Imperial College London

Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)
Minutes from the meeting held on
Wednesday 3 July 2019

Present

David Ashton, Academic Registrar – Chair

Dr Lorraine Craig, Faculty of Engineering representative

Claire Stapley, CLCC/CHERS representative

Alejandro Luy, ICU Deputy President (Education)

Karen Tweddle, Business School representative

Laura Lane, Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School

Professor Peter Lindstedt, Senior College Consul

Martin Lupton, Faculty of Medicine representative

Judith Webster, Head of Academic Services

Rebecca Middleton, Faculty Education Manager: Natural Sciences, attending on behalf of the Faculty of Natural Sciences representative

Lucy Heming, Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance and Enhancement) - Secretary

In attendance

Kirstie Ward, Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) - Deputy Secretary

Apologies

Professor John Seddon, Faculty of Natural Sciences representative

Dr Edgar Meyer, Chair of Programmes Committee

Ute Thiermann, GSU President

1	**Welcome, apologies and announcements**	

1.1   The Chair welcomed the attendees to the meeting and apologies, as listed above, were noted. Particular welcome was extended to Laura Lane attending her first meeting as the representative of the Graduate School.

1.2   The Chair expressed on behalf of the Committee its gratitude to Professor Peter Lindstedt and to Alejandro Luy for their contribution to the Committee, for whom this would be the last meeting they would attend in their current role as they had reached the end of their term in office.

2	**Minutes of the Previous Meeting**	QAEC.2018.88

2.1   The Committee confirmed the minutes of 5 June 2019 as an accurate with a single amendment to point 3.2.1 to change 'Department' to 'Centre'. It was subsequently noted by the Secretary that point 4.1.2 also required to be amended to 'conversely level 6 modules'.

2.2   **Review of Committee Actions**   QAEC.2018.89

2.2.1   The Committee noted the status of the points of the action sheet. In particular, the Committee noted the following updates.

2.2.2   Action: March 2019 5.1.4: This action will be reassigned to the new Imperial College Union Deputy-President (Education).

2.2.3   Action: June 2019 3.1.2: The action is now complete.

2.2.4   Action: June 2019 5.1.6: The Chair reported that the meeting with the Provost had taken place and that the concerns raised by the Committee were being taken forward. It was also reported that a review group was being set up to consider aspects of the Student Discipline Procedure into which these discussions would feed.

2.2.5   It was reported that the ongoing actions would be reviewed to ensure that they are completed or signed off if they were no longer relevant.

3   **Matters arising from the Minutes**

3.1   **Update on payment for electronic submission of research degree theses (March 2019)**   QAEC.2018.90

3.1.1   The Chair reported to the Committee that, following on from the approval of the proposal to remove the fee from students to print their thesis, some procedural aspects required further work to ensure that it was fully operational. The agreed timeline for implementation would be adhered to, with the College bearing the cost.

3.1.2   It was noted the funding for some PhD students included the cost of printing. This would be investigated in the development of the process.

3.1.3   The Committee noted the concern that the costs would be charged back to Departments without due consideration.

3.2   **Update to the External Examiners action plan**   QAEC.2018.91

3.2.1   The Committee noted the updated action plan presented for approval.

3.2.2   The Committee agreed to all actions bar the implementation of an annual conference for all External Examiners without further development. It was considered important to ensure that the relationship between the departments and their examiners was maintained; however, it was noted that there was supporting information and College-wide developments were important to be communicated in a consistent manner as well.

3.2.3   It was agreed that a draft programme which would include College level updates and department-based activity would be drafted and presented to the Committee in the Autumn.

Action: Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards)

3.2.4   The Committee requested that the Quality Assurance team review with Finance the personal details collected on payment forms for External Examiners to ensure that it remains compliant with GDPR legislation.

Action: Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards)

3.3   **Periodic Review of Taught Programmes**   QAEC.2018.92

3.3.1   The Committee considered the update to the review of process for Periodic Review of Taught programmes, which had been recommended to be restarted in the findings of the audit of quality assurance processes by KPMG. It was noted that an updated policy was to be presented in the new academic year. The Committee noted that the provision at Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine would be reviewed under the current procedures, as had been agreed.

