College of Science and Engineering

College arrangements for quality assurance: discussion paper

Summary

This paper contains a proposal that has been developed within the College Office. It has significant implications for Schools, particularly for the QA Representative; Director of Teaching and Teaching Organisation Administrator. It is intended to stimulate discussions within Schools. The paper is to be considered by both the College Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC) and the College Learning and Teaching Committee (CL&TC). Both Committees will be asked for their views on the proposal, to go forward via CSMC to the Head of College.

This issue is being raised now because it is recognised that the operation of the College Quality Assurance Committee is burdensome. There are large meetings, for which the preparation and attendance are time-consuming. Following the meetings, there is a poor link between the identification of QA issues and their resolution. This arises mainly because the members of CQAC are not (usually) the School Officers that have responsibility to implement change. Much of the business of CQAC is administrative in nature, and this could be accomplished by administrative colleagues. The proposal below for an enhanced administrative role for CQAC does raise issues of to what extent the College QA processes can engage with Schools at an administrative level, and whether a more effective interface can be made between the auditing process and the academic issues which arise from it.

Background

During the past year there has been a change in the balance of expertise in the School representation on the College Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC). When the Committee was set up, it had one academic quality assurance (QA) representative from each School. Currently the School representation is: both an academic and the Teaching Organisation Administrator (four Schools); only a Director of Teaching (one School); only a Teaching Organisation Administrator (one School); only an academic QA representative (one School).

This change in the balance of expertise may reflect an increasing focus on the audit role for CQAC. It is the policy of the College that the responsibility for quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) is separated: the former being the remit of CQAC; the latter being the remit of the operational teaching areas – in the re-structuring of the College now represented at undergraduate and taught postgraduate levels by the College Learning and Teaching Committee (CL&TC). At University level there is currently no separation of responsibility of QA and QE, as both are overseen by the Senatus Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (SQAEC), though this is expected to change in the near future.

The mechanism for feedback from the audit function to inform teaching practice is currently not clearly defined in the College procedures. Similarly, with the disbandment of the College Postgraduate Studies Committee, there is a lack of clarity on some of the quality assurance and enhancement roles formerly undertaken by that Committee, particularly consideration of Quinquennial Review reports.

It is therefore timely to review the College arrangements for quality assurance, in terms of College structures and processes to promote efficiency, to minimise the time of staff required for meetings and for providing customised documentation; maximising the opportunities for quality enhancement; whilst ensuring compliance with University and College requirements.
There have been discussions recently within the College Office about possible revised arrangements. These have been condensed into the options below which describes revised remits for CQAC, focusing on a quality audit role; and an expanded role for CL&TC, incorporating quality assessment. There are also some possible variations on this proposal.

The broad elements of quality management which need to be included in the remits of the College structures are defined in Appendix 1. The current remits of CQAC and CL&TC are given in Appendix 2.

**Devolved context**

Any College arrangements for quality management need to recognise that much of the management of quality will take place within Schools. However, there are roles for the College in both quality assurance and enhancement.

As degrees are awarded by the University rather than Schools or Colleges, there is a legitimate interest for the University to require an audit by the College of the quality procedures within Schools. A key element of quality enhancement is the identification and sharing of good practice, so there is a role for the College in promoting discussion between teaching practitioners across different Schools. There is a further requirement for the College to report activity and outcomes at University level. The College Annual QA report should have some endorsement, if not ownership, by Schools in the College, so there does need to be a College forum to discuss the draft report.

**Option of revised remits for CQAC and CL&TC**

(i) **role of CQAC**

Under this option, the College Quality Assurance Committee would focus on a more audit-based role: its membership would comprise administrative staff (normally the Teaching Organisation Administrator) in Schools rather than academic staff. The remit of such a Committee would incorporate the quality audit function above: ensuring the School Quality Assurance Model has been implemented; and ensuring that all the teaching metrics specified by the College have been collated and have been considered by the relevant School body. These teaching metrics may need to be defined more explicitly than at present. The Committee can also ensure that all External Examiner reports have been received and that Schools have responded to them; that lists of membership of Boards of Examiners have been received; and that Minutes of Boards of Examiners have been received and that they are satisfactory. In terms of the Annual College Quality Assurance Report to SQAEC: CQAC would draft the section outlining the QA processes operating in the unit over the period, and supporting documentation.

As the Committee does not have any academic membership, it will not have the expertise to make an academic judgement on the significance or implications of deviations from procedures, but can highlight them in the report, as part of the quality control function. Similarly, the Committee will not have the expertise to consider the outcomes of quality assessment. The Committee should report to CL&TC that it has undertaken this role, and should highlight any areas where procedures have not been followed or metrics not collated. There may be a need for some academic filter of areas of concern identified by the CQAC audit report before these are referred to CL&TC if the latter are not to have an unreasonable workload.

A further refinement of this option is that, since the audit function does not require any collective judgement, this role could be undertaken by an individual within the College Office, rather than a Committee of School representatives.
(ii) role of CL&TC

The CL&TC has a membership comprising the Directors of Teaching in the Schools and currently has a remit of determining teaching and learning strategy and policy in the College, and promoting quality enhancement and engagement with the enhancement themes. Under this proposal, it would also have the role of considering the outcomes of quality assessment.

This additional role would include commenting on the outcomes of: the audit report from CQAC; Teaching Programme Reviews; Professional Accreditation Reports; the PGT component of Quinquennial Reviews and the School responses to it; and of student surveys. As part of the quality control role, the Committee would identify areas where there are still deficiencies and ensure action is taken to address these. This additional role is proposed because of the interface of quality assessment with teaching operations, and with teaching policy: how is the School handling issues that have arisen through QA processes; what general issues does the School think should be raised for discussion across the College; what are the novel developments of good practice within the School which may be of interest to other Schools? For the QA process to be effective, and especially for it to be effective in helping to bring about Quality Enhancement, it is essential that these items are written from within the teaching policy structure of the School. A record of these discussions provides the material for the corresponding section of the College QA&E Report.

In terms of the Annual College Quality Assurance Report to SQAEC: CL&TC would be responsible, through the Associate Dean, for compiling the Report. It would draft a commentary on the operation of the QA Model in the period, and a discussion of general issues arising from this commentary and elsewhere, and incorporate the sections on audit from CQAC. The proposed revised remits of CQAC and CL&TC are given in Appendix 3.

(ii) option of “QA visitors”

One disadvantage of the option above is that the academic filtering of areas of concern identified by the CQAC audit report is divorced from consideration of the report itself. One of the useful features of the current process is that academic and / or administrative staff from the relevant School are present during discussions on the report and can comment upon the academic context of the teaching metrics.

One way of retaining this feature, without requiring a full CQAC meeting, is that a small group of academic and administrative “visitors” from the College Office could visit each School in turn and undertake the audit and academic filter roles during that visit. Such an arrangement could reduce the need for Schools to produce separate, detailed QA reports, as the original documentation could be scrutinised as part of the visit. Although this process may reduce the overall resource required by Schools, it may be perceived to duplicate some of the TPR activities, but on an annual basis.

(iii) refinement of current procedures

A third alternative is to retain the current remits for CQAC and CL&TC, but streamline the documentation required for quality management. In particular, there should be a review of Schools QA models to assess how such models are useful in assuring quality and improving standards in Schools. The intention would be to seek a common School QA model across the College; a common set of documents and data for review; and to seek a greater consensus on the standards required so that weaknesses can be more easily identified. This would simplify and facilitate the audit function, allowing CQAC to engage more fully with quality assessment.
For CQAC to continue to operate effectively in this role, its composition should revert to being primarily academic, and Schools should be prepared to commit experienced staff to this role.

**QA for PGR**

There will need to be clear policies developed by the College for quality management for postgraduate research programmes and students. This should include procedures for consideration of External Examiners recommendations and comments; student feedback; and the organisation and outcome of Quinquennial Reviews.

Quinquennial Reviews will be organised and administered by the College Academic Affairs section. It is proposed that the Report will go to CLTC for consideration of the outcomes for PGT, and to the College Strategy and Management Committee (CSMC) for consideration of the outcomes for PGR. The written responses from the School, both the initial response and the twelve-month response, would also be considered by these bodies.
Appendix 1. Definitions of elements of quality management

Quality standards
There needs to be specification of standards for degrees. These are set externally by QAA codes of practice and internally by University codes of practice. Many degrees in CSE also have external professional standards set by the relevant PSB(s).

Quality assurance
There needs to be identification and clear documentation of procedures necessary to meet these standards consistently. This will include procedures at School level, documented in the School Quality Assurance Model.

Quality audit
There needs to be checks that Schools (and College) are following the specified quality assurance procedures. (it is not part of the audit to review whether these are the most appropriate procedures.)

Quality assessment
There needs to be mechanisms to determine whether the specified standards are being met. This is accomplished by external (QAA and PSB) reviews and internal (TPR and QQ reviews) and by reports from External Examiners. Feedback from students, either through University mechanisms such as course or programme questionnaires, or through national mechanisms such as NSS or PRES, are an important element of such assessment.

Quality control
There needs to be a mechanism to ensure remedial action is taken if the quality assessment shows some deficiency in the attainment of standards or implementation of procedures.

Quality enhancement
There need to be mechanisms to improve the quality of teaching provision, through commitment to:
- staff development and training,
- innovation in teaching and assessment
- ongoing review of course and programme content and delivery
- engagement with the national quality enhancement themes
Appendix 2. Current remits of Committees

1. Remit of College Learning and Teaching Committee

- To formulate and drive forward policy and strategy relating to learning and teaching in line with College and University strategic planning.
- To promote effective learning and teaching across the College.
- To promote quality enhancement in learning and teaching across the College.
- To promote University and College strategy in course, programme and curricular development.
- To discuss matters referred on issues such as curricular development, regulations, student support or progress.
- To consider and approve proposals for new courses and/or programmes.
- To report to the Senatus Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committees as appropriate and to discuss issues referred by them to the College.

2. Remit of College Quality Assurance Committee

- To monitor the systems used by Schools to establish and maintain appropriate standards for courses and degree programmes, for assessment methods and for teaching quality.
- To review the continuing development of Schools’ QA Models, in the light of internal changes and external requirements.
- To specify the format of School Annual QA Reports, and receiving and reviewing these Reports in an annual cycle.
- To audit the engagement and response of Schools to the Reports of External Examiners.
- To receive, audit and monitor responses by Schools to recommendations of Teaching Programme Reviews, and report outcomes to Senatus Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.
- To provide a forum for discussion of all aspects of Quality Assurance as it pertains to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in CSE.
- To collaborate with College Learning and Teaching Committee in quality enhancement through the recognition and encouragement of innovative good practice.
- To support the preparation of the Annual Report of the College of Science and Engineering to Senatus Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.
Appendix 3. Proposed revised remits of Committees

1. Remit of College Learning and Teaching Committee

- To formulate and drive forward policy and strategy relating to learning and teaching in line with College and University strategic planning.
- To promote effective learning and teaching across the College.
- To promote quality enhancement in learning and teaching across the College.
- To promote University and College strategy in course, programme and curricular development.
- To discuss matters referred on issues such as curricular development, regulations, student support or progress.
- To consider and approve proposals for new courses and/or programmes.
- To report to the Senatus Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committees as appropriate and to discuss issues referred by them to the College.
- To receive, audit and monitor responses by Schools to recommendations of Teaching Programme Reviews, and report outcomes to Senatus Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.
- To provide a forum for discussion of all aspects of Quality Assurance as it pertains to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in CSE.
- To engage with academic issues arising from the audit of School Annual QA Reports
- To support the preparation of the Annual Report of the College of Science and Engineering to Senatus Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.

2. Remit of College Quality Assurance Committee

- To monitor the systems used by Schools to establish and maintain appropriate standards for courses and degree programmes, for assessment methods and for teaching quality.
- To specify the format of School Annual QA Reports, and receive and review these Reports in an annual cycle.
- To audit the engagement and response of Schools to the Reports of External Examiners.