

H/02/27/02
CSPC: 25.01.18

The University of Edinburgh

**Minutes of the Senatus Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC)
held on Thursday 25 January 2018 in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House**

Present:

Professor Alan Murray (Convener)	Assistant Principal, Academic Support
Professor Graeme Reid	Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSCE)
Dr Paul Norris	Associate Dean (Academic Progress), CAHSS
Dr Lisa Kendall	Head of Academic and Student Administration (CAHSS)
Ms Alexandra Laidlaw	Head of Academic Affairs (CSCE)
Dr Sheila Lodge	Head of Academic Administration (CMVM)
Professor Neil Turner	Dean of Undergraduate Learning and Teaching (CMVM)
Dr Jeremy Crang	Dean of Students (CAHSS)
Ms Bobi Archer	Vice President Education Students' Association
Ms Gin Lowdean	Advice Place Manager, Students' Association
Dr Neil Lent	Institute for Academic Development
Dr Adam Bunni	Head of Governance and Regulatory Framework Team
Mrs Lisa Dawson	Director of Student Systems
Ms Anne-Marie Scott	IS Learning, Teaching and Web

In attendance:

Mrs Jackie Barnhart	Service Excellence Programme
Mr Neil McGillivray	Service Excellence Programme
Ms Ailsa Taylor (Secretary)	Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services
Mr Tom Ward	Director, Academic Services
Mr Stephen Warrington	Service Excellence Programme

Apologies for absence:

Dr Antony Maciocia	Dean of Students (CSCE)
Dr Juliette MacDonald	Edinburgh College of Art
Professor Susan Rhind	Assistant Principal, Assessment and Feedback

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 23 November 2017 were approved as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising

a) Timing of Assessment/Semester 1 Examination Boards

At the last CSPC meeting in November 2017, the Committee had agreed that Boards of Examiners were to be held following the end of Semester, 1 to ratify results for all courses whose assessment was complete during or immediately following Semester 1. The deadline for entry into EUCLID of ratified course results for Semester 2 courses

would be adjusted from 2018/19 to accommodate those PGT programmes struggling to meet the current deadline of 31 January 2018.

31 January 2018 was also the Student Administration deadline for students withdrawing from the University to be entitled to a partial refund of fees. Dr Adam Bunni reported that Academic Services had consulted Student Administration about this. Student Administration had agreed to allow some flexibility in considering refund requests from students in the few weeks after the deadline, where students could demonstrate that they received their Semester 1 course results after 31 January.

The College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science raised a related query about the timing of assessment in relation to Semester 1 examination boards. Some Schools had stated that they had a substantial number of Semester 1 courses that were not currently assessed until the Semester 2 summer examination diet. The Committee felt that it was desirable for Semester 1 courses to complete their assessment during, or immediately following Semester 1 where possible, but accepted that there may be pedagogical reasons for a different approach. The Committee requested that College representatives seek further information from Schools and subject areas affected by this issue, and report back to CSPC in March 2018.

ACTION: College representatives to consult with the relevant areas to see what their rationale is for the assessment of some Semester 1 courses at the end of Semester 2, and report back to the next meeting of CSPC in March 2018.

b) Overseas Resits

At its September meeting, CSPC had agreed that the Overseas Examination Service should be offered on a more consistent basis, with some Schools currently opting out from offering the service. Academic Services had sought feedback from Schools regarding challenges relating to use of the service. Dr Adam Bunni updated the Committee on this feedback, which primarily related to difficulties scheduling overseas examinations synchronously with Edinburgh sittings. The Committee agreed that this issue would continue to place limits on the volume of students to whom the service could be offered. However, the Committee reiterated its position that it continued to be of benefit to offer the service as widely as possible, even if time zones would place restrictions on its use. The Committee therefore agreed that all Schools should be asked to offer the service where possible.

3. Service Excellence Programme - Student Administration and Support Update (CSPC 17/18 3 A)

Mr Neil McGillivray presented this paper, which provided an update on the work being undertaken by the Student Administration and Support strand of the Service Excellence Programme. The relevant Programme Board last met in November 2017, and was expected to meet on 15 February 2018 to analyse the fully developed business case and blueprint documentation for the following projects:

- Special circumstances, extensions and concessions
- Working and study away
- Student Immigration Service.

Further blueprint recommendations relating to student finance and timetabling would be submitted to the April 2018 Student Administration and Support Board.

4. Service Excellence Programme - Working and Study Away Update (CSPC 17/18 3 B)

Mr Neil McGillivray and Mrs Jackie Barnhart updated the Committee on developments with the working and study away strand of the Service Excellence Programme, and presented some proposals for policy change that were currently being explored. A detailed current state assessment and detailed process design discussions had identified a range of existing issues and challenges.

Emerging recommendations included the establishment of a professional specialised team that would work in close collaboration with Schools to manage the administration associated with study away, reducing the administrative burden on academic members of staff. Committee members raised a query about how learning agreements would be managed by this team; members were keen to see greater clarity about how the team would ensure appropriate levels of academic input into learning agreements.

