

QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP
Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April 2013

Present: P Rouse (Chair), B Dyer, J Edwards, K Fisher, J Freeman, A Main, C Merrett, G Roushan, N Silvennoinen (Secretary), M Simpson, R Stafford, C Symonds

In attendance: R Chater, L Hutchings, K Randall

Apologies: None

1 Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 The Chair reported two changes to the membership of the Quality Assurance Standing Group (QASG). Katy Fisher would temporarily replace Marianne Barnard and was welcomed to the meeting. Andy Guttridge who had recently stepped down was thanked for his contribution and the Chair invited members to put forward nominations for a new Programme Administrator representative. It was suggested that Robin Chater, who had previously acted in this capacity, could rejoin the Group on his return to the Media School in June.

Action: Further nominations for a new Programme Administrator representative to be sent to the secretary by 7th May.

- 1.2 The following non-members were in attendance: Lianne Hutchings and Kirsty Randall to discuss item 3a (Implementation of the proposed new capping rule); Robin Chater to discuss item 3 and to introduce item 5 (Review of *6H – Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards*).

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2013

- 2.1 The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record.

- 2.2 The following were reported under matters arising:

- 2.2.1 Minute 4.3.3: Academic Standards Committee (ASC) had approved QASG's recommendation to provide greater flexibility with regards to the timing of reassessment between levels for those students who had mitigating circumstances during the resit period. The current University advice was that students who were allowed to commence the next level in this circumstance, were expected to make good failure in the failed units before formal enrolment. It had since come to light that some Schools allowed students to enrol at risk on the next level/stage before they had accumulated all the required credits for progression. Usually this was done in order to qualify for a bursary because provisional enrolment did not activate their funding. The Student Processes Manager noted that she was aware of this practice and proposed to discuss the matter further with her team and the Schools in question.

Action: The Student Processes Manager to investigate the matter and report back to the May meeting of QASG in order to ensure that *6L – Assessment Board Decision-Making, including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* is amended appropriately for 2013-14.

- 2.2.2 Minute 4.3.4.1: ASC had approved the recommendation for Assessment Boards to carry a capped pass mark forward to the following Board for late submissions provided that the unit had been graded at a pass mark or above.

- 2.2.3 Minutes 4.3.4.2 and 4.3.6.1: ASC had given in-principle approval for the proposed changes to the University's standard assessment regulations but it had been requested that implementation of the new capping rule be discussed further at the April meeting of QASG (see agenda item 3.1 below). It was intended that a paper outlining the proposed new regulations would be forwarded to the June Senate for University approval following a debate on the matter at the May meeting of ASC.

- 2.2.4 Minute 4.4.2: QASG had decided in January to invite views from Schools on the rounding of marks in Unit-e to inform the tendering process for a new student records system. It was subsequently agreed to discuss the issue directly with the relevant working group. This resulted in a decision for EDQ and Student Processes to prepare a policy paper for QASG discussion to help reach consensus on an approach to rounding of level aggregates and unit, formal element and sub-element marks before the new student record system would be rolled out.

Action: EDQ and Student Processes to prepare a paper as per above for the July meeting of QASG to help ensure that the rules that determine the level of accuracy marks should be calculated to and displayed in the new student record system.

2.2.5 Minute 4.4.3: See agenda item 3.2.

2.2.6 Minutes 5.2 and 5.4: Actions arising from the consideration of the external examining annual report had been completed.

2.2.7 Minute 6.2: The Common Academic Structure (CAS) Working Group had discussed implementation of the proposed mid-level student progress reviews which would help identify and support students whose performance had been below pass-level during the preceding semester. Representatives who had attended the meeting reported that it had been agreed that the next revision of *6E- Assessment Feedback and Return of Assessed Work: Policy and Procedure* should include clear University guidance in this regard to help ensure consistency across Schools. CAS representatives also reported that the term 'mid-level' should be replaced with 'in-level' to reflect the fact that programmes which aligned with a three rather than two-semester structure may require more than one inter-semester progress review or review at some point other than mid-level.

