



# Review of Programme Academic Quality Committees

## Final report and suggestions for improvement

Academic Board initiated a review of Programme Academic Quality Committees [PAQC] in July 2019 as part of its approach to continuous improvement which seeks to review, reform and improve academic governance practices at Unitec. PAQCs are recognised as having a critical role in the governance of the programmes and courses for which they are responsible. Given recent changes in institutional structures and concerns about the effectiveness of governance across the institute, it was deemed to be timely to confirm whether PAQCs were operating as intended, and to identify good practice and areas for improvement in programme level governance.

This final report will be submitted to QAB and formal recommendations will be created from among the suggestions here.

### Background

PAQCs were reinstituted as programme level governance committees in early 2018. Since that time there have been significant structural changes as a result of the 2018 Renewal Plan. The External Evaluation and Review in late 2018 also identified governance as a key concern.

Terms of reference for the review were approved by Academic Board 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2019 with the purpose of reviewing the function and operation of Programme Academic Quality Committees [PAQC] and, where appropriate, making recommendations for improving their effectiveness in the governance of their respective programmes and courses.

The review examined:

1. The extent to which PAQC Terms of Reference continue to be appropriate
2. The manner in which PAQCs operate
3. The extent to which current operational procedures allow PAQCs to meet their Terms of Reference effectively and efficiently
4. The current level of operational support available to PAQCs
5. The appropriateness and capability of PAQC members

Data was collected from a range of sources for this review. A total of 36 participants provided direct verbal feedback by engaging in focus groups, these included PAQC Chairs, PAQC secretaries and PAQC members (excluding Chairs). Commentary was also provided by some participants who could not attend the focus groups via direct email. The STAR group also participated in a feedback session.

Information was also gathered from other sources and included a document analysis of agendas and minutes from the Academic e-Library, commentary gathered from the recent PAQC Chair reports to QAB, results from the recent Statutory Declaration survey and the review of Programme Evaluation and Planning [PEP] Reports has also contributed to this review.

The following sections represent the main findings of the review and associated recommendations for consideration. The findings are arranged according to the main themes that arose from the Focus Group sessions.

## **1. The purpose and function of PAQC**

By way of introduction, the participants shared their general views on the purpose and the way that PAQCs have been functioning since their re-establishment in 2018. These themes, both good and bad, surfaced repeatedly in further conversation in each of the focus groups, and also through the Chairs reports to QAB.

The following is an overview of the main points, beginning with some positive feedback:

- The consistency of PAQC have improved the quality assurance of the programme by identifying, discussing and managing issues pertaining to students and course delivery.
- PAQC has provided a platform where issues can be safely discussed, considered and outcomes are reached in accordance to regulation and process.
- PACQ has contributed to the improvement of the programme by way of ensuring accountability that things are being followed through and actioned.
- PACQ provides advice on decisions made and actions that are required to mitigate risk/issues.
- PAQC provides members with a cross school overview of practices, procedures and decisions. It is a space where best practice, sharing of ideas and the load is able to occur.
- PAQC is supporting our programmes to ensure that compliance activities are completed and / or to identify issues around these.

There was also some negative feedback, which included:

- PAQC has no power to demand any change be made at any level.
- Agendas are too long to be able to address sufficiently all of the items; many agenda items are standing items which do not need to be considered at every meeting.
- PAQC is a dumping ground for information - PAQC should be a forum to discuss learning and teaching.
- PAQC is dominated by compliance and there is little time to review some of the discussion.
- PAQC are not well advised on policy and regulation and sometimes make bad decisions because there is no one in the room with that knowledge.
- PAQC has too many meetings and no plan, therefore the agenda is simply what members have thought up between meetings or what TKK has decided needs to be there.
- Most members do not contribute beyond their own courses or programmes.

### ***Safety in committee***

Commentary regarding the 'safety' that the PAQC provided for decision making, especially in regard to student progression and students at risk, was strongly represented in all of the focus groups. Participants explained this as being a reaction to the previous structure of non-formal decision making, and related it to individuals not feeling that they had the support of their peers, regulation and/or policy when they made decisions in isolation. It was admitted that this was a risk averse approach and, for some, stemmed from a number of appeal decisions that were up held against their decisions, especially in the area of SAC. The following summarises the main points:

- Feeling of safety for staff when dealing with contentious issues
- Safety in numbers - decisions are made by a committee (many) instead by an individual (one)
- Collective wisdom from the room-decisions and opinions coming from different perspectives
- Shoddy practices are avoided
- Some serious stuff taken out of one person's hands – some issues are bigger than our programmes

### ***Feeling connected***

Another aspect of 'safety' in committees was a feeling of connectedness to other committees and colleagues who were dealing with similar issues. In this way it was seen that a committee structure allowed for the sharing of good practice among committees where a "tricky student situation" could be mitigated by learning that has come from a similar incident in another area. An example was given where a student was facing exclusion and "there was another programme that had a great learning plan model, which we were able to adopt and it resulted in the Council agreeing to accept the student back".