3.3.2   The Committee discussed that the sector was changing its approach with regards to periodic review, and that in some institutions it had been phased out in favour of alternative practices as it was no longer considered appropriate.

3.3.3   The proposed approach of limiting the number of reviews in 2019/2020 to pilot the updated procedure in an open and light touch approach was agreed by the Committee. It was noted that the approved schedule of review no longer reflects the College's academic department structure. It was agreed that it would be appropriate to invite Departments to volunteer to be part of the pilot phase.

3.3.4   The Committee noted that the implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework, and how individual departments would be in a position to engage positively with periodic review in the light of the recent curriculum review process, and the finite resources available in the Departments and Registry would have an impact on the proposed review process. It was agreed that the process would be flexible to take into account the priorities of Departments, and to ensure that it could meet different purposes.

3.3.5   The Committee discussed that the aim of the periodic review process is to be useful to those completing it, as it provides a "critical friend" approach to support the identification and dissemination of best practice, or to identify potential areas for further enhancement.

3.3.6   Members of the Committee commented that within Registry there needed to be sufficient resource to support individual departments in their preparation for review. It was reiterated that the paperwork required for the review process, once agreed, would be designed to meet the requirements of different process, such as external accreditation or TEF submission, and be kept to the minimum needed.

3.3.7   There were provisional nominations for the Department of Materials and the Dyson School of Engineering, from within the Faculty of Engineering. It was also suggested that consideration could be given to inviting those departments with higher numbers of Student Complaints or Academic Appeals to be in the earliest years of the updated schedule.

3.3.8   It was agreed that at the next meeting of the Committee a position paper with regards to the process and a proposed schedule based on nominations would be presented.
                     **Action: Position paper and proposed schedule of review to be presented to the
                     Committee in September, Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance and
                     Enhancement)**

4   **Academic Regulations and Policy**

4.1   **Update to Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures for Postgraduate Research**   QAEC.2018.93
             Students

4.1.1   The Committee was presented with proposed changes to the current appeals processes in relation to Postgraduate Research Students. It had been previously agreed to condense the three current documents into one procedure, to provide greater clarity to those utilising them, alongside further updates to bring it in line with sector best practice.

4.1.2   The Committee noted the proposed changes had been disseminated for consultation to the College community, and the responses that had been received. It was also noted that the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee had endorsed the proposed policy and procedure.

4.1.3   It was agreed to recommend the approval of the updated procedure to Senate, with the addition of 'Faculty Senior Tutor' to paragraph 1.13 and a flowchart to support the interpretation of the procedure. It was agreed that the policy should come into effect for all relevant Postgraduate Research programmes decisions falling after 1 October 2019.
Action: Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) to update procedure and present to Senate to final approval

4.2   **Amendment to Regulations in relation to attendance monitoring**   QAEC.2018.94

4.2.1   The Committee was reminded of the need to have clear procedures in place with regards to attendance monitoring for Tier 4 students, in line with the requirements of UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). These procedures need to be kept under review to reflect any updates in policy from UKVI.

4.2.2   The Committee agreed to recommend to the Chair of Senate the addition below in the regulations for continuing students (General Regulations) and new entrants (Single Set of Academic Regulations) from 2019/2020.

"As a sponsor of Tier 4 international students the College is required by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) to have in place additional attendance monitoring requirements. The College must therefore withdraw sponsorship of students who miss 10 consecutive expected contact points or do not meet Departmental attendance monitoring requirements."
Action: Secretary to prepare changes to relevant documentation and forward to Senate for approval

5   **Postgraduate Taught Annual Monitoring**

5.1   **Faculty Annual Monitoring Reports**   QAEC.2018.95

5.1.1   The Committee had received for consideration the annual monitoring reports in relation to postgraduate taught provision (2017/2018). Representatives were invited to highlight to the Committee any particular points in the reports.

5.1.2   Engineering: It was noted there were some issues raised in the annual monitoring process that were specific to particular departments, for which support had been put in place by the Faculty. It was also noted that the Faculty had agreed to provide focussed support for individual departments for a set period, where it had been identified as necessary.

5.1.3   It was shared with the Committee that there are department-based Staff Student committees, which feeds into a faculty-level committee. This approach had proved useful as students had felt enabled to raise concerns at the level deemed appropriate, or to escalate their concerns if it had been felt that there had not been an adequate response at

the department level. It was noted that this practice was also in place in the Faculty of Natural Sciences.

5.1.4 Areas of commendable practice had been identified such as the successful spinout companies from Bioengineering, the established network of mental health first aiders in Earth Science and Engineering, and that 18% of students in Mechanical Engineering continue as PhD students in the department which was a significant improvement.

5.1.5 It was also raised that there was concern within the Faculty with regards to the development and implementation of the Academic Calendar, and its potential impact.

5.1.6 It was reported that there were difficulties in the virtual learning environment, Blackboard™, in the Faculty which were being taken forward. It was noted that the Business School and Medicine used bespoke systems, rather than Blackboard™.

5.1.7 Medicine: It was reported that the lack of appropriate teaching space, particularly flat floor, was a challenge to the Faculty. The difference in Learning and Teaching technical support available over the different campuses on which the Faculty operate was highlighted to the Committee.

5.1.8 The Faculty had noted the concerns raised by students with regards to the timeliness and quality of assessment feedback, and the deteriorating NSS scores in relation to this. The competing demands of staff in relation to teaching, research and other priorities was acknowledged.

5.1.9 It was highlighted to the Committee that the Faculty had noted an increase in challenging student behaviour and its impact on other students and the wider College community. It encouraged the development of Fitness to Study procedures and requested that the Senior Tutors and Welfare tutors are included in the development and consultation process.

5.1.10 In response to a point in the report, the Committee was informed that the Graduate School was developing statistical training for postgraduate taught students, to complement that provided for Research students and postdocs.

5.1.11 Natural Sciences: It was highlighted to the Committee that there were concerns with regards to the level of support in central services for students and staff at Silwood Park.

5.1.12 The Mental Health and Resilience workshops initiated within the Centre for Environmental Policy were identified as an area of particular good practice, and that the Faculty are seeking to roll this out beyond the Centre.

5.1.13 Business School: The lack of space available to the School was highlighted as the most particular pressing concern, but reassurance was provided that alternatives were being explored. It was also noted that the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback remained a concern.

5.1.14 It was reported the School had piloted digital exams in the academic year 2018/2019 which had gone well and would be taken forward with "Bring Your Own Device" exams for the Summer School in August 2019.

5.1.15 CLCC/CHERS: It was reported that excellent scores had been received for feedback and teaching from students. The flexibility provided in the programme had meant that there was a greater take up and completion rate however, it was noted that students needed the full support of the home departments to enable successful completion.

5.1.16 Whilst there had been improvement in the amount and quality of teaching space available, this had continued to be an issue in some cases and further developments were still required.

5.1.17 Finally it was noted that further development was needed with regards to the learning resources for students on these programmes. This was being taken forward by the Centre and the Library.

5.2	**College summary report on Postgraduate Taught Annual Monitoring**	QAEC.2018.96

5.2.1 The Committee received the College Annual Monitoring summary report on Postgraduate Taught provision (2017/2018), which drew together the themes from the individual faculty level reports.

5.2.2 It was agreed that a College level strategic action plan would be produced in the light of the summary report, which would be monitored by the Committee.
> **Action: Assistant Registrar (Monitoring and Review) to produce action plan**

5.3	**Update to annual monitoring schedule and process**	QAEC.2018.97

5.3.1 The Committee considered the updated schedule, following the agreed changes at the previous meeting of the Committee. It was noted a further update would be required to confirm how and where the relevant data would be available, and at what point the discussion and review would take place, as part of the monitoring process.

5.3.2 The Committee was informed that much of the student data would be made available through Power BI dashboards. It was agreed that a demonstration of the dashboard would be given at the next meeting of the Committee.

5.3.3 It was noted that some issues arising in the annual monitoring process related to operational matters, rather than being under the remit of the Committee. Whilst these areas were important in overall experience of the student, they would be better served to be addressed under different routes, in a potentially timelier manner.

