

Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)

Minutes from the meeting held on
Wednesday 26 February 2020

Present

David Ashton, Academic Registrar – Chair
Ashley Brooks, ICU Deputy President (Education)
Dr Lorraine Craig, Faculty of Engineering representative
Laura Lane, Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School
Claire Stapley, CLCC/CHERS representative
Karen Tweddle, Business School representative
Rebecca Middleton, Faculty of Natural Sciences representative
Dr Amir San, Faculty of Medicine representative (on behalf of Martin Lupton)
Judith Webster, Director of Academic Quality and Standards
Kirstie Ward, Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) (on behalf of Scott Tucker) - Secretary

Apologies

Mohit Devgan, GSU President
Martin Lupton, Faculty of Medicine representative
Dr Edgar Meyer, Chair of Programmes Committee
Professor Peter Openshaw, Senior Consul
Scott Tucker, Deputy Director (Academic Quality and Standards)

1. Welcome, apologies and announcements

1.1 The Chair welcomed the attendees to the meeting, noting apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

QAEC.2019.36

2.1 The Committee confirmed the minutes of 15 January 2020 as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes

3.1 Study Abroad Placements Task and Finish Group (January 2020 minute 3.2)

3.1.1 The Committee were informed that the first meeting of the working group had been held. The issues to pursue and areas for further research had been identified.

3.2 Programme and Module Modification Procedure (January 2020 minute 5.2)

3.2.1 The Committee were provided with a verbal update. It was reported that meetings had been set up with departments across the College to be held imminently. It was requested

that confirmation was sought regarding a meeting on this with CLCC, CHERS and the Centre for Academic English, as appropriate.

Action: Secretary to liaise with Assistant Registrar (Programme Development) to ensure all relevant departments have been included in the consultation.

3.3 Policy on the handling of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Certificate information (January 2020 minute 13.1)

3.3.1 The Committee were informed that subsequent to the approval of the policy, the relevant action from the recent audit has now been confirmed as being met.

3.4 Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes (January 2020 minute 14.1)

3.4.1 The Committee were informed that the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team were in the process for arranging briefings. The format and structure were being finalised and it had been agreed to being with other Registry departments, then to academic departments and other relevant stakeholders.

4. Review of the Committee Actions

QAEC.2019.37

4.1 It was noted that the action log needed to be updated. This would be completed by the Secretary and reviewed at the next meeting of the Committee.

5. Academic Regulations and Policy

5.1 Draft Procedure for the use of Computers in Examinations and Assessment

QAEC.2019.38

5.1.1 The Committee were informed that the current guidance note had been reviewed in conjunction with ICT and Imperial College Business School (ICBS). During initial pilots in ICBS for computer-based assessment it had been noted that an update to the guidance was required.

5.1.2 The replacement procedure was presented to the Committee with 'track changes' to enable the updates to be clearly identified. The changes were to ensure that the procedure clearly articulated the process to approve a computer-based assessment, how alternative assessment should be considered in case of a required reasonable adjustment or due to technical failures at the time of the assessment. It was noted that the procedure needed to be further refined to ensure that all forms of assessment were noted, rather than formal examination only.

5.1.3 The Committee were informed that ICT had agreed an addition to the procedure subsequent to its circulation to the Committee. This would be added in the final version and read: *"ICT will ensure that all college owned devices, including loan laptops, used to deliver computer-based examinations and assessments will have up to date versions of the required software and are capable of operating in accordance with this policy. ICT (and EUC) should be notified of any changes to the required software version at least 10 working*

days before the date of the exam(s). If procurement of a new version is required, then a longer period may be required with the 10 days starting once EUC receive the software.”

5.1.4 The Committee noted that ICBS had run two pilot assessments on computers. One pilot as a “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) session, and one on College owned IT equipment. They were also informed that in April 2020 ICBS would be running a large-scale examination. In preparation for this approximately £30K of technical equipment had needed to be purchased in order to ensure the suitable power terminals were available to students. ICBS reported that the software that they had agreed to use to support this process was ‘Wiseflow’.

5.1.5 The Committee approved the policy, subject to the agreed updates.

5.2 Draft Taught Student Attendance Policy

QAEC.2019.39

5.2.1 The Committee were asked to consider the draft attendance policy. The policy was to be developed to support the wellbeing students by monitoring their engagement with their studies, ensure compliance with academic regulations and external requirements such as UKVI policy. The supporting procedure (section b of the paper) had been developed to support pilot projects utilising an electronic monitoring system utilising the College ID card system. It was confirmed that separate consideration would be needed for research programmes due to the differences in expectations for research students.

