

Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)

Minutes from the meeting held on

Wednesday 1 June 2022

Present

David Ashton, Academic Registrar – Chair

Dr Clemens Brechtelsbauer, Chair of Programmes Committee

Dr Lorraine Craig, Faculty of Engineering representative

Prof Richard Green, Business School representative

Laura Lane, Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School

Daniel Lo, ICU Deputy President (Education)

Rebecca Middleton, Faculty of Natural Sciences representative

Prof Andrew Parry, College Consul representative

Prof Jason Riley, Vice Dean (Education), Faculty of Engineering

Claire Stapley, CLCC/CHERS representative

Prof Richard Thompson, Vice Dean (Education), Faculty of Natural Sciences

Dr Jeffrey Vernon, Faculty of Medicine representative

Scott Tucker, Deputy Director (Academic Quality and Standards) – Secretary

In Attendance

Prof Emma McCoy, Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience)

Apologies

Martin Lupton, Faculty of Medicine representative

Judith Webster, Head of Academic Services

1. Welcome, apologies and announcements

- 1.1** The Chair welcomed attendees to the last meeting of the academic year, noting apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

- 2.1** The Committee confirmed the minutes of 6 April 2022 as an accurate record, subject to a QAEC.2021.68 minor record of attendance amendment.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

- 3.1** There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

- 4. Update on QAEC actions** QAEC.2021.69
- 4.1** The Committee received an update on outstanding QAEC actions, as noted in the action list. It was noted that ongoing actions would be rolled over to 2022-23 and rationalised, where appropriate.
- 5. External Examiners**
- 5.1** The Committee considered the College PGT External Examiner report summary 2021-22 (reporting on 2020-21). The summary was based on 185 reports which had been received. QAEC.2021.70
- 5.2** The academic year to which the report related saw the second year of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee were assured that the majority of Externals, where they made specific reference to the College’s response to the pandemic, continued to be supportive of the measures that had been put in place to ensure the academic standards of the College were maintained.
- 5.3** The summary highlighted the following themes, of which both positive and negative comments were received by External Examiners:
- Provision of programme and Module information
 - Assessment
 - Boards of Examiners
- 5.4** The Committee noted the following overall confidence statements:
- 99% 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.”
 - 97% 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.”
 - 98% agreed that “The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other degree awarding bodies of which you have experience.”
- 6. Undergraduate Annual Monitoring**
- 6.1** The Committee noted the Faculty UG Annual Monitoring Reports (reporting on 2020-21) QAEC.2021.71
- 6.1.1** Faculty representatives praised their colleagues for providing an outstanding educational experience during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Issues raised within Faculty reports were discussed under Item 7.

6.2 The Committee noted the College UG Annual Monitoring Report Summary 2021-22 (reporting on 2020-21). Following feedback from last year's report, an additional annex was provided, which summarised good practice reported by departments. QAEC.2021.72

6.2.1 The Committee considered a wide range of issues set out in the report. These issues had been responded to by the relevant service provider and allocated to an appropriate academic committee, where appropriate.

Faculty representatives highlighted a number of areas for consideration including the following:

Faculty of Engineering

- Concerns over the Module Evaluation Questionnaire and how the MEQ related to academic promotion.
- Resource constraints on the counselling service and extra support needed for Senior Tutors.

Faculty of Natural Sciences

- Space constraints.
- Restrictions due to the College's credit framework.
- Questions over the role of annual monitoring.

Business School

- Regulatory restrictions on programme development.

CLCC

- Concerns over the increase in student casework load and the difficulty supporting casework across multiple departments with differing approaches to managing casework.

6.2.2 It was reported by the Chair that the Student Lifecycle and Administration Board (SLAB) would address some of the issues raised, where appropriate.

7 Sub-Committees

7.1 Regulations and Policy Review Committee (RPRC)

7.1.1 The Committee noted the report from the RPRC meeting held on 27 April 2022. QAEC.2021.73

7.1.2 The Committee considered the report from the RPRC meeting held on 25 May 2022, and agreed the following: QAEC.2021.74

(i) Process for managing progression for students with unpaid tuition fees

RPRC recommended the procedure, which provided a framework within which to enact the relevant College regulations which state that students who owe a tuition fee debt may not re-enrol to the next stage/year of their programme. It was noted that the period of interruption required, should a fee be unpaid, and a payment plan not be in place, would count towards the maximum registration period for the programme. It was also noted that financial issues may not appear in isolation and that a student may be impacted by other personal concerns that have led to their debtor status. The Committee were assured that the team that contacts students were aware of this and treat students with care and consideration.

The Committee agreed the principles of the procedure but required sight of the full procedure for formal approval to be granted.

Action: Secretary

(ii) Principles of consideration of exceptional requests for exit awards

Following the wider approval of exit awards as part of programmes that have been curriculum reviewed, and which were now governed by the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study, requests have been made to exceptionally grant exit awards to students on pre-curriculum review programmes, that from a regulatory perspective would not be entitled. The Committee agreed that requests were most likely in relation to postgraduate taught provision, whilst there was an overlap of programmes with pre-curriculum review cohorts studying alongside those on the curriculum reviewed programmes.

The Committee agreed that the College should seek on a case-by case basis, where there are exceptional circumstances, to provide formal recognition of achievement through an exit award for students on pre-curriculum review programmes, where this can be aligned to the curriculum reviewed versions. It was agreed that this principle should be drafted into a time-limited protocol for RPRC consideration and approval.

7.2 Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

- 7.2.1** The Committee considered the report from the PRQC meeting held on 10 May 2022 and agreed the following: QAEC.2021.75

(i) Piloting the submission of theses through Turnitin report

PRQC recommended that the proposed October 2022 roll-out of thesis submission via Turnitin was deferred. PRQC felt that the technical issues identified by the pilot required further development and to introduce the procedure without resolving these would create excessive burden on students, administrative staff, supervisors and internal examiners. PRQC also recommended that further discussion was held with Central Secretariat regarding the principle of requiring all theses to be submitted via Turnitin. It was suggested that the College could retain the right for a thesis to be submitted to Turnitin but this would only be done in specific cases where plagiarism was suspected.

The Committee agreed with the concerns raised by PRQC and recommended to Senate that the October 2022 roll-out of thesis submission via Turnitin was deferred.

Action: Secretary

(ii) Proposed Amendments to the ‘Research Degree Students: Transfer of Registration for Admission

PRQC recommended amendments to the ‘Research Degree Students: Transfer of Registration for Admission’ policy and procedure to allow Imperial staff and Imperial NHS trust employees to enter for a research degree with advanced standing as was currently permitted for a research student wishing to transfer to Imperial from another university. It was agreed that even if the students had a curtailed registration period to reflect the research undertaken prior to formally registering for the degree, it should not be possible for them to seek exemption from the Late-Stage Review.

The Committee approved the amendments to the procedure.

8. Degree Outcomes

- 8.1** It was noted that an updated College Degree Outcomes Statement was not yet finalised and will be submitted to the next meeting.

Action: Secretary

9. College Academic Calendar

- 9.1** The Committee noted the draft UG and PGT College academic calendars 2022-23. As set out in the QAEC Action List, a working group will be established to inform the development of the 2023-24 academic calendar. QAEC.2021.77

10. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

- 10.1** The Committee noted the OIA Annual Report 2021:
<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/2706/oia-annual-report-2021.pdf>

11. Education Committee

- 11.1** **The Academic Technology Approval Scheme (considered at the Education Committee on 12 May 2022)**

11.1.1 The Central Admissions Team have been keeping track of ATAS refusals over the last year. Currently this was c.40 refusals. All bar one of those refusals are for Chinese nationals. The Central Admissions team have been tracking previous study history of these applicants to establish if any patterns are emerging. Possibly more concerning was an increase in ATAS refusals for students who were already a significant way into their PhD. Due to the pandemic and associated lab closures, more international PhD students have applied for additional time on their visa to complete their studies. New ATAS clearance was required for a visa application and applicants were being assessed under the widened criteria and being refused.

11.1.2 The Committee noted that the Education Committee approved the formation of a working group to act in the following capacity:

- To ensure robust policies were in place to provide clear guidance for both students and staff in the event of ATAS refusals or 'forced' course withdrawals, seeking legal advice where necessary.
- To monitor and collate data on ATAS refusals and establish patterns, and how College should use this information.
- To ensure that the College is supporting the UK Governments' anti-proliferation and arms control initiatives whilst continuing to champion research at the highest level.
- To act as a main point of contact for CPACC and RCAT.
- To monitor Government policy and developments in these areas, and any associated risk to the College.

11.1.3 The Committee noted summaries from previous meetings:
<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/about/leadership-and-strategy/provost/vice-provost-education/education-committee/>

12. Any Other Business

12.1 On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Daniel Lo, the outgoing ICU Deputy President (Education), for supporting and contributing to QAEC business.

13. Dates of Meetings 2022-23

13.1 The Committee noted the dates for future QAEC meetings to be held in 2022-23 (all 10:05-12:00) as follows:

- 28 September 2022 (reporting to Senate on 12 October 2022)
- 23 November 2022 (reporting to Senate on 14 December 2022)
- 8 February 2023 (reporting to Senate on 1 March 2023)
- 15 March 2023 (reporting to Senate on 10 May 2023)
- 26 April 2023 (also reporting to Senate on 10 May 2023)
- 7 June 2023 (reporting to Senate on 28 June 2023)