In summary, the re-establishment of PAQCs was welcomed and valued, however there were recognised areas where improvement could be made. The PAQC was seen to provide a forum for decisions to be made regarding student progress and programme development and quality that is robust, connected and safe for members.

## **2. Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference statements were seen to be clear and appropriate, however they were perceived to be high level and therefore more associated with oversight (governance) rather than with the operation (management) of the programmes. Each of them was seen to embody both governance and management aspects, some more so than others. There were also some statements that were more associated with procedure, or the way that Committee functioned.

The statements were generally acknowledged as providing the committee with a clear understanding of what is required of them, however there was consensus that the TOR statements could be improved to provide even greater clarity and effectiveness by grouping them into themes, consolidating some statements together and removing some statement which were no longer relevant, or were operational and functional in nature (see recommendations below).

### ***Currency***

The question of currency of the terms of reference statements was raised with regard to shifting priorities of Quality Academic Board [QAB] and Academic Board [AB] with a suggestion that there may need to be more focus on addressing the requirements of the Academic Quality Action Plan [AQAP] via committee prioritization and monitoring.

### ***Learning and Teaching***

The place of the committee as being a forum for discussion of learning and teaching was also considered. There was a question around the statement "to interact with the Unitec Ako Ahimura Committee to promote excellent learning and teaching practice", and what the intended purpose of this was. Generally the feedback was that while some elements of Learning and Teaching would be appropriate within the remit of the PAQC, such as maintenance of standards and setting goals for continuous improvement, there were already other forum such as the Ako Ahimura, where higher level governance consideration of learning and teaching can take place.

What was seen as a concern was that the limited membership of the PAQC did not allow for a more fulsome forum that should involve a wider range of teaching staff. The participants suggested that each School should establish separate appropriate forum for deeper conversations about learning and teaching.

### ***Operation and function***

Some of the current TOR statements were seen to be procedural and more related to the way that Committee functioned. Participants suggested that these statements be removed from the TOR and instead employed as guidance for committee operation and function.

### **Summary of findings and suggestions for improvement**

The review participants agreed that the TOR statements were clear and appropriate and supported the role of the PAQC in Governance and Management of the programmes and courses allocated to them. There was consensus that the TOR statements could be improved to provide even greater clarity and effectiveness by grouping them into themes. The suggested arrangement is as follows:

#### **Programme Academic Quality Committee Terms of Reference**

##### ***Student support and achievement***

- To monitor and safeguard the fair treatment and wellbeing of students, including their progress through their programmes;

##### ***Academic quality outcomes***

- To ensure the maintenance of high standards and continuous improvement with respect to the quality of teaching, assessment and performance of students in accordance with Institute quality assurance processes;
- To ensure quality assurance processes for each qualification, programme and course in accordance with institute policies and procedures, including but not limited to, moderation, monitoring, student course evaluations, and ensuring the consistency of graduate outcomes;
- To engage in the ongoing evaluation of programmes and external peer review;

##### ***Programme design and delivery***

- To ensure that the curriculum of each programme is continually developed and maintained, is relevant to the approved objectives, and supports student retention and success;
- To ensure there is effective engagement with graduates and industry/community to ensure the ongoing relevance and maintenance of the programme.

***Note: These are the existing TOR statements rearranged into grouping. It is expected that the actual statements will be modified once this report is submitted to QAB who will be responsible for creating formal recommendations.***

There were also a number of current TOR statements that the review identified as being more operational in nature, as well as a statement referring to the Ako Ahimura committee which was unclear. The participants suggested that these operational and functional statements be removed and reframed accordingly:

The committee employs the following to achieve its TOR:

- Maintains relationships and interactions with other committees at Unitec to ensure information is shared and accountabilities are maintained;
- Employs evidence-based action planning and execution to deliver continuous improvement;
- Maintains records of Programme Academic and Quality Committee level academic decision making.

