

QUALITY ASSURANCE & ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (QAEC)
held on
Thursday 25th April 2013

Present:

Professor Debra Humphris, Pro Rector (Education) - Chair
Dr Simon Archer, College Tutor
Mr Doug Hunt, ICU Deputy President (Education)
Dr Paul Lickiss, Department of Chemistry
Professor Omar Matar, Department of Chemical Engineering
Dr David McPhail, Deputy Director of the Graduate School
Mr Ebrahim Mohamed, Imperial College Business School
Professor Sue Smith, Faculty of Medicine
Professor Richard Thompson, College Consul for Natural Sciences
Mr Nigel Wheatley, Academic Registrar
Professor Denis Wright, Director of Student Affairs

In attendance:

Professor Peter Cheung for the Faculty of Engineering
Mr Chris Harris, Quality Assurance & Enhancement Manager, Faculty of Medicine
Mr Dan Smith, Management Trainee
Professor Alan Spivey for the Faculty of Natural Sciences
Ms Sophie White, Senior Assistant Registrar (Secretary)

Apologies:

Professor Andrew George, Director of the Graduate School
Professor Glenda Gillies, Department of Medicine
Professor Nigel Gooderham, Senior College Consul
Professor Dot Griffiths, Imperial College Business School
Professor Robin Leatherbarrow, College Consul for Natural Sciences

Minutes

1. Welcome and Apologies

Professor Humphris welcomed members to the meeting and apologies, as listed above, were noted.

2. QAEC minutes

The minutes from the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee held on 5th March 2013 were approved.

2.1 Matters arising from the minutes

A list of actions from previous QAEC meetings was received and it was noted that all outstanding actions were in the process of being resolved. **QAEC/2012/80**

- 2.1.1 Further to minute 11.2, it was noted that the External Examiner for Music Technology had been appointed.
- 2.1.2 Further to minute 12.2, it was noted that all departments had been asked to link to the Union's "You Said, We Did" campaign.
- 2.1.3 Further to minute 12.3, it was noted that the UG and PG SOLE Overall Course questions had been amended and all departments had been alerted to the new requirement to provide a departmental summary.
- 2.2 As requested at the last meeting, a breakdown of minor cheating offences by department was received. It was agreed that the report should be sent to all departments for their information. **QAEC/2012/81**

Action: Sophie White

- 2.3 It was noted that the paper concerning amendments to the Procedure for the Review of Existing Master's Courses would be made available at a future meeting pending the outcome of the current round of reviews.

3. QAA Institutional Audit: Internal Mid-Cycle Review

The Committee noted the latest developments following the 2010 Institutional Audit.

- 3.1 The Committee received the latest version of the College's 2010 Institutional Audit Action Plan. It was noted that there were a number of items still outstanding. **QAEC/2012/82**
- 3.2 Professor Humphris reported that, due to changes to the QAA audit process, the QAA no longer required the College to undertake a mid-cycle review. However, the College Management Board had agreed that an internal mid-cycle review should take place to ensure that the College remained focused on addressing the recommendations made by the QAA as part of their 2010 Institutional Audit.
- 3.3 The Committee received the internal mid-cycle review and noted that the report would be presented to Management Board in May. The mid-cycle review would also be included as part of the evidence base for the next institutional review. **QAEC/201282a**
- 3.4 It was noted that a significant amount of work had been undertaken to address the recommendations from the QAA and that the following four (of eight) recommendations had now been fully addressed:

Recommendation 1 (Advisable): *Ensure that Senate, or the relevant committee reporting to it, is provided with sufficient information on external examiners' reports to discharge responsibility for the oversight of academic standards.*

Recommendation 2 (Advisable): *Consider the appropriateness and use of the Diploma of Imperial College as both an academic award and a 'post nominal' title.*

Recommendation 6 (Desirable): *Extend the existing opportunities for student access to external examiners' reports.*

Recommendation 7 (Desirable): *Strengthen the procedures for checking the quality of*

teaching and learning materials for programmes which have e-learning/blended learning elements.

