

Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)

Minutes from the meeting held on

Wednesday 15 March 2023

Present

David Ashton, Academic Registrar – Chair
Dr Lorraine Craig, Faculty of Engineering representative
Prof Richard Green, Business School representative
Laura Lane, Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School
Shangyi Liu, ICU PGT Representation Chair
Prof Jonathan Mestel, Senior College Consul
Rebecca Middleton, Faculty of Natural Sciences representative
Prof Jason Riley, Faculty of Engineering representative
Claire Stapley, CLCC/CHERS representative
Dr Mike Tennant, Faculty of Natural Sciences representative
Karen Tweddle, Business School representative
Judith Webster, Head of Academic Services
Chengning Yao, ICU PGR Representation Chair
Jason Zheng, ICU Deputy President (Education)
Scott Tucker, Deputy Director (Academic Quality and Standards) – Secretary

In Attendance

Leila Guerra, Vice Dean (Education), Business School
Diptasri Basu, ICU Policy and Research Officer

Apologies

Dr Clemens Brechtelsbauer, Chair of Programmes Committee
Martin Lupton, Faculty of Medicine representative.
Dr Jeffrey Vernon, Faculty of Medicine representative

1. Welcome, apologies and announcements

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and terms of reference

2.1 The Committee confirmed the minutes of 8 February 2023 as an accurate record. QAEC.2022.34

3. Matters arising from the minutes

3.1 No matters arising.

4. Update on QAEC actions

4.1 The Committee noted the updated action list. QAEC.2022.35

4.2 *Policy for the Award of Posthumous and Aegrotat Postgraduate Research Degrees (6.1.8 refers)*

It was noted that the Policy was approved by Senate, subject to final recommendations.

4.3 *MEQ 2022-23 UG and PG Autumn Term results summary (8.2.2 refers)*

It was noted that module level quantitative data was being distributed to Module Leaders or named lecturers. An update on the Spring MEQ would be sent in the week commencing 20 March and Prof Jason Riley kindly offered to check the draft communication before it was circulated.

Action: Secretary

5. Designation of Imperial Institutes

5.1 The Committee considered a proposal to amend the current department values held in Banner for PGT programmes delivered by Imperial Institutes. QAEC.2022.36

5.2 It was reported that there were a number of PGT programmes delivered by institutes within associated departments. The current Banner/CRM department designation was currently configured to the department within the institute’s faculty, rather than recognising the institute as the departmental value. It was proposed that the department designations in Banner should be amended as follows:

Faculty	Current Banner Department	Programme(s)	Code(s)	Proposed Banner Department
FoE	Mechanical Engineering	Sustainable Energy Futures (MSc 1YFT)	H9A1.3	Energy Futures Lab
FoNS	Physics	Security and Resilience: Science and Technology (MSc, PGDip, PGCert – FT/PT suite)	F3C12.2 F3C24.2 F3SD12.1 F3SD24.1 F3SR.1 F3SR24.1 F3SR24.1	Institute for Security Science and Technology
FoE	Chemical Engineering	Molecular Engineering (MRes 1YFT)	H803.2	Institute of Molecular Science Engineering

5.3 The Committee noted that whilst the institutes were not recognised as departmental values in Banner/CRM currently, they were recognised distinctly in the College's financial systems (ICIS). This meant that for financial planning purposes, these institutes were separate entities with their own financial planning and student intake targets. The current set up meant that there was a misalignment between the Banner/CRM data for these institutes and the College financial planning data/model.

5.4 Questions were raised pre-meeting from the Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) and Vice Provost (Research and Enterprise) regarding the scope of the proposed changes. There were concerns that, if the changes resulted in greater ownership by institutes instead of the named departments, such that institutes would be required to take on many of the roles and processes currently handled by departments, that this would be a distraction from the institutes' primary purpose in leading cross-College research priorities.

It was clarified to members that the proposal was only to change the department value field in Banner and would not mean that the institutes in question would become departments in practice. Departments in which the Institutes currently sit would still be accountable for the PGT programmes.