### **3. Governance and Management**

There was much discussion about how well the terms of reference supports the work of the PAQC's in the governance and management of programmes and courses. The frame of the discussion was aligned with the understanding that **governance** is the role of leading whereas **management** is more associated with day-to-day running or operating.

From a governance perspective, the PAQCs were seen to provide direction, leadership and control, of the programmes and courses for which they are responsible. There is a focus on quality of outcomes and compliance. This form of governance was also seen as being a contextualisation of higher-level requirements (Academic Board, QAB, the Institution, or external bodies) applied to the localised programmes and courses with a primary focus on evaluation and improvement.

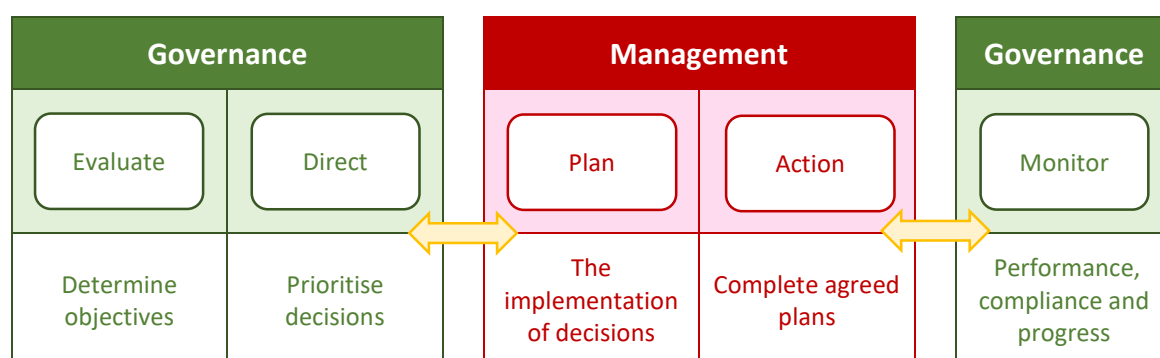
Management was understood to be focussed on “day to day problem solving actions” that were primarily related to the student journey through the programmes. These activities were seen to occur randomly and outside of a PAQC meeting timeframe. Decisions relating to at risk students, SACs, assessment issues, resits/resubmissions, enrolment issues, etc. were seen to require decisions to be made immediately as they arise, by people who are closest to the issue. This was also seen to be true for grade approvals that require a larger group of people to be involved than are members of the PAQC. Through this perspective of management, the PAQCs were seen to enable directed activities to be planned and actioned through groups such as sub-committees and working groups.

There was strong support for clarity to be established around the focus of the PAQCs and for them to strengthen the governance aspects of their work. The participants expressed strong support for the work of governance and management to be kept distinct from each other. Some suggested that “staff meetings are for day to day management and PAQC are for governance”, with one suggesting that “management blocks out everything else”.

### ***Focus on Governance***

It was generally agreed that the PAQC should strengthen its governance role, where it would oversee management rather than undertake the management itself. PAQC would:

- Evaluate to determine agreed-on quality and operational objectives (often contextualised from above into localised settings);
- Direct through prioritisation and decision making;
- Monitor performance, compliance and progress against agreed direction and objectives.



PAQCs would benefit from strong formal reporting mechanisms being established to allow the PAQC to be satisfied that any management sub-committees and working groups are doing their job in accordance with policy and resources. In this way, the PAQC would act in a ‘trustee’ role where the committee would behave like a guardian of the programmes for which it is responsible and would be accountable to its stakeholders, such as:

- Students
- Community, Industry and other external Stakeholders;
- Accrediting bodies such as NZQA and Professional Groups;
- Committees such as QAB, Ako Ahimura and AB.

### **Authority**

Discussion also took place around the authority that PAQCs have over the programmes for which they are responsible. This was especially focussed on issues that are beyond the ability of the PAQC to control or change, and specifically to direct staff and others to make changes in process or behaviour. A number of participants suggested that 'the committee is powerless with no authority to tell people to do anything if the authority sits outside the committee', and some suggested that PAQCs do not have any authority to achieve changes in these areas and are simply a 'rubber stamp' to ensure compliance.

### **Relationships with other governance and management committees**

The relationships with other committees was discussed and determined to be inconsistent. As mentioned above, both the QAB and AB have priorities which from time to time are filtered down to the PAQCs for consideration and action. There is also a functional relationship with Unitec Ako Ahimura Committee that is somewhat confused. The participants agreed that a formalisation of the method for action items and information flow between the committees at all levels needs to be developed to ensure that the whole system is working together.