The Committee noted the requirement for a continued emphasis on the importance of the Personal Tutor role in relation to support for students who were away from the University. Personal Tutors should continue to keep strong relationships with their tutees whilst they were away, as they would still be the first point of contact for academic support, and Student Support Offices and Teaching Organisations would continue to provide support to students too.

During discussion by the Committee, it was emphasised that there should continue to be academic scrutiny of proposals for new exchange agreements, and due diligence would still rest with the academic areas concerned, even if the new team were involved in the final sign off.

It was understood that more detailed policy proposals in relation to this strand would be brought to the next CPSC meeting in March 2018.

5. Service Excellence Programme - Special Circumstances and Coursework Extensions Update (CSPC 17/18 3 C)

Mr Neil McGillivray and Mr Stephen Warrington presented this paper, which gave early sight of a range of policy proposals in relation to coursework extensions and special circumstances, in advance of the Student Administration and Support Programme Board meeting, which would be held on 15 February 2018. CSPC would be invited to approve any policy adjustments at its March 2018 meeting.

Coursework extensions

The paper included proposals to amend policy in relation to coursework extensions, with the proposed new default being that students could self-certify for requests for coursework extensions of up to seven days, with no requirement for the provision of supporting evidence. This represented a change to the current regulation, which assumed the submission of supporting evidence alongside the case, and stated that self-certification would only provide sufficient evidence in some circumstances. If this change was approved, then the Taught Assessment Regulations would need to be amended for 2018/19 to clarify this. It was anticipated that the coursework extension application process would be actioned by professional services staff.

CSPC noted that the current regulation (Taught Assessment Regulation 28 Late submission of coursework) referred to assessed coursework "including research projects

and dissertations". The Committee would welcome clarity from Service Excellence about whether or not it was intended that the new arrangements for self-certification for up to seven working days would also apply to Master's projects and dissertations.

The Online Distance Learning community in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM) had previously suggested to the Committee that extensions of over seven working days could be more routinely available for part-time online distance learning students. This was something that had been raised by Programme Directors within CMVM, and raised with CSPC in Semester 1. At that previous discussion, CSPC had noted that it could be problematic to attempt to legislate for part-time students separately in this way, and had not recommended any change to the current position. Any further comments from the Online Distance Learning community about this aspect of the coursework extensions process were to be submitted to the Service Excellence Programme directly.

Special Circumstances

Committee members raised significant concerns about some of the proposals for special circumstances, as presented. The most pressing concerns raised related to the following:

- a) The proposed constitution, membership, volume and timing of Special Circumstances Committees meetings (SCCs). Given that the Special Circumstances Policy defined the composition of Special Circumstances Committees, CSPC needed to agree to any future changes to their composition. The proposal suggested that Special Circumstances Committees would be held at College level, with academic membership drawn from Schools. An agreed composition had yet to be established, but there was a possibility that it could include 2-3 members of academic staff, and these staff could be based anywhere e.g. they would not be specifically drawn from the subject area of the course that any particular special circumstances (SC) application related to. As long as the remit of the revised SCC was **not** extended beyond that currently set out in the Policy (ie the revised SCC would only make decisions about whether or not special circumstances existed or not, and what the impact of those circumstances are likely to have been), then the Committee did not raise any fundamental issues regarding holding SCCs at College level, without relevant subject-level expertise on each case. However, whilst it was recognised that extensive modelling was still underway, there was some concern about the volume of cases that would need to be considered at each meeting, and the scrutiny each case would receive under these circumstances.
- b) The proposal also suggested that the remit of SCCs be extended to allow them to make recommendations that would be binding on a Board of Examiners, as long as the student was not disadvantaged. This would represent a significant departure from current Policy (where the SCC can make recommendations to the Board, but the recommendations are not binding) and would require careful consideration. Members of the Committee were unanimous in their agreement that it would not be possible to consider extending the remit of SCC unless the proposed composition of the College SCC allowed for relevant subject-specific expertise in relation to each case. Since this was not understood to be compatible with the current proposals for College-level SCCs, some re-modelling would be required by Service Excellence to consider options that provided for at least one member of the SCC to have subject-specific expertise (most likely at discipline rather than at School level). As an alternative, it was suggested that College-level SCCs could restrict their binding recommendation to specifying the timing and severity of a student's SCs (in line with the current Policy). School-level Boards could then, with full understanding of the context for the

SCs, be empowered to determine a course of action (eg “remove lateness penalty”) to account for the SCs.