2.2.8 There were no outstanding actions from previous meetings.

3 Review of Standard Assessment Regulations: issues for further consideration

3.1 *Implementation of the proposed capping rule*

3.1.1 The Secretary outlined the background to the paper and invited members to consider how to best implement the new rule to cap formal element rather than full unit marks which had received in principle endorsement from ASC in February. The new regulation would replace the current practice of capping whole units instead of capping failed formal elements only at the pass mark following successful reassessment. No change had been proposed to the current practice of capping marks for repeat students. Subsequent discussions had highlighted that this would create potentially different assessment outcomes amongst those students who are offered reassessment opportunities through one or more mid-level Boards depending on when failure takes place compared with those students whose results are considered in a single end-of-level Board. Board timings are linked to the mode of study and programme structure, including progression requirements.

3.1.2 It was noted that all options presented to QASG would support academically equitable, but different, ways to implement the capping rule. Members' consideration of these and the recommendations for change are summarised below. If approved by ASC and Senate, the changes will be implemented for all extant students and new entrants from the start of the new academic year.

A separate discussion paper provides further context and examples (see ASC agenda item 3.3 - Standard Assessment Regulations: Recommendations for Change from QASG).

3.1.3 Members considered the issues and each of the proposed options. To facilitate discussion, a process of elimination was adopted. Options 3a and 3b were deemed the least viable and were hence considered first. It was noted that both would require mid-level Boards to award provisional marks and/or credits which an end-of-level Board could cap or claw back for students who later go into a repeat mode. Members agreed unanimously that these went against the principles agreed in January and discarded both options as unfair to students.

3.1.4 The benefits and drawbacks associated with Option 2 were debated next. Members did not support Option 2 as presented as it proposed to allow repeat students to repeat the failed elements only and apply the proposed new capping rule also to repeats as well as reassessments. Members did however, feel that this option could be modified so that students would still repeat the failed unit(s) but only the failed formal element(s) would be capped in line with reassessments. It was acknowledged that this would help motivate repeat students and was in line with the principles agreed in January. However, even the modified version of Option 2 was deemed problematic to manage, for instance, in terms of curriculum changes and Members rejected it after some deliberation. Two additional models which offered further variations of Option 2 were also put forward but did not receive as much support as the first modified proposal.

- 3.1.5 Option 1 proposed to allow equal reassessment opportunity to all students regardless of their programme structure, mode of study or the overall number of credits failed within a level. This would mean that all students would be required to repeat units only after exhausting their reassessment quota. Repeated units would be capped at the pass mark as per current practice. Some members expressed concern whether a student who has failed beyond the level entitlement for reassessment would benefit from repeating units for academic reasons. Others argued that if the student failed to pass having been offered an opportunity to be reassessed, they would be required to do exactly that. Members noted in favour of Option 1 that it would also ensure financial (as well as academic) parity in terms of repeat fees which Option 2 could not achieve. This might influence whether a student could afford to make good failure and achieve a sufficient number of credits for an intermediate or terminal award. On balance, Option 1 was deemed to create greater academic parity and fairness for all students than Option 2. Members supported Option 1 but noted that it would be useful to review its operational impact in a year's time.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: that Option 1 is adopted to support the implementation of the proposed new capping rule. *6L – Assessment Board Decision-Making, including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* to be amended accordingly to outline that all students would qualify for the same number of reassessment opportunities in the first place before entering repeat mode only if/when they exceed the reassessment threshold for the level.

ACTION: Subject to approval of the proposed changes, QASG to review the operational impact of the new capping rule as part of the next annual review of the standard assessment regulations.

- 3.1.6 It was noted that if ASC were to endorse Option 1, this would necessitate further amendments to the University's Standard Assessment Regulations. Members agreed that the wording provided be clarified prior to submission to ASC.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: to recommend to Senate that Section 12 of *6A - Standard Assessment Regulations*, 'Provision for Failed Candidates', be amended to specify that all students would qualify for reassessment regardless of the total number of credits they had failed in a level (see *ASC agenda item 3.3, Appendix C for details*).

