**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**

**UNCONFIRMED minutes of the meeting held 4th May 2016**

**Present:** C Symonds (Chair), A Chapman, R Chater, C Hunt, G Jordan, S McLawrence, E Mayo-Ward, P Mathews, K Phalp, R Rogers (Clerk), P Ryland, S White

**In attendance:** A Quinney (*6F - Generic Assessment Criteria*), M Frampton (Observing),

**Apologies:** A Mercer, H Mitchell, T Mutter, S Ponsford, N Silvennoinen, C Williams

**1 Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March 2016**

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

**2 Matters arising**

2.1 **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 was requested. (Update 04.05.16) An updated version was circulated to QASG members for feedback but further work is required within EDQ before inclusion in the *Academic Regulations, Polices and Procedures (ARPP)* (2016-17).

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

3.1 There were no updates on QASG recommendations to ASC / Senate.

**4 UPDATED MEMBERSHIP**

4.1 Thomas Mutter - Student Administration Manager has joined QASG as the Student Administration representative.

**5 *6F – GENERIC ASSESSMENT CRITERIA: PROCEDURE***

5.1 QASG welcomed Anne Quinney - CEL Theme Leader for Assessment and Feedback who had led the recent review of *6F – Generic Assessment Criteria: Procedure.* The paper was presented to QASG for feedback prior to discussion at the Academic Standards Committee 25th May; with the intention of it being approved for inclusion in the *ARPP.* There was also a proposal to include a rubric within Turnitin to enhance the process of providing assessment feedback.

5.2 It was explained that the Centre for Excellence in Learning (CEL) had been approached to review the criteria based on concerns raised by staff and students about the language and tone of the original document. Overall it was felt that it was now out of date and required substantial updating to help inform student feedback and useful feedforward. A cross-Faculty working group was convened to review the criteria which included Faculty representatives, EDQ and SUBU. Feedback was also sought during a CELebrate workshop at BU. Feedback had also identified that the original document contained language that emphasised deficits rather than acknowledging strengths and areas for improvement.

5.3 The reviewed criteria included landscape table formats to enable easier comparison between mark bands. It also included clearer and consistent language across Levels 4 – 7 that referred to the work and not the student, as well as feedforward for each mark band to provide more explicit feedback for learning. QASG noted that the reviewed criteria made reference to upper mark bands that the University did not currently offer awards for and questioned the rationale for this, particularly in relation to high distinctions. It was explained that students are asking how they can improve their marks and it also encourages the use of the full range of marks including at the top end. It was added that some students might also benefit from understanding the expectations at the very top marking range if they for example needed to increase their overall aggregate mark for the Level. QASG also questioned whether the criteria was subject-specific and heard that it had been written generically and would underpin all disciplines but would need to be adapted to different types of assessments.

5.4 QASG supported the updated criteria and advised that appropriate references to the *Quality Assurance Agency UK Quality Code* should be included. It was raised that the assessment brief templates within *6E - Assessment Feedback and Return of Assessed Work: Policy and Procedure* may need revisiting to ensure alignment with the new criteria and QASG heard that this would be overseen as part of the wider work of this project. It was debated when the updated criteria should be published and QASG proposed that it should be published to the *ARPP* following ASC approval so it could be made available to staff and included in forthcoming Student Handbooks.

5.5 QASG also supported the inclusion of this information as a rubric within Turnitin, but suggested that it be checked that this was possible from a technical perspective. It was explained that Learning Technologists had been involved in the review process and this should not be a concern.

**6 UPDATE ON THE EDQ ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15: UNRESOLVED ISSUES FROM EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

6.1 Following consideration of the EDQ Annual Report 2014-15, it was identified that for 2 consecutive years there were a number of external examiners who were advising of outstanding unresolved issues from their previous reports. EDQ had advised that they would report on this differently moving forward, but ASC had requested a follow up paper to ensure that key areas of quality assurance and standards, as well as opportunities for enhancement were not being overlooked. The table of data which demonstrated the number of EE Reports with raised concerns in the final summary section (i.e. where EEs provide a ‘No’ response) was updated.

6.2 The analysis of the data highlighted that within the small number of unresolved issues there were a range of different types of unrelated issues; although a number of them did fall under the categories of marking or assessment feedback. This analysis clearly demonstrated the need for consistency of implementation of policy and procedures associated with assessment and feedback. QASG had no further actions or feedback to add to the paper for ASC as a result of their consideration of the paper.

**7 *6A – STANDARD ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS* – TRAILING FAILS**

7.1 At the February meetings of ASC and Senate, the principle of allowing trailing fails at BU was debated. Following the Senate debate, Senate approved the principle that BU would allow trailing fails (up to 20 credits at Levels 4 and 5) for implementation in 2017-18. A set of 11 proposed recommendations to operationalise this approved principle was developed by EDQ for committee debate, primarily based on sector research. Following discussion at QASG, these proposed recommendations would be amended where necessary for consideration by ASC. Following the ASC debate, the agreed recommendations would be considered by Senate.

7.2 The first set of proposed recommendations related to the actual process of managing trailing fails including trailing fails across academic Levels and fast-tracking trailing fails. QASG was also asked to discuss how students with mitigating circumstances in relation to trailing fails and proceeding ‘at risk’ could be managed and about updating definitive documentation. This discussion would be incorporated into the ASC paper and added to the recommendations where appropriate.

7.2.1 **Proposed** **Recommendation 1** – The sector research demonstrated that Assessment Boards were responsible for permitting trailed fails and this could be with or without attendance. QASG agreed with the proposal that Boards would be responsible for making this decision (unless PSRBs stipulate otherwise or do not permit trailing fails). However, following the discussion it was questioned what fees students would be paying. It was noted that they could be paying the same as a repeat student but receiving a more limited learning experience. Whilst this was not the correct forum for discussing fees, it was agreed that the ASC paper and recommendation should refer to fees so it could be considered within the correct University forum.

7.2.2 **Proposed Recommendation 2** – The sector research indicated that for students to be eligible to trail a fail they should have made a reasonable attempt to pass the unit. This mirrored the proposed recommendation from EDQ, with a reasonable attempt being defined as attempting all pieces of assessment. QASG was also asked whether or not a unit aggregate mark hurdle should also be included e.g. 30%. QASG did not support an aggregate mark hurdle or that all pieces of assessment should be attempted as this would be difficult to manage due to informal sub-elements. A more flexible approach was supported and QASG agreed to recommend to ASC that there should be a mark against each formal element on the Board report for the failed unit; this would also show that the student had attempted to engage with the unit. QASG also recommended that if the formal element on the Board report showed a Non-submission (NS) or a mark of zero (0%), then it would not normally be eligible to be trailed.

7.2.3 **Proposed Recommendation 3** – QASG supported the proposal that a trailed fail could apply to both core and option units unless the Board determined that the failed unit provided key underpinning learning and must be passed prior to commencing to the next Level. QASG debated whether definitive documentation would require updating demonstrating this information and agreed that a list held locally by each Team would be more manageable. This was added to the recommendation for ASC.

7.2.4 **Proposed Recommendation 4** – Some universities allow students to trail a fail from Level 4 into Level 6 whilst others do not. This was seen to be a high risk process by EDQ and QASG agreed with this concern. QASG therefore supported the proposal that a student who was allowed to proceed to the next Level with a trailed fail must make good the deficiency by the end of that academic Level otherwise they could not proceed any further.

7.2.5 **Proposed Recommendations 5** **and 6** - QASG supported the proposal that students be clearly advised of the consequences of subsequently failing the trailed unit (e.g. withdrawal, awarded credit only) and are provided with an opportunity to repeat the failed unit instead of trailing it (without having to appeal the Board decision). QASG also supported that students be permitted one further opportunity to make good any failure on the trailed fail unit before being withdrawn from their programme. QASG advised that the ASC paper be made more transparent that students would take their trailed fail exam at the next available exam period for that unit and that they would only have one further reassessment opportunity if they failed the trailed fail. QASG also agreed that this further reassessment opportunity should not be taken from the reassessment allowance for the current (higher) Level as the unit applied to the previous (lower) Level.

7.2.6 **Proposed Recommendation 7** – Consideration of a fast-track approach to managing trailing fails was supported by ASC and Senate. EDQ had tried to develop some fast-track proposals but these were considered to be high risk for such a new process. QASG agreed with EDQ’s concerns and supported the proposal that a fast-track approach be put on hold until the trailing fails process had embedded itself at BU. QASG did question whether mid-year Boards could help in the future to manage semester 1 fails.

7.3 **Students with mitigating circumstances** – It was noted that students with mitigation on outstanding assessments were able to proceed ‘at risk’ to the next Level, unless there were clear academic reasons for not doing so. Concerns were raised that students with mitigation may be allowed to proceed to the next Level ‘at risk’ and may also have 20 credits of failure, but their full profile was not yet known because they still had remaining assessment attempts to complete. Without wanting to disadvantage students with mitigation, the process may be more challenging to manage, particularly as the student could effectively be trailing a fail, completing assessments ‘at risk’ and undertaking study for the higher Level units. It was also noted that students could fail assessments being taken ‘at risk’ which would put them over the 20 credits permitted to trail a fail. QASG discussed this and agreed that other than counselling these students about the impacts of any further failure, the decision of the Board should primarily be based on the best interests of these types of students. Based on the QASG discussion, a further recommendation would be added to the ASC paper recommending that for students in this situation normally 20 credits should be carried over into the next Level but exceptionally no more than 40 credits overall. These decisions should be clearly minuted by the Board.

7.4 The next set of recommendations related to the compensation regulation.

7.4.1 **Proposed Recommendations 8, 9 and 10** – The compensation regulation was not discussed previously at Senate but had been discussed at ASC where it was noted that that the current percentage level at BU was seen to be harsh (38% to less than 40% / 48% to less than 50%) compared with sector practice. Furthermore, allowing up to 40 credits per Level was more generous than within the sector. A change to the compensation regulation would better align BU to the sector and could actually help manage the trailing fails proposals because it would allow more students with marginal failure (up to 20 credits at first attempts only) between 36% to less than 40% to progress to the next Level. It was also noted that compensation did not currently apply where there was a fail within the Level and it should be confirmed that students could not be compensated and allowed to trail a fail. QASG supported the latter proposal and also supported reducing the percentage level to 36% or 46%. However not all QASG members supported reducing compensation from 40 credits to 20 credits per Level due to BU having a number of 40 credit units. It was agreed that this concern would be added to the ASC paper and it was requested that EDQ provides data relating to the number of 20 credit and 40 credit units at BU to help inform the ASC discussion.

**ACTION**: EDQ to investigate the number of 20 credit and 40 credit units at BU to help inform the ASC discussion in relation to compensation.

 **Post QASG note**: The number of unique 20 and 40 credits units at BU with students enrolled onto them was investigated by EDQ for the purposes of informing the wider University debate. However, a decision was made pre-ASC to not currently discuss the compensation regulations as part of the trailing fails debate. However this information would be available should the decision be to review compensation in the future.

7.5 The next recommendation related to Non-Honours degrees.

7.5.1 **Proposed Recommendation 11** – Non-Honours degrees were not discussed at ASC or Senate, but an opportunity was identified by EDQ to amend the current credit structure of this award based on sector practice to support trailing fails. A student who trailed a fail from Level 5 to Level 6 but failed this trailed fail would effectively leave BU with a Certificate of Higher Education intermediate exit award and mixed credit from Levels 5 and 6. Sector practice demonstrated that students exiting with a Non-Honours degree could do so on the basis of 100 credits at Level 5, providing they had a portfolio of Level 6 credits. QASG supported the proposal that a non-Honours degree at BU still be awarded based on 320 BU credits (120 Level 4 / 120 Level 5 / 80 Level 6) but to allow additional flexibility by adding a further model based on 120 Level 4 / 100 Level 5 and at least 100 credits at Level 6 (but only where the shortfall of 20 credits at Level 5 was directly as a result of a failed trailed unit). QASG asked whether other interim exit awards could be awarded based on mixed Level credits. EDQ explained that this may not be possible but would investigate this further.

**ACTION**: EDQ to investigate whether other interim exit awards could be awarded based on mixed Level credits.

7.6 QASG was asked whether trailing fails should be introduced for new and continuation students for 2017-18 or just for new students. It was noted that if this was implemented to new students only then they would be on different regulations and processes from continuation students. QASG supported a ‘big bang’ approach for all students.

7.7 QASG requested an overview of the updated recommendations before consideration by ASC.

**ACTION**: EDQ to circulate the updated recommendations to QASG before consideration by ASC.

**8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

8.1 There was none.

**9 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

9.1 The date of the next QASG meeting was to be confirmed.