5.2.2 It was noted that a previous attendance monitoring policy had been considered by the Committee in 2017 however, concerns had been raised regarding delays on the part of UKVI in issuing visas at that time, and with regards to inclusivity to all regimes of study.

5.2.3 The Committee endorsed the approach to ensure that the policy was to support the wellbeing of students and reflected engagement rather than relying on physical attendance. As such it was agreed that the title would be amended to ‘Taught student Attendance and Monitoring Policy’ and that the opening section of the policy should also refer to engagement. The Committee noted that the policy would be clearly linked to development of a fitness to study procedure.

5.2.4 The Committee considered whether there should be a minimum expectation across the College and reflected in regulations but recognised that there are some areas in which a higher requirement is mandated such as to meet Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements. It was noted that should a minimum attendance or engagement requirement be agreed that this could only be mandated where the facility to monitor and evidence engagement in a clear and transparent manner was available.

5.2.5 It was noted that the Faculty of Medicine were currently considering a specific policy for students on the MBBS programme. It was agreed to develop the current policy to include specific requirements for MBBS, rather than to have a standalone version.

5.2.6 The Committee agreed that an updated version of the policy be presented at the next meeting, and that pilot departments for the monitoring system should be invited to share their experience with the Committee.

Action: Updated policy and procedure to be presented to Committee in April 2020

Action: Secretary to invite pilot project areas to share experience with the Committee

5.3 Update regarding review of Postgraduate Research Regulations

5.3.1 The Committee were given a verbal update with regards to the progress of the working party reviewing the Postgraduate Research Regulations. It was noted that there had been two meetings of the working group. The progress of the group had also been reported and discussed at the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee.

5.3.2 The group had noted that the updates to the regulations were unlikely to be as complex as for the taught regulations. It was highlighted to the Committee that areas that had already been agreed were to maintain fixed deadlines for milestones rather than a range, and to review and integrate Doctoral Academic Communication Requirements (DACR) appropriately into the regulations.

5.3.3 It was reported that the group expected to present a draft version to the Committee in April 2020 for discussion and final version for approval in June 2020.

5.3.4 The Committee noted that whilst it was expected to complete the majority of the review for approval and implementation from 2020/2021, it would be an iterative process of improvement over the following academic year.

6. Student Casework

6.1 Student Complaints (Taught) summary report

QAEC.2019.40

6.1.1 The Secretary apologised for the late circulation of this paper. The Committee received the report regarding complaints raised by taught programme students from the formal stage (stage 2) of the Student Complaints Procedure (Ordinance E3). The report provided data regarding the number of complaints received, broad reasons for complaint and outcome by calendar year (census date 31 January).

6.1.2 The significant increase in complaints were noted by the Committee, though recognising that this related to a small part of the College provision overall. It was also noted that the areas in which the majority of complaints were received related to supervision/project management (which resonated with data previously provided on research complaints), poor programme management, and the quality or availability of information or communication of relevant information.

6.1.3 The report noted that whilst an increasing proportion of complaints this year had been partially upheld, half were not upheld. Those that were not upheld could be seen to relate to differences in expectations which needed to be addressed to prevent future concerns.

- 6.1.4** The Committee noted that the report highlighted the need to appropriately support those investigating complaints. This would include increased guidance, template documentation and training in investigation technique and report writing. It was also noted that at present complaints are not often completed at the formal stage within the expected timelines. This was for several reasons and the complainants were kept informed of updated timelines however, falls behind the expectations in the policy and published sector best practice.
- 6.1.5** The report reported concerns by students of a perceived conflict of interests in the investigation of a formal complaint as the procedure states that this will be within their home department however, it was also acknowledged that with the College structure it is difficult where the investigator is outside of the department to consider appropriate remedy as this is not within their authority and there may be departmental/field specific concerns that may also need to be addressed.
- 6.1.6** It was noted that the data presented did not include stage 1 complaints, and as such missed any learning that could be gained from this data. There was acknowledgment of the difficulties reported by staff and students to understand and appropriately respond to a 'concern' and a stage 1 complaint, and the subsequent requirements for a stage 1 complaint.
- 6.1.7** The Committee discussed the concerns that had been raised by staff where the complainant has disclosed mental health difficulties that may have been related to the complaint or are a consequence of the circumstances on which the complaint had been raised. This included how to support students, how to investigate fairly and respond appropriately.
- 6.1.8** The Committee also considered the small number of students in the previous year that have not conducted themselves through the complaint or other casework processes in an acceptable manner such as refusing to follow the procedures, excessive or unreasonable communication demands, or the use of aggressive or intimidating language and behaviour. It was noted that the OIA considering it good practice to have clear expectations of reasonable behaviour and to set out the process that will be followed should this not be met.
- 6.1.9** The Committee acknowledged the support that is provided to students by the Imperial College Union Advice Centre is valuable however, is necessarily limited due to the extensive remit of the service and its limited resources.

