**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**

**Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 23rd March 2015**

**Present:** C Symonds (Chair), P Alexander, A Chapman, R Chater, J De Vekey, E Mayo-Ward, H Mitchell, A Mercer, C Merrett, K Phalp, R Rogers (Clerk)

**In attendance:** M Frampton (observing)

**Apologies:** B Dyer, J Freeman, G Jordan, S McLawrence, P Ryland, N Silvennoinen

**1 Minutes of the meeting held on 14th january 2015**

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

**2 Matters arising**

2.1 **Minute 5.5 (11.07.14) - Management of mid-Level assessment outcomes for incoming mobility students** - Following the changes proposed by QASG relating to the management of mid-Level assessment outcomes for incoming mobility students, this would be considered by AAT for feedback prior to implementation. **Completed** – (Update 14.01.15) A final template letter with provisional marks was circulated to AAMs from Academic Partnerships. No further feedback was received.

2.2 **Minute 4.3 (14.01.15) QASG membership update for 2014-15** – QASG academic representatives to propose three Faculty academic representatives (to the Chair of QASG) with the assumption that normally 2 of them would attend QASG. **Ongoing** – (Update 23.03.15) Still awaiting confirmation from Faculty of Media and Communication (1 member confirmed).

2.3 **Minute 4.3 (14.01.15) Confirmation of Terms of Reference** - EDQ to update the Terms of Reference to reflect these changes for ASC approval. **Completed** – This was updated and submitted to ASC (February 2015).

2.4 **Minute 5.2 (14.01.15) - Ratification of revised 9B – Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group: Procedure** - EDQ to republish *9B – Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG): Procedure* to the *ARPP* subject to the amendment as per 5.2 and to update other *ARPP* documents to reflect the changes in QAEG independence and to inform Faculties and relevant departments of the change. **Completed** – Relevant ARPP documents have been updated and an email circulated to Faculties and Partners (16.01.15).

2.5 **Minute 6.2.3 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - Student Processes and EDQ to determine how the process of Late Submission will be best managed for the purposes of Assessment Board reporting. **Ongoing**

2.6 **Minute 6.4.1 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - EDQ to further clarify in *ARPP 6L* that where students are reassessed they must achieve a formal element mark that is sufficient to ensure they pass the unit overall. **Ongoing**

2.7 **Minute 6.5.1 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - EDQ to clarify in existing guidance in ARPP 6L that partially failed units should be chosen over fully failed units. **Ongoing**

2.8 **Minute 6.7.1 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - EDQ to liaise with HSS regarding the Faculty’s existing Dip HE provision. **Completed** – EDQ has met with the relevant people in HSS to amend their Assessment Regulations.

2.9 **Minute 6.9.1 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - Student Processes to update QASG if Unit-E could highlight all formal elements requiring reassessment during 2014-15. **Completed** – It will not be possible to alter the Board report for the 2014-15 academic year. Guidance has been produced by Student Administration on sorting Board reports.

2.10 **Minute 6.9.1 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - EDQ to liaise with AAMs and to include reference to formal elements requiring reassessment within relevant staff development sessions. **Completed** – AAMs were informed of this by EDQ via AAT (11.02.15).

2.11 **Minute 6.10 (14.01.15) – Review of assessment regulations and associated procedural change** - EDQ to advise the relevant School/Faculty that Foundation degree students should meet the entry requirements to the receiving programme before progressing. **Completed** – The relevant School/Faculty was informed by EDQ (04.02.15).

2.12 **Minute 9.1 (14.01.15) – Assessment Practice update** - EDQ to request updates from School/Faculties on assessment practice. **Completed** – This was included on the March QASG agenda.

2.13 **Minute 9.1 (14.01.15) – Assessment Practice update** - QASG to send any feedback on enhancing Assessment and Feedback to the Chair of QASG. **Ongoing** – QASG agreed this should remain ongoing to allow new Faculty members the opportunity to provide feedback.

It was noted that mid-cycle feedback should be managed effectively and in a timely manner, for example mid unit, to ensure students had undertaken an appropriate level of learning before providing feedback. Whilst SUBU advised that giving feedback was perceived as a positive process by students, QASG raised some concerns that students do not always understand the process. It was noted that this was being considered by the Student Voice Committee.

**3.0 UPDATES ON RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY QASG TO ASC AND SENATE**

3.1 An update on the recommendations made by QASG for ASC and Senate were noted.

**4 QASG MEMBERSHIP UPDATE FOR 2014-15**

4.1 The new Faculty members were welcomed to QASG. Geli Roushan would no longer attend QASG. QASG would like to record their gratitude to Geli for her involvement with the committee.

**5 REVISED *FRAMEWORK FOR HE QUALIFICATIONS OF UK DEGREE-AWARDING BODIES***

5.1 In October 2014, *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* was published as part of *the UK Quality Code for Higher Education*. This version brought together *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (*FHEQ*) previously published in August 2008 and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (*FQHEIS*).

5.2 The key component of the document was *The Qualification Descriptors* (Levels 4 – 8), the text of the descriptors are unchanged. Changes included restructuring of the text; updated terminology and the addition of the *FQHEIS* and additional information pertaining to Scottish provision. QASG was advised that the University could be assured of continuous alignment to *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (October 2014) and no further action was required.

5.3 QASG heard that there had been a number of recent consultations from the *Quality Assurance Agency* to which EDQ or the Graduate School had responded to, as follows:

* *International Students Studying in the UK: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers;*
* *Foundation Degree Characteristics;*
* *Master's Degree Characteristics ;*
* *Doctoral Degree Characteristics;*
* *Qualifications Awarded by Two or More Degree-Awarding Bodies Characteristics;*

5.5 A further consultation led by the *Higher Education Funding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* entitled: *The future of quality assessment in higher education* was published earlier this year. A response prepared by EDQ in consultation with staff across the University was submitted. QASG was advised that the Vice Chancellor had discussed the University’s response at a consultation meeting following the submission date, and the Head of Quality and Academic Partnerships would be attending a further meeting at the end of March. It was agreed that, if appropriate, it would be useful for QASG to have oversight of the University response at the April meeting.

**ACTION**: EDQ to add the University’s response to: The *future of quality assessment in higher education* consultation to the April Agenda of QASG.

**6 EDQ ANNUAL REPORT: OVERVIEW OF KEY ACTIVITIES**

6.1 Following completion of each academic year, EDQ reports annually on its quality assurance and enhancement activity to the Academic Standards Committee (ASC). The EDQ annual report brings together a number of key areas of activity, including:

* Evaluation Events: Review, approval, closure and modifications;
* Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies;
* Annual Monitoring and Central ARFM Audit;
* External Examining;
* Academic Offences.

6.2 **Evaluation Events: Review, approval, closure and modifications**

6.2.1 There were no issues raised but the ongoing review of the evaluation event process was discussed. QASG heard that work was ongoing to streamline the evaluation event process and create further efficiencies. It was anticipated that the new Student Records System (SITS) would help streamline processes in the future. It was identified that terminology may require updating as the process had evolved, for example, the purpose of the Design Phase was no longer to design provision but to scrutinise the proposal prior to the evaluation event. It was also added that certain aspects of the initial process sometimes held up the process of considering key areas of the curriculum and ways of streamlining/decoupling certain aspects of the process were under consideration. QASG was invited to provide any other feedback to EDQ to help streamline the current evaluation event process.

**ACTION**: QASG to provide feedback to EDQ to help streamline the current evaluation event process.

6.3 **Annual Monitoring and Central ARFM Audit**

6.3.1 QASG noted the issues which had arisen as part of the central ARFM audit following the 2013-14 monitoring cycle. Concerns had been identified but these had been raised with the relevant School/Faculty and were now being addressed although some remained specifically late/incomplete submission and timeliness of consideration at Faculty level of a significant minority of ARFMs.

6.3.2 With regards to *5C – Monitoring of Taught Academic Provision and ARFMs: Policy and Procedure*, it was identified that a link from *ARPP 5C* to the Terms of Reference for Framework Management Team meetings would be helpful. The actual Terms of Reference would also need updating in light of recent changes within the University.

**ACTION**: EDQ to update the Terms of Reference for Framework Management Team meetings and provide a link within *ARPP 5C*.

6.4 **External Examining**

6.4.1 QASG noted the current number of External Examiners (EE) within *Tables 6a* and *6b* and questioned the rationale for including the level of detail by *Mission Group* and *Current Status*. It was agreed that EDQ would clarify if this level of detail was still relevant.

**ACTION**: EDQ to clarify if the level of detail recorded within *Tables 6a* and *6b* was still relevant.

6.4.2 Attendance at the EE seminar was discussed and QASG heard that feedback received from EEs was positive and it had been useful for supporting them in their roles. QASG heard that further advice relating to the afternoon session of the EE seminar would be provided. More information had also been incorporated by the Learning Technology team for online support during the morning of the EE seminar, but it was noted that more work needed to be done to support EEs at programme and unit level where variances existed. As a result of the discussion it was agreed that the ongoing action from the 2012-13 EDQ annual report: ‘Schools ensure that relevant support is provided to all EEs who need to access assessments online’ should remain.

6.4.3 The increase in ‘unresolved issues’ was raised. There were no notable themes outlining a clear and common rationale for these. Faculties would be advised via the EDQ annual report to investigate this.

6.4.4 Sections 6.9 and 6.10 of the report allows Schools/Faculties and Partners, via their respective Quality Reports, to remit themes arising from EE reports to QASG for further consideration. These particular sections (6.9 and 9.10) are not presented to ASC, but any areas that require ASC discussion based on the information provided would be included for oversight by ASC. It was noted that many areas were already being discussed within Schools/Faculties and other committees or added to relevant actions plans, for example S/FQR action plans or ESEPs.

6.4.5 The following areas required further discussion by QASG, and whilst there were no issues to remit to ASC, a number of actions have arisen as an outcome of this discussion:

* Ease of access for EEs to online materials – EDQ would feed this into TEL Strategy Forum (see also 6.4.2 above). See update below.

