MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CARDIFF UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY COMMITTEE (ASQC) HELD ON TUESDAY 19 JANUARY 2021 AT 09.30 AM HELD VIA ZOOM

Present:	Ms Claire Morgan (Chair); Ms Jane Chukwu; Ms Hannah Doe; Ms Judith Fabian; Dr Kate Gilliver; Dr Julie Gwilliam; Professor Martin Jephcote; Professor Dai John; Dr Andrew Kerr; Dr Emma Kidd; Dr Rhys Pullin; Mr Sebastian Ripley; Dr Andrew Roberts; Dr Hannah Shaw; Professor Helen Williams; Dr Robert Wilson.
In attendance:	Mr Rhodri Evans (Secretary); Ms Sian Ballard; Ms Kath Evans; Ms Tracey Evans; Mr Lloyd Hole; Ms Sian Lewis; Tracey Stanley Ms Martine Woodward; Mr Simon Wright.
Apologies:	Dr Robert Gossedge.

1294   MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee held on 14 October 2020 (paper 20/193) were confirmed as a true record.

1295   MATTERS ARISING

Received and considered paper 20/359, 'Matters Arising'.

Arising therefrom:

1295.1   Regulations (Minute 1280.1)

NOTED that the equality impact assessments for all academic regulations were scheduled to be completed by end of April 2021.

1295.2   Periodic Review (Minute 1280.2)

NOTED that the Chair had approved the establishment of a task and finish group to develop a new re-validation process by the end of 2020/21.

1295.3   Annual Quality Report (Minute 1283)

NOTED that the annual quality report had been endorsed by Senate and Council and the executive summary of the report published on the University web pages.

1295.4   Degree Outcomes Statement (Minute 1269)

NOTED that Council and Senate approved the Degree Outcome Statement which had been published on the University web pages.

1295.5   Education Governance (Minute 1285)

NOTED that Senate confirmed that consultation should be undertaken on the proposed changes to education governance arrangements and proposals would be submitted to Senate for approval by the end of 2020/21.

1295.6   Monitoring and Review Policy (Minute 1286)

NOTED that Senate approved the Monitoring and Review Policy.

1295.7   Other Matters Arising

NOTED that other matters arising would be considered elsewhere on the agenda:

.1   Review of Chair's Action (Minute 1280.3)

See Minute 1300

.2   ARE (Minute 1280.5)

See Minute 1301

1296   **ITEMS FROM THE CHAIR**

1296.1   Update on Covid-19

NOTED

.1   that after the Christmas Recess, the start of in-person teaching for the majority of taught programmes was delayed until 22 February 2021 in the first instance, with teaching provided online. Health-related and practical-based programmes, where on-campus activity was required to meet programme learning outcomes, continued to be delivered by a blend of on-campus and online activities, and the campus, including residences, libraries, study spaces and other buildings, remained open;

.2   that Schools had been asked to implement their contingency plans, developed at the beginning of the academic year, to ensure that student learning continues to be supported during this period of remote study;

.3   that postgraduate research students who need to access the campus to undertake and complete their research continue to be able to do so and, to minimise the impact of any disruption, supervisors would discuss with research students how their plans may need to be adjusted;

.4   that variations to postgraduate research student policies and procedures were being kept under review, some of which expire at the end of January, with the possibility of extending these variations beyond the end of January;

.5   that the University would be adapting its Student Complaints Procedure and introduce a student complaints process for issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1296.2   Safety Net Policy

Received paper 20/380 '2020/21 Safety Net'

NOTED

.1   that the 2020/21 safety net policy had been reviewed and updated following feedback received from our student body, including from an open meeting with students, organised by the Students' Union, and feedback from the Russell Group of Students' Unions;

.2   that the 2020/21 safety net policy contained a package of measures to ensure that students should not be disadvantaged, in terms of their achievement because of the disruption resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019/20, and the ongoing constraints in the delivery of on-campus provision in 2020/21;

.3   that a briefing session for staff was being held on 22 January 2021 to provide an overview of the 2020/21 safety net policy and to address questions regarding its application.

1296.3   Degree Apprenticeships

NOTED

.1   the QAA would be undertaking a Degree Apprenticeship Review on behalf of HEFCW which was a developmental review focused on higher education providers' delivery of programmes, including work-based learning. As a developmental review, review teams would not be making an overall judgement on the standards and/or quality of a provider's provision;

.2   that the QAA would produce an unpublished report for each provider which would be shared with HEFCW and a published sector-wide report which would include an anonymised summary of the provision and findings for all the provider reviews and make recommendations for the future delivery of apprenticeship programmes. The QAA Degree Apprenticeship Review would complement the Welsh Government's evaluation of the HEFCW Degree Apprenticeships pilot scheme;

.3   that the QAA was adopting a proportionate approach to its review of the University and would be based on the following:

- submission of documentation by 1 February 2021 based on available information e.g. committee papers, approval paperwork, and responses to HEFCW and Welsh Government consultations;
- one-day for the review in March 2021 which would consist of a desk-based analysis, centred around how we use the QAA Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships and specifically the Work based learning elements of the UK Quality Code, and:
  - Virtual meeting with apprentices –45 minutes;
  - Virtual meeting with employers –45 minutes;
  - Virtual meeting with University staff in COMSC – 45 minutes;

.4   that the QAA had appointed two reviewers: Mr Mark Cooper (University of Portsmouth), and Mr Matthew Kitching (Buckinghamshire New University). The Head of Quality and

Standards would be the facilitator liaising with the QAA Officer, David Gale;

.5   that the developmental report would be submitted to ASQC when published.

1297   **FRAMEWORK FOR APPROVING PROGRAMME CHANGES FOR 2021/22**

Received and considered paper 20/381 'Framework for Approving Programme Changes for 2021/22'.

NOTED

1297.1   that the University adopted a framework for managing changes to programmes for 2020/21 which was a variation on the established arrangements specified in academic policies and procedures. The feedback received on the operation of this framework was generally positive;

1297.2   that as the Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact on the delivery of teaching and assessment, and there remained uncertainty regarding ongoing impact, the principles of the framework would continue to be applied when planning for the 2021/22 academic year;

1297.3   that consideration would need to be given to the schedule to be applied for approving changes to programmes, to ensure staff had sufficient time to plan teaching and assessment activities for 2021/22, and, where required, stage 1 enrolment (the opportunity for continuing students to select modules for the next academic year) could be completed;

1297.4   that consideration was being given to the possibility of delaying the start of the academic year, which would impact on the implementation of the schedule specified in the framework;

1297.5   comments from members on planning for 2021/22:

- including the option for some Schools to retain Stage 1 enrolment, and adopting a consistent approach across Schools offering Joint Honours programmes;
- the benefit of high-level institutional principles to guide and support Schools when considering changes to programmes for 2021/22;
- Schools should be encouraged to review their approach to assessment to reduce the burden on staff and students and that the Assessment Task Force could provide advice and examples of good practice to enable staff to change assessment practice.

RESOLVED

1297.6   to update the framework to take account of members' comments and to undertake further consultation with Schools prior to approval of the framework by the Chair.

1298   **APPROVAL OF ONLINE DEGREES**

Received and considered paper 20/360 'Approval of online degrees'.

NOTED

1298.1   that there was interest in the development of online degrees and schools had asked for clarification of the process to approve such programmes, particularly if full-time versions of the programme had been validated;

1298.2   that the process for approving new online programmes would remain as outlined in the Programme Development Policy. The Recruitment and Admissions Strategy Group (RASG) would oversee Stage 1 of the process and Colleges submit proposals to the Stage 1 panel;

1298.3   that where Schools wish to adapt existing face to face/blended provision to fully online, a revised process was proposed for Stage 1 and Stage 2 to support an agile transition whilst ensuring the academic standards and student experience were not compromised, as outlined below:

- **Stage 1:** Colleges to submit proposals to the Recruitment and Admissions Strategy Group (RASG) for the transition of existing programmes to online delivery. Business case to include market analysis and resources. If approved move to Stage 2;

- **Stage 2 Programme Development:** Schools to submit a bespoke Programme Information Template highlighting how existing provision would be transitioned to online including support for students. Changes to programme/module information permitted within the limits outlined in the threshold for change;

- **Stage 3 Academic Approval:** Proposals submitted to the Programme and Partner Standing Panel may be considered virtually to ensure appropriate time to update information where necessary and expedite recruitment;

1298.4   that where changes go beyond the threshold of change, indicating a significant change to the programme, the proposal would be considered a new programme;

1298.5   that to ensure the University meets its obligations under consumer law, advertising new programmes was not permitted until formal ASQC approval was granted thereby ensuring the accuracy of information available to applicants and students.

RESOLVED

1298.6   to approve the changes outlined in paper 20/360 to the Programme Development Policy to enable Schools to adapt existing face to face/blended programmes to fully online.

1299   **OVERVIEW OF TAUGHT EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS FOR 2019/20**

Received and considered paper 20/377.

NOTED

1299.1   that, in April and June 2020, all taught external examiners had been informed of the actions taken by the University in response to disruption

to assessment during 2019/20 and to provide additional information on the Framework for Variation, the Safety Net Policy, and virtual attendance at meetings of Examining Boards;

1299.2   that the External Examiner annual report template for 2019/20 and the Examining Board Framework had been amended to ensure External Examiners could comment on the actions taken in response to the unprecedented disruption and the conduct of virtual Examining Boards.

1299.3   Academic Standards

NOTED

.1   that analysis of taught External Examiner Reports and associated Examining Board Frameworks indicated that, in general:

- the actions taken as a result of the variation of assessments in relation to industrial action and Covid-19 had been appropriate to protect the academic standards of the programme and had enabled students to achieve their programme level learning outcomes;
- there were no major concerns raised regarding the academic standards of awards;
- the degree outcomes of each programme under consideration were in line with the sector and, where relevant, met professional, statutory, and regulatory body requirements;
- where scaling had been applied there was appropriate justification for the action, based on the scaling guidance, and the scaling methodology applied to the marks was appropriate;
- where issues had been identified, the Examining Boards had been clear in their deliberations and actions to safeguard academic standards;

.2   that only one report from an external indicated significant concern, due to considerable differences of opinion in marking and moderation of two modules. The School had discussed the issues raised at the Board of Studies, consulted with the College Deans, and provided a comprehensive response to the External Examiner;

.3   that overall, External Examiners had been complimentary about the approach taken by the University to adapt its arrangements during the pandemic to continue delivery of programmes while maintaining standards. External Examiners highlighted:

- the care and diligence taken to switch teaching and assessment activities to the online environment, with some praising the use of innovative methods of assessment;
- the levels of communication and support maintained with students following the move to remote teaching;
- the application of the Safety Net Policy to ensure no student was disadvantaged.
- the efficient conduct of virtual Examining Boards, with some suggesting this could be usefully continued beyond the duration of the pandemic;

.4   that the Examining Board Frameworks, submitted by Chairs of Examining Boards, were completed with a high degree of variability and detail within and between Schools.

RESOLVED

.5   to report to Senate the assurances provided by the external examiners reports for 2019/20;

.6   the Examining Board Framework be updated for 2020/21 to ensure Schools capture the appropriate information to be used when submitting recommendations for the conferment of awards to the Awards and Progress Committee and when analysing External Examiner reports.

1299.4   University Awards

NOTED

.1   that the Awards and Progress Committee received a report from Examining Boards for taught degrees before awards were conferred to ensure that there were no issues raised regarding the academic standards of awards;

.2   in 2019/20 the Awards and Progress Committee also considered the profile of degree classification for undergraduate Bachelor and Integrated Master degrees for the last 5 years, taking into consideration the variations to assessments made in response to Covid-19 disruption and, where required, industrial action;

.3   that in order to understand the reasons for the increase in the proportion of students attaining a 1st class degree in 2019/20, and to establish whether the application of a Safety Net Policy was a factor, the Awards and Progress Committee asked 10 Schools, where there has been a notable increase in the proportion of 1st class degrees, for further information and to identify if actions were required to protect the academic standards of awards;

.4   that all schools would consider the degree outcomes profile and feedback from External Examiners as part of the ARE process and identify any action required to ensure that academic standards are maintained.

1299.5   Institutional Themes

NOTED

.1   that in October 2019, the Annual Quality Report identified an action for Registry to collate key themes identified in taught external examiner reports;

.2   that the themes highlighted in paper 20/377 fall into the following broad categories:

- Structure and coherence of the programme
- Academic Standards
- Assessment and Feedback

- Marking and moderation
- General administration/communication issues

and had been circulated to College Deans to support the review of degree outcomes in College ARE Reports;

.3   that whilst work on the structure and content of programmes would continue to be addressed with Schools through the implementation of a revalidation process, many of the comments from externals suggested that an institutional action was required in relation to the development and application of marking criteria, consistency of marking and moderation practice, and assessment and feedback;

.4   that the comments from externals on matters related to assessment had been shared with the Chair of the Transforming Assessment Group and to establish how the issues raised could be aligned to the priorities of the Assessment Group, including a review of the content of the academic regulations and policies.

RESOLVED

.5   to prioritise the following areas for action:

.1   the development of a set of high-level institutional principles outlining priorities for programme changes to support Schools to re-examine their approach to assessment with a view to reducing volume of assessment;

.2   CESI to develop workshops to support Schools with a high volume of examinations to identify whether other methods of assessment could be used;

.3   training for Chairs of Examining Boards to be updated to ensure that at meetings of Examining Boards there was sufficient opportunity to discuss the enhancement of teaching and assessment in addition to confirming academic standards.

1299.6   Appointment of 'Programme' External Examiners for taught programmes

NOTED

.1   that there was an over reliance on subject level External Examiners which could impact on externals' opportunity to comment on academic standards at programme level and detract from a whole programme approach when reviewing provision within a School;

.2   that a review of sector practice indicated that many institutions had 'programme' level External Examiners, alongside 'subject' level External Examiners for taught programmes;

.3   that 'programme' External Examiners predominantly focused on academic standards and ensuring fairness in the application of award regulations and procedures at programme level,

particularly where different subjects may be combined for the intended award, whereas the 'subject' External Examiners focused on the review and moderation of assessments on specific modules;

.4   that as there was greater scrutiny on degree outcomes and initiatives to protect the value of UK degrees, it was critical to ensure that for each degree programme an External Examiner was designated to provide an overarching view on programme level academic quality and standards in addition to subject specific commentary;

.5   that the appointment of External Examiners was inextricably linked to the structure of Examining Boards operated within each School, therefore it would be helpful if the review of academic governance undertaken by the Head of Registry included the structure of Examining Boards, ensuring that appropriate 'programme' and 'subject' External Examiners' were in place aligned with the appropriate Examining Board structures;

.6   that further work should be undertaken to understand the role of a 'Chief' External Examiner which had been adopted by a few universities and its appropriateness for introduction at Cardiff University.

RESOLVED

.7   to confirm the following actions:

.1   the review of the structure of Examining Boards be included into the wider review of academic governance to ensure that there were designated 'programme' External Examiners appointed which align with an appropriate Examining Board structure;

.2   that the discussion around the appointment of a Chief External Examiner be incorporated into the wider review on academic governance and Examining Board structures.

1300   **REVIEW OF ASQC CHAIR'S ACTION**

Received paper 20/361, 'Review of ASQC Chair's Action'.

NOTED

1300.1   that in 2019/20, due to remote working, it was only possible to assess the cases held on the Chair's Action database, hence it could not be confirmed whether the total number of cases matched the number reported to the Committee;

1300.2   that the auditor confirmed that the use of the single database appeared to be reducing variation in record keeping and based on the sample selected there was now very little variation in the recording of appropriate documentation to support decisions across all the areas;

1300.3   that over the last 6 months the Deputy Head of Registry had reviewed processes and audit trails for all operational ASQC executive action

decision, to ensure that all documents and decisions were available electronically in line with the regulations;

1300.4 that further areas had been identified by the Deputy Head of Registry for review and this would be encompassed with the work undertaken as part of the education governance review.

RESOLVED

1300.5 to confirm:

.1 that the auditor was highly satisfied that the decisions taken by the Chair on behalf of the Committee were consistent and appropriate;

.2 that there was a high-level of discussion if decisions were challenged and that where further evidence was required to support a decision this was sought and filed;

.3 that further areas for review identified by the Deputy Head of Registry should be completed within a defined timeline in parallel with the review of education governance and reported back to ASQC at its next meeting.

1301 **COLLEGE REPORT ON ANNUAL REVIEW AND ENHANCEMENT (ARE) PROGRESS**

Received paper 20/362, 'College ARE Progress Report'.

NOTED

1301.1 that each College had submitted an ARE progress report based on discussions held with Schools on specific areas of focus as part of the ARE process, including an update on interventions implemented with Schools identified as 'at risk' by ASQC in June 2020;

1301.2 that the College ARE sub-committees would be meeting in January 2021 and April 2021 to review and analyse school submissions and action plans, identifying where progress needed to be made and areas of good practice that could be shared with the wider University community;

1301.3 that a full ARE report including the outcomes and progress on action plans for each School would be presented to ASQC in July 2021.

1301.4 AHSS progress report

NOTED

.1 that all schools in AHSS had completed a review of four areas of focus: 1a NSS submitted in September 2020; and 1b PGT Student Satisfaction, 1c PGR Student Satisfaction, and 2a UG programme outcomes submitted in December 2020;

.2 that individual meetings had been held with all AHSS schools in September and October 2020 (except Welsh as a meeting was not required) to discuss NSS, with a follow up meeting for LAWPL held in early January 2021;

.3   that statements exploring low overall satisfaction scores had been requested in respect of several programmes where external factors such as industrial action may have had an impact, and that work was ongoing to address poor NSS scores for Assessment and Feedback for Economics and related subjects drawing on advice from the Chair of the University's Assessment Group and the Centre for Education Support and Innovation;

.4   that the College Deans and the Education Manager would review the other three areas of focus in January 2021.

1301.5   <u>BLS progress report</u>

NOTED

.1   that the College ARE meeting had taken place on 14th January 2021 and the action plans for NSS, degree outcomes, and external examiner reports had been reviewed in depth by the College ARE Committee;

.2   that degree outcomes for HCARE had been considered and the Committee was satisfied that the developments that had been put in place and continue to be implemented which would have a positive impact, although it may take time to become apparent;

.3   that the high percentage of 1st class degrees in PSYCH had been described by the School as being a consequence of the assessment and marking criteria not being sufficiently adapted to an online environment and an over reliance on remote examination-based assessments;

.4   that PSYCH was investigating the differential outcomes for students who undertook the professional placement year in comparison with the standard 3-year programme;

.5   that DENTL was taking action in relation to closing the feedback loop and the Head of School was holding regular meetings with students, confirmed as as a positive move forward by the Students' Union representatives;

.6   that PHRMY was commended by External Examiners for its use of scaling and this good practice would be shared with other Schools to support the application of scaling at Examining Boards in 2020/21.

1301.6   <u>PSE progress report</u>

NOTED

.1   that the College ARE committee was due to take place at the end of January 2021 and the College Deans and the Education Manager had reviewed the action plans for each area of focus and provided feedback to ensure they contain well framed action points;

.2   that 4 schools (CHEMY, COMSC, ENGIN, MATHS) had been identified as under-benchmark for NSS and had developed

action plans in response - COMSC and ENGIN had developed programme level action plans to address specific programme concerns for BSc Applied Software Engineering and BEng Mechanical Engineering;

    .3   that 6 Schools out of 7 had been identified as requiring further support to interrogate the increase in the award of 1st class honours degrees in 2019/20;

    .4   that monthly update meetings take place between the College Deans and Directors of Learning and Teaching of CHEMY, COMSC, ENGIN, MATHS to monitor progress against actions.

1301.7   <u>'At risk' Schools</u>

NOTED

    .1   that HCARE was making positive steps to improve the issues identified in previous ARE reports and the Directors of Learning and Teaching (UG and PGT) had ensured there were appropriate processes in place to deal with the end-to-end administration and operation of programme delivery and commended for the positive and proactive culture they have brought to the consideration of issues;

    .2   that a review of postgraduate programmes in HCARE had been undertaken in consultation with the College Dean (Postgraduate) which had resulted in the development of two new programmes to address past issues and associated individual student variations;

    .3   that the intervention strategy used to support SHARE was moving forward in a positive manner and the intervention team was progressing from the strategic review stage into the operational stage, implementing a number of the recommendations to ease staff burden and enhance the student experience;

    .4   that whilst the strategic review of SHARE had resulted in a number of programmes being discontinued, including joint honours, it would enable the School to create space, manage workload and build a solid foundation to explore the development of new provision in the future;

    .5   that some staff had found the intervention process unsettling and were being supported by members of the intervention team and the College.

1301.8   that it was important for Schools to ensure action plans were evaluated to show evidence of the impact of change, mindful that some actions may take some time to demonstrate impact;

1301.9   that whilst PTES/PRES survey data were not available for 2019/20, Schools should consider other feedback received from students in the absence of the formal survey feedback;

1301.10 that module evaluation data were becoming available to Schools and the feedback received should be used to shape their thinking about their education provision for 2021/22;

1301.11 the process of academic renewal and revalidation would provide the opportunity to review the portfolio of programmes in all schools to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

1302 **REPORTS FROM GROUPS**

Received paper 20/363, 'Report from Programme and Partner Standing Panel'.

NOTED

1302.1 Collaborative Provision

NOTED that collaborative provision Moderator reports had been received for all partnerships arrangements and discussed by the Panel at its meeting in January 2021. A report of the discussions and actions would be reported to the next meeting of ASQC.

1302.2 Study Group

NOTED

.1 that the Study Group project had been completed and a revised governance structure adopted; joint working groups with Study Group formed under a joint steering group, which reports to RASG;

.2 that recruitment to Study Group International Foundation programmes in 2019/20 had exceeded expectations.

1302.3 Study Abroad - Covid-19

NOTED that, during the summer, staff in the Schools had explored options for students studying abroad this academic year and developed contingency plans. As students had been advised of contingency plans, any variations resulting from the ongoing disruption would be aligned with these plans.

1303 **ACTION TAKEN ON BEHALF OF THE COMMITTEE**

Received and NOTED paper 20/364R, 'Routine Actions Taken on Behalf of the Committee'.

1304 **DATE OF MEETINGS: 2020/21**

NOTED the dates of remaining meetings to be held in 2020/21:

Tuesday 18th May 2021 at 9.30 am
Tuesday 20th July 2021 at 9.30 am