Minutes of the joint meeting of TLSC and QASC on 27 September 2017 at 2pm in the PMR

Present
Prof D Gilbert (Co-Chair, VP Quality and Standards), Prof K Normington (Co-Chair, Senior VP (Academic)), Dr M Beck, Mr M Brooke, Dr D Chong, Dr M Crompton, Prof R Deem, Dr V Greenaway, Dr Joseph Harris, Dr R Hawley, Mr C Jones, Prof J Knowles, Dr C Matos, Dr J McEvoy, Prof B O’Keefe, Ms S Plackeck, Dr T Sharia, Mr P Tarasiewicz

In attendance Mr J Tuck

WELCOME
The Senior Vice Principal (Academic) opened the joint meeting, explaining that its intention was to set a trajectory for the year ahead. The SVP thanked the Directors of Teaching and Learning faculty representatives present for putting themselves forward for either TLSC or QASC, and encouraged them to send other faculty representatives in their place in the event they could not attend the scheduled meetings; the Secretary can provide a list of contacts if required. The Vice Principal (Quality and Standards) echoed this sentiment, thanking those Directors of Teaching and Learning that had volunteered for QASC.

1. APOLOGIES
The apologies received were noted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS
2.1 The minutes of the final meeting of LTQC (M17/77-17/142) held on 09 May 2017, were approved as a true record, subject to the addition of Ms N Barrett (SU President) to the list of attendees.

2.2 The minutes of the first meeting of QASC held on 21 August 2017 (M17/01-M17/42) were approved as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES
It was noted that actions arising from the August meeting of QASC had largely been completed.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE
4.1 The Committee received the TLSC terms of reference for 2017-18 and the TLSC membership list (TLSC-QASC/17/01). The Committee noted that the quorum for TLSC would be set at 10 members, as per College guidelines.

4.2 The Committee received the QASC terms of reference for 2017-18 and the QASC membership list (TLSC-QASC/17/02). The Committee noted that the quorum for QASC would be set at 7 members, as per College guidelines.

5. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2017
5.1 The Committee received a report highlighting successes and areas for attention in the 2017 NSS (TLSC-QASC/17/03). The SVP explained that historically the analysis of the NSS had been rather protracted with the survey results looked at in the Planning round, with action plans written as late as January for the following academic year. By embedding the
formulation of responses in Annual Review it was hoped to make the process more responsive. The VP Quality and Standards added that, any lower quartile (orange) scores were unacceptable given the RHUL student demographic.

The Committee agreed that it should be relatively simple to convert some of the mid-quartile, white scores to green, by straightforward interventions or helping students interpret questions in a slightly different way. The Associate Dean (Education) for Arts noted more work could be done, within the confines of what is acceptable, to decode the questions. The VP Quality and Standards shared this view, giving feedback as an area which would benefit from elaboration. The Associate Dean (Education) for Science noted there was ambiguity around some of the terminology especially where the NSS use ‘course’ as an alternative to ‘programme’ (where course or course unit at RHUL is the norm, instead of module).

The Committee noted that more would need to be done to satisfy Joint Honours students, as demonstrated by some of the free-form comments received, in addition to lower scores for the ‘learning community’ and ‘organisation and management’ groups of questions. The Head of Educational Development added there would be some benefit in conducting a focus group with Joint Honours students to ascertain their motives for opting for this type of degree. This could be conducted as a Bristol Online Survey. The Committee were supportive of the proposal.

**ACTION:** Head of Educational Development to conduct a Bristol Online Survey with a sample of Joint Honours students to understand their motives for choosing a joint degree.

The Committee decided that more information was needed on how NSS scores were attributed to departments in the case of Joint Honours students. The Dean for the Faculty of MEL explained that this was according to the way JACs codes were used in the programme setup. The Head of AQPO agreed with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts that it would be beneficial to circulate a report which showed how JACs codes were mapped to programmes, which she would undertake to acquire from Strategic Planning and Change.

**ACTION:** The Head of AQPO to obtain a report on how JACs codes are mapped to programmes from Strategic Planning and Change, for circulation to the Deans.

