performance and assessment processes. There was a slight increase in the number of 'YES but with reservations' responses which were received from 12 externals in relation to the above three key areas. The concerns and recent updates from the relevant Schools were summarised in the appendices. It was noted that it would be useful to merge the initial and subsequent School responses into one column.

- 5.2 In addition to the more detailed scrutiny of individual comments relating to specific concerns, the annual report highlighted key themes arising from the scrutiny process. These included praise for innovative assessment methods and high quality feedback to students. Whilst it was recognised that the reports had not been written with publicity in mind, Members noted that it would be useful to investigate whether any comments included in the reports could be used to promote the academic profile. It was suggested that positive feedback could be drawn to the students' attention, but Members noted that students should have access to external examiner reports through framework team meetings.

**ACTION:** EDQ to contact Marketing and Communications regarding the potential use of positive external examiner comments subject to appropriate consent to promote the academic profile.

- 5.3 The reports from external examiners who had indicated a 'NO' or 'YES but with reservations' response in their 2010-11 reports had also been followed up to ensure that the examiners' concerns had been addressed. The follow-up confirmed that none raised concerns during the current review cycle.

- 5.4 The thoroughness and extent of this detailed independent review was commended and Dr Hanson was thanked for her work on this. It was also noted that the summary of the external examiners' comments should be made available to Deputy Deans (Education) to allow Schools to identify common issues and areas of good practice.

- 5.4 **ACTION:** EDQ to finalise the report in light of the discussion for submission to ASC and make the external examining summary available to Schools.

## 6 AOB

- 6.1 The Business School representative queried whether the University should consider introducing mid-level boards after Semester 1. It was noted that this had been discussed in March 2012 in relation to the introduction of the Common Academic Infrastructure. Members had agreed then that Schools should carry out formalised mid-year student progress reviews to identify students whose performance has been below pass-level and counsel them of the implications of failure for the remaining units and the level. Schools would be required to implement this practice from January 2014.

6.2 **ACTION:** EDQ to include reference to mid-year progress reviews in the next revision of *6E - Assessment Feedback and Return of Assessed Work: Policy and Procedure*.

**7 Date of next meeting**

7.1 The next meeting was due to take place on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013 but would possibly be rescheduled due to the Easter break.