

H/02/27/02  
CSPC: 22.03.18

The University of Edinburgh

**Minutes of the Senatus Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC)  
held on Thursday 22 March 2018 in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

**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
Ms Alexandra Laidlaw	Head of Academic Affairs (CSCE)
Dr Sheila Lodge	Head of Academic Administration (CMVM)
Dr Jeremy Crang	Dean of Students (CAHSS)
Dr Antony Maciocia	Dean of Students (CSCE)
Ms Bobi Archer	Vice President Education Students' Association
Ms Gin Lowdean	Advice Place Manager, Students' Association
Dr Adam Bunni	Head of Governance and Regulatory Framework Team
Mrs Lisa Dawson	Director of Student Systems

**In attendance:**

Dr Gerhard Anders	School of Social and Political Science (Paper C-E only)
Mrs Jackie Barnhart	Service Excellence Programme
Ms Esther Dominy	Vice President Welfare Students' Association
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 Lisa Kendall	Head of Academic and Student Administration (CAHSS)
Dr Neil Lent	Institute for Academic Development
Dr Juliette MacDonald	Edinburgh College of Art
Dr Geoff Pearson	Dean of Students (CMVM)
Professor Susan Rhind	Assistant Principal, Assessment and Feedback
Professor Neil Turner	Dean of Undergraduate Learning and Teaching (CMVM)

**1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 25 January 2018 were approved as an accurate record.

**2. Matters Arising**

**a) Concessions arising from industrial action approved by correspondence**

Mr Tom Ward reported on this item. A series of concessions arising from industrial action had been approved by correspondence by the Committee, and by Convener's Action, between the last meeting on 25 January 2018 and this meeting.

These concessions to regulations and related policies referred to the operation of Boards of Examiners, and were designed to mitigate the impact upon students of the strike action, whilst maintaining academic standards. Concessions had therefore been granted in relation to a range of activity, including, for example:

- External examiner review of examination papers;
- coursework extensions;
- quorums at Board of Examiners;
- membership of Boards of Examiners;
- weighting of assessment components;
- progression.

Now that the impact of the industrial action was becoming clearer, further requests for concessions were expected. These would be sent on to Committee members, as required, for approval over the coming weeks. The impact of the University and College Union (UCU) request to External Examiners to resign and to not accept any new posts until the dispute was resolved needed to be thought about carefully, and some more minor aspects were also expected to require concessions.

**b) Acceptable grounds for special circumstances and coursework extensions: harassment/assault (CSPC 17/18 3 E)**

Dr Adam Bunni reported on this item. At the last meeting on 25 January 2018, the Committee had approved amendments to relevant policy and regulation, as proposed in Paper E. This had been 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. Since that meeting, further discussion had taken place between Academic Services and the Students' Association about the specific wording on this. It was proposed that "experience of other forms of harassment" should be added to the list of acceptable circumstances for coursework extensions and special circumstances, in addition to "experience of sexual harassment or assault". The Committee approved these changes for insertion in the relevant policy and regulations from 2018/19.

**c) Postgraduate Taught Assessment and Progression Task Group (CSPC 17/18 3 F)**

Dr Adam Bunni updated the Committee on progress made by the Postgraduate Taught Assessment and Progression Task Group. Formal proposals arising from the deliberations of the group, and related consultation, were expected to be brought to the 31 May 2018 meeting for further discussion.

**d) Knowledge Strategy Committee Report/ Bulk email investigation (CSPC 17/18 3 G)**

At the last meeting on 25 January 2018 the Committee had requested further information from Student Systems in relation to the outcome of a bulk email investigation. Mrs Lisa Dawson had provided an update prior to the meeting by email on 21 March 2018; it was further noted that this information was not confidential, and could be shared with other staff as required. In addition, if interested staff parties wished to see the quality

assurance matrix that had been created as a result of the investigation, this could also be shared. Interested parties were invited to contact Mrs Lisa Dawson on [lisa.dawson@ed.ac.uk](mailto:lisa.dawson@ed.ac.uk)

### **3. Service Excellence – Student Administration and Support Update (CSPC 17/18 4 A)**

Mr Neil McGillivray gave an update on the student administration and support strand of the Service Excellence Programme. The update that had been provided in the paperwork for the CSPC meeting was now slightly out of date. The Service Excellence Board had met on 9 March 2018, and had now approved business cases for Work and Study Away and the Student Immigration Service, therefore work had now begun on the implementation phase. A new suite of tools had been approved for formal communications from the Service Excellence Programme, and planning was now underway for the next year of the programme.

### **4. Service Excellence – Special Circumstances and Coursework Extensions Update (CSPC 17/18 4 B)**

Mr Neil McGillivray introduced this item with reference to robust but constructive feedback that had been received by Service Excellence from CSPC in relation to this item at the last meeting. Since 25 January 2018, Service Excellence had held meetings across all three Colleges, communicating with School colleagues and academic and professional services staff, as well as with the Students' Association. Feedback received had centred around issues of high capacity/volume of special circumstance applications, and the requirement for final decisions regarding outcomes in individual cases to be made by academic staff.

Mr McGillivray highlighted the following specific points that had emerged during recent discussions between Service Excellence and colleagues in Schools and Colleges:

- There appeared to be a common view that academic staff needed to be involved in the discussion and decision-making in relation to special circumstance cases, and a preference in some areas for this to continue to take place in special circumstance committee meetings (as per the current model).
- There was a concern raised by colleagues that a dedicated professional services model could generate different special circumstance outcomes, and a view in some quarters that student cases were more likely to be rejected if considered outside of the academic community (or academic special circumstances meeting).
- Colleagues had expressed concern about the 'centralising' of this responsibility, noting that distance from the School could disadvantage and confuse the student.
- There was a concern that the student voice was not being heard sufficiently in discussions at College and Senate Committee level regarding special circumstances – instead, feedback appeared to focus on what academic colleagues felt worked well in their School, and the type of decisions that they were qualified to make.
- The Service Excellence Team were working to defined Service Excellence Programme Design Principles, whereas arguments and proposals from Schools and Colleges seemed to be framed on the basis of past experience/local culture/expectations.

The major change following the feedback received was that decisions regarding the validity, level of impact and timing of special circumstances would be made by professional services staff in a University-level unit, while decisions about the appropriate outcome in the event that those professional services staff found that special

circumstances had occurred and impacted on assessment, would continue to be made by Boards of Examiners.

Service Excellence colleagues reported that full consultation on these revised proposals would continue to take place from now until the next CSPC meeting on 31 May 2018. The Committee raised concern that it may not be possible to undertake sufficiently broad and deep consultation during this period, particularly given the industrial action.

CSPC highlighted some issues that it would want clarity and reassurance on when considering the policy dimensions of final proposals:

- How the interface between the central unit and Boards and Examiners would operate in practice; CSPC members wished to understand how decisions made centrally regarding validity, timing and impact of circumstances would be transmitted to Boards of Examiners, and how these would inform decisions regarding final outcomes. It was suggested that the determination of outcomes would take place in a “pre-Board” stage, before the full Board of Examiners meeting, but it was understood that there were many different approaches to pre-Board activities in operation within Schools.
- Timelines for implementation of this strand, given the stage that the proposals were at currently, and the significant policy, regulatory and system work that was needed. Service Excellence Programme colleagues noted that they were beginning to reach a view that implementation at the beginning of 2018/19 was not achievable, and with this in mind, the Service Excellence Board had requested that they consider whether delivery in semester 2 of 2018/19 was feasible. CSPC members suggested that they had some serious concerns about introducing such change mid-year – such a major policy shift in the middle of an academic year had not been tackled before, and presented significant policy and regulatory issues. There were significant risks to take account of in relation to the student experience. Staff development would also be an issue, and CSPC members would require reassurance that such a pace of transition was absolutely necessary, given the risks involved.
- Whether the proposed approach would lead to any efficiencies. At the moment, CSPC members were not clear about what the overall gains were. It was clear that there were some gains to be achieved through having an online workflow system, whereby students were directed to a single location in order to submit their special circumstances applications. However, after this, the benefits of the proposals were much less clear. Certainly, evidence pointed to student requests for greater consistency of process and outcome – but the perceived inconsistency at the moment was understood to be to do with the final outcome, as opposed to the decision about the validity of special circumstances. Staff reported that they were overloaded in dealing with the volume of special circumstances applications and would be keen to see that the new process would bring efficiencies and reduce the time allocation. However, it was difficult for members to evaluate what the overall efficiencies would be in the absence of clarity regarding what would happen in the interface between the decision about validity and the outcome at the Board. Members encouraged Service Excellence to ensure that arguments in favour of the new plans, in terms of both consistency and efficiencies, be better articulated across the University.

The Committee also emphasised that, if the proposed change was agreed, it would be essential to test its operation with mock student cases in order to ensure it delivered consistent, fair and appropriate decision-making, before operating it with real student cases.

In summary, it was agreed that the Service Excellence Programme would need to provide clarification over the following:

- what would the central team communicate to Boards of Examiners; what would occur in the interim period after the validity of the special circumstances had been determined, and before the Board of Examiners meeting took place?
- what the timescales for implementation were; CSPC members cautioned very strongly against mid-year rollout;
- what the overall benefits/efficiencies of the proposals were.