**Update following QASG**: Following a discussion with the Senior Learning Technologist in Academic Services, any issues relating to online access for EEs, variance in online assessments across units and any other online issues should be communicated directly to the Faculty’s dedicated Learning Technologist. Raising these issues via TEL Strategy Forum would not be the correct mechanism for addressing them.

* An exit strategy to support the remaining students on closing provision – Whilst it was noted that this was for the School/Faculty to manage effectively, EDQ would check the guidance within *4D – Framework and Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Policy and Procedure*;
* Standard External Examiner Response form – Bridgwater College uses a standard External Examiner Response form which is deemed to be good practice. EDQ to add this to the next QASG agenda for further consideration.
* Unit mark statistics sheets being made available to EEs in advance of the Board – QASG agreed it would be inappropriate to send details of any marks which had not been checked to EEs in advance of the Board.

**ACTIONS**:

1. EDQ to check the guidance within *ARPP* *4D* relating to supporting students following programme closure
2. EDQ to add Bridgwater College’s standard External Examiner Response form to the April QASG agenda for further consideration

6.5 **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies** / **Academic Offences**

6.5.1 No issues were raised relating to either of these sections.

**7 ASSESSMENT PRACTICE UPDATE**

7.1 During 2013-14, QASG was provided with an update on Schools’ approaches to the following: peer review of draft assessment briefs; use of assessment brief templates; use of School-wide assessment feedback form; mid-year progress review for failing students. Updates on these areas were provided to QASG for discussion. Notably, these were considered in relation to NSS scores, particularly in the areas of Assessment and Feedback.

7.2 SUBU advised that students had had the opportunity to provide feedback on these areas via the Student Opinion Survey. Overall, students were generally more positive than in previous surveys in response to questions relating to assessment and feedback, particularly students at Levels I and H, as well as postgraduate taught and research students. Whilst Level C students were mostly satisfied (although less so than students at other levels), it had been noted at QASG that further work was required to help Level C students better understand these areas. Key common themes were as follows:

* *The following features feature of assessment design/feedback should be retained*
* Providing detailed, constructive feedback with suggestions for how to improve;
* Providing clear assessment briefs, criteria and information on expectations, especially when included in lectures and unit guides;
* Providing feedback within agreed timescales.
* *Assessment design/feedback should make wider use of the following practices:*
* More detailed and constructive feedback which suggests how to improve;
* Clearer assignment briefs, past examples, criteria and better communication from teaching staff about assignments;
* More contact time with teaching staff to discuss assignments and marks.
* *Assessment design/feedback should reduce and eliminate the following practices:*
  + Vague or illegible feedback with limited or no constructive criticism / suggestions for how to improve;
  + Unclear, vague complicated briefs or briefs with mistakes on;
* Late feedback outside of agreed timescales.

7.3 The Faculty of Health and Social Sciences were reinforcing the use of generic assessment criteria in online feedback alongside their use of Turnitin. If other Faculties were interested in developing this approach, they should contact their Learning Technologist.

7.4 In relation to mid-year progress reviews, the Faculties outlined their process for managing this activity. The process was deemed to be useful and helpful to better prepare failing students. SUBU advised that student feedback about this was also positive.

**8 *6J – MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES INCLUDING EXTENSIONS: POLICY AND PROCEDURE***

8.1 **Short Term Sickness Notification**

8.1.1 During November 2013, the process of Short Term Sickness Notification was added to *6J – Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and Procedure*. An update on this process was requested by ASC (May 2014) and no concerns were identified. Following the main summer Assessment Board period, EDQ contacted Schools/Faculties for an update where again no issues were identified and the process continued into the 2014-15 academic year. An update and feedback on the Short Term Sickness Notification was once more presented to QASG. No issues were raised and take up has remained very low.

8.2 **Appeals and Mitigating Circumstances in conjunction with Online and Dissertation Support**

8.2.1 During 2013-14, a small number of appeals were received at the Central Review Stage relating to concerns arising from online and dissertation support. Some of the Local Stage responses received included advising students submitting on appeal on this basis that they should have submitted mitigating circumstances. There is not a consistent approach to this across the University. *6J – Mitigating Circumstances including extensions: Policy and* *Procedure* does not specifically document difficulties with dissertation support as grounds for requesting extensions/assessment board consideration, However as mitigating circumstances are defined as ‘taking into account of circumstances which were not within the foresight and/or control of the student’, one interpretation is that a lack or perceived lack of support may meet this definition..

8.2.2 It was recognised that the dissertation and support for this activity was a key part of the students’ journey. EDQ had requested information from Faculties and Partners relating to this and feedback provided outlined their support mechanisms. These appeared to be appropriate, however in the event of an appeal, issues would be considered via the Mitigating Circumstances or Appeals process providing they were evidenced. It was agreed that expectations must be managed and EDQ would continue to review this in light of appeals received.

**9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

9.1 There was no any other business.

**10 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of QASG would be held on Monday 27th April 2015.