6.2 Academic Misconduct Annual Report

QAEC.2019.41

- 6.2.1** The Committee received the annual report regarding cases of Academic Misconduct. The census date for the report was 31 January. The report is limited to allegations of major plagiarism, examination offences or dishonest practice against students on taught aspects of their programme (all undergraduate programmes, postgraduate taught programmes, and taught elements of a research programme).

6.2.2 The report noted the limitations of the data as minor misconduct figures were unavailable. These are held within Departments by each Board of Examiners. The report also noted that there appeared to be discrepancies between Departments in how minor misconduct is considered and there was a limited ability to consider these across the College. It was discussed that one reason for this is the lack of parity between panel decision regarding allegations of major plagiarism and decisions regarding minor plagiarism within the departments.

6.2.3 The Committee agreed that further work would be required to support consistent practice across the College with regards to the consideration of potential misconduct cases, and consistent decision making with regards to allegations such as whether an allegation is poor academic practice or misconduct, and the sanction to be given where proven. It was suggested that a research project may be an appropriate way to consider this aspect of the College casework.

7 Student Surveys

7.1 Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Autumn SOLE Survey report

QAEC.2019.42

7.1.1 The Committee received the Autumn SOLE results for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students. It was noted that report gave a large amount of data at department level and aggregated to Faculty and College-level but had limited analysis.

7.1.2 It was noted the data for CLCC/CHERS was not provided. Subsequent to the meeting the Secretary confirmed that this data was scheduled to be presented to a later meeting.

7.1.3 The Committee noted the low and falling participation rates in SOLE across the College and that the working group (refer to item 10) was considering all aspects of the SOLE survey.

7.1.4 The Committee discussed the consideration of SOLE data, how it feeds into the annual monitoring and other quality processes of the College. It was noted that in-depth analysis of SOLE is completed within the departments and forms a key component in the annual monitoring process at Department and Faculty level. The method and timing of presentation of the report to the Committee as it stands was agreed to need reconsideration.

7.1.5 It was noted that the consideration of survey data was included in the current governance review. The Committee were reminded of the importance of feedback from students on the quality of the programmes, and how it is considered under College governance is a key part of the Office for Students standards and conditions for registration.

7.1.6 In addition, the Committee noted concerns regarding the software that is currently utilised for SOLE, and that this was an aspect under consideration by the working party.

8 Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

QAEC.2019.43

- 8.1** The Committee received a report on the meeting of the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee and particularly noted the amendments to process that would prevent 1+3 CDT students being disadvantaged by the timing of progression to full PhD.

9 Learning & Teaching Committee Report

- 9.1** The Committee received a verbal report of the last meeting of the Learning & Teaching Committee on 23 January 2020. There were no particular items to note for the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee.

10 Lecturer and Module Evaluation Working Group

QAEC.2019.44

- 10.1** In relation to the working group, the Committee noted that its remit was larger than the consideration of SOLE, and issues as discussed at item 7. It was reported that the group had acknowledged the platform needed to be replaced, but also needed to review and consider the purpose of SOLE for the College and as such the content of the questionnaire.
- 10.2** The Committee noted the current sector development in relation to the National Student Survey, which included a possible to move to a yearly survey of all undergraduate students.
- 10.3** The Committee discussed the differences SOLE outcomes between students' home departments and for modules taken from CLCC. CLCC report that they note a lower result in Autumn than the Spring, with home departments reporting the opposite outcome.
- 10.4** It was reported that consideration had been given in the Business School to hold mid-module surveys however, due to the limitations on actions that could be taken mid-module and the potential impact of incomplete teaching in students' understanding of the topic being studied this had not been taken forward.

11 Industrial Action

- 11.1** The Committee received a verbal update regarding the agreed College position in relation to strike action. The principles agreed were:
- The College will respect and not seek to undermine people's right to take industrial action and to withdraw their labour.
 - The College will seek to mitigate the impact on student's education in terms of teaching, learning and assessment, though there may be some variation in delivery.
 - Teaching and assessment will be prioritised to ensure programmes are maintained, where necessary suitable alternative methods to deliver teaching and learning will be explored.

The Committee were informed that information regarding the strike action and the College's position would be available on the website.

- 11.2** The College had put in place a strategic group and an operational group meeting weekly with regards to the industrial action. The operational group would consider the impact that the strike was having on students and the mitigation that had been, or would need to be, taken. This information would be held on a central log. The operational group also provides advice to the strategic group.
- 11.3** It was further reported that a mailbox had been established for students or staff to have a centralised single point of contact with regards to matters relating to the strike.
- 11.4** The Committee noted that within the sector strikes had also taken place in the previous term and that some HEIs had reported that there had been a significant impact on their students due to this.

12 Update regarding Coronavirus

- 12.1** The Chair gave an update to the Committee with regards to the College's preparations with regards to the novel Coronavirus outbreak (Covid-19). It was reported that an Incident Management Group had been formed reporting to the President and the Provost. This group was supported by sub-groups focusing on specific areas such as education support.
- 12.2** It was relayed that the first concern had been for those students and potentially staff that were unable to return from China. Other areas that the group were focusing attention were the effect on delivery of programmes and emergency scenario planning which was based on the Public Health England advice and guidance.
- 12.3** It was reported that students would be given advice and support with regards to missed teaching or assessment, such as claims under the mitigating circumstances procedure.

13 Interim report from Programme Committee

- 13.1** The Committee received the interim report for the meeting of Programmes Committee held on 18 February 2019. The Committee approved the following: QAEC.2019.45

(i) New Programmes:

MRes Cancer Technology

The above programme from the Department of Bioengineering, Faculty of Engineering, will be available as a full-time programme over one academic year with effect from October 2020. The Programmes Committee approved of a 70 ECTS weighted project module (the College Regulations allow for a maximum of 60 ECTS for MRes programmes).

MSc Applied Machine Learning

The above programme from the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, will be available as a full-time programme over one academic year with effect from October 2020.

Weekend MBA- Corporate Stream

The above corporate stream of the Weekend MBA from the Business School will be available to a closed cohort from Saudi Aramco as a part-time programme over 21 months with effect from October 2020.

I-Explore STEMM modules

The above portfolio of STEMM modules forming a new I-Explore stream (the existing streams being Horizons, BPES and the new Multidisciplinary Project stream) with effect from October 2020.

13.2 (ii) Major Modifications:

Faculty of Engineering:

MSci Earth and Planetary Science

To introduce a 'Year Abroad' version of the above programme with effect from October 2020.

Undergraduate Materials

MEng Materials Science & Engineering

BEng Materials Science & Engineering

BEng Materials with Management

MEng Materials with Nuclear Engineering

MEng Biomaterials and Tissue Engineering

To retrospectively make changes to the progression rules of the above programmes with effect from October 2019.

Faculty of Natural Sciences:

MRes Green Chemistry: Energy and the Environment

To retrospectively make correctional changes made to the programme structure with effect from October 2019.

Horizons:

Year 2 Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) and Year 2 Change Makers

To with the aims of I-Explore and the Learning and Teaching strategy by reducing the ECTS credit value of non-languages Horizons modules to 5 ECTS with effect from October 2020.

13.3 (iii) Suspensions and Withdrawals:

With immediate effect:

MSc Advanced Computational Methods (2YPT) (Faculty of Engineering, Department of Aeronautics)

MSc Composites (2YPT) (Faculty of Engineering, Department of Aeronautics)

MSc Environmental Engineering (2YPT) (Faculty of Engineering, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering)

MSc Environmental Engineering with Business Management (2YPT) (Faculty of Engineering, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering)

With effect from October 2020:

MSc Conservation Science (Faculty of Natural Sciences, Department of Life Sciences)

MRes Molecular and Cellular Basis of Infection (Faculty of Medicine, Department of Infectious Disease)

MSc Paediatrics and Child Health (Faculty of Medicine, Department of Infectious Disease)

14 Dates for meetings 2019/2020

14.1 The dates for meetings for the remainder of the academic year were noted as:

- 22 April 2020 (reporting to Senate on 6 May)
- 3 June 2020 (reporting to Senate on 24 June)

15 Any other business

15.1 The Chair extended his thanks on behalf of the Committee and the College to Dr Edgar Meyer, who would be leaving the College. Dr Meyer had been Chair of the Programme Committee and the Chair expressed his gratitude to Dr Meyer for his work and commitment to the College, particularly that relating to Programmes Committee and QAEC.

16 Reserved Area of Business

16.1 There was no reserved business.