5.3.4 There was further discussion with regards to the dissemination of information such as the outcome of student experience surveys which are considered in other areas such as Provost Board. The Committee endorsed the proposed action for the Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance and Enhancement) to review further.
> **Action: Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance and Enhancement) to review and propose amendments to the distribution of student experience related information**

6 **Student Casework and Mitigating Circumstances**

6.1	**Annual report on postgraduate Academic Appeals**	QAEC.2018.98

6.1.1 The Committee received the report on postgraduate appeals for the last academic year. It was noted that the Business School had received a higher number of appeals than other areas. Whilst it was recognised that there may be subject specific reasons for the proportionally higher number of appeals in the Business School to other areas of the College, the Quality Assurance team and the Business School were working together to identify any themes arising from the data and to address this.

6.1.2   It was noted that a large number of appeals were on the grounds of late notification of mitigating circumstances, which would not be dealt with under the appeals process in the next year but instead via the mitigating circumstances process. This indicated that further work was needed to support students to declare concerns at the time of assessment, rather than waiting the outcome of their programme. It was noted that many cases were for students that were requesting an uplift in classification on the basis of their grounds for mitigation.

6.1.3   It was agreed that data would be shared with individual departments, as had been completed for the undergraduate report.

Action: Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) to disseminate data to Faculty representatives

6.1.4   The Committee noted the concerns raised in the report about ensuring that students are encouraged to seek support as early as possible in their studies if needed, and also to keep the resource administrating appeals under review.

6.2   **Interim Review: Mitigating Circumstances procedure**   QAEC.2018.99

6.2.1   The Committee discussed in detail the findings of the interim review of the Mitigating Circumstances procedure implemented in September 2018.

6.2.2   It was agreed that a further review would be required once a full cycle of the procedure had taken place, which would also be able to include information of how students had submitted late claims for mitigation after the Boards of Examiners and all appeals related to the consideration mitigating circumstances claims.

Action: Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) to complete a review to be presented to the Committee in Spring 2020

6.2.3   The Committee's decisions with regard to the suggested actions identified in the report were as follows:
   1. Improvements in the timing and dissemination of changes to policies and procedures should be considered for the year ahead and beyond. **AGREED**
   2. Relaunch of Mitigating Circumstances policy and procedure to all staff. **AGREED**
   3. It is recommended that the deadline be extended to 10 days, and the details of supplying evidence in the following period is made clearer. **AGREED**
   4. Review self-certification over 2019/2020. **AGREED**
   5. It is recommended that the evidence requirements are extended to provide 3 levels of evidence. **NOT AGREED. To be considered as part of further review**
   6. Extensions: It is recommended that the sequencing of the document is reconsidered and the guidance on process expanded. **AGREED**
   7. It is recommended that the routinely accepted duration of impact for claims for bereavement, without requiring additional evidence, is kept at 6 months at this time, and reviewed in due course when more data will be available. **AGREED**
   8. Review of procedure and guidance relating to claims resubmitted with new additional evidence. **AGREED**

Action: Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) to complete

7   **Research Degrees**

7.1   **Proposed amendments to Assistant Supervisor Scheme**   QAEC.2018.100

7.1.1 The Committee received to papers in relation to the proposed amendments to the Assistant Supervisor Scheme. It was noted that Assistant Supervisors should not be used in place of the assigned academic supervisor, but could provide additional support.

7.1.2 All changes were agreed with effect from academic year 2019/2020.

7.2	**Annual Report: Graduate Teaching Assistants (2018/2019)**	QAEC.2018.101

7.2.1 The Committee noted the annual report regarding Graduate Teaching Assistants and associated papers updating the roles and responsibilities document.

7.2.2 The changes to the roles and responsibilities document were agreed by the Committee, to come into effect from academic year 2019/2020.

8 **Student Surveys**

8.1	**Outcome of Spring UG and PGT SOLE surveys**	QAEC.2018.102 a & b

8.1.1 The Committee received Spring UG and PGT SOLE survey report. The low response rate to the survey in the Spring term was noted and possible reasons for this were discussed. It was reported that SOLE completion had not been supported by Student Reps in some areas and that there was a lack of faith in the process. The Committee affirmed that closing the feedback loop with regard to the outcomes of student surveys was important in ensuring that student surveys remain valued.