#### **5. Service Excellence – Work and Study Away Update (CSPC 17/18 4 C)**

It was agreed that further drafting of the Undergraduate Degree Regulations 2018/19 would be required in the light of discussions that had taken place at the most recent Service Excellence Board meeting on 9 March 2018; at the Board it had been confirmed that the new Work and Study Away Service was not expected to be in operation until 19 January 2019, and that there would be a single Progression Board for Optional Study Abroad operated at University level and supported by the planned new Service. Careful consideration would need to be given to the wording of the relevant Degree Regulations (proposed regulations 27-34 in the Undergraduate Degree Regulations 2018/19) to accommodate these developments. CSPC members gave their approval for the degree regulations to be amended by Academic Services as required, to account for these developments.

It was also anticipated that amendments would be required to the Taught Assessment Regulations 2018/19 to account for the developments in this area, and there would also need to be revised Terms of Reference for the College Progression Boards for Optional Study Abroad. The Taught Assessment Regulations 2018/19 were due to be finalised at the 31 May 2018 CSPC meeting, which was the last meeting of the 2017/18 session.

[www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/studyabroadcollegeboards-termsofreference.pdf](http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/studyabroadcollegeboards-termsofreference.pdf)

CSPC members noted that greater clarity was required at the earliest opportunity about the respective responsibilities of Schools and the Work and Study Away Service once the Service was established, particularly with regard to implementation of Learning Agreements, and liaison about academic content and exchange partners.

**ACTION: Mr Tom Ward to discuss relevant text for the Undergraduate Degree Regulations 2018/19 further with Mrs Jackie Barnhart. Any amendments required to the degree regulations would be made and sent to University Court on 9 April 2018 for approval alongside the rest of the degree regulations for 2018/19.**

**Mr Ward and Ms Barnhart were also asked to consider implications for the Taught Assessment Regulations 2018/19 and the Terms of Reference for College Progression Boards for Optional Study Abroad.**

#### **6. Authorised Interruption of Study Policy (CSPC 17/18 4 D)**

It was agreed that further consultation on this item would take place with Directors of Teaching and Senior Tutors. The Task Group would bring final proposals to CSPC for formal approval at a future meeting.

**7. CAHSS – Anthusia (CLOSED - E)**

Dr Gerhard Anders introduced this closed paper. It was agreed that further discussion between Mr Tom Ward and Dr Anders would take place after the meeting in relation to any non-standard assessment aspects of this proposal.

**8. Undergraduate Degree Regulations 2018/19 (CSPC 17/18 4 F)**

Subject to minor amendments and clarifications from Academic Services (who had not been able to review all aspects of the proposed changes prior to the meeting due to the industrial action), and some adjustment to account for further discussions about the timing of implementation of the Work and Study Away Service, the Undergraduate Degree Regulations 2018/19 were agreed as presented.

**9. Postgraduate Degree Regulations 2018/19 (CSPC 17/18 4 G)**

Subject to minor amendments and clarifications from Academic Services, the Postgraduate Degree Regulations 2018/19 were agreed as presented.

**10. Higher Degree Regulations 2018/19 (CSPC 17/18 4 H)**

The Higher Degree Regulations for 2018/19 were agreed as presented.

**11. Senate Committee Planning 2018/19 (CSPC 17/18 4 I)**

Mr Tom Ward presented this item, noting that the paper invited Committee members to identify its full set of priorities for 2018/19. The Committee agreed that items listed in the paper were appropriate and necessary, but members queried whether it was all achievable in the timescales outlined, especially given the current focus on supporting outcomes from the Service Excellence Programme. It was also recognised that further priorities could emerge from the consideration of planning round submissions.

It was further agreed to look to set up a short-life task group in 2018/19 to complete some work on undergraduate degree programme transfers (e.g. a single application form, a set of guidance and unified processes, possibly a website). This work would also involve consultation with Student Recruitment and Admissions.

The Students' Association made some comments about student experience in relation to the University's complaints process, which would need to be taken up directly with Mr Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary Student Experience.

The Committee recognised that, in addition to considering the Support for Study Policy and the Code of Student Conduct, it would be valuable to take a broader look at policy regarding student support arrangements. However, the Committee recognised that it would not be appropriate to undertake a broader review in 2018/19 given that significant related developments (e.g. within Service Excellence) would also be happening during that period.

**12. Progress with Committee Priorities 2017/18 (CSPC 17/18 4 J)**

This item was received by the Committee for information.

**13. Knowledge Strategy Committee Report (CSPC 17/18 4 K)**

This item was received by the Committee for information.

**14. Any Other Business**

There was no further business.

Ailsa Taylor, Academic Policy Officer, 29 March 2018