

**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**  
**Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

**Present:** J Taylor (Chair), J Edwards, A Guttridge, B James, C Merrett, K Randall, N Silvennoinen (Secretary), C Symonds

**In attendance:** X Velay

**Apologies:** M Barnard, B Dyer, K Jones, A Main, G Roushan

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Andy Guttridge and Brian James as new members and introductions were made.
- 1.2 As this was an extraordinary meeting which would consider one agenda item only, the minutes from the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> January would be confirmed at the next meeting to be held on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

**2 Progression and reassessment between and within academic levels**

- 2.1 The Chair explained that the Quality Assurance Standing Group (QASG) had been asked to consider progression and reassessment requirements between academic levels due to an increasing number of emerging non-standard programme developments, including those involving condensed modes of delivery. QASG had also been asked to consider whether the University should consider ongoing reassessment or mid-year reassessment periods as part of the Common Academic Structure (CAS). Currently some existing postgraduate programmes and a small number of part-time undergraduate programmes held mid-level Boards whilst one programme allowed ongoing reassessments.

**2.2 Progression between levels on non-standard programmes**

- 2.2.1 The current assessment principles applied to the University's academic provision require that an Assessment Board formally confirms that all lower level/stage credits have been achieved before students proceed to the next level. This means that all reassessment and progression decisions are determined by an Assessment Board. A number of current developments have challenged these principles and members were asked to consider whether the University's progression requirements should be amended for all non-standard programmes or, alternatively, whether exceptions could be approved on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.2.2 Members discussed the implications of allowing students to progress to the next academic level/stage before the formal meeting of an Assessment Board. All members apart from one School representative argued that the University should retain the principle that students cannot 'trail fails'. It was argued that by asking students to make good lower level failure before proceeding to the next level, would help ensure that they are not set up to fail at the next level. The counter argument to allow students to proceed 'at risk' was not supported and members noted that it was not meaningful for students to potentially leave with a combination of lower and higher level credits but no named award.
- 2.2.3 It was reported that it was a requirement for an Assessment Board to take place both at the end of each level and at the end of the academic year for HEFCE/HESES funding and reporting purposes. This supported the argument against trailing fails although it was noted that not all programmes with non-standard structures currently followed this requirement.
- 2.2.4 Members agreed that an element of flexibility should be introduced for programmes with non-standard structures and proposed that there should be a minimum period of one month between levels to allow for an Assessment Board to take place. This would facilitate reassessments for up to one month of the start of the term during which period students would progress to the next level but would not formally enrol before they had successfully passed the lower level units. This would provide a cut-off point at which those who were unable to successfully pass reassessments would be prevented from continuing before incurring a substantial loss of time and money. This degree of flexibility was already in place for students who failed a 'first attempt' during a reassessment period due to mitigation and whose subsequent reassessment had to take place within a short time period to accommodate

progression to the next level. It was agreed that students with failures should be counselled and may be offered a choice to repeat instead of being reassessed in the failed units. Members recommended that other non-standard structures should not be allowed unless exceptionally approved by the University.

**RECOMMENDED TO ASC:** that a minimum period of one month is required between levels for all programmes (including non-standard programmes) to allow reassessments to take place up to one month of the start of the following level. Formal enrolment in the subsequent level is to be deferred until the student has achieved the required credits to proceed.

**RECOMMENDED TO ASC:** that an Assessment Board be held at the end of a level (to consider reassessment and progression) and the end of an academic year (to facilitate statutory reporting). Any exceptions to these principles require University approval on a case-by-case basis by the University through the process of programme/framework evaluation.

### 2.3 **Progression within levels: Common Academic Structure and current practice**

2.3.1 Due to the introduction of CAS and mid-year assessment periods, members were asked to consider whether early or on-going reassessment decisions should be allowed across the University's provision. Members discussed the implications if students were to take reassessments mid-level, including the impact on subsequent performance in the remaining units at that level, and whether students' motivation would suffer if they were to fail mid-level reassessments. Concern was also expressed with regards to the practical implications of such changes, including how to ensure robust management of ongoing or early reassessments. Concern was also expressed in terms of any potential implications for staff workloads if additional assessment briefs/exam papers would need to be written. Other institutions' practices to allow students to graduate with fails or to ask students to study beyond the required number of credits for the award in order to accommodate failures were also discussed but not supported.

2.3.2 Those members who already had experience of semesterised delivery noted that students have not requested early reassessments or complained about the current reassessment arrangements. Instead, students who fail in mid-year assessments receive counselling regarding the implications of their failure for the remaining units/level and guidance on potential reassessments. Members suggested extending this current practice to CAS noting further issues in relation to the varied treatment of students on existing postgraduate and part-time undergraduate programmes where mid-level reassessment decisions resulted in different outcomes for students.

2.3.3 Overall, concern was expressed that there was no viable way to ensure fair and consistent mid-year reassessment decisions and, in order to ensure equitable treatment of all students, members supported the proposal that framework/programme teams hold a mid-year student progress review meeting following mid-year assessments and counsel students of the implications of any failed assessments, including advice regarding how they may wish to prepare for any reassessments at the end of the level and/or academic year. The mid-year student progress review meeting should also highlight any students who have had known mitigating circumstances and they should be advised to request formal consideration of these by the Circumstance Board.

**RECOMMENDED TO ASC:** that framework/programme teams hold formalised mid-year student progress review meetings and counsel students of the implications of any failed assessments for their remaining units and the level.

### 2.4 **Other issues**

2.4.1 A number of issues were highlighted which were outside the remit of QASG but could have academic implications for programmes with non-standard structure and/or delivery pattern.

2.4.2 It was noted that the University had not yet agreed whether part-time or online programmes would be exempt from CAS. This could have implications for some current developments.

2.4.3 HEFCE's definition of full-time programme was considered in relation to part-time provision and resulted in the following recommendation.

**RECOMMENDED TO ASC:** that part-time programmes deliver a maximum of 80 credits per academic year to ensure sufficient distinction between full and part-time provision.

- 2.4.4 The other queries relating to fees; enrolment; funding; and student numbers would be forwarded to colleagues with expertise in these areas.

**ACTION:** EDQ to forward the remaining queries included in the discussion paper to relevant departments for a response.

**3 Any other business**

- 3.1 None.

**4 Date of next meeting**

- 4.1 The next meeting will take place on 26th April 2012.