5.5 The Committee agreed that changing the status of institutes in Banner may have wider implications, particularly on quality assurance processes and reporting mechanisms, including external data returns. The Committee agreed to the changes in principle but required further assurance that relevant parties had been consulted on the proposed changes and that any knock-on effects had been identified and discussed.

5.6 It was agreed that the Secretary would ask the Head of Admissions (Registry) to explore any wider implications with relevant colleagues and liaise with the Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) before reporting back to the Committee.

Action: Secretary

6. Modality of Research Degree Final Thesis *Vivas*

6.1 The Committee considered a policy to offer the option of remote or hybrid final thesis research degree *vivas*. QAEC.2022.37

6.2 In Autumn 2022, the Graduate School was asked to establish a Working Group to explore whether the College should continue to offer the option of remote (where all participants attend the examination remotely) or hybrid (where some participants attend on-site and in-person and others attend remotely) final thesis research degree *vivas* on a permanent basis, following their introduction as a temporary measure during the pandemic. The Working Group considered feedback from Departments, received during a Summer 2022 consultation exercise, the views from existing students as well as postdocs who had experience of participating in a remote *viva* either at Imperial or elsewhere.

6.2 It was noted that the proposed policy was broadly comparable with the current Regulations for the Awards of MPhil and PhD:

Regulation 14.1.10 - The viva voce examination will normally be conducted at one of the College campuses with both examiners present. The College may, however, exceptionally agree that the examination be conducted elsewhere and/or remotely via video conferencing facilities if there are circumstances which make this expedient. The positive consent of the student should be obtained for the viva to be conducted in these exceptional circumstances.

However, it was noted that a distinct difference was that the regulations referred to the 'positive consent of the student' whereas the policy referred to a 'student-led' process:

The case to hold a remote or hybrid final thesis viva would normally be student-led and must be approved by the Director of PG Studies.

It was noted that many of the scenarios set out in the policy whereby a remote *viva* might be considered, such as where travel arrangements or medical conditions would make it difficult for external examiners to attend in person, would not be the result of a student request.

6.3 The Committee approved the Policy and agreed that the reference to a 'student-led' process was removed, and clarification was provided that 'student consent' was required, to mirror the current regulations.

Action: Secretary

6.4 The Committee agreed that students should be encouraged to attend in person and that a log of the reasons for remote *vivas* to be held was kept in order that the Policy could be reviewed.

6.5 It was noted that the Working Group would next develop guidance for staff and students which will include operational information as well as the application of the policy.

7. Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure

7.1 The Committee considered two proposals for in-year updates to the Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure.

QAEC.2022.38

7.2 The Committee considered Proposal 1: an updated definition of academic misconduct in response to the proliferation of artificial intelligence language models.

7.2.1 Following pre-meeting feedback from the Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience), the Head of Academic Services made some final updates to the Policy and Procedure, which were tabled at the meeting.

- 7.2.2 The ICU Deputy President (Education) agreed that, given the rapid advancement in AI language models, the proposed changes should be implemented in-year. Further clarity was sought as to whether AI language models could be used as a tool to synthesise information. It was noted that the Policy had not been updated to relate academic misconduct to quantifiable terms of work generated via AI, and that academic judgement in the context of assessment marking criteria would take precedent.
- 7.2.3 It was noted that two Working Groups had been set up by the Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) to explore AI language models in the context of academic integrity and academic innovation.
- 7.2.4 The Committee approved the references to artificial intelligence language models within the Policy with immediate effect. The updated Policy would be published and communicated to the wider College.

Action: Secretary

- 7.3 The Committee considered Proposal 2: the introduction of a trial process to streamline the consideration of cases where a student had admitted having committed moderate or severe academic misconduct.

- 7.3.1 Under the current procedure, following a request for a response from a student in relation to an allegation of a moderate or severe academic misconduct, or a subsequent allegation of a further minor offence, a case would be referred to a central panel for consideration. This panel, comprising three staff members outside the student's department, would be charged with deciding if the case was proven, and if so, agreeing a penalty. This process would apply if the student admitted the allegation or not.

It was proposed to trial a process by which a student who had admitted an allegation was considered by one experienced panel member, who would agree a sanction in line with the guidance. This would enable these cases to be completed more quickly which was beneficial to the student. The student would still retain the ability to appeal the sanction, if they considered that it had been applied out of line with College procedures, if they considered that there was prejudice or bias in the decision-making process, or if, for good reason, there was mitigating circumstances that could not be brought to the decision-makers attention at the time the sanction was agreed.

- 7.3.2 It was noted that the proposal was not against OIA good practice guidelines and was carried out by other providers across the sector.
- 7.3.3 Committee members, including faculty representatives, were in support of the proposal and agreed that this would be beneficial for students. It was acknowledged that there should be a named Department member(s) to act as a nominee for the experienced panel member, should they be unavailable to carry out the required duties.

7.3.4 The Committee approved the proposal with immediate effect, which would be published and communicated to the wider College.

Action: Secretary

7.3.5 It was agreed that the Student Casework Team, with the panel members that had considered cases under this trial, would evaluate the outcomes prior to the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year, and make recommendations to the Committee as to whether to adopt the change of process permanently.

Action: Judith Webster

7.3.6 The Chair reiterated that the Student Casework Team was still under resourced and that this was being addressed through the upcoming planning round.

8. Approach to Grading

8.1 The Committee considered a proposal for a new approach to grading in the Business School for PGT programmes.

QAEC.2022.39

8.2 The following system was proposed:

- i. Examiners would mark coursework and examinations on the usual 0-100% scale. These marks would be returned to students and no scaling would ever be performed.
- ii. The overall module grade (e.g. A, B, C, D and F = Fail) would be assigned to each student based on the weighted average of the coursework and examination marks, but where the cut-offs would be determined by the examiners, subject to certain constraints (see point 6 below) on the cut-offs between these grades.
- iii. The grades could be mapped to a numerical score. In the US, this would be the Grade Point Average (GPA) where typically A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1 and F = 0. However, this could be adjusted for the College so that, for example, A = 75, B = 65, C = 55, D = 45, F = 25. A module would then have an average numerical score across the cohort. For example, if a module had 10 students who collectively obtained 2 A's, 4 B's, 3 C's and 1 F, the average score for the module would be $((2 \times 75) + (4 \times 65) + (3 \times 55) + (1 \times 25)) / 10 = 60\%$.
- iv. While coursework and examination marks could be reported to students (either informally or formally), only the overall module grade (either the letter grade or its numerical translation) would be officially reported by the examiners to the College and only this would appear on a student's transcript.
- v. These overall module grades would then be used to determine whether the student obtains a distinction, merit or pass for the programme as a whole. The example numbers above could be used within the Single Set of Regulations so that a student with half of their ECTS at A and half at B would receive a distinction (weighted average mark of 70%). D-graded modules could be compensated, subject to the usual rules on the maximum number of credits receiving compensation and the student's weighted average.

- vi. Marking to a curve could be easily enforced using the marking scheme, which would set out the requirements for a student to achieve a mark at Pass, Merit and Distinction Level (or Fail), taking account of what was stated for a student to achieve the learning outcomes.

The Business School reported that the proposed system would be transparent and consistent, whilst maintain standards and engender organisational efficiency.

8.3 Some of the drivers behind the proposed changes were reported as follows:

- External examiner feedback indicated that there had been a significant number of distinctions awarded each academic year.
- Many local algorithms and scaling practices had developed to counter this, which the Business School and College was keen to move away from.
- In the US, it was common practice to 'mark on a curve' and academics in the Business School had significant experience in this.
- Student feedback had indicated a preference for this method of marking and this was often the expectation of prospective employers.

8.4 The Business School representatives highlighted that some other UK providers use this method of grading, which does not breach any English or UK wide external regulations.

8.5 It was noted that the Business School already use a Dean's List to recognise the top 10% of students.

8.6 The Chair made the following opening comments in response:

- The College should not be concerned about a high proportion of good degree outcomes, given the general College entry requirements
- The College should not use a US grading system for a UK degree that falls under the Office for Students
- Learning outcomes, marking criteria and assessment components should be regularly reviewed to ensure that programmes are constructively aligned

8.7 The Committee agreed that scaling could be appropriate in instances where an assessment turned out to be too challenging or too easy. However, it felt that marking on a curve would essentially fulfil the same role as scaling, which the Business School had declared an eagerness to avoid.

8.8 The following concerns were raised by Committee members:

- It could be argued that if a cohort scores extremely highly across the board in a specific assessment component, and these outcomes are disproportionate to other assessments on the programme, the component in question is poorly designed. However, marking on a curve could remove the need to address the assessment design as the outcomes would be consistent with other current and

historical assessments; and *vice versa*, if a cohort scores extremely low across the board.

- It was fundamentally unfair that a student who performed well within a strong cohort could receive a lower mark compared to an identical assessment undertaken by a student in a previous year. This was a common concern with normative assessment practices.

8.9 The following questions were raised by Committee members:

- What would appear on the transcript – module marks and/or grades?
- Could standard deviation be added to transcripts?
- When would students receive their mark and their subsequent grade?
- How would students from other faculties who are taking Business School modules be affected?
- For clarity, could a translation table be produced alongside the marking criteria?
- How and when would Banner need to be developed to accommodate the proposed changes, noting that this was not currently scheduled in the SLAB roadmap?
- How would the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study need to be adapted? Academic appeals would need to be managed appropriately as eligibility reviews of appeals need to be based on clear School guidance.

8.10 Despite the concerns raised, the Committee felt that there was merit in the Business School modelling previous academic years' data in the first instance to establish how these data translate to a curve, before a decision was made by the Committee as to whether a pilot grading scheme could be rolled out. The EDU should also be consulted for further advice.

Action: Secretary, Business School Representatives

9. Degree Outcomes Statement

9.1 The Committee considered the updated College Degree Outcomes statement, covering data up to 2021-22. QAEC.2022.40

9.2 That the College's existing Degree Outcomes Statement had been updated to include completion data from 2021-22 and developments from the last academic year. Relevant extracts from the College's TEF submission, compiled by the Strategic Planning Division, were also included to provide additional context. The Secretary thanked Louise Hanger, Education Evaluation Manager, who provided the updated data sets.

9.3 It was noted that the data in Table 1 was rounded to the nearest 5 to follow HESA's rounding and suppression methodology.

9.4 The Committee recommended the updated College Degree Outcomes statement to Senate, subject to the Fair Assessment hyperlink link being added.

Action: Secretary

10. Undergraduate External Examiner Report Summary

10.1 The Committee considered the College UG External Examiner Report Summary 2021-22, which covered BSc, MSci, BEng, MEng, iBSc and MBBS programmes, as well as Horizons/I-Explore modules offered by the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication and BPES/I-Explore modules in the Imperial College Business School. QAEC.2022.41

10.2 It was noted that reports were very positive. External examiners concurred that the programmes were in line with expectations and standards set out in the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and PSRBs. Student performance was comparable with and often exceeded that of other providers.

10.3 Responses to the overall confidence statements were noted as follows:

- 100% agreed that “The degree awarding body is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements.”
- 98% agreed that “The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the programme and is conducted in line with the College's policies and regulations.”
- 99% agreed that “The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other degree awarding bodies of which you have experience.”

10.4 Whilst the summary report highlighted that the College could be assured of the quality and standards of its programmes, there were isolated cases where improvements could be made, which were addressed in individual responses from departments:

- Programme schedule information, such as when meetings would occur and when work would be completed, could be improved. There were also some issues accessing different platforms across the College used for maintaining and disseminating programme documentation
- Improvements could be made regarding the balance of individual programmes and modules, although most externals commented that the curriculum review had produced improved programmes.
- Of concern was that some examiners reported that they did not receive assessment briefs for all modules under consideration and reported that in these areas there was a correlation with issues during the assessment, marking and moderation.
- When questioned about appropriate grade boundaries, concern was raised about potential grade inflation, citing the increase in top grades awarded and that lack of availability within the scale to differentiate by classification beyond the 70% band. Externals urged programme teams to be clear about their processes and the thresholds and the College was keeping abreast of any unexplained changes via student outcome reporting at Senate.

10.5 Of note throughout the reports were concerns about the assessment load on students across the programme as well as the expectations of individual assessments in some areas. The concern regarding the workload of students was also expressed in comments relating the relative workloads between modules and levels, with only 74% of examiners responding positively that this was fair and equitable. It was noted that assessment was an ongoing theme raised in reports and as a result the College had set up a working group to address assessment concerns.

11. Sub-Committees

11.1 Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

11.1.1 The Committee considered the report from the PRQC meeting held on 8 February 2023 QAEC.2022.42

11.1.2 i. **Modality of Final Thesis Research Degree Vivas Working Group [PRQC.2022.19.20]**

It was noted that this was considered under QAEC Item 6, Paper QAEC.2022.37

ii. **New PhD programme proposal [PRQC.2022.22]**

QAEC approved a new research degree programme 'Research in Security and Resilience' from the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and the Institute for Security Science and Technology. The Banner department field would be the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. The programme could now be set up and marketed without a caveat.

iii. **PhD programme withdrawal request [PRQC.2022.23]**

QAEC approved the withdrawal of the PhD programme 'Joint Research with USP Home USP' (JPUSP.2) requested by the Department of Aeronautics. This programme ran as part of a collaborative arrangement which had now ended, and all students had been awarded.

iv. **Graduate Teaching Assistant Framework [PRQC.2022.08]**

QAEC approved changes to the GTA framework to permit students who had previously undertaken formal training on teaching and learning to request to be exempted from the compulsory College GTA training. Each request would be reviewed to ensure the experience or qualifications met the required standard.

QAEC was informed that the Director of the Graduate School had been asked to form a group to review GTA pay to ensure that pay rates are appropriate and consistent across the College. The results of this work would be incorporated into the framework.

11.1.3 It was agreed that the QAEC Secretary would liaise with the PRQC Secretary regarding the PRQC report outcomes.

Action: Secretary

12 Admissions Subcommittee

12.1 The Committee noted the draft minutes from the ASC meeting held on 6 February 2023. QAEC.2022.43

12.2 It was noted that an Admissions Complaints Log had been set up, which would be used to systematically report Admissions Complaints data to ASC, and QAEC where appropriate.

13. Module Evaluation Questionnaire

13.1 The Committee approved the MEQ 2022-23 UG and PG dates as follows: QAEC.2022.44

Term	Opening Date	Closing Date
Autumn	7 December 2022	10 January 2023
Spring	23 March 2023	1 May 2023
Summer	23 May 2023	20 June 2023

13.2 The dates were in line with previous module evaluation surveys. It was noted that the dates of the MEQ were under review and consideration by the MEQ Working Group.

14. Chair's Actions

14.1 Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering

QAEC.2022.45

The Committee ratified modifications to the following programmes in the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering:

- HG65 BEng Electronic and Information Engineering
- GH56 MEng Electronic and Information Engineering
- HG6M MEng Electronic and Information Engineering with a Year Abroad
- H6N2 MEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering with Management
- H600 BEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering
- H604 MEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering
- H601 MEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering with a Year Abroad

15. Dates of next meeting

The Committee noted the dates of the remaining QAEC meetings to be held in 2022-23 (all 10:05-12:00):

- 26 April 2023 (also reporting to Senate on 10 May 2023)
- 7 June 2023 (reporting to Senate on 28 June 2023)