- 3.1.7 Further clarification was sought regarding situations where a Board would be required to determine which units were to be made good through reassessment in the first instance and which ones were to be repeated by a student. Members suggested that where this was the case, the Board would use its discretion and reach a decision based on academic judgement. The rationale for its decision would need to be clearly recorded in the Board minutes. In other cases Board decisions would be taken through successive Boards and the order in which reassessments were granted would dictate which unit(s) needed to be repeated.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: that where a Board determines both reassessment and repetition opportunities for a student, this should be based on Board discretion.

- 3.1.8 Members supported the proposal to provide training to chairs of Assessment Boards in line with any changes.

ACTION: EDQ to provide training for chairs of Assessment Boards following implementation of the new ruling in September 2013.

3.2 Self-plagiarism and repetition

- 3.2.1 The Secretary introduced the paper which had been prepared following a discussion at the January meeting of QASG on two inter-related issues, self-plagiarism and assessment requirements for repeat students following requests from Schools to clarify guidance in these areas. QASG decided then that it would return to consider these issues in more detail in April when the University's *6H – Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards* was due for annual review. Subsequent to QASG discussion, a recent University Academic Offences Board (AOB) recommended that the University 'review the Academic Offences Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards regarding self-plagiarism, [...] that clearer guidance on self-plagiarism be made available to students and that the academic offences

of plagiarism and self-plagiarism should always be covered together, when talked about to students and in University Documentation' (extract of a meeting held on 4th February 2013).

- 3.2.2 On the basis of the issues raised, a paper was prepared for consideration at the April meeting of QASG. QASG had agreed in January that in principle students could utilise previously submitted work (or elements of it) if they had not received credit for it and that students should be allowed to do so for both reassessment and repeat purposes without being in breach of self-plagiarism. Members considered the proposed definition of self-plagiarism and supported it subject to a minor amendment.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: To endorse the revised definition of self-plagiarism which forms part of the policy section of *6H - Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards* and recommend approval to Senate. Procedural guidance including *6C - Assessment Design, Handling and Submission: Policy and Procedure* and *6L – Assessment Board Decision-Making, including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* to be updated accordingly (see *agenda item 3.4 - Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards: Recommendations for Change from QASG for details*).

- 3.2.3 Members welcomed this clarification but noted that in order to ensure staff and student awareness and understanding, the revised definition must be communicated clearly and effectively prior to implementation in September 2013. Student-facing guidance and other information provided to students should state that previously submitted work should only be utilised for reassessment or repetition purposes where the content is relevant to a new assignment. Students' understanding of plagiarism, self-plagiarism and other academic offences should be clarified through clear and accessible examples.

ACTION: EDQ to work with Schools and Library and Learning Support (LLS) to enhance student-facing guidance on self-plagiarism and to incorporate reference to self-plagiarism consistently alongside information on plagiarism to improve students' understanding of this academic offence in line with the recommendation received from the University Academic Offences Board and other feedback received by QASG. To include (but not limited to) the following:

- i. The BU Student Handbook
- ii. The Library web pages (['How to avoid plagiarism'](#)).
- iii. The [Academic Skills Community on myBU](#)
- iv. The coursework declaration for online submissions
- v. Level and Programme Handbooks
- vi. Assignment Briefs
- vii. Assignment sheet front covers
- viii. Induction and refresher sessions

- 3.2.4 QASG also considered additional feedback from several Schools in relation to University guidelines for setting reassessments and/or repeat work. A range of differing views was noted and Members agreed that both reassessment and repeat requirements should be based on academic judgement and intended to facilitate achievement of the relevant intended learning outcomes.

- 3.2.4 This and the principle agreed earlier that students could utilise previously submitted work for repeat purposes resulted in a recommendation to ASC to delete a clause in the standard assessment regulations for postgraduate taught programmes which stipulates that where a Dissertation/Final Project is repeated, this must be based on a new topic. This clause was also deemed problematic as a postgraduate student who has failed three taught units at first attempt was not eligible for reassessment in a Dissertation/Final Project, even if this was marked as a marginal fail.

(See a separate paper under agenda item 3.3, Standard Assessment Regulations: Recommendations for Change from QASG, for details.)

