

The University of Edinburgh

**Minutes of the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) meeting  
held online on Thursday 21 January 2021 at 2.00pm**

**Present:**

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Professor Alan Murray (Convener) | Assistant Principal, Academic Support  |
| Dr Jeremy Crang                  | Dean of Students (CAHSS)   |
| Dr Paul Norris                   | Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum<br>Approval (CAHSS)                     |
| Dr Lisa Kendall                  | Director of Academic and Student<br>Administration (CAHSS)                       |
| Kirsty Woomble                   | Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS)   |
| Professor Judy Hardy             | Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE)  |
| Stephen Warrington               | Dean of Student Experience (CSE)   |
| Alex Laidlaw                     | Head of Academic Affairs (CSE)   |
| Dr Antony Maciocia               | Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE)  |
| Philippa Burrell                 | Head of Academic Administration (CMVM)   |
| Professor Neil Turner            | Dean of Undergraduate Learning and<br>Teaching (CMVM)                            |
| Dr Paddy Hadoke                  | Director of Postgraduate Research and<br>Early Career Research Experience (CMVM) |
| Fizzy Abou Jawad                 | Vice President Education, Students'<br>Association                               |
| Gin Lowdean                      | Advice Place Manager, Students'<br>Association                                   |
| Dr Cathy Bovill                  | Institute for Academic Development (IAD)   |
| Dr Adam Bunni                    | Head of Governance and Regulatory<br>Framework Team, Academic Services           |
| Sarah McAllister                 | Student Systems and Administration   |

**In attendance:**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Lisa Dawson              | Director, Student Systems and<br>Administration                 |
| Rosie Edwards            | Student Systems and Administration                              |
| Professor Tina Harrison  | Assistant Principal Academic Standards<br>and Quality Assurance |
| Professor Edward Hollis  | Deputy Dean of Research (CAHSS)                                 |
| Ailsa Taylor (Secretary) | Academic Policy Officer, Academic<br>Services                   |

**Apologies for absence:**

There were no apologies for absence.

**1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 September 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

## **2. Matters Arising**

Electronic business and Convener's Action had been conducted since the last meeting on 24 September 2020 as follows:

- a) Electronic Business - Special Circumstances and Covid-19 (14-19 October 2020), CAHSS PUC Chile (18 November – 25 November 2020), Virtual Boards of Examiners - concession to the Taught Assessment Regulations (23-26 November 2020)
- b) Convener's Action - CSE Mathematics PUC Chile (23 October 2020), approval of the Expected Behaviour Policy (8 October 2020)

Item 11 Any Other Business (24 September 2020):

Reference was made to the late paper that was circulated in advance of the last meeting by the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in relation to advice for staff about authorised interruption of studies. It was agreed by the Committee that a more permissive approach to authorised interruption of studies than that approved at the last APRC meeting may be more acceptable in the current circumstances.

## **3. Una Europa Joint PhD in Cultural Heritage (CLOSED A)**

Professor Edward Hollis and Kirsty Woomble presented this closed paper. The Committee provided feedback for the UoE Una Europa team on the proposals.

APRC were satisfied that the proposals were in line with existing University of Edinburgh approaches to collaborative PhD programmes, and satisfied that the proposals adequately safeguarded the academic standards and student experience expectations of the University of Edinburgh. If the final arrangements for the joint PhD programme were in line with the draft proposals presented, APRC agreed that these could be approved by APRC by Convener's action.

## **4. Board of Examiners 2020 Resilience Survey Analysis (APRC 20/21 2B)**

This paper was presented by Lisa Dawson, Student Systems and Administration and provided the Board of Examiners 2020 Resilience project post-project survey analysis. The paper was approved by the Committee, with the caveat that there needed to be a cross-check with the proposals to mitigate the impact of covid-19 on student assessment (both Paper G and a late circulated paper on covid-19 and student assessment by Professor Harrison).

## **5. Mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on student assessment (CLOSED G)**

The Committee agreed to re-order the agenda to take the closed paper (Paper G) on mitigating the impact of covid-19 on student assessment at this point. This paper considered some further measures which may be appropriate to mitigate the ongoing impact of the pandemic on students' performance in assessment in the current 2020/21 session.

Another paper had been circulated on behalf of Professor Tina Harrison to APRC members in advance of the meeting. This paper was to be read in conjunction with Paper G, and made a suggestion for a proposed approach, for consideration by APRC.

Members from Colleges provided comments on behalf of their constituent Schools and Deaneries. The Committee noted the short time that had been allowed for comments, but felt that there was urgency to make decisions, if possible, given that students were anxious to receive certainty regarding what measures would be in place. Key issues considered included:

- The measures introduced in 2019/20 had placed extreme workload pressures upon staff in Schools; measures introduced this year must avoid compounding this;
- In considering the measures to be introduced, members were asked to be especially mindful of the demands upon students who have caring or employment commitments;
- Regarding borderlines for classification, there were concerns in some areas that increasing these may lead to inflation in degree outcomes; however, it was also noted that, while expanding the borderline would increase the volume of students considered, using the same criteria as normal for upgrading students (e.g. the CAHSS algorithm), should mitigate against unreasonable inflation;
- Members were keen to avoid setting an expectation that there must be blanket extensions to assessment deadlines, as many Schools had already amended submission deadlines as much as would be compatible with returning marks by relevant deadlines; members were mindful that staff may struggle to provide feedback to students within the normal, expected timelines;
- CAHSS members proposed consideration of automatic approval of 7-day coursework extensions, where these would normally be offered;
- Members noted that Boards of Examiners can (under existing powers) consider performance of cohorts against those of previous years, and can make marking adjustments if they feel these are warranted; it is understood, however, that routine scaling of marks is not common.

The Committee approved the paper provided by Professor Harrison outlining the proposed range of mitigation measures, after making some minor changes to it.

The following mitigating measures were therefore approved for 2020/21, subject to any further minor clarifications:

### **Extensions**

- Students can apply for a 7-day extension to coursework deadlines (via the ESC service, as normal), which will be approved automatically (i.e. they do not need to demonstrate a valid reason).
- Students can continue to apply through the Special Circumstances process for extensions of longer than seven days. Conveners of Special Circumstances Committees can make decisions about these by Convener's Action under the "expedited decisions" provisions (7.6) of the Special Circumstances Policy.

Academic Services will work with ESC colleagues to ensure the flow of information regarding these cases is improved, to enable Schools to make these decisions promptly.

- Schools are encouraged to consider greater use of blanket extensions/changes to deadlines for whole cohorts/courses, including dissertations:
  - a. