

Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)

Minutes from the meeting held on
Wednesday 17 November 2021

Present

David Ashton, Academic Registrar – Chair
Dr Clemens Brechtelsbauer, Chair of Programmes Committee
Dr Lorraine Craig, Faculty of Engineering representative
Professor Richard Green, Business School representative
Laura Lane, Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School
Daniel Lo, ICU Deputy President (Education)
Martin Lupton, Faculty of Medicine representative
Rebecca Middleton, Faculty of Natural Sciences representative
Claire Stapley, CLCC/CHERS representative
Judith Webster, Director of Academic Quality and Standards
Scott Tucker, Deputy Director (Academic Quality and Standards) – Secretary

In Attendance

Dr Camille Candiko Howson, Associate Professor of Education, CHERS [Item 8.3]
Dr Jeffrey Vernon, Faculty Senior Tutor, Faculty of Medicine

Apologies

Professor Peter Openshaw, Senior College Consul

1. Welcome, apologies and announcements

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting, noting apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

2.1 The Committee confirmed the minutes of 29 September 2021 as an accurate record. QAEC.2021.20

3. Matters arising from the minutes

3.1 No matters arising.

4. Update on QAEC actions

QAEC.2021.21

4.1 The Committee received an update on outstanding QAEC actions. It was noted that target completion dates had been reviewed but that there were still a small number of actions that had a target date to be confirmed. In these instances, further work would be undertaken to be able to establish a realistic completion deadline.

5. Terms of Reference, Composition and Membership

5.1 Update to the QAEC composition and membership

QAEC.2021.22

5.1.1 The Committee agreed that representation from the College's PGT community would be a valuable addition to the Committee. It was proposed that the four Faculties were allocated two representatives.

5.1.2 To allow for a wider pool of College Consuls to act as QAEC representative, QAEC proposed that the 'Senior College Consul **or nominee**', would be permitted.

5.1.3 To allow for a wider pool of Imperial College Union staff to act as QAEC representative, QAEC proposed that the 'ICU Deputy President (Education) **or nominee**', would be permitted.

5.1.4 The Committee confirmed that Professor Andrew Parry will replace Professor Peter Openshaw as QAEC College Consul Representative.

5.2 Update on College's Schedule of Delegation

5.2.1 It was noted that the Schedule of Delegation will be reviewed this academic year, in line with the terms of reference of Senate and its sub-committees.

6. Regulations, Policy and Procedures

6.1 Updated Authorised Interruption of Studies Procedure

QAEC.2021.23

6.1.1 The Committee approved updates to the Authorised Interruption of Studies Procedure, which provided clarity on module registration and management. It was agreed that the following proposed paragraph was removed:

An Authorised Interruption of Studies request submitted during the agreed examination period for a programme of study (i.e. upon completion of the teaching delivery period) will not normally be granted.

6.2 Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure

QAEC.2021.24

6.2.1 The Committee approved updates to the Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure, noting that the guidance table in Appendix 1 (Penalties for Academic Misconduct) required final revision. The Document would be published once Appendix 1 was finalised.

Action: Secretary

7. Student Casework

7.1 Academic Misconduct Report 2020-21

7.1.1 The Committee considered the report, which covered major cases referred to the Student Casework Team. The report provided analysis of the challenges presented by the unprecedented increase in the number of cases of academic misconduct during the 2020-21 academic year. QAEC.2021.25

7.1.2 The Committee noted that, with such a significant increase in the number of reported cases, the primary challenge had been the turnaround of cases in a reasonable timeframe. The timeliness concerns were identified as resulting from:

- Delays between the date of the assessment and report of a major allegation to the Student Casework Team
- Availability of nominated academic staff available to consider cases, particularly between July and September
- Unexpected staff absence in the Student Casework Team for six weeks in August and September
- Timing of allegations relating to resit examinations.

7.1.3 The Committee noted that the majority of allegations related to collusion or plagiarism in Timed Remote Assessments. These cases were particularly prevalent in the Departments of Computing and Mathematics.

7.1.4 Committee members discussed a number of approaches that might help support timely processing including the following:

- Introducing a named academic integrity officer in each Department to filter cases
- Reducing the number of panel members required from three to two
- Delegating some decisions to a local level

However, it was felt that the most appropriate approach at this stage was to provide staff with support to ensure an increased understanding of the stages of the procedure and the available penalties. Support for staff was a key theme in the recommendations set out in the report.

7.1.5 The Committee noted the following recommendations presented in the report:

- To provide staff with support following the revisions to the Academic Misconduct procedure for the 2021-22 academic year to ensure increased understanding of the stages of the procedure and the penalties
- To develop, with the involvement of experienced Panel Members, good practice guidance to support departments in the identification and reporting of allegations of academic misconduct, including supporting evidence requirements such as the rubrics and any relevant assessment criteria and candidate

instructions are provided to with the other papers, as part of the evidence base of the Panel

- To identify a wider pool of academic staff for academic misconduct panels during the peak period (July-September)
- To refer some issues raised under Concerns Identified to the Regulations and Policy Review Committee for consideration
- That resource to support this area of casework is kept under review
- That the Casework Team will continue to keep workflows under review to address the timeliness issues and identify further enhancements to process.

7.1.6 The Committee debated whether an allegation should be investigated if the published College turnaround time had lapsed. Although the Committee agreed that a penalty given to a student significantly after a proven offence was poor practice, it could be harmful not to follow up on all cases of perceived academic misconduct. It was felt that the most effective way forward was for the College to adopt the recommendations in the report.

7.1.7 The Committee approved the report and the recommendations presented. It was noted that a further report will be submitted to QAEC in due course, which would build on existing recommendations and provide further data and thus allow for a more holistic overview before final decisions on amendments of the Procedure.

Action: Judith Webster

8. Student Surveys

8.1 NSS 2021 Summary of College Results

QAEC.2021.26

8.1.2 The Committee noted the NSS 2021 Summary of College Results and thanked Bojan Cvijan from the Strategic Planning Division for drafting the report.

8.1.3 Overall Satisfaction in the College increased to 84.5% from 81.4% in 2020.

8.1.4 The College's percentage satisfaction improved in seven question categories: Teaching (+2.6 percentage points to 86.3%); Learning Opportunities (+1.9 percentage points to 82.9%); Assessment and Feedback (+3.5 percentage points to 63.8%); Academic Support (0.6 percentage points to 77.5%); Organisation and Management (+1.9 percentage points to 76.3%); Learning Community (+0.3 percentage points to 77.7%); and Students' Union (+3.4 percentage points to 57.7%). 8. The College's percentage satisfaction fell in two question categories: Learning Resources (-2.0 percentage points to 87.5%); and Student Voice (-0.4 percentage points to 74.6%).

8.2 NSS 2021 Imperial College Union Response

QAEC.2021.27

8.2.1 The Committee considered the ICU response to the NSS, noting the following recommendations for the College:

- Improving the quality of coursework feedback
- Improving the punctuality of coursework feedback
- Improving communication between students and their departments
- Developing a stronger student community and more pastoral support
- Balancing workload and avoid timetabling clashes
- Improving mental health support

8.3 Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ) update

QAEC.2021.28

8.3.1 The Committee received an update on developments over the implementation phase of the project to replace Student Viewpoint and redesign SOLE. The Project Team had been working with UGAM Solutions, Qualtrics' designated analytics and technology services partner. The following activities had been completed during the implementation phase:

- Survey theme set-up
- Survey build
- Survey invitations
- Banner data export and formatting of data
- Import of enrolment file
- Testing of survey

The following activities were scheduled to take place:

- Dashboard build for data analysis
- Final testing with a larger data set, review and enhancement

8.3.2 The Committee discussed presentation of the questionnaire data in the MEQ dashboard. It was noted that SOLE analysis used to include a 'Weighted Score', derived by applying a value to each text answer, starting from 5 (for "Definitely Agree") down to 1 (for "Definitely Disagree") and dividing this by the number of valid responses to create a score out of 5. However, it was reported that converting a Likert text rating scale to numerical values could result in arbitrary values that could misrepresent the gaps between answers. It was proposed that the College only use Percentage Agree (Definitely Agree % + Mostly Agree % Divided by Total % - Not Applicable %) as the main comparative value and no longer provide a Weighted Score (e.g. 'The module was well structured' would be represented as 81%, not '4.12'). However, there was concern that many Departments use the Weighted Score metric so this should remain until wider consultation was carried out.

8.3.3 It was confirmed that 'Percentage Agree' and 'Weighted Score' would be reported via the four main question areas: Teaching Delivery; Assessment and Feedback; Engagement with Staff and Students; and Access and Support.

8.3.4 The provision to use additional banks of questions was approved by QAEC in July 2021. The Committee noted that agreement on how the use of additional questions will be determined to provide additional student feedback on areas of concern or good practice would be developed for implementation from October 2022.

8.3.5 The Committee discussed the dissemination of free text comments across Faculties, Departments and the wider College. It was agreed that for the first academic year of the MEQ, the process used for SOLE should remain, that is, comments would be sent to the HoDs/DUGs or DPSs for review and any inappropriate comments would be flagged to be redacted from distribution to the module leader, for onward dissemination to teaching staff.

8.3.6 The Committee agreed to add the following text in bold to the free text question:

Please use this box to provide any constructive feedback on **the delivery of** this module, including the different components. Students with a disability are invited to make specific suggestions for improvements that would assist them.

8.3.7 The Committee agreed to add an additional question to the MEQ as follows:

The Module Evaluation Questionnaire (previously SOLE) was updated this year. Please provide any comments on your ability to feedback on the quality of your modules (e.g. length, questions, accessibility, or anything else).

It was agreed that the Data Analytics, Evaluation and Monitoring Group (DAEM) analysed student feedback (to this question only) and that staff and students provided feedback through FECs, which would inform the DAEM evaluation. Feedback will be presented at QAEC to inform Autumn 2022 enhancements.

8.3.8 The Committee noted that the College's Student Surveys Policy would be reviewed over the academic year which would inform MEQ processes from October 2022.

9. Admissions

9.1 Faculty of Medicine undergraduate entry requirement changes for 2023 entry QAEC.2021.29

9.1.1 The Committee approved changes for 2023 entry.

9.2 Faculty of Engineering undergraduate entry requirement changes for 2023 entry QAEC.2021.30

9.2.1 The Committee approved changes for 2023 entry.

10. Sub-Committees

10.1 Postgraduate Research Quality Committee Report from the meeting held on 3 November 2021

QAEC.2021.31

10.1.1 QAEC considered the report from PRQC, noting the following:

- Minor updates to the Terms of Reference and Membership
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey results
- Update on the Turnitin Implementation Group
- Update on the cornerstone supervisor training and development programme
- International PhD Task and Finish Group draft recommendations

10.1.2 It was highlighted that the International PhD Task and Finish Group draft recommendations would be taken forward by the following working groups:

- Collaborative PhDs and Joint PhDs – Led by Registry with support for the International Relations Office
- Visiting PhD – Led by the International Relations Office with support from Registry
- Remote PhD – Led by the Global Development Hub with support from the International Relations Office

The Committee would receive further updates on developments and proposals as appropriate.

11. Sector Reports and Consultations

11.1 Office for Students (OfS) - Assessment practices in English higher education providers: spelling, punctuation and grammar

QAEC.2021.32

11.1.1 The Committee noted that the OfS had undertaken a review of a small number of providers following reports in the press in early 2021 that some providers had adopted policies which could undermine the integrity of assessment. It was unclear how many providers were included in the review or what type of institution they were. The review had been published to assist other providers in making and adjustments to their policy and practices as a result of this report.

The main findings of the report were summarised by the OfS as follows:

- Some providers' assessment policies were designed in a way that meant spelling, punctuation and grammar were not assessed
- Some providers' interpretation of the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation has led to their not assessing technical proficiency in written English for all students. The OfS does not consider that position to be necessary or justified
- Providers should assess spelling, punctuation and grammar where this was relevant to the course, subject to compliance with their obligations under the

Equality Act 2010 and other legislation. The OfS would expect this to mean that most students on most courses should be assessed in their technical proficiency in written English

- There was no inconsistency in a provider complying with equality legislation and making its assessments accessible, while also maintaining rigour in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Providers should ensure that students benefit from both accessibility and rigour.

11.1.2 It was noted that the College's Assessment Working Group would consider the implications for the College and what adjustments might need to be made to current policy and practice.

11.2 **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) - Consultation on revised Subject Benchmark Statements** QAEC.2021.33

11.2.1 The Committee noted that the QAA was currently consulting on draft Subject Benchmark Statements. Subjects included in the consultation included:

- Chemistry
- Computing
- Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Technology

12. External Examiners

12.1 Outstanding nominations and undergraduate reports QAEC.2020.34

12.1.1 QAEC noted outstanding nominations and undergraduate reports.

13. Suspension to Regulations

13.1 List of suspensions to academic regulations approved by the Academic Registrar QAEC.2020.35

13.1.1 The Committee noted a List of suspensions to academic regulations approved by the Academic Registrar. The list would be updated and presented periodically to QAEC. This would allow the Committee to consider if there were any trends and how best to support Departments in implementing approved academic regulations, as well as identifying where regulations needed to be developed further.

14. Any Other Business

14.1 Disciplinary Procedures

14.1.1 It was noted that the College intended to review its Student Disciplinary Procedure. It was noted that a proposal would be considered at Senate on 8 December 2021.

15. Dates of Meetings 2021-22

15.1 The Committee noted the dates for future QAEC meetings to be held in 2021-22 (all 10:10-12:00) as follows:

- Wednesday 26 January 2022 (for 23 March Senate)
- Wednesday 2 March 2022 (also for 23 March Senate)
- Wednesday 6 April 2022 (for 18 May Senate)
- Wednesday 1 June 2022 (for 29 June Senate)