The TLSC representative from the English department noted that they were already trying to improve the experience of Joint Honours students by having a named contact within English with an active interest in the partner department, rather than relying on just an Academic Coordinator or Director of Teaching and Learning. In her view this would lead to improved scores.

The SVP concluded the discussion, noting that the improvement in RHUL’s position (from 35th to 25th) could also be attributed to other HEI’s not faring as well in the 2017 NSS. However the College was not far off doing extremely well, provided effective solutions in some areas were forthcoming. The Dean of Arts noted that it would only take a 2 per cent overall increase in the NSS score for the College to climb 17 places in the rankings.

Following on from discussion under 5.1, the Committee noted the 2017 NSS Follow Up steps (TLSC-QASC/17/04) and considered overarching NSS issues identified by QASC: feedback and assessment, degree outcomes, organisation and management and Student Voice.
As regards feedback and assessment, the SVP remarked that there was a college-wide strategy to reduce over-assessment and introduce more proportionality to the weightings of assessment, as per the work undertaken by the Associate Dean (Education) in the Faculty of Arts. This theme was also being picked up in validation events.

**ACTION:** The next meeting of TLSC to receive an update on assessment weighting work undertaken in the A&SS faculty.

The SVP noted that the VP for Teaching Innovation and the Head of EDC had been working on a Digital Learning Strategy, which would most likely be looked at at the next meeting. The strategy was especially important for two years hence, when subject-level TEF would be introduced, and would look at such measures as time spent on Moodle etc.

**ACTION:** TLSC to be updated on progress of Digital Learning Strategy at next meeting

The SVP revealed that she had written to Heads of Department to remind them of good management practices, which would hopefully lead to some improvement in the ‘organisation and management’ category of questions. The reality is that students are more inclined to view changes to their programme as an inconvenience rather than something of benefit. In addition HODs had been reminded as to the fundamental importance of the timely return of marked work.

The SVP explained that departments with scores in significant need of improvement would be subject to enhanced monitoring. The Head of EDC added that the School of Management were already working with his department to address their scores.

The SVP flagged the LLB programme as one which might produce poor NSS scores in 2018; the Penultimate Year Survey conducted by the College had returned some low scores.

**ACTION:** The Dean of the MEL Faculty to discuss the penultimate year survey with the School of Law.

On the theme of Student Voice, the SVP noted that the VP (Student Engagement) had already met with the Student Voice Stream.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT AND ENHANCEMENT PLAN

6.1 The Committees received the Quality Assessment Review Report 2016-17 (TLSC-QASC/17/05), with the VP Quality and Standards explaining how Council was now responsible for providing assurance to HEFCE on quality matters; in the past, the QAA had conducted reviews every 5-6 years.

6.2 The Committees received the College Enhancement Plan 2017-18 (TLSC-QASC/17/06), which set out the College’s priorities for the continuous improvement of the student experience and the maintenance of the standard of awards made in the College’s name. The Enhancement Plan touched upon many of the issues arising out of the NSS as discussed under item 5.

The SVP clarified that there was a separate operationalisation plan, which had not been included with these papers. The operationalisation plan identified departments/persons responsible for taking forward actions.

The VP Quality and Standards requested that TLSC-QASC approve the Quality Assessment Review Report 2016 and the College Enhancement Plan 2017-18, so that it could be remitted to Academic Board. TLSC-QASC approved the proposal.
**ACTION:** Senior VP to ensure that Quality Assurance Report and Enhancement Plan is sent on to the Academic Board Secretary for inclusion in the papers of the 11 October meeting.

6.3 The committee RECEIVED a verbal update from the VP (Quality Assurance and Standards) on the Council Academic Quality Assurance Committee (CAQAC) 17/25

The VP Quality and Standards explained how Council's response to the Quality Assurance Report and Enhancement Plan would be conveyed through CAQAC, after the November 2017 meeting of Council. The intention in future is to bring the schedule forward, so that Academic Board have sight of the final Report and Enhancement Plan at their May/June Meeting, in order to approve this to be remitted to Council. The SVP noted that all parties are still familiarising themselves with the new process. As the system beds in, the level of scrutiny by CAQAC could well increase with more challenging questions for the College.

The VP Quality and Standards stressed that the scrutiny provided by Council would not extend to intervention in the day-to-day management of the College or matters pertaining to details of the curriculum.

7. **OPEN DISCUSSION ITEM: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED ACADEMIC STRATEGY** 17/28

The Committee received a paper from the Senior Vice Principal (Academic) on an integrated academic strategy (TLSC-QASC/17/07), which set out how research and teaching might be brought together at RHUL as part of the overall College Strategy until 2020. The Committee was asked to come up with some principles to construct a 'Royal Holloway Degree Framework'; a set of design elements that all degrees elements at RHUL could use. The SVP noted that the framework could be viewed as a parallel to the 'QM Model' or 'Sussex Choice'.

The VP Teaching Innovation noted that a commitment to ethics and social justice should be an important pillar of any RHUL degree. The Head of EDC echoed the sentiment, noting that this could be set against RHUL’s unique historical narrative. It was also noted that the College could emphasize its relatively small student population as a strength, with the result that students perceive a more individualised experience than with our competitors.

The Director of Teaching and Learning from the Department of English suggested that the College could look to attract more WP students, by taking advantage of its close proximity to West London and the WP students that reside in the area.

The Associate Dean (Education) for the Faculty of Arts suggested that the degree framework should reflect the input of Professional Services, to emphasise the commitment of all stakeholders as a community of professionals. In addition, the promotion of joint degrees or the taking of electives from other departments, along with the introduction of Year in Industry and Year in Business variants would bring diversity and robustness to the RHUL degree, to equip graduates with the flexible skill-set they would need in a rapidly changing world.

The Associate Dean (Education) for the Faculty of Science queried whether the College already had a mission statement, or something which already points to an RHUL identity. The SU VP Education suggested the College’s motto 'to be, rather than to seem to be' could be taken as a starting point for devising a modern strapline.

The SVP thanked the Committees for their contributions, which would be used as a basis for follow-up discussions with the Students’ Union and Heads of Department.
**ACTION:** SVP to take the contributions from TLSC-QASC on principles underpinning the Royal Holloway Degree Framework to the Students’ Union and Heads of Department for further discussion.

8. **TEACHING INNOVATION**
The Committees received a verbal update from the VP (Teaching Innovation) on the work of the Teaching Innovation Group.

The Committees noted that the group, comprising academic and student representation, was working to identify and fund one teaching innovation project per faculty this year. In addition, work is ongoing to identify teaching space which could be used experimentally for this purpose; space in Bourne Laboratory and the Jane Holloway Hall have been suggested.

The Committees noted that the group is exploring the possibility of collaborating with other HEIs.

The Committee noted that the Students' Union VP (Education), is in the process of holding discussions with student faculty representatives with a view to putting nominations forward to participate in the group.

The VP Teaching Innovation explained that the Teaching Innovation Group would also advise on the strategy in terms of MOOCs, although it was noted their future remains uncertain.

9. **INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK**
The Committees discussed the final report from the LTQC working group on international outlook (TLSC-QASC/17/08) with the SVP noting that international outlook was very important to the College's curriculum development, validation and review processes. The Head of AQPO confirmed it is possible these processes will be further modified to embed international outlook as an integral consideration.

The SVP noted that work was still ongoing as to the development of a Trigger Warning Policy and these principles would most likely need to be endorsed at a subsequent meeting of TLSC.

The SVP noted there was more work to be done insofar as the development and resource support for a central web space to promote good practice case studies.

More clarity was also required around student mobility in light of Brexit. The Head of AQPO confirmed that she had been looking at Study Abroad agreements with the Senior Scholarships & Partnerships Manager, in an attempt to account for the fragmented nature of international offerings by departments at RHUL.

10. **ACADEMIC YEAR**
The SVP confirmed that consideration was being given to introducing some structural changes to the academic year, so that students taking 15 credit course units in the autumn do not have to wait until May to be assessed; rather they would instead be assessed in January. This could have benefits for the NSS, especially with regard to the employability group of questions, as it would give students a clearer indication of their progress earlier on. Some departments already run assessments in January but these lack central oversight and are arranged at local-level, which can leave the College vulnerable to appeal, especially where there is variable adherence to examination conditions for example. Commercial
Services had confirmed the impact would be negligible in terms of their revenue as the summer vacation period is their most lucrative period.

The SVP stressed that there would have to be a College-wide adoption of the changes, in recognition of the potential disruption for Joint Honours Students if departments were permitted to opt-out.

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and the Associate Dean (Education) of the Faculty of Arts noted that many Heads of Department in their faculty were supportive of June resits as an alternative to August resits, to facilitate the progression of students with complex Extenuating Circumstances.

The VP (Teaching Innovation) confirmed that a similar proposal had been explored by a working Group in the past, with the end result a 50:50 split in terms of those in favour and against.

The VP (Quality and Standards) was opposed to any move which would further compress the month of May. The month was already an extremely busy one for academics, so to encroach upon it with further teaching might have a negative impact in terms of quality and standards. He stressed the primary importance of marking during that period, and suggested that there might be the opportunity for other activities at this time of year, particularly as related to employability.

The Dean of MEL remarked that a shift in attitudes was needed in terms of reconciling the academic year in assessment points. An assessment point at the end of term 1 would permit for 15 and 30 credit course units to run seamlessly alongside one another.

11. REPORT ON STUDENT VOICE CONFERENCE
The Students’ Union VP (Education) introduced a paper on findings from the Student Voice Conference held earlier in 2017 (TLSC-QASC/17/09). The paper was a consequence of consultations between students, academic and professional services staff on the theme of assessment and feedback.

The Committees discussed the feasibility of introducing a College-wide feedback coversheet in order to improve the consistency of feedback. The SVP noted that such a proposal could well be overtaken by the take-up of online marking, but both GradeMark and Moodle platforms could be used to convey feedback.

The Head of EDC suggested that there was merit in investigating the SU’s assertion about the quantity and tone of feedback. All feedback had to justify the mark that had been arrived at and give indicators as to how students could develop their answers to attain higher grades. There would be benefit in establishing institutional principles in this regard, informed by sector research. The Committees agreed to put together a working group to identify key principles underpinning feedback, mapped to current practice at RHUL. This could report back to TLSC/QASC as appropriate.

ACTION: Head of EDC and DoTL representatives from Arts (QASC rep), Management (QASC rep) and Science (TLSC rep) to form a working group to identify key principles that should underpin assessment feedback at RHUL.

The Committees agreed that there was merit in the SU’s proposal to bring more uniformity to feedback, controlling for differences between academic disciplines.
The Committees agreed it would be logistically impossible to introduce a 6-week interval between assessment deadlines.

12. **FEEDBACK POLICY**

The Committees received a proposal from the Head of AQPO on sector practice on return of assessment with feedback (TLSC-QASC/17/10), which had been informed by sector research into equivalent practices at other HEIs (although not comparator institutions).

The Head of AQPO noted it would be beneficial to define turnaround time in terms of working days, rather than weeks, so as to be more precise and avoid confusion where marking periods coincide with Bank Holidays, vacation periods etc.

The Committee moved to consider the College-wide issue of over-assessment. The Dean of Arts noted that feedback had to be given to students far enough in advance of their next assignment, so they could act upon it, as a first principle. The Associate Dean (Education) for the Science Faculty remarked this was already embedded in the culture of Science departments.

The Dean of the Arts Faculty explained how he and the Associate Dean (Education) would shortly be identifying a department to participate in a programme design assessment by an external company. They would undertake to look at the current assessment regime for that programme i.e. what it is for; how it works and its timings etc. The exercise would be largely student-led.

The Committees noted that HODs do identify staff that have not returned assessed work on time. In addition, adherence to this principle is monitored in the PAR form for academic staff.

The Committees agreed that RHUL should adopt the University of Nottingham definition of turnaround time as per Appendix B of the paper, with the addition of a disclaimer around the marking of dissertations and projects, which can take longer for pedagogic reasons. The Head of AQPO agreed to modify the paper to incorporate the Committees’ feedback, before remitting to the December meeting of Academic Board.

**ACTION:** Head of AQPO agreed to modify the paper on sector research on turnaround time for return of assessed work and feedback (TLSC-QASC/17/10), using the University of Nottingham policy model, before remitting to the December meeting of Academic Board.

13. **EMPLOYABILITY GROUP**

The SVP confirmed she would deliver a verbal report on the meeting of the employability group at the next TLSC meeting.

**ACTION:** SVP to deliver a verbal report on the meeting of the employability group at the November TLSC meeting.

14. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The committees received the late paper ‘The future of Course Feedback Surveys’ (TLSC-QASC/17/11), which proposed that all course feedback surveys shift from paper-based to online completion.

The VP (Teaching Innovation) remarked that this was an issue that had been discussed exhaustively at LTQC but Student Administration had previously pushed back on resource grounds. It was encouraging therefore that they were now prepared to move to a complete roll-out following a successful pilot.
The SVP was supportive of the proposal, noting that it should be cost-neutral and less labour intensive than paper-based forms. The Committee did note that it would be useful for Student Administration to set out how the roll-out would be operationalised, as there was little detail in the proposal. The observer in attendance, the Director of Academic Services, agreed to convey the Committees’ approval to the Director of Student Administration, with a recommendation that an operationalisation plan is drawn up.

**ACTION:** Director of Academic Services to feedback to the Director of Student Administration that TLSC-QASC has approved the proposal to roll-out online course feedback surveys across the College, but consideration should be given to setting out how this will be operationalised.

**Starred items**

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETINGS**

TLSC noted that the date of the next meeting of TLSC is 21 November 2-5pm in the Large Boardroom (LBR). Further TLSC meetings for 2017-18 are as follows:

17 January 2018, 2-5pm in the PMR
21 March 2018, 2-5pm in the PMR
09 May 2018, 2-5pm, in FE139

QASC noted that the date of the next meeting of QASC is 15 November 2-4pm in the PMR. Further QASC meetings for 2017-18 are as follows:

15 November 2017, 2-4pm, PMR
27 February 2018, 2-4pm, PMR
08 May 2018, 10-12pm, PMR
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Min Number</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Person responsible</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17/10</td>
<td>Head of Educational Development to conduct a Bristol Online Survey with a sample of Joint Honours students to understand their motives for choosing a joint degree.</td>
<td>Head of EDC</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/12</td>
<td>The Head of AQPO to obtain a report on how JACs codes are mapped to programmes from Strategic Planning and Change, for circulation to the Deans.</td>
<td>Head of AQPO</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/15</td>
<td>The next meeting of TLSC to receive an update on assessment weighting work undertaken in the A&amp;SS faculty.</td>
<td>Dean of A&amp;SS, AD (E) A&amp;SS</td>
<td>Update at 21 November TLSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/16</td>
<td>TLSC to be updated on progress of Digital Learning Strategy at next meeting</td>
<td>VP Teaching Innovation, Head of EDC</td>
<td>Update at 21 November TLSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/19</td>
<td>The Dean of the MEL Faculty to discuss the penultimate year survey with the School of Law.</td>
<td>Dean of MEL</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/24</td>
<td>SVP to ensure that Quality Assurance Report and Enhancement Plan is sent on to the Academic Board Secretary for inclusion in the papers of the 11 October meeting.</td>
<td>Senior VP</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/33</td>
<td>SVP to take the contributions from TLSC-QASC on principles underpinning the Royal Holloway Degree Framework to the Students’ Union and Heads of Department for further discussion.</td>
<td>Senior VP</td>
<td>Possible update at 21 Nov TLSC meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/51</td>
<td>Head of EDC and DoTL representatives from Arts (QASC rep), Management (QASC rep) and Science (TLSC rep) to form a working group to identify key principles that should underpin assessment feedback at RHUL.</td>
<td>Head of EDC</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/59</td>
<td>Head of AQPO agreed to modify the paper on sector research on turnaround time for return of assessed work and feedback (TLSC-QASC/17/10) using the University of Nottingham model, before remitting to the December meeting of Academic Board.</td>
<td>Head of AQPO</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/63</td>
<td>Director of Academic Services to feedback to the Head of Student Administration that TLSC-QASC has approved the proposal to roll-out online course feedback surveys across the College, but consideration should be given to setting out how this will be operationalised.</td>
<td>Director of Academic Services</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>