**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**

**UNCONFIRMED minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2016**

**Present:** C Symonds (Chair), P Alexander, R Chater, C Hunt, G Jordan, E Mayo-Ward, H Mitchell, A Mercer, K Phalp, S Ponsford, R Rogers (Clerk), C Williams

**In attendance:** L Hutchings (Agenda item 5 – Suspension of studies), M Frampton (Observing)

**Apologies:** A Chapman, J De Vekey, S McLawrence, P Mathews, P Ryland, N Silvennoinen, S White

**1 Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2015**

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

**2 Matters arising**

2.1 **Minute 4.3 (14.01.15) QASG membership update** – QASG academic representatives to propose three Faculty academic representatives (to the Chair of QASG) with the assumption that normally 2 of them would attend QASG – **Completed.** (Update 23.03.15) Still awaiting confirmation from the Faculty of Media and Communication (FMC) (1 member confirmed). (Update 27.04.15) This was raised at the Faculty Academic Standards Committee (FASC) on the 22.04.15, but two further members were not yet confirmed. (Update 22.09.15) Two members have been confirmed, one is still outstanding. (Update 21.01.16) Three representatives are now in place from FMC.

2.2 **Minute 6.2.3 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - Student Processes and Educational Development and Quality (EDQ) to determine how the process of Late Submission will be best managed for the purposes of Assessment Board reporting – **Completed.** (Update 27.04.15) This was still subject to Senate Chair’s Action, but discussions were ongoing within Academic Services. (Update 22.09.15) Senate approval was given on the 72 hour Late Submission ruling within *6A Standard Assessment Regulations* for implementation in 2015-16. Further updates were still required within *6L - Assessment Board Decision-Making, Including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* which would be published to the *Academic Regulations, Polices and Procedures (ARPP)* shortly. (Update 21.01.16) This was concluded in October 2016 and associated documents were republished to the *ARPP*.

2.3 **Minute 9.1 (14.01.15) – Assessment Practice update** - QASG to send any feedback on enhancing Assessment and Feedback to the Chair of QASG - **Completed** - QASG agreed this should remain ongoing to allow new QASG Faculty academic representatives the opportunity to provide feedback. (Update 22.09.15) There were no further updates to add to the feedback previously recorded in QASG minutes. (Update 21.01.16) No further updates had been received and this action was closed off.

2.4 **Minute 8.3 (22.09.15) – Faculty Student Exchanges** – Academic Partnerships to consider setting up a working group with Faculty experts to further discuss the arrangements for Faculty Student Exchanges – **Completed.** (Update 21.01.16) This work would now be continued by the new incoming International Mobility Manager who would be meeting with Faculties in due course.

**3 UPDATES TO QASG MEMBERSHIP**

3.1 There were four new members joining QASG since the previous meeting. Chris Williams from the Faculty of Media and Communication, Clive Hunt from the Faculty of Science and Technology (covering Andrew Main who was on secondment), Sara White (covering Barbara Dyer who was on secondment) and Susan Ponsford (covering the Student Administration representative).

**4 EDQ ANNUAL ARFM AUDIT (2014-15)**

4.1 Each year EDQ undertakes an audit of the annual review of framework monitoring process (ARFM) which forms part of the EDQ Annual Report. However, due to concerns raised by Faculties and colleagues within EDQ following the 2014-15 monitoring cycle, the audit was brought forward so areas for improvement and enhancement could be identified and implemented during the current monitoring period. *5C - Monitoring of Taught Academic Provision and ARFMs: Policy and Procedure* would also be reviewed to ensure the overall monitoring process continued to work effectively.

**4.2 Continuous Action Plan (CAP)**

4.2.1 A number of areas for improvement were identified with the CAP. Primarily actions remaining on the CAP year after year without apparent evidence of any action being taken, new actions not being added, completed actions not being managed correctly and recommendations from evaluation events not being included. A number of the concerns raised were already included within *ARPP 5C* and these needed reiterating to Faculties and Partners. It was proposed that if an action had been ongoing after a period of two years, it should be: removed from the CAP and documented why the action could not be resolved or reworded and brought up to date or discussed with senior management. Completed actions would be removed annually and only the live/ongoing actions on the CAP would be submitted to FASC and appended to the new version of the Framework Leader’s Report (FLR). Following discussion, it was noted that some actions may need to remain on the CAP for more than two years (e.g. those raised by Professional Bodies) and *ARPP 5C* should advise of this accordingly. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.2 - Continuous Action Plan.

**4.3 Framework Leader’s Report (FLR)**

4.3.1 The FLR is completed at the end of each academic year in order to provide FASC with an overview of the monitoring cycle. Concerns relating to the FLR included inaccurate use of sections within the template, long executive summaries (section 1), section 2 not being completed properly in terms of managing the monitoring data and section 3 not including enough emphasis on the strengths and issues of the provision or they were very ‘issues’ based. It was proposed that section 1 be removed and section 2 be streamlined so it focused only on the monitoring data. Section 3 would remain the same but the entire template would include useful prompts (extracted from the current *ARPP 5C*) throughout to ensure ease of completion for the author. The FLR would be retitled Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) which would more accurately reflect the monitoring of programmes or suites of programmes (frameworks) where they continued to exist. Following discussion, it was agreed that Department Heads of Education would be the lead contact for AMRs, who would then allocate Programme Leaders (or equivalent) to complete the documentation. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.3 – Framework Leader’s Report (FLR).

**4.4 Folders of monitoring data/Managing monitoring data**

4.4.1 During the ARFM audit, it had appeared that some responses to external examiner reports were not available in the EDQ ARFM folders. Minutes of Programme/Framework Management Team meetings (P/FMTs) and other monitoring data were also missing from various folders. Statistics with students’ personal details and confidential Board information had also been saved there in error. Whilst we are confident that external examiners were being responded to, he importance of responding to them was stressed as this was a requirement of the *QAA UK Quality Code*. The information which should and should not be saved in the ARFM folders would be reiterated. QASG members were reminded that P/FMTs should be managing missing data and this was not the responsibility of FASC. All monitoring data should be saved throughout the year in the central EDQ ARFM folders and not in any other location. Any missing data that becomes available after ARFM submission should be saved in the relevant EDQ ARFM folder so each monitoring cycle was completed. Following discussion of the points raised, it was agreed that Faculties should check that all folders were set up correctly as they would have the flexibility to adapt folders for individual programmes/suites of programmes (frameworks) as required. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.4 – Folders of monitoring data/Managing monitoring data.

**Action**: Faculties to check the current structure of the EDQ ARFM folders and amend where necessary as per their monitoring preferences.

**4.5 Spreadsheet of monitoring data**

4.5.1 The spreadsheet of monitoring data has been in place for a number of years and would continue to be used in order to assist with managing data and helping to inform P/FMTs of any missing monitoring data. The spreadsheet of monitoring data should be submitted to the first P/FMT of the academic year, in order that any missing data can be easily managed, discussed and updated. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.5 – Spreadsheet of monitoring data.

**4.6 Templates**

4.6.1 During the ARFM audit, it was noted that some old templates had been used. Members were reminded that the latest versions were available directly from the ARPP. Forthcoming correspondence from EDQ to Faculties/Partners about the changes to this process would also include useful hyperlinks as this approach had worked well recently with other updated templates. Yeovil College had historically been given permission to use a bespoke FLR template, although this was now very out of date, had varied across their provision and was creating extra work for them. Academic Partnerships would be asked to contact Yeovil College to review the FLR template they were currently using. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.6 – Templates.

**Action:** Academic Partnerships to contact Yeovil College in relation to updating their Framework Leader’s Report once the process had been finalised.

**4.7 Unit Monitoring Reports (UMRs)**

4.7.1 The UMRs audited had included very different levels of detail and, where MUSE was applicable, it had not always been collected or could not be collected e.g. due to the type of delivery/placement etc. There had been examples of Faculties using three years of data, but it was not consistently included. Some reasons identified during the audit for this were units/programmes being new and could therefore not reflect on it, and some UMRs were completed following semester 1 and at the time Faculties had not been requested to revisit already completed UMRs. Members agreed on the importance of being able to reflect on MUSE data but Faculties were advised to contact the Chair of the Student Voice Committee if there were issues that required further University discussion. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.7 – Unit Monitoring Reports.

**4.8 Programme/Framework Management Team Meeting Agendas**

4.8.1 Members were reminded that the P/FMT indicative agenda must always be followed. If monitoring data was correctly considered throughout the year at P/FMTs as per the agenda and minuted well, the minutes could be a useful starting point for writing the FLR. It was also noted that Foundation degree teams were not always documenting employer/industry involvement within the curriculum and this should be reiterated in order to ensure continuous alignment with the *QAA UK Quality Code*. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.8 – Programme/Framework Management Team Meeting Agendas.

**4.9 FASC handling of ARFMs**

4.9.1 During the ARFM audit, it was noted that some ARFMs had been considered at numerous FASC meetings and the process had become unnecessarily burdensome and resource intensive, with more emphasis being placed on the process rather than on considering strengths and weaknesses of the provision and the sharing of good practice. It was also noted that some FASC members and Programme Leaders/Readers had not attended and their ARFMs could not be discussed.

4.9.2 It was proposed that all ARFMs be considered by a subgroup of FASC held around late October or early November which would allow time for any internal Faculty processes to be completed, and to still allow time for the DDEPPs to write their Faculty Quality Report for ASC in December. The subgroup should be scheduled at least six months in advance by the Faculty to ensure those required were able to attend. It was agreed that an annual deadline would remain for the submissions of ARFMs but with some flexibility for non-standard provision that have Assessment Boards at the end of September.

4.9.3 The subgroup would consider the new FLR and the appended CAP (live, ongoing actions only), but not all members of FASC would be required and the membership of the subgroup had been streamlined appropriately. The FASC Chair, Secretary and EDQ Representative would read and have oversight of all FLRs and appended CAPs. The HoD (or DHoE) would read those in their department and a set from one other Department allocated to them by the FASC Chair. All subgroup members would stay for the entire meeting. The subgroup would focus on quality assurance and enhancement matters relating to each ARFM and a Programme Leaders/ARFM author (or a nominee from the team) should attend the subgroup at an allocated time to present the ARFM. It was suggested that *ARPP 5C* should include guidance on what the subgroup would be expected to discuss.

4.9.4 The Reader’s role in its current form would be removed from the process. Where the ARFM author was new to the role or the completion of the ARFM had historically been problematic; the author may seek or request a ‘critical friend’ or be allocated one by the Chair of FASC who would provide peer support and provide an opportunity to read the ARFM before consideration by the subgroup. By holding the subgroup of FASC around late October or early November this would allow time for this internal process to be implemented.

4.9.5 ARFMs should be fully completed and checked before submission, but would no longer be approved or deemed fit for purpose, but rather taken on face value and the discussion be based on what was submitted. If the ARFM documentation was not presented, or there was no representative from a Department, consideration would not occur. Members agreed that administration staff were responsible for collecting evidence and the ARFM author would be responsible for listing this on the FLR and ticking a box that this has been managed. Actions set by the subgroup would be managed via the minutes and through matters arising at the next FASC. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.9 – FASC handling of ARFMs.

**4.10 Staffing and staff development**

4.10.1 Process inaccuracies were noted when staff left and other staff picked up the process. Moving forward, the ‘critical friend’ and the useful prompts in the templates would help produce a fully completed ARFM. Members were reminded that EDQ provide staff development sessions and could provide bespoke sessions if required. It was also suggested that EDQ representatives could have an allocated timeslot at FASC to talk through the reviewed process and this could be included on the EDQ summary. QASG approved the recommendations listed in Section 2.10 – Staffing and staff development.

**4.11 Updated Terminology and further considerations**

4.11.1 It was agreed that monitoring would continue to be managed at either individual programme level or a suite of programmes (framework) and ARFMs would now be referred to as ARCMs (Annual Review of Continuous Monitoring) to accurately reflect the process. The FLR would be retitled Annual Monitoring Report and *ARPP 5C* would be retitled *5C – Continuous Monitoring of Taught Academic Provision: Policy and Procedure*. The process of completing and submitting Faculty / Partner Quality Reports remained unchanged. QASG approved the suggestions made within Section 2.11 – Updated Terminology and further considerations.

**Action**: EDQ to update *ARPP 5C* in line with the recommendations made within the QASG paper and the suggestions from QASG members (as minuted within this section).

**5 SUSPENSION OF STUDIES**

5.1 Suspension of studies is used when a student has to step off their programme and return to the University at a later date, normally at the same stage of the programme the following year. Within the University, this may also be referred to as interruption of studies. The number of students suspending is much larger than initially thought and this is recorded by Student Administration.

5.2 EDQ was recently asked for advice regarding a student who had to suspend last year for serious health reasons. The suspension happened at a point when the student had already undertaken a substantial amount of learning and one summative assessment in a unit which had not yet finished. However, the current University guidance is outlined in *3K – Attendance Monitoring and Withdrawal: Procedure* which states that students may not suspend their studies partway through a unit and should not normally be permitted to suspend once the taught part of the unit has been completed to avoid any unfair advantage before assessment. It does not state what action should be taken when suspension partway through a unit cannot be avoided.

5.3 QASG heard that this could be particularly challenging to manage on units with large practical components, units with underpinning work that feeds into other units, within taught components with placements or where the student had already received a strong mark for a summative assessment. There were scenarios where this could be managed by giving long extensions, or circumstance boards would take this into consideration and offer the original mark or a further attempt as if for the first time. Within CPD, the student could be given an extension for a year but if the time period exceeded this then the student would be expected to re-enrol and start the teaching again. It was questioned whether this could be managed through which Intended Learning Outcomes had already been achieved, although it was noted that subsequent assessments were likely to change.

5.4 Following the discussion it was apparent that the current wording in *ARPP 3K* was not flexible enough to manage the different types of scenarios and the process should allow individual consideration, as each student’s case would be different, whereby they were neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by the decision. It was also suggested that Boards should not be responsible for making these decisions as it needed to be managed on an individual basis and it could be managed through the mitigating circumstances process. EDQ would look at the current wording and propose more appropriate wording for consideration by QASG.

**Action**: EDQ to look at the current wording within *ARPP 3K* relating to the suspension of studies and propose more appropriate wording for consideration by QASG.

**6 ACADEMIC OFFENCES (PENALTIES 1 AND 2)**

6.1 Currently, penalties 1 and 2 within *6H – Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards* stipulate the unit be capped at the pass mark, irrespective of what assessment within the unit had an academic offence attached to it. This was previously introduced based on feedback at the time to ensure that a student who committed an academic offence was not treated equally to a student who failed honestly or submitted late and was penalised. Furthermore, section 11.5 of *ARPP 6H* also advised that a Panel/Board may exceptionally use its discretion and amend a penalty if it does not suit the situation.

6.2 At a recent SITS implementation meeting for Assessments, it was raised whether the University would like to revert back to having a penalty where just the formal element be capped. There had not been any support for this at the time, but it was agreed that QASG should consider this at its January meeting. At this time, EDQ heard that some academic offences panels (AOPs) were exceptionally amending penalty 1 or 2 (in line with section 11.5) to cap the formal element and questioned whether there should always be a minimum requirement that the unit be capped.

6.3 Current and recent Chairs of AOPs were also asked these questions to help inform the discussion at QASG but their responses were varied and inconclusive. QASG agreed that the penalties should not be changed and discretion (as per section 11.5) should remain with a clear message that this be exceptional.

**7 DEFINITION OF COMMON UNITS**

7.1 The current definition of common units was available within *2B – Programme Structure and Curriculum Design Characteristics: Procedure* version 4.0 and had been in place for a number of years. However, at the recent SITS implementation meeting for Assessments, it was discussed that in reality a number of common units across the University were not actually common and had variations within them including different assessments which could be applied for different cohort groups or different subject disciplines within a department. This would have an impact upon the way SITS and the VLE were set up.

7.2 EDQ had proposed an alternative definition of common units but QASG felt that it still did not accurately reflect what a common unit was, particularly in terms of outlining different approaches within the indicative assessment section. It was agreed that Faculties should still be able to choose to continue to deliver joint teaching and related activities. Consideration of a shared unit directory of all common units within SITS was suggested and terminology relating to whether a common unit should be referred to as a shared unit was also discussed.

**Action**: EDQ to revisit the definition of common units and propose more appropriate wording for reconsideration by QASG. (subject to timing this could be circulated via email)

**8 ANNUAL REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS**

8.1 Annually, QASG considers feedback relating to the *6A -* *Standard Assessment Regulations* and *6L - Assessment Board Decision-Making, Including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure*. However, with the current implementation of SITS it was pragmatic not to make any changes that could impact upon this ongoing work for 2016-17. Whilst some feedback had been collected, QASG heard that none of it raised substantial concerns that would require University consideration at this stage.

8.2 Some of the feedback raised could be clarified without impacting upon SITS, although feedback received relating to managing compensation between mid and end of level Boards was already underway within SITS. The new ’72 hour rule’ for late submissions of coursework would be reviewed after a full cycle of its implementation and ‘element passes’ would be clarified within *ARPP 6L*. QASG was reminded that closing the classification boundaries had previously been approved by Senate and would come into effect in line with SITS.

8.3 Some feedback resulted in EDQ seeking committee approval to make some minor clarifications to *ARPP 6A* within Section 11 – Classification. These changes would clarify existing practice that the classification for Certificate of Higher Education be based on Level C/4 units only and the classification for Diploma of Higher Education be based on Level I/5 units only. This would not require changes within SITS. It was questioned whether the incoming classification boundaries for 2016-17 should have been included in the paper and it was confirmed that they would be updated for 2016-17 in the regulations to reflect this. QASG supported these clarifications to the regulations and they would be forwarded to ASC for note.

**9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

9.1 There was none.

**10 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

10.1 The date of the next QASG meeting was scheduled for 22nd March 2016.