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: to recommend to Senate that Section 12.7, 'Provision for Failed Candidates', of *6A - Standard Assessment Regulations (Postgraduate Taught Programmes)* be amended to allow an Assessment Board to determine whether a failed Dissertation or Final Project is retrievable for repetition purposes.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: to approve changes to 6L – *Assessment Board Decision-Making, including the Implementation of Assessment Regulations: Procedure* to reflect the principle that students could be allowed to utilise work for which they have not received credit, for both reassessment and repeat purposes and the proposed change to the standard assessment regulations for postgraduate taught programmes (see above recommendation).

4 Request for a formal exception to the standard assessment regulations: Undergraduate Computing Framework, School of Design, Computing and Engineering

4.1 This item was deferred until 28th May 2013.

5 Review of 6H – *Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards*

5.1 Robin Chater (EDQ) outlined the background to the annual review of 6H – *Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards* which had highlighted a number of issues and queries which QASG was now asked to consider with a view to recommending any updates to the current policy and procedure for the 2013-14 academic year. In total, ten proposals for change were put forward and debated by Members. These resulted in seven recommendations and a number of actions as outlined below.

(See a separate paper, ASC agenda item 3.4 - Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards: Recommendations for Change from QASG for more information on the recommended changes.)

5.1.1 Evidence presented for an Academic Offences Panel/Board hearing - Academic Offences Panel/Board requesting further evidence before a decision is reached: Clarification had been sought on whether an academic offences Academic Offences Panel/Board may, in exceptional circumstances, request further evidence and, if so, whether the student needs to consent to this. QASG supported the proposal as an appropriate course of action as per below.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: to allow an Academic Offences Panel/Board, during its meeting, in exceptional circumstances only, to request additional evidence on the basis that such evidence is likely to significantly affect the outcome. If all parties, including the student, agree that the Panel members may consider this evidence and reach a decision without further need for the student or School to have an opportunity to respond to the additional evidence, then all parties will be allowed to depart and the decision will be communicated to all parties in writing. Otherwise an Academic Offences Panel/Board may decide that a meeting would need to be adjourned in order to give all parties the opportunity to have time to prepare and respond to the new evidence.

5.1.2 Evidence presented for an Academic Offences Panel/Board hearing - Dealing with additional evidence provided by a programme team after the deadline has passed for evidence to be made available to all parties involved in an Academic Offences Panel/Board hearing: Clarification had been sought on how an Academic Offences Panel/Board may deal with additional evidence from the team that is presented less than five working days before or at the meeting and whether this practice should be allowed. Members emphasised the need for a robust preliminary stage to support the gathering of a sufficient evidence base before the formal stage is instigated. It was noted that it was possible for the team to call a student in at an early stage in order to obtain evidence in order to enable the decision as to whether to progress the case further. Members felt that Proposal 2, to emphasise the need for a robust stage, was unnecessary and already covered in the documentation. Proposal 3 was supported as per the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: To clarify in the procedure that the programme team's evidence must be made available to all parties at least 5 working days in advance of the hearing. This is to ensure the student has sufficient time to prepare their case and also that they are not presented with new allegations for the hearing which they hadn't previously been made aware of. If the team wishes to provide additional evidence after the 5 working days deadline, then agreement in writing would need to be requested from the student for the hearing to go ahead as planned. If the student disagrees, then the meeting should be moved forward in order to give the student additional time to prepare their case in respect of the late additional evidence.

- 5.1.3 Providing a student's history of academic offences in a reference: School Academic Offences Panel chairs had asked for clarification on whether a history of academic offences should be disclosed in a student's reference. Legal Services had advised EDQ that it was a requirement to disclose any academic offence ('as not to would be misleading'). Alternatively, the request for a reference could be declined. QASG expressed concern regarding this advice and what it could do to a student's career. It was noted that a minor academic offence which was committed early on in the programme could, for instance, be conflated with a fitness to practise issue with serious consequences for the student. On the other hand, the person giving a reference might not be aware of past academic offences thus resulting in references containing different information for different students. Legal Services had advised EDQ that a new policy was being prepared around references. A question was raised whether disciplinary hearings would also be covered by the policy and Members suggested to wait for the new policy to be published before considering Proposals 4 and 5. EDQ was asked to follow the issue up with Legal Services.