8.1.2 The Committee noted that there was a working group reviewing SOLE and it was agreed that the Committee's discussion would be provided to the group with regard to the low response rate. In some areas it was noted that the response rates were so low as to make it statistically unsafe to draw clear conclusions, which may then further add to the lowered rates of completion.

8.2	**Survey Schedule 2019/2020**	QAEC.2018.103

8.2.1 The Committee noted the survey schedule for 2019/2020. It was additionally noted that admissions surveys were now included, and that inclusion of PTES may change dependent on the outcome of the development of the pilot postgraduate taught survey by the Office for Students.

9 **Faculty Education Committee**

9.1	The Committee received reports for the Faculty of Education Committee from:	QAEC.2018.104 a & b

- Business School: 9 April 2019
- Faculty of Engineering: 1 May 2019

10 **Learning and Teaching Committee**

10.1 The Committee noted the papers and minutes for Learning and Teaching Committee previously provided. The attention of the Committee was drawn to:
- The update on digital learning plans
- Consideration of admissions data to be published as part of the Transparency Conditions under OfS Registration
- Discussion of occupancy rates

- Discussion of the review of the Learning and Teaching Strategy ahead of an extraordinary review meeting of LTC in July 2019

11 Senate

11.1 The Committee noted the papers and minutes for Senate previously provided. The attention of the Committee was drawn to:
- Approval of the latest iteration of the Single Set of Academic Regulations.
- Discussion of the new requirement to produce a statement of intent on degree classification.
- Consideration of student outcomes data.

12 Any Other Business

12.1 Proposal from the Business School: Early adoption of classification regulations   QAEC.2018.105

12.1.1 The Committee considered the proposal by the Business School to suspend paragraph 1.5.8 of the *Academic Regulations for the award of Taught Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas and Postgraduate Certificates* for part time entrants that had commenced in 2018/2019. The rationale provided was that these cohorts would be awarded at the same point as new entrants from 2019/2020 and would be subject to a disparity because of this. Under the current regulations the part time students would have their classification capped should they be required to repeat an assessment for a capped mark, whereas the 2019/2020 entrants would not.

12.1.2 The Committee agreed the proposal and in addition that this principle should be applied across other College provision in similar circumstances.
Action: Outcome of Committee decision to be provided to the Department by the Chair
Action: Outcome of Committee decision to be considered by the Quality Assurance team to identify and put in place recommended action where appropriate.

12.2 Programme specific regulations regarding compensation for Mathematics programme (19/20 entry onwards)   QAEC.2018.105

12.2.1 The Committee considered the proposed programme specific regulations requested from the Mathematics Department to apply to the updated single honours undergraduate Mathematics programmes (2019/2020 entry onwards).

12.2.2 The agreed regulation is to permit compensation to a maximum of 15 ECTS per credit level where a student has achieved a mark between 30.00% and 39.99% inclusive (40.00 and 49.00 for level seven) in an elective or compulsory module.

12.2.3 The proposal was to permit Board of Examiners in the final years (year 3 for Bachelor programmes, and years 3 and 4 of Integrated Master programmes) to apply compensation to a maximum of value of 15 ECTS and a maximum of 30 marks (percentage) in total across compensated modules.

12.2.4 There was significant discussion of the rationale and suitability of the request, including consideration of the information provided in the benchmark statements. Whilst it was acknowledged that there are differences in requirements across subject areas, it was not considered that it would be appropriate to accept the proposal as it would not adhere to the principles that had been agreed as part of the single set of regulations, regarding a

tolerance of failure, nor being able to demonstrate achievement of module learning outcomes as previously expressed within the QAA documentation.

12.2.5 The Committee therefore did not approve the proposed programme specific regulations.
Action: Outcome of Committee decision to be provided to the Department by the Chair

13   Dates for Meetings

13.1   9 October 2019 (reporting to Senate on 11 December)*
20 November 2019 (reporting to Senate on 11 December)*
15 January 2020 (reporting to Senate on 11 March)
26 February 2020 (also reporting to Senate on 11 March)
22 April 2020 (reporting to Senate on 6 May)
3 June 2020 (reporting to Senate on 24 June)

*secretary note: dates amended following the meeting

14   Reserved Areas of Business

14.1   There was no reserved business.