- 3.4.1** Although it was felt **Recommendation 7** had been fully addressed, it was suggested that it might be appropriate for the College to develop more centralised guidelines in this area to promote enhancement across the College. Professor Omar Matar agreed to raise this with the E-Learning Committee and report back.

Action: Professor Omar Matar

- 3.5** With regards to **Recommendation 4 (Advisable):** *Provide a full and consistent level of student representation in all its deliberative academic committees*, the Committee agreed that this could now be considered addressed as it had been fully addressed at a strategic level and was pending implementation across College. It was expected that there would be student representation on all department education committees by October 2013. It was further agreed that whilst places on the committees could be guaranteed by the College, help was needed from the Students' Union to ensure the places were filled.

- 3.6** With regards to **Recommendation 8 (Desirable):** *Draw more systematically upon the education developments and good practice evident within its faculties and departments to enhance the support for student learning*, the Committee agreed that this could now be considered addressed as it had been discussed at a strategic level and subsequently implemented. Procedures for the approval and oversight of programmes were due to be reviewed by QAEC in summer 2013 and it was intended that these procedures would be implemented by October 2013.

- 3.7** It was noted that action was on-going with regards to **Recommendation 5 (Advisable):** *Review its procedures for the approval and oversight of collaborative provision to ensure that relevant sections of QAA's Code of Practice are taken into account*. It was noted that it had been discussed at a strategic level and a working party had been set up. The working party would be surveying departments on the collaborations and mapping the College's procedures against the new UK Quality Code. Procedures for the approval and oversight of programmes were due to be reviewed by QAEC in summer 2013. It was intended that these procedures would be implemented by October 2013.

- 3.8** It was noted that **Recommendation 3 (Advisable):** *Expedite its review of assessment procedures to ensure consistency in the management of academic standards within and across its degree structures, and ensure parity of treatment for examination candidates*, was the most significant recommendation to come from the audit. This recommendation has been discussed at a strategic level however due to the nature of the recommendation; implementation of a College-wide policy regarding assessment procedures had, until recently, made little progress. It was noted that work was currently in progress to ensure consistency in the management of academic standards and it was expected that College-wide policies regarding the conduct of Board of Examiners' meetings, re-sit opportunities and undergraduate level weightings would be implemented by 2013-14. These items would all be discussed later in the meeting.

- 3.6** It was agreed that six of the eight recommendations could now be considered addressed and that the remaining two (Recommendations 3 and 5) were in progress. It was agreed that the mid-cycle review summary should be updated to reflect this

before it was submitted to the Management Board.

Action: Professor Denis Wright

4. Undergraduate and Postgraduate Master's Re-sit Opportunities

4.1 The Committee considered a paper on the re-sit opportunities available to undergraduate and postgraduate Master's (including MRes) students. **QAEC/2012/83**

4.2 Mr Nigel Wheatley presented the paper and explained that the regulations for undergraduates differed by Faculty but the regulations for postgraduates were common across all Faculties (although some postgraduate courses allowed in-year re-sits, permission for which had to be obtained from Senate first).

4.3 It was noted that the Faculty of Engineering was the only Faculty to use SQT for undergraduate students and that since the paper had been written the Faculty of Engineering had agreed the basic principles of harmonisation for the format and criteria for SQTs across all their departments. Harmonisation would be implemented from 2013-4.

4.4 In Engineering students had to pass all examinations to progress to the subsequent year and were not permitted a formal re-sit in individual examinations. It was noted SQTs were used to rescue those that were likely to pass the following year but who had experienced an unusually bad result in one or two papers only. The SQT mark was capped. Professor Cheung explained that students who failed more than two papers were required to re-sit the year. In this instance the mark was not capped as the students were examined on the whole of the previous year's work.

4.5 Professor Spivey commented this differed from the Faculty of Natural Sciences where students only re-sat those papers they had failed but that the mark in these papers was capped to avoid a situation where a student could potentially improve his/her marks by strategically choosing when and what examinations he/she should work for.

4.6 It was noted that in the Faculty of Medicine, students had one opportunity to re-sit but in the case of the final students had two chances. The additional early re-sit meant that students who had a bad day or who had fallen apart under pressure but who were otherwise sound had an additional opportunity to progress into employment which had a single August entry point.

4.7 It was agreed that, generally, there was commonality across undergraduate examination practices, with Faculties ensuring good students were not disadvantaged whilst ensuring students could not "play the system" in the hope of receiving better marks. It was agreed that the Faculties should look again at their practices and present at the next QAEC a robust response from their Faculty Teaching Committees which demonstrated why there should be differences between the Faculty practices. Senate would then be asked to approve the overarching policy on re-sit opportunities at their June meeting.

Action: Professors Cheung, Spivey and Smith

4.8 It was agreed that there were no discrepancies with postgraduate re-sit opportunity which needed addressing.

5. Conduct of Examination Boards

5.1 The Committee considered guidance on the conduct of Examination Boards for undergraduate students. **QAEC/2012/84**

5.1.1 Professor Humphris explained that further to the QAA's recommendation that the College should "*Expedite its review of assessment procedures to ensure consistency in the management of academic standards within and across its degree structures, and ensure parity of treatment for examination candidates,*", QAEC was now being asked to consider approving a College-wide policy on the conduct of examination boards.

5.1.2 It was noted the proposed policies for undergraduate and postgraduate Master's programmes included a requirement for anonymity which was currently practised at undergraduate level in the Faculty of Medicine but not elsewhere. Generally, it was agreed that anonymity should be introduced across the College but the question of when and how to deal with mitigating circumstances whilst ensuring student anonymity needed to be addressed.

5.2 The Committee considered proposed modifications to the draft policy from the Faculty of Engineering and it was noted that some Faculty of Engineering departments would be trialling these new arrangements in June. **QAEC/2012/85**

5.3 The Committee considered proposed modifications from the Faculty of Natural Sciences. **QAEC/2012/85a**

5.3.1 It was agreed that there was a lot of commonality between these two Faculty approaches and it was agreed that all the Faculties should come back to the next QAEC meeting having got their departments on board with the introduction of anonymity and with a narrative describing how their examination boards would work in practice. The narrative would include a rationale for why there should be differences (if any) between their practice and those of other Faculties.

Action: Professors Cheung, Spivey and Smith

5.4 The Committee received a paper on the conduct of Examination Boards for Postgraduate Master's students. It was agreed that the Graduate School should be asked to consult on the paper with a view to a final paper being submitted for consideration at the May QAEC meeting and a policy being introduced with effect from 2013-4. **QAEC/2012/86**

Action: Professor Andrew George

6. Undergraduate Year Weightings

6.1 The Committee considered a paper proposing the introduction of an overall College policy on undergraduate year weightings. **QAEC/2012/87**

6.2 It was noted that the new policy would not apply to the Faculty of Medicine but that, through their early years review, the Faculty of Medicine were currently in the process of harmonising the weightings which contributed to the BSc in Medical Sciences and BSc in Biomedical Science. This process was taking time because the types of assessment currently used in the first two years of the MBBS/BSc programme were pass/fail. The Faculty of Medicine were currently considering introducing new assessments which could reasonably contribute to the BSc grade for internal

MBBS/BSc students. It was noted that the Faculty of Medicine did not believe that there was an acceptable way to harmonise the weightings for intercalating BSc students from external institutions and felt that this weighting should remain at 100%. QAEC agreed this point.

6.3 Professor Cheung reported that within the Faculty of Engineering, they had moved in principle to harmonisation for year weightings across all their departments (except one). The principle had been established that the weighting for year 1 should be small, that there should be different weightings for BEng and MEng programmes (and within this for two types of programme; with internships and without internships) and that the weighting for 3rd and 4th years without internships should be the same. It was noted that the Faculty of Engineering would unify their weightings shortly.