ACTION: EDQ to clarify the legal position of individuals writing references and raise concern regarding a potential for inequity amongst students the requirement could create.

- 5.1.4 Definitions of academic offences – a student who arranges for someone to translate their work into English: There had been a case when a student whose first language was not English had written an assignment in their native language and had then arranged for it to be translated. The student had then presented the translation as their own work. It was now proposed to add this to the list of definitions as an academic offence. members supported this proposal as per below:

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: To incorporate into the list of examples of academic offences, the use of a translator, via the following amendment to existing academic offence definition xiv: "making use of an editor, *translator* or proof reader in such a way as to change significantly the content, *language*, meaning or significance of what is written".

- 5.1.5 Tariff of Penalties - Penalties 1 and 2: Feedback from School Academic Offences Panels indicated that Penalties 1 and 2 were interpreted by some chairs to mean that a student should be required to make good failure in a piece of work which has been plagiarised (which could be a sub or formal element) whilst others understood the penalty to always cover the formal element. Clarification had been requested as to whether the penalties should be interpreted as 'resubmit the work in question' or 'resubmit all pieces of work related to the formal element in question'. QASG noted that both penalties should have elevated severity for a student who has plagiarised compared to a student who simply failed a unit through poor performance. Penalties 1 and 2 should therefore require for all work related to the formal element to be resubmitted and for the full unit mark to be capped (*Secretary's note: subsequent to the meeting it was agreed via email correspondence with members that in order for Penalty 1 to remain viable it would need to be specific to the piece of work that has been plagiarised although it would result in the same assessment outcome, i.e. a capped unit mark, for the student*).

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: To change the wording of Penalties 1 and 2 as per above.

(see proposed wording in a separate paper, ASC agenda item 3.4 - Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards: Recommendations for Change from QASG for details).

- 5.1.6 Records retention in cases where the outcome is "no case to answer": In suspected academic offences cases where a preliminary consideration or an Academic Offences Panel/Board finds that there is "no case to answer", documentation relating to the suspected offence must be destroyed. A query was raised whether a central record should be kept by the University for audit and statistical reporting purposes. QASG agreed that it was important to maintain an audit trail but emphasised that student anonymity should be protected. With this principle in mind, QASG supported two proposals as per the below recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: To include a requirement in the procedure that "a central record be kept, in such a way that the student could not be identified, that would include the key details of a case such as: academic School, academic level (C, I, H or M), date outcome agreed and a brief statement to note how the decision was reached. Nothing would be held on the student's file."

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: To state in the procedure that if Panel members of an academic offences hearing learn that a student was previously involved in a suspected case where the outcome

was 'no case to answer', that this must not be taken into account/allowed to prejudice the decision of the Panel for the current case.

- 5.1.7 Clarification of the requirement of Schools to provide subsequent follow-up support and guidance to a student found guilty of committing an academic offence: The current procedure requires that students who have been found guilty of an academic offence must be provided with additional guidance and support to help enhance their understanding of academic offences. QASG had been asked to consider whether this requirement should be made more explicit to ensure the student has understood the guidance. Members expressed concern that the policy and procedure should not be too prescriptive in this regard and did not support Proposal 10. The following action was agreed:

ACTION: EDQ to send an email to School Academic Offences Panel chairs and remind them of the current guidance and expectations.

- 5.1.8 Self plagiarism - The academic offence of self-plagiarism in relation to reassessment and repeating students: This issue linked to repetition requirements and was discussed under item 3.2 above which details QASG's discussion and recommendations in this area.

- 5.1.9 How students are informed about the academic offence of self-plagiarism (as defined by BU): See 5.1.8 above.

ACTION: EDQ to amend *6H – Academic Offences: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards* to reflect the recommendations for change in sections 5.1.2-5.1.9 above for the 2013-14 academic year subject to ASC approval.

6 **AOB**

- 6.1 None.

7 **Date of next meeting**

- 7.1 The next meeting would take place on 28th May 2013.