Mechanisms for reporting from the PAQC to other committees about progress against actions, or to escalate issues that were beyond the PAQC ability to solve were seen to be another missing element. This was seen as being a risk, where higher level committees were potentially unaware of issues and/or progress being made at PAQC level directly with individual programmes and courses. Participants shared the following:

- We need a better system to raise risk and success from PAQC to QAB. With no existing feedback mechanism to QAB, programme level knowledge of challenges, reasoning, context, etc... may be lost – for instance, reasons why student evaluations are low and suggestions for changes that could increase engagement
- There needs to be better communication of QAB matters to the PAQC and vice versa. For example, the QAB has had a working party established to develop a new SAC process but PAQC chairs were not consulted. This is an area which affects all programmes and the PAQC committee should have had a voice
- Better communication up to QAB and AB would allow PAQC to provide updates on
  - what is being done about "At risk learners" and "priority groups"
  - smart goals for quality improvement and how they are progressing
  - course evaluations and team responses

It was suggested that one approach could be for the PAQC Chair to provide a twice-yearly summary (two-pager) to the QAB and/or AB related to the key accountability areas as per the terms of reference. It could also be useful to gather all PAQC chairs twice yearly to allow for the sharing of best practice and to ensure an appropriate level of consistency of approach.

### **Summary of findings and suggestions for improvement**

The review confirmed the understanding of the function of PAQC with regard to its Governance and Management focus. It was agreed that the PAQC needed to operate with more of a Governance perspective, while monitoring the Management of Programmes and Courses for those areas that fall within their remit as described by the TOR. Its primary role is to evaluate and determine agreed-on quality and operational objectives; direct through prioritisation and decision making; and monitor performance, compliance and progress against agreed direction and objectives.

An understanding of the authority and accountability that PAQC hold was seen to be variable across the Schools. It was clear that some staff in some areas did not understand or acknowledge the authority of decisions made by the PAQC. There was also a lack of understanding among some staff regarding their responsibility for responding to, and/or enacting decisions made by the committee.

To enable more clarity for both the PAQCs and Staff with regard to authority and accountability, the review participants suggested that the Committee Purpose Statement, as well as the Terms of Reference for PAQC be reviewed to ensure that the following is clearly articulated:

- The specific areas of programme quality that belong to PAQC and what belongs to others
- The authority that is held by PAQC within its TOR remit
- The level of accountability that is vested in the PAQC and its members
- Resolution/Escalation paths for any non-compliance (courses, programmes, people, etc.) with PAQC decisions
- Resolution/Escalation paths for issues that sit outside of the ownership of PAQC

This information should be distributed throughout Unitec.

Another area of concern that was raised through the review process was the lack of a formal process for communication between Unitec Committees to ensure that actions approved at all levels were disseminated. The suggestion here was to establish a centralised process that managed the distribution of agenda items between committees. Such a process might also be employed to create a simplified reporting process of key action points from PAQC to QAB that might serve as a Chair's report.

Finally, as mentioned above, the review identified that there is a lack of specific process for the escalation of risks or issues from the PAQC to other authorities. These may be Academic Issues that need to be escalated to another Committee, or issues that are beyond the remit of the PAQC to resolve, and that may need to be referred to other Institutional Agencies. The suggestion is to create such a process and to ensure that there is a feedback loop built in to be able to track progress of any referred items.

#### **4. Membership**

Current membership requirements for the PAQC includes representative role holders (leaders and managers) as well as other stakeholders (students and teachers) from within the programmes who contribute to the direction and accountability of the programmes. There are also other stakeholders who do not directly contribute to the day to day management of the programmes, but who represent elements of the organisation that contribute to the programmes, or to which the programmes are accountable (Kaihautū; Knowledge specialist from Student Success; Representatives of Te Korowai Kahurangi). There was also strong support for including opportunities for the new Priority Group Champions, representatives of Student Support and TPA to contribute to the work of PAQCs.

This membership profile was seen to supporting a governance approach more than a management approach. This was perceived by some as a block to ensuring that the essential day to day management of the programmes was undertaken by those who are best placed to contributing to a solution. As a result, there was strong support for other 'Management' focused subcommittees/groups to be established where people who are directly involved in the day to day operations of the programmes, and can add a direct contribution to the mahi required for each activity through their deep understanding of the context of each issue, can participate. Examples of these include grade ratification groups, Student pastoral care groups, programme development groups, etc. These are primarily teaching staff with support from services centres as required. Other stakeholders may also be required to advise these management groups on matters surrounding policy and process from time to time.