6.4 Professor Spivey reported that the Faculty of Natural Sciences had some progress in this area with their departments agreeing they could implement standard weighting but they were not yet in a position to agree what those weightings should be. However, it had been agreed that weightings should be low in the 1st year and increasing in years 2 and 3 with the ratio being constant between BSc and MSci programmes to avoid students moving between awards being penalised. It was further noted that it would take 5 years to implement the changes fully.

6.5 The Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences were asked to bring back to the next meeting a summary of their positions with a view to establishing a common College-wide policy on year weighting with effect from 2013-4.

Action: Professors Cheung and Spivey

7. SOLE Results Autumn Term 2012

7.1 The Committee received the Autumn Term PG SOLE results. It was noted that the participation rates were higher than in the 2011 Autumn Term and that the results were in line with the same time last year. **QAEC/2012/88 & 88i**

7.2 The Committee received the Autumn Term UG SOLE results. It was noted that the participation rates were higher than in the 2011 Autumn Term and it was believed that the participation rate was the highest achieved to date. The Students' Union were thanked for their help in promoting the survey via their year reps. It was noted that the results were in line with the same time last year. **QAEC/2012/88a**

7.3 It was noted that both surveys had remained open longer than in previous years and participation rates had risen by 5% per department over the Christmas period.

8. Distribution of Honours Degree Classifications

8.1 The Committee received a report on the distribution of Honours Degree Classifications for 2011-2 and were pleased to note that, across the College, no departments were below the 70% threshold (the combined percentage of first and upper second class honours degree award threshold) in 2011-12. The total for the combined percentage of firsts and upper seconds for the College in 2011-2 was 85.7%. **QAEC/2012/89**

9. QAA Consultation on the Handbook for Higher Education Review

9.1 The Committee received the College's final response to the QAA consultation on the **QAEC/2012/90**

handbook for HE Review which was submitted to the QAA on 16th April 2012.

- 9.2** The Committee receive a copy of the Russell Group's draft response to the consultation. It was noted that the Russell Group's draft response shared similar concerns to those of Imperial, e.g. regarding the use of international reviews and increasing student representation and ensuring "light touch" meant "light touch". It was noted that the College's final response had been shared with the Russell Group. **QAEC/2012/91**

10. Continuing Professional Development Quality Committee Annual Report

- 10.1** The Committee received the Continuing Professional Development Quality Committee Annual Report. **QAEC/2012/92**

11. Any Other Business

11.1 QAEC Membership **QAEC/2012/93**

It was noted that Professor Nigel Bell and Professor Gillian Gillies had stood down from the Committee (although Professor Gillies may attend as an alternate if Professor Sue Smith was absent). Professor Humphris also stated her intention to invite Professor Peter Cheung and Professor Alan Spivey to join the Committee. It was agreed that QAEC membership would be discussed at the next meeting.

11.2 HEFCE KIS Audit

Mr Nigel Wheatley reported that the College had now received the report from the HEFCE KIS audit visit which had taken place in January. The Audit Team had indicated a good result during their visit but had since changed their minds and the final report concluded "we have not gained assurance over the systems and protocols used in deriving the KIS data, based on the KIS 2012/3 rules".

- 11.2.1** It was reported that some of the issues raised in the report were easily fixed (such as KIS data not being signed off by the Rector and the UniStats "widget" not appearing on the correct place on the website.

- 11.2.2** Other issues, such as the lack of module descriptions and inconsistent use of ECTS, would require further input from departments and the Registry were in the process of collating this information.

- 11.2.3** It was noted that the audit had been a pilot and some of the rules and procedures had been found to be unclear and would need resolving before the audit process was rolled out to other institutions. As Imperial had volunteered to take part in the audit pilot the audit outcome would not be published.

12. Dates of next meetings

Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee

Thursday 30th May 2013 at 10am – 1pm, Council Room, 170 Queen's Gate
Monday 1st July 2013 at 10am – 1pm, Solar Room, 170 Queen's Gate

13. Reserved Areas of Business

There was no reserved business.

