University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 29 May 2009

Report from the Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officers on Annual Monitoring for Session 2007-08

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1. Introduction

The Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officers (FQAEO) Group has been proactive in a number of areas in Session 2008-09 with a view to enhancing the Annual Monitoring process, notably:

- The introduction of a template for the preparation of the Faculty overview of Annual Monitoring Reports (Appendix 1)
- Enhancements to the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) proformas to reflect the feedback received from staff (Appendix 2)
- The provision of a template to guide departmental scrutiny of reports (Appendix 3)

The new template for Faculty overview reports was used for the first time this session and minor amendments will be made to it for 2009-10to improve clarity. The template mirrors the University's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) proformas and promotes consistency of approach across the University. This has assisted the Group in identifying common issues and sharing good practice. The new template is also intended to improve the efficiency of forward reporting to ASC. Over time, it is anticipated that it will also help individual faculties to measure incremental change in the quality of local engagement with the Annual Monitoring process. Members of the Group reported that they had found the template straightforward to use and helpful although some had found that the preparation of their report had taken a little longer than previously.

In addition, the FQAEO Group developed a standard set of responsibilities for Departmental Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officers (Appendix 4) which is intended as a guide to the quality assurance and enhancement responsibilities that require to be discharged at departmental level. It is acknowledged that there will necessarily be local variation in how quality assurance and enhancement is managed but it is hoped that the summarised responsibilities may be a useful tool in assisting departments to reflect on the completeness of their arrangements. There is flexibility for Heads of Departments to determine how, and by whom, the various elements of the role should be taken forward within their existing structures.

2. Consideration of Annual Monitoring Reports by the FQAEO Group

The FQAEO Group considers Faculty undergraduate overview reports in March and postgraduate taught (PGT) reports in April each year, with a view to submitting a consolidated overview of the University's engagement with Annual Monitoring to ASC in May.

Scrutiny of the Faculty reports revealed that PGT reports were generally less full than undergraduate reports, although there are notable exceptions (eg Law, Business and

Social Sciences, Medicine). There was also variation in the amount of detail and reflective analysis in both undergraduate and PGT reports within departments.

Engagement with the University's strategic objective, including 'to be recognised as a leading postgraduate University, renowned for the quality and breadth of our provision' and with the Learning and Teaching Strategy objective, 'to secure our position as a leading postgraduate university, through further development of postgraduate opportunities, and the provision of high quality support' has led to an expansion in postgraduate taught programmes and a drive to increase student numbers. Steady progress has been made in engaging PGT staff in the quality enhancement process and some faculties are ahead of others in this respect. However, the significant proportion of part-time students and the small numbers of students on many programmes, together with annual variations in the list of programmes being offered, has created challenges for departments and faculties and FQAEOs are actively exploring ways of embedding quality enhancement more explicitly in the annual monitoring of PGT programmes at departmental level and encouraging approaches that will be helpful to departments, eg combining AMRs where there are shared core courses and the same External Examiners across programmes.

With these factors in mind, and to further promote consistency and good practice in the AMR process, the Senate Office is offering a Workshop on "Getting the most out of Annual Monitoring" in June 2009, intended primarily for undergraduate and PGT Course Conveners. The Workshop will draw on the good practice and enhancements identified in AMRs, the student perspective of Annual Monitoring and case studies to demonstrate the benefits of reflecting on and reviewing the Annual Monitoring process at departmental and faculty level.

Each year there are difficulties in maintaining the AMR reporting schedule due, in part, to delayed submission of reports to the FQAEO and to the timing of the consideration of the overview reports in some faculties. Amendments made to the AMR proforma for Session 2008-09 will encourage departments to complete the process earlier than previously. The FQAEO Group has also agreed to pilot a new approach to its scrutiny of Faculty PGT reports next session modelled on the approach adopted by ASC for the scrutiny of DPTLA reports, the approach taken in the University of Edinburgh and in the PGT programmes in the Faculty of Medicine. Each FQAEO will scrutinise another Faculty's PGT report and present a reflective summary for discussion within the FQAEO Group. This approach has been introduced with a view to strengthening the sharing of good practice and approaches to the Annual Monitoring process across faculties and, if successful, will be rolled out to include the undergraduate reports in the following session. FQAEOs will require adequate time to reflect on another Faculty's report and it would be helpful if Faculties could agree with their FQAEOs on a suitable date for the receipt of the Faculty FQAEO overview of undergraduate and PGT reports with this in mind.

The FQAEO Group reflected on how the monitoring of engagement with Equality and Diversity at course and programme level might be better incorporated into the Annual Monitoring process and specific questions for inclusion in next session's AMR proformas have been discussed and agreed with the Director of the Equality and Diversity Unit.

ASC will have noted from previous reports that the Faculty of Medicine favours an individual approach to Annual Monitoring in each of its three Undergraduate Schools and has not hitherto appointed a Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officer to manage the overview of its Quality Assurance and Enhancement processes. Whilst it is recognised that there are benefits in having a separate overview report from each School, which can be readily shared with the relevant professional/statutory body, the FQAEO Group does not have access to the integrated Faculty level monitoring and

scrutiny of these undergraduate courses and programmes. The overall Medical Faculty perspective is not therefore fully taken account of in the Group's discussions, which has implications for onward reporting to ASC. The addition of a Faculty representative on the FQAEO Group to enhance the work of the Group and the quality of feedback provided to the Faculty will be discussed with the Faculty for implementation in 2009-10.

3.   Progress in addressing key issues from previous AMRs

The FQAEOs' reports reflected on progress with issues identified in the previous cycle of Annual Monitoring and provided an update on how these matters had been taken forward. A key part of the process is feeding back to Departments the action taken by Faculties and the University to address the issues that they have raised. The FQAEO Group continues to reflect on how this aspect of Annual Monitoring might be improved and a suggestion from the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences will be further explored.

4.   Feedback from Students

Student satisfaction was evident in all reports and where issues had been raised steps had been taken to address them. The commitment to closing the feedback loop was demonstrated most effectively in the reports from the Faculties of Arts and Law, Business and Social Science although there was evidence of engagement with this in all faculties. Common examples of good practice included:

- The posting of Staff-Student Liaison Committee minutes on noticeboards and in Moodle;
- The dissemination of course reports.

Several reports commented on correlations with NSS data, data from the First Year Student Experience Survey and data from the International Student Barometer, demonstrating colleagues' engagement in wider reflection.

The Law, Business and Social Sciences PGT report reflected that evidence from end-of-session questionnaires suggests that students are now more inclined to acknowledge that their studies equip them well for subsequent employment or their intended vocation.

5.   Feedback from teaching staff

Common issues raised in reports included:

- The Generic Regulations for Taught Masters Degrees, specifically the criteria governing awards with Merit and Distinction and opportunities to compensate for grades below C **[addressed]**
- The provision of designated postgraduate teaching areas or suites of rooms **[currently being addressed]**
- Regret at the widespread loss of peer-assisted learning (PAL) following the introduction of Disclosure Scotland legislation
- Challenges in recruiting new postgraduate research students as GTAs, especially because of the requirement to be trained and disclosed in advance
- Engagement with Faculty-wide initiatives
- The shortage of small tutorial room accommodation

- Measures taken locally to improve attendance and performance

- Observations that a high proportion of students do not collect the feedback on their assessments and the associated impact on staff morale

- The challenges in improving the basic mathematics skills of new entrants

- The challenges in supporting students for whom English is not their first language

- The challenges in providing sufficient materials for large laboratory classes

- Improvement in the standard of lecture theatres following refurbishment, but continuing lack of instructions on the use of equipment

- The change to the structure of the academic year, including concerns about how it might impact on student performance and staff working practices, and the associated constraints placed on postgraduate teaching

- Issues relating to specific teaching locations

Other matters discussed in reports included:

- Acknowledgment of the valuable contributions made by Student Representatives

- Pride in student achievements

- The links to departmental research priorities

- The opportunities that MLitt programmes provide for teaching with colleagues within and across departments

- The benefits of close industrial links

- Ways of identifying at an earlier stage students who may need additional support

- The importance of observing admissions standards and tightening procedures to ensure that registered students are suitably qualified in academic terms and appropriate IELTS scores

- A suggestion from one Faculty that the preparatory English language courses offered by Glasgow International College and the EFL Unit may be delivering advantages in preparing and focusing international students for subsequent work

- Concerns about the relatively late publication of the examination timetable

- Problems related to capturing complete examination statistics

- The relationship between poor attendance at lectures and student performance and retention

- The difficulty of making direct comparisons between NSS results and end of programme feedback results

- The increasing need for provision of technical support for evening and weekend teaching in some areas

- A plea for a period of stability following the major reorganisation involved in accomplishing the introduction of the new academic year

- Concern at any tendency for reports to focus predominantly on the negative

Specific matters for the attention of the University are raised elsewhere in this report. Significantly fewer issues relating to teaching accommodation have been raised this year and recent upgrades and improvements have been welcomed. The Senate Office will take forward issues related to specific teaching venues with Estates and Buildings. Three members (two academic, one academic-related) of the FQAEO Group are now members of the Teaching Room Allocation/Timetabling User Group (Superusers).

6. Feedback from External Examiners

Feedback from External Examiners confirmed that standards in the University of Glasgow are broadly comparable with other institutions. A number of reports referred to good practice identified by External Examiners and drew the Faculty's attention to particular matters that had been raised. A small number of External Examiners continue to have issues with the Code of Assessment and there were frequent comments on the Generic Regulations for Taught Masters Degrees which have since been reviewed and revised.

7. Results

Extracting the relevant information from the Student Success Performance Indicators (SSPI) data available on the Planning Office website continues to be challenging for report compilers and additional manipulation is frequently necessary to allow reflection on trends. The relatively late availability of SSPI data also causes difficulties. The specific concerns of the FQAEO Group have been shared with the Student Lifecycle Project to enable solutions to be explored.

Staff have expressed a desire to complete AMRs at the conclusion of the main teaching and examination period to enable them to reflect on courses and programmes whilst information is fresh in their minds. Changes have therefore been made to the AMR proforma for Session 2007-08 to enable staff to complete the results section without having to wait for resit data to be available, with the proviso that any issues arising in relation to the resit diet are commented on in the following year's report. In addition, if the results information requested is available locally in another format, staff may now include this as an appendix to their report in lieu of completing the results table in the AMR. It is anticipated that these changes will make the process less onerous for staff and there may be opportunities to foreshorten the Annual Monitoring process, and speed up associated action if earlier completion of course AMRs becomes the norm.

There have been particular difficulties for PGT report compilers, where uptake on individual programmes varies from year and the combination of full-time and part-time provision creates additional challenges. To improve the consistency of information provided across the University, an amendment has been made to the PGT AMR proforma to require report compilers to comment on student numbers, noting any marked shifts in profile.

8. Quality Enhancement

As previously stated, there is variation in the reports received from a number of departments in terms of content, scrutiny and engagement with the process. There is room for improvement in the quality of information provided and some FQAEOs have already had discussions about this with relevant Heads of Department. Further steps are being taken to improve engagement with quality enhancement across the University, eg the forthcoming Workshop on "Getting the most out of the Annual Monitoring".

Some of the enhancement activity that departments are engaging in does not appear to be reported through the AMR process and may be less easy to reflect on at course level, eg:

- Engagement with the Enhancement Themes

- Enhancements resulting from DPTLA recommendations

- Good practice identified in DPTLA reports

- Enhancements resulting from accreditation by professional and statutory bodies

- Reviews of intended learning outcomes to reflect updates to subject benchmark statements

The FQAEO Group **recommends** formalisation of the requirement for Heads of Departments, to submit a report of the Department's scrutiny of AMRS (see Appendix 3) to the FQAEO to accompany its AMRs. A Departmental overview of the scrutiny process should assist Heads of Departments to identify themes arising from the Annual Monitoring process and to identify where improvements in individual reporting styles may be achieved. It may also provide a vehicle for departments to comment on more general enhancements that have been made that are less easily attributed to individual courses. Above all, it will assist FQAEOs to identify the key departmental issues that require the attention of the Faculty and/or the University.

Examples of enhancements and good practice are appended separately (Appendix 5). These are not comprehensively reported since some reporting styles make it less easy to extract examples. The omission of a Faculty from the list of examples does not therefore imply that enhancements and good practice have not been included in the synthesised Faculty report. The adoption of a bullet point reporting style in Faculty AMRs will simplify the extraction process in future years. Work has still to be done to identify recurrent themes, and decisions made about how best to disseminate the examples of good practice and enhancement. These matters will be addressed by the Senate Office.

9.   Topics of Current Importance

This section was added recently to the AMR proforma with a view to gaining insight into how key aspects of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and Faculty Plans for Learning & Teaching are working and/or reflected at course and programme level. The information contained in Faculty AMRs is attached as a separate appendix (Appendix 6) for easy reference by those who may wish to take aspects of the findings forward.

10.   Action identified for the attention of the University

The following points have been identified for action by the University. Minor issues raised in relation to teaching accommodation are not reported here as the Senate Office will take them forward directly with Estates and Buildings. Where possible, actions have been identified for the attention of specified individuals.

Issues already resolved

- IT facilities in teaching rooms (i.e., provision of networked computers **[Introduced in Session 2008-09]**

- Designated teaching areas or suites of rooms to accommodate the specialised needs of postgraduate teaching **[Premises formerly occupied**

by Registry being developed for this purpose, together with dual purpose refurbishment of Senate and Carnegie Rooms]

- Reservations about the Generic Regulations for Taught Masters Degrees **[Regulations reviewed and amendments approved by Senate, April 2009]**

- Monitoring of administration of 'absence recording' **[Clarifications to Student Absence Policy and introduction of accompanying Guidance, to be reported to Senate June 2009 and introduced in Session 2009-10; Recommendation to Heads of Departments that compulsory attendance be clearly specified in course documentation to mitigate against unnecessary absence reporting]**

Ongoing Accommodation Issues

Fora now exist to enable faculties to discuss enhancement of locally owned accommodation with Estates and Buildings. Senate Office will consider the most appropriate means to bring the following matters to the attention of senior colleagues.

- The single most recurring concern expressed in the Faculty of Arts AMRs relates to the fitness for purpose of teaching spaces. The most pressing of these concerns are in relation to Classics and Music: the accommodation difficulties for these two Departments have been reported in Faculty reports for the past three and four years respectively and continue to be raised by External Examiners in both areas as well as, repeatedly, in student comments. The lack of fitness for purpose in both these cases is impacting on student satisfaction (as demonstrated in NSS scores), likely on student retention and certainly on the accessibility of Music to certain groups of disabled students. For Music in particular, this is proving challenging for recruitment as they are competing against far better appointed institutions for the top students. The convenor of Classical Civilisation 2B points out that access to suitable spaces for different forms of teaching "goes to the heart of the teaching quality agenda". The impact on staff morale is also noted. It is felt that action is required to safeguard the standing of these Departments.

- As noted in the last Faculty of Arts report, Theatre, Film & Television Studies are out-growing their space. The problems noted in the AMRs are essentially the same as last year and there is a particular concern expressed over the lack of janitorial cover after 4.30pm. This raises safety concerns for staff (and students) in classes up until 5pm and means that performance space is not being effectively used in the evening, despite intense pressures on this space during the day which impact particularly on devising projects for Theatre Studies. This also means that access to the Resources Room is curtailed.

Generic Issues

- Ongoing difficulties with securing appropriate accommodation on the main University campus for small group teaching **[Action: Director of Estates & Buildings]**

- Lack of accommodation for classes of 30-40 students **[Action: Vice Principal (Strategy & Resources) and Director of Estates and Buildings]**

- Request for University to conduct an annual review and upgrade of teaching rooms **[Director of Estates and Buildings]**

- Improvements in the efficiency of central room bookings with particular attention to avoiding unnecessary movement of courses between rooms **[Action: Director of Estates and Buildings]**

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- Provision of instructions for use of IT equipment in teaching venues **[Action: Director of IT Services]**

Faculty of Arts

- A clarification of the University position on the September weekend is required to avoid confusion, particularly for new students and in fairness to students (and staff) with childcare commitments. **[Action: Vice Principal (Strategy & Resources)]**

Faculty of Biomedical & Life Sciences

- A plea for a period of stability following the major reorganisation involved in accomplishing the introduction of the New Academic Year. **[Action: University to note]**

- Refurbishment of the Biology laboratories on the 9th floor of the Boyd Orr is an urgent priority. Staff involved were devastated to learn that the refurbishment, expected to occur in summer 2009, has been postponed. Poor facilities are considered bad for retention. The same goes for SCENE. **[Action: Vice Principal (Strategy & Resources)]**

Dental School

- There has been a major refurbishment programme in the Dental School, which has resulted in the provision of good facilities. The remainder of the building requires refurbishment and the University's support is requested to ensure that this is addressed. **[Action: Vice Principal (Strategy & Resources)]**

Faculty of Education

- Consideration be given to the ways staff undertaking the New Lecturers Teaching Programme are further supported and mentored by their parent Departments. **[Action: Director of Human Resources and Vice Principal (Learning, Teaching & Internationalisation)]**

- In line with the Internationalisation agenda establish more flexible arrangements, including scholarships and, as appropriate, reduced fees for students from developing countries currently unable to pay full cost recovery overseas fees. **[Action: Vice Principal (Learning, Teaching & Internationalisation)]**

Faculty of Information & Mathematical Sciences

- Central Room Bookings confirmed teaching rooms quite close to the start of the first semester, making it difficult for staff to react to the allocation of teaching space and for any unsuitable assignments to be swapped. **[Action: Director, Estates and Buildings]**

Faculty of Law, Business & Social Sciences

- Limited access to 'plug and play' technology in PG teaching accommodation, and poor IT Help Desk service/coverage. **[Action: Director of IT Services]**

Medical School

- Maternity leave cover in areas with a heavy teaching load should be a priority. This is particularly notable in the case of the MSc (Med Sci) Human and Clinical Nutrition, where only one replacement was supplied to cover three members of staff on maternity leave. **[Action: Executive Dean of the Faculty of Medicine]**

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine

- The need to develop teaching and laboratory facilities at Garscube, both to alleviate the demand at Gilmorehill and to facilitate enhancement of the teaching and learning experience of science based subjects due to limited facilities/increased student numbers. In this regard the Faculty corporate plan has proposed construction of a new teaching and conference facility, on the Garscube site, which would address many of the shortcomings identified within the FACMR with regard to teaching spaces. In addition, construction of such a facility would address related issues identified outside of the FACMR, such as the inadequate capacity of current on site catering and would enhance integration of the university within the wider local community. **[Action: Vice Principal (Strategy & Resources) and Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine]**

- Promote to students an inquiring mentality rather than learning to assessment. **[Dean of Faculty of Veterinary Medicine]**

- Enlarge facilities for post mortems. **[Action: Dean of the Faculty of Medicine]**

- The Faculty would like increased commitment and support from Estates and Buildings for identified projects. **[Action: Director of Estates and Buildings and Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine]**