The College Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC) met on three occasions during January and February 2008. Below is a summary of the discussion of cross-College issues of teaching or assessment policy or practice that arose from External Examiner Reports and School Annual QA Reports. 

Note: The full Summary of External Examiner Reports for taught programmes for 2006/07 was presented to the CL&TC at its meeting on 19 February 2008 (Paper E).

1. Operation of Boards of Examiners

Some External Examiners still expressed concern over the interaction between Course and Programme Boards and the lack of mechanisms to view or moderate 3rd year marks. The Examiners felt that it would be valuable for mechanisms to allow course boards to gain a wider view across all courses to help maintain the standards across the programme. At least four Schools had mechanisms in place to facilitate this.

It was noted that there have been discussions at CL&TC on revisions to Exam Board structures to facilitate such overview, and that the University Assessment Administration Working Group is currently reviewing the structure and operation of the University’s Examination Boards.

CQAC urges the CL&TC to adopt procedures that allow Exam Boards to have an overview of 3rd year marks.

2. Special Circumstances

Some External Examiners expressed concern over the apparent lack of uniformity in the treatment of students with special circumstances in some cases. It was noted that there have been discussions at CL&TC on possible revised procedures and that the University Assessment Administration Working Group is currently reviewing these proposals.

CQAC urges the CL&TC to adopt robust and uniform procedures in such cases.

3. Moderation and scaling

Some External Examiners reported an apparent lack of consistency in the application of moderation and scaling to course marks. It was noted that the use of mark scaling is currently being investigated by an University Assessment Group chaired by Prof Nigel Seaton.

CQAC urges the College representatives on that Group press for a consistent approach to mark scaling.

4. Operation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy

There was a discussion on whether the operation of the College Learning and Teaching Strategy is having an effect on student performance, in particular the engagement of first-year students with the course materials. One School highlighted concern over attendance at lectures and general engagement by first years.

CQAC urges the CL&TC to monitor the relative performance of first years, following the adoption of the Strategy.
5. Teaching in Semester 2

It was noted that there seems to be a trend of lower attainment by students in semester 2 compared with semester 1. Various possible reasons were proposed, including the proposition that semester 1 might contain more revision material, whereas semester 2 contains more new material. It was noted that the University is instigating a review of the Academic Year and would be setting up consultation opportunities where these concerns could be raised.

CQAC urges the CL&TC to consider this issue when approving programme schedules.

6. Feedback to students

It was noted that many references in the School QA Reports to new procedures or mechanisms to provide timely feedback to students. It was noted that the issue of feedback is being considered by the CL&TC.

7. SWOT feedback sessions

It noted the innovation in the School of Engineering and Electronics of SWOT feedback sessions during the May exam diet to allow final year students to give detailed feedback on their views of teaching provision.

CQAC considered that these types of sessions could be very valuable and urged Schools to consider how they may be implemented within their own context.

8. Late submission of coursework

It was noted that the School of Informatics has adopted a common procedure across the School for the definition of ‘good reasons’ for late submission. This has been circulated to other Schools for information.

9. Teaching Development Officer

It was noted that the School of Physics has established this position originally to address a specific problem in the School but the role had now been expanded to assist with providing additional support to other students in Physics. This was seen as an excellent innovation but it was noted that one of the main difficulties that Schools faced was ensuring that the students who most needed additional support did participate in the additional activities laid on.