### ***Leadership of the committee***

Discussion around the most effective way to run the meeting led to consideration of the Chair and the Secretarial roles. The key discussion revolved around the capability of the Chair to manage the agenda well and to ensure that the work was completed and that members were given a chance to contribute. This was regarded as a specialist function and would benefit from targeted training. The secretarial role was also regarded as being pivotal to the success of the meeting and was a specialist position that required training. The following were the broad comments regarding the leadership of the committee:

- The Chair should be a senior academic who has strong leadership capabilities and can run a meeting
- Chair should ensure all members contribute to the discussion and have the opportunity to say something
- The Chair should not be a role holder – to ease tension between governance and management. This will allow APM to be a participative member of the committee
- APMs should not necessarily be the chair to ensure healthy governance and management issues resolution – but could be the Deputy Chair
- A neutral Chair would avoid making the meeting come up with pre-determined outcomes that APM wants
- Chair should know how to formalize things – time management; how to address when there is no quorum; important things that need to be recorded
- Chair must be able to summarize actions and decisions for the Secretary so that the Secretary is not left to interpret as they are not subject matter experts

Further discussion also resulted in a desire for PAQC Chairs to meet together in a forum to discuss critical milestones in the Academic Cycle as well as to share good practice and keep connected.

### ***Membership participation***

The confusion around the governance and management purpose of the PAQC was attributed to a range of disfunction among membership, as expressed in the following commentary:

- Some committee members do not fully buy in. They perceive PAQC as being lower value compared to other things they need to be doing
- Many staff only come when there is something on the agenda that interests them, which affects the quorum
- Membership should not only be role-holders
- People who are interested are not necessarily members because they do not hold a role
- Some members are not committed to discuss/engage in the discussion that does not relate to their programme
- Members do not always know programmes sufficiently enough to give feedback
- Not many members have a lot of knowledge because they are new and have come without actual teacher training
- The same people are in staff meetings and PAQC so there is the same discussion in both forums
- Staff want to be included because they feel that they are involved in making decisions, but it is probably better to limit it to people who can actually contribute

There was also a general discussion around the ability of members to contribute to governance elements of the committee without training. There was agreement that most members do not understand how they should be contributing to the PAQC and also a lack of knowledge and understanding of evaluation and review, including the key evaluation questions. Therefore it was highly recommended that a plan be developed for upskilling all committee members (Chairs, secretaries, members) to enable them to better participate and to contribute to the work.



Another issue that was identified regarding membership engagement was meeting attendance, with many reporting that some members regularly did not attend, or send a proxy on their behalf. This has resulted in meetings being regularly cancelled due to a lack of quorum. Discussion led to a range of suggestions being made including limiting the membership to a smaller group of key, capable staff who would form the quorum, while other staff would be invited to attend and participate for specific agenda items such as PEP or Programme Improvement approval, but would not be regarded as quorate members. Processes, such as sending a proxy to the meeting if the member cannot attend were also suggested to be made mandatory. Participants overwhelmingly considered that members who continually do not attend should be removed from the committee membership.

### ***Time allocation for Committee Work***

Allocation of sufficient time to engage in the work of the committee was seen as a barrier. It was reported that there was no standard across the Schools, with some Schools only allowing the meeting time in workload planning, while others allowed for preparation and follow-up. The following were the general comments:

- For the PACQs to act more proactively, greater time allocation for the chair and members is needed.
- Recognition of the attendance for members through workload allocation needs to be standard across the Schools
- There is too much paperwork and no recognition of the workload
- Our members don't have the time before the meeting to read every item in the agenda
- Follow up of actions is variable as members do not prioritise these as part of their workload
- Members should have a minimum workload allocation that covers all of the work of the committee, not just attending the meeting

### ***Student Representation***

Student representation was acknowledged as being important, but also mis-understood by the general membership. It was clear that student representation is not currently functioning and that this needs to urgently addressed. The following thoughts were shared:

- Despite strong lobby from Student Council, there are not enough resources thus it did not work
- Happy to go back to Schools to shoulder tap students, but who will give training? will the student sign a confidentiality agreement?
- Student reps want to get paid
- Confidentiality about grades is not an issue anymore because the grades are done at grade ratification meetings where there are no student representatives
- Concerns when dealing with at risk students, however the student view is also important
- Members need to know what the students' purpose and responsibilities are in a PAQC
- Chair needs to support students before and during the meeting by inviting them to contribute, and asking their opinion

### **Summary of findings and suggestions for improvement**

There was strong support from the review participants for the membership to be appointed with consideration for ensuring appropriate knowledge informs and adds value to decision-making at a governance level. It was also highlighted that the membership of the PAQC needed to be revised in light of recent changes made in roles and responsibilities within Programmes and Courses and to align with membership considerations for other Academic Committees at Unitec. There was also strong support for including the new Priority Group Champions, representatives of Student Support and TPA in the work of the committee, but not necessarily as full voting members.

Membership capability was addressed and was seen to be variable due to a lack of understanding about the function of the committee and the members responsibility and expectation of participation. The review participants strongly suggest that a form of 'committee citizenship'

capability training (possibly recognised as Professional Development through a badge system) and specific committee leadership capability training is developed and deployed as soon as is practical. The following was specifically cited as being required:

- Leadership and committee management capability for Chairs and Secretaries
- Committee citizenship (function, responsibility and participation) capability for committee members
- Committee citizenship (function, responsibility and participation) capability for student representatives
- Committee secretarial support capability for Secretaries

Membership participation and attendance was identified as being a concern for some participants. It was reported that some members regularly did not attend, or send a proxy on their behalf. This has resulted in meetings being cancelled due to a lack of quorum. Discussion led to suggestions that the membership could be leaner and engage with more capable staff to form the quorum, while allowing other staff to attend and participate for specific agenda items such as PEP or Programme Improvement approval, but not be quorate members. Processes, such as sending a proxy to the meeting if the member cannot attend were also suggested to be made mandatory. Participants overwhelmingly considered that members who continually do not attend should be removed from the committee membership.

There was general concern that sufficient time to engage in the work of the committee was not uniformly allocated across Schools, and this was seen as a barrier to participation. The participants recommend that equitable workload allocations be developed, either centrally or within Schools to support members of PAQC to participate in all aspects of the work of the Committee.

Finally, the lack of Student representation on the PAQC was acknowledged as not currently functioning and as being a risk. It was also acknowledged that there is a mis-understanding among some staff members of PAQC as to the reason that Students are included in the membership, and this needs to be addressed directly through communications about the requirement for, and our commitment to student inclusion. There was also some support for a centralised support and management structure to be put in place to ensure that student representatives are identified, inducted and looked after as members of PAQCs. The participants suggested that the lack of Student Representation be address as a matter of urgency.

## **5. Operation of Committee Meetings**

Current PAQC practices are seen to be disparate between committees with each setting its own agenda based on its own understanding of what its purpose is. There is currently no standardised over-arching work plan to guide the work of the committees. There is also no standardised structure for sub-committees or other work groups to undertake more managerial aspects of committee business. The frequency of PAQCs was also seen to be problematic and contributing to high workload and low levels of quality outcomes.

### ***Agendas***

There was general consensus that there needs to be a standardisation of PAQC agendas to better support its role for governance and management. Current agendas are seen to be too long to be able to sufficiently address all of the items and many are standing items which do not need to be addressed at every meeting. It was agreed that the current template with its large 'standing items' focus was overly complicated and daunting for many members.

The following summarises discussion about how to improve agendas:

- Prepare a standardised work plan and compliance calendar which informs the content of meeting agendas and all other quality requirements. This is then tailored to the specific requirements of each PAQC
- Streamline and focus the agenda by grouping items into categories - For approval; For discussion; For receipt/noting
- Pre-meeting with Chair and secretary to plan the flow of the meeting, pre-prepare motions for all approval items, and to Follow up/investigate items in the agenda prior to meeting e.g. Students at risk, SACs, COGs, etc.
- Streamlining the process for setting agendas and distributing them with ample time to members for their consideration. This also involves a strict structure and deadlines for items to be placed onto any agenda
- Reduce the length of agendas by varying the subject of each meeting to focus on specific items to allow sufficient time to consider and discuss outcomes
- Prepare support material, such as compliance trackers, to be available for members to consult, with only specific areas of concern or those which require discussion to be discussed in the meeting
- Have clear plan for the running of the meeting with an idea of the timing required for each item
- Decide on action items and allocate responsibility in the meeting, with these followed up immediately and with ongoing reminders from the Secretary between meetings
- Start some discussion of items at staff meetings so all staff are aware of what is happening or what is being decided on, and then bring this discussion to the PAQC for a final decision
- Employ more sub-committees or working groups to undertake or support decision making of management related activities.
- Grade Ratification meetings and results reported to PAQC but it is the business of the team because staff has contextual information about the students
- Do not confuse items best discussed at staff meetings rather than at PAQC

### **Minutes**

As with the agendas, the minutes of the meetings are not standardised and often contain standing item heading with no actions. A full revision of the minute template would accompany any revision of the agenda template. Minutes have not been distributed on a timely basis and this can result in actions not being completed before the next meeting occurs. It was also pointed out that the decisions noted in the minutes of the PAQC are not widely distributed to all concerned staff, resulting in confusion around actions that need to be taken.

The following summarises discussion about how to improve minutes:

- Action items and allocated responsibility from the meeting to be followed up immediately and with ongoing reminders from the Secretary between meetings
- Minutes to be published and distributed to all School staff within a week of the meeting

### **Meeting frequency**

The frequency of PAQC was discussed and it was agreed that this should be determined by the amount and nature of the work to be covered. Generally, the participants suggested that the meetings were too frequent and supported a return to a six-weekly cycle of PAQC to allow for timely preparation and distribution of agenda items and time to complete actions between meetings. There was also support for 'special' meetings to occur for specific purposes, outside of the standard schedule, for example a special meeting to approve PEPs, or complicated grade ratifications, etc.

The following summarises discussion about the frequency of meetings:

- Frequency should be about every 6 weeks. This allows for other sub-committee, working groups and staff meetings to occur in the intervening weeks.
- Consider establishing a standing committee, using e-meetings or allowing Chairs actions to cover any urgent items that occur outside of the meeting schedule. Each would require clear guidelines that outline the types of items that can be considered and approved.
- If PAQCs are less frequent it will give more time to consider and discuss items
- Whilst regular meetings are beneficial, it can result in action points being repeatedly discussed with minimal impact. This is because there is not always sufficient time between meetings to demonstrate significant progress.

### ***Operational Support***

It was recognised that ongoing support for PAQC, and for decision making within PAQC were variable. This was seen to stem from the capability of the secretarial role as well as the wider question of capability of Chair and Membership. The ongoing support of the PAQC by the committee secretary was widely discussed with a suggestion that role of secretary should be more than preparing the agenda and minutes. It should be a proactive role that would include:

- Keeping the Chair on track during the meeting
- Following up with members regarding action points
- Collating and communicating updates on compliance issues and smart goals
- Communicating committee decisions to a wide audience.

It was recognised that the current secretaries, many of whom are new to the position, are not able to advise on policies/procedures, and do not carry in depth knowledge about each programme. It was agreed that training would begin to upskill the secretaries in this area, but that in the meantime the Quality Partnering Lead and Specialists will attend meetings to ensure that this knowledge is available in each meeting.

### **Summary of findings and suggestions for improvement**

PAQC processes and practices were seen to be inconsistent between committees with differences in agenda, frequency, committee procedure, action planning and general quality processes. It is acknowledged that there is no standardised over-arching work plan to guide the work of PAQC. This was seen to add to confusion around the focus of each meeting. The participants strongly suggested that an overarching standardised academic quality work plan, which is related to the Academic Quality Calendar, be established to guide the work of PAQC. It was also noted that any overarching plans would need to be tailored into individual work plans to support the work of each committee in recognition of differences in programme and course requirements. There was also general agreement that agenda and minute templates for PAQC be redesigned to simplify and standardise committee operations and record keeping.

The frequency of PAQCs was seen to be problematic and contributing to high workload and low levels of quality outcomes. It was agreed that a tailored workplan would inform the frequency required for PAQC. This in turn was seen to inform the establishment of sub-committees or other work groups to undertake more managerial aspects of committee business. The participants also suggested that consideration should be given to establishing a standing committee, using e-meetings or allowing Chairs actions to cover any urgent items that occur outside of the meeting schedule. Each of these would require clear guidelines that outline the types of items that can be considered and approved.

Finally, it was recognised that ongoing support for PAQC, and for decision making within PAQC were variable and that additional support for advice on policies, procedures and regulations be provided in committee while upskilling and training took place to allow committee secretaries to develop deeper understanding in this space.