It was agreed that, if the Committee was to approve any related policy adjustments at the next meeting on March 2018, then proposals would need to be adjusted in order to address these issues and to provide reassurance regarding the benefits and practicalities of the proposals. In addition to these two major issues, the Committee highlighted a number of other matters in relation to special circumstances that were believed to be less pressing, but nevertheless needed to be taken into account by the Service Excellence Programme going forward:

- The requirement to ensure procedures allow for electronic Special Circumstances Committee meetings to be held, rather than tailoring processes towards an expectation that all SCCs would meet in person. The volume and timing of meetings was expected to demand flexibility in processes here.
- The workflow process to allow Personal Tutors to submit documentation for Special Circumstances cases should ensure that variations in the levels of proactivity of different Personal Tutors do not raise any equity issues. Members agreed that the optimum arrangement would include workflow design which sought to avoid students being advantaged or disadvantaged by any variation of support, and also encouraged Personal Tutors to submit any relevant evidence on their tutee’s behalf as soon as possible.
- The introduction of rolling SCCs meeting during the Semester could lead to an increase in additional SC submissions, particularly where students have ongoing conditions (since an individual student could make multiple submissions in relation to circumstances affecting an individual course), and it was important to consider alternate ways of handling ongoing conditions.

Consultation arrangements

The Committee noted that it was essential that sufficient consultation across the University was held about the proposals for special circumstances and coursework extensions, including the proposed policy changes, in advance of the next CSPC meeting in March 2018. The Committee heard that there were further planned College and School consultation meetings coming up, which was welcomed, and would form a useful element of the consultation process.

6. Coursework Extensions and Employment Commitments (CSPC 17/18 3 D)

The Committee had requested further guidance for Schools regarding how to determine whether a request for a coursework extension based on employment commitments would be acceptable. The paper contained draft guidance, and it was proposed that this guidance should be published in a condensed form on the University’s web pages for Personal Tutors and Student Support Teams. The Committee indicated that they were happy with the guidance and the proposed approach for its publication. However, it was agreed that further thought should be given to our approach to requests for coursework extensions from students experiencing financial pressures. Currently the Taught Assessment Regulations explicitly stated that students could not apply for extensions based on financial issues, and the Committee were keen to explore whether or not this was a common position within the sector. It was agreed to carry out some benchmarking on this issue, for consideration at a future meeting.

ACTION: Dr Adam Bunni to conduct benchmarking with comparator institutions in relation to their approach re: applications for coursework extensions from students experiencing financial pressures, and report back to the Committee.

7. Acceptable grounds for Special Circumstances and Coursework Extensions: Sexual harassment or assault (CSPC 17/18 3 E)

The Committee approved the amendments to relevant policy and regulations as proposed in the paper (subject to a further amendment to list experience of harassment separately to sexual harassment or assault, as relevant grounds for seeking special circumstance/coursework extensions).

8. Postgraduate Taught Assessment and Progression Task Group Update (CSPC 17/18 3 F)

Dr Adam Bunni introduced this paper, which provided a brief summary of the emerging proposals from the Postgraduate Taught Assessment and Progression Task Group. Committee members confirmed that they were content for the Task Group to begin consulting on what was proposed. A final report of the Task Group, containing the relevant recommendations, was expected at the March 2018 meeting of CSPC.

9. Knowledge Strategy Committee Report (CSPC 17/18 3 G)

This item was received by the Committee for information.

ACTION: Lisa Dawson agreed to provide Committee members with further information about the findings of the bulk email investigation referred to in the report.

10. Programme and Course Approval and Management Documentation (CSPC 17/18 3 H)

Mr Tom Ward presented this paper, which proposed a consolidation of existing documentation on programme and course approval, which consisted of both University policy and guidance in each College, into a single University suite of documents. This would support planned University-wide training for Conveners of Boards of Studies, and assist with other objectives e.g. compliance with Competition and Markets Authority requirements.

The Committee approved the paper, and welcomed the plans to consolidate the documentation, which was expected to simplify processes further.

11. Any Other Business

Representatives from the Students' Association raised a query about the Student Appeal Regulations. These regulations referred to the strict deadlines governing the submission of academic appeals, and undergraduate students who were not in their final year were required to submit an appeal within 10 working days of being informed of the decision. It was believed by the Students' Association that this timescale could be quite challenging for some students, and a query had been raised about whether there was any flexibility in the system. It was confirmed that there was some flexibility, within reason, and that it was crucial that the student get in touch with Academic Services ahead of the intended submission date to notify the University of any difficulties. This would enable staff to

make a judgement about whether the request was reasonable, and to calculate whether a short extension would be possible.

Mr Tom Ward updated colleagues on the position regarding the proposed University and College Union (UCU) strike action, which was currently expected to involve an escalating wave of strikes over a four-week period, during late February and March 2018. During the time of the most recent industrial action, the Committee had agreed to a series of temporary concessions in relation to assessment processes, which had allowed Boards of Examiners to operate. It was possible that the Committee would be asked to agree similar concessions this time around. The approach taken would be intended to minimise the impact upon students without compromising academic standards.

Ailsa Taylor, Academic Policy Officer, 2 February 2018