**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**

**UNCONFIRMED minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March 2016**

**Present:** C Symonds (Chair), R Chater, C Hunt, G Jordan, H Mitchell, P Mathews, R Rogers (Clerk), P Ryland, C Williams, S White

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

**Apologies:** P Alexander, A Chapman, S McLawrence, E Mayo-Ward, A Mercer, K Phalp, S Ponsford, N Silvennoinen

**1 Minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2016**

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

**2 Matters arising**

2.1 **Minute 4.4 (21.01.16) Annual Review of Framework Monitoring** – Faculties to check the current structure of the central ARFM folders and amend where necessary as per their monitoring preferences (e.g. monitoring by individual programmes or suites of programmes). **COMPLETED** This was raised by EDQ in the *ARPP* communication email sent out to Faculties/Partners outlining changes to *ARPP 5C – Continuous Monitoring of Taught Academic Provision: Policy and Procedure* on 21st March 2016.

2.2 **Minute 4.6 (21.01.16) Annual Review of Framework Monitoring** – Academic Partnerships to contact Yeovil College in relation to updating their Framework Leader’s Report once the process had been finalised. **COMPLETED** An email was composed by EDQ and sent via Academic Partnerships after the *ARPP* communication email was sent to Faculties/Partners outlining changes to *ARPP 5C*.

2.3 **Minute 4.11 (21.01.16) Annual Review of Framework Monitoring** – EDQ to update *ARPP 5C* in line with the recommendations made within the QASG paper and the suggestions from QASG members (as per the January minutes). **COMPLETED** This was undertaken by EDQ during the rewrite of *ARPP 5C.*

2.4 **Minute 5.4 (21.01.16) Suspension of studies** – EDQ to look at the current wording within *ARPP 3K - Attendance Monitoring and Withdrawal: Procedure* relating to the suspension of studies and propose more appropriate wording for consideration by QASG. **ONGOING** This was considered at the March meeting of QASG under a separate agenda heading. Further work has been requested.

2.5 **Minute 7.2 (21.01.16) Definition of common units** – EDQ to revisit the definition of common units and propose more appropriate wording for reconsideration by QASG. **COMPLETED** An updated and streamlined version was produced and circulated to QASG and Academic Administration Managers (AAMs) in February and added to *ARPP* *2B – Programme Structure and Curriculum Design Characteristics: Procedure*.

**3 UPDATES ON QASG RECOMMENDATIONS TO ASC / SENATE**

3.1 QASG had previously recommended that the ‘Classification’ sections within *6A – Standard Assessment Regulations* be amended to clarify that all units taken at Level C/4 will normally have a weighting towards Certificate of Higher Education award classifications, and classification for Diploma of Higher Education awards will be based on Level I/5 units only. This did not change current practice. ASC did not raise any concerns and this clarification would be included from September 2016.

3.2 QASG heard that the University had been debating the introduction of trailing fails. Senate had agreed with the principle although further work would be required. EDQ would produce a paper for consideration at ASC outlining how the process could be operationalised including the criteria for trailing fails and any other changes to Regulations and processes which may be impacted by this. The debate would then return to Senate. It was most likely that this would be in place for 2017-18.

**4 EDQ ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15**

4.1 **Context**

4.1.1 Following completion of each academic year, EDQ reports annually on its quality assurance and enhancement activity to ASC covering a number of key areas of activity, including:

* Programme Evaluation: approval, review, closure and modifications;
* Engagement with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs);
* External Examining;
* Management of Academic Offences.

The process for annual monitoring and central ARFM Audit would normally be considered within this report too but this was discussed separately at the January meeting of QASG.

4.1.2 Key points from within each section of the report were raised and QASG discussed particular areas of activity and themes as appropriate. It was highlighted that whilst there were many strengths and positive aspects of the processes, where issues were identified these were addressed or reviewed so process enhancements could be put into place.

4.3 **Overview**

4.3.1 QASG heard that the total number of programmes at BU had continued to decrease across both campus and partner provision but noted that student numbers had continued to increase.

4.4 **Evaluation events: Programme approval, review, closure and modification**

4.4.1 There had been 44 evaluation events held during 2014-15 involving a total of 93 programmes. For the first time during the reporting cycles, the overall number of closures had reached its lowest level although the number of closures at partners exceeded those for main campus provision. Only 2 programmes that closed during 2014-15 never recruited, with the key rationale for actual closures being due to low recruitment / low applications. The number of modifications reached a 5 year high with 73. The most common reason for modifying provision was to replace, remove or add units.

4.4.2 The high number of modifications was discussed and it was questioned whether programme teams were spending enough time and effort designing their provision in the first instance. It was noted that more time would now be spent at the evaluation event stage scrutinising the curriculum which should hopefully see a reduction in modifications; although the actual impact of these changes to Section 4 of the *ARPP* would not be known until after a full year’s implementation. It was explained that the modification process was rigorous and thorough and allowed careful scrutiny.

4.4.3 Faculty’s providing administrative support during the evaluation process was discussed. It was agreed that the Programmes Administrator could be the appropriate person for this, as they understand the provision. It was noted that this suggestion could feed into the student journey project consultations that were due to be published shortly.

4.5 **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)**

4.5.1 BU was continuing to engage with PSRBs and relationships were working well, with new relationships under development. There were 45 PSRBs linked to BU provision across 131 programmes, 34 of which were linked to more than 1 PSRB. Further external organisations were also linked to BU provision and offered added value including endorsements, links to industry and advice on curriculum development.

4.6 **External examining**

4.6.1 There were currently 182 EEs in place during 2014-15, and 193 reports had been received. A number of positive themes were highlighted across the University and its Partners and fewer EE reports were identifying negative themes; although some reports included more than one concern. Faculties were monitoring these concerns and some were being addressed within the University through various working groups, for example anonymous marking and generic assessment criteria. *ARPP 6D Marking, Moderation and Independent Marking: Policy and Procedure* had also been updated to address EE feedback. The number of concerns remained very low in the key areas of Standards, Comparable Student Performance and Processes relating to Assessment, Examination and the determination of Awards. However, despite Teams sending thorough responses to EEs, there still remained a high number of what are recorded as ‘unresolved issues’. EDQ would review this information in the future and identify actual ‘unresolved issues’ for the purposes of accurately reporting within the EDQ Annual Report. This had been recorded on the EDQ Annual Report Action Plan.

4.6.2 One of the common key strengths noted and also common negative theme noted related to second marking. It was noted that there were problems within the Grade Centre and Turnitin which did not allow audit trails to be transparent and had to be managed using paper audit trails. It was suggested that this be discussed further with the Faculty Learning Technologist in the first instance and consideration given to raising this at a future meeting of TELSF if need be.

4.7 **Academic Offences**

4.7.1 The number of School / Faculty level academic offences panels where students were found guilty of committing academic offences had increased slightly. The overall number of hearings had remained relatively stable over a three year period. The statistics revealed there was little consistency in any particular School / Faculty in relation to having the most academic offences, although it was apparent that ‘Plagiarism’ remained the most common academic offence committed across the University. ‘Collusion’ and ‘Borrowing’ were less problematic during 2014-15 but there had been a small increase in the use of ‘Unauthorised materials in an examination’. At University level, ‘Forgery’ was the most common offence committed, although the number of all types of offences at this level were very low. Based on students who had committed academic offences, there was no apparent trend to determine which academic Level was more likely to commit an academic offence, but Level C/4 was most likely to commit the fewest which surprised QASG members as they felt the number of offences committed would have been the highest at Level C/4.

4.7.2 QASG asked what the University would do with this information. It was agreed that when reporting on academic offences within the 2015-16 EDQ Annual Report, the Academic Offences statistics would be widened further by breaking down the information into more useful segments e.g. types of students, academic groups etc committing academic offences. Whilst it was acknowledged that the University was unlikely to stop all academic offences, different statistical information may help the University recognise useful patterns and trends to further help the prevention of academic offences in the future.

**5 QAA UPDATES: FOUNDATION DEGREE & MASTERS DEGREES CHARACTERISTICS**

5.1 In September 2015, a revised *Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement* and a revised *Master’s Degree Characteristics Statement*were both published to the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* and would becomereference points for the purposes of QAA reviews conducted from 1 August 2016. Educational Development and Quality had considered and discussed these new documents and was confident that the University continued to align with the requirements specified and no further action was required. QASG was invited to provide any further feedback on these documents in terms of BU alignment and no concerns were raised.

**6 SUSPENSION OF STUDIES**

6.1 Following the last meeting of QASG, EDQ was tasked to review the proposed wording within *ARPP 3K* relating to the suspension of studies, in particular for students who needed to suspend mid-unit.

6.2 In the first instance, the proposed principles within section 12.5 which apply to all cases of suspension were deemed to be appropriate. However, there was further debate around other areas relating to the suspension of studies; in part due to the requirements of each Faculty and the slight variations they use to internally manage the process. It was important that there was a consistent approach across the University whilst still allowing Faculties the flexibility they required. One Faculty was currently writing their own internal guidance to help manage the process, but it was agreed that this should be kept separate from *ARPP 3K*.

6.3 There was much discussion around approval of suspensions and mechanisms to extend registration periods (if required) and whose remit this should be. It was agreed that Programme Leaders (or equivalent) might approve the suspension but some Faculties would require approval by other members of staff to ensure equitable decision-making across programmes, e.g. AAM. Where registration periods require extension, the decision should be made in conjunction with an Assessment Board Chair at the point of suspension and later ratified by the Assessment Board. All student assessment and associated marks would be subject to Assessment Board confirmation later in the year. It was discussed whether the suspension of studies might be linked to the consideration of mitigating circumstances at Assessment boards, but QASG noted that student’s suspending their studies might not always be doing so because of a mitigating circumstance. It was agreed that the text within section 12.2 would benefit from some clarification and that EDQ would circulate updated wording to QASG for final confirmation before the wording was finalised. The form associated with suspension activity would be updated to ensure that all relevant questions and discussion occurred at the point of suspension.

6.4 Within the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, they use the term ‘interrupt’ instead of ‘suspend’ partly due to the perceptions of the terminology. If students are suspended through other mechanisms e.g. fitness to practise or disciplinary matters, this involves the University actually making a decision to temporarily remove the student from the University during the investigation (also known as suspension). QASG questioned whether the term ‘interrupt’ could be used and suggested that this be investigated further as part of the updates required to the proposed wording for further consideration by QASG (ongoing action).

Update post QASG: *Within SITS, suspension of studies will be referred to as interruption of studies and the proposed wording for ARPP 3K will reflect this. The term suspension of studies will not be used in this context from 2016-17.*

**7 DEFINITION OF COMMON UNITS**

7.1 QASG was provided with the updated definition of common units. This had been circulated to QASG and AAMs in February 2016 for final feedback and then subsequently added to *ARPP* *2B – Programme Structure and Curriculum Design Characteristics: Procedure*. It was advised that further work was undergoing within the University relating to this, particularly for the management of currently approved units.

**8 ANONYMOUS MARKING PILOT**

8.1 QASG was provided with an update on the anonymous marking pilot that was currently underway within the University. Following the recommendation from the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) in September 2015, a working group was set up to discuss implementation of the pilot which included representatives from Faculties, EDQ and SUBU. Due to timing, it had not been possible to commence the pilot during semester 1 because online systems had already been set up and any submitted work already in the system would be lost. There had been a number of significant IT issues which required resolving before the pilot could start linked to contacting students who did not submit on time and monitoring Tier 4 students. Learning Technology had identified ‘work around’ processes to help manage this but they were quite labour intensive. The working group would meet again in May to collect feedback and evaluate the process. Updates on progress would be reported back to ESEC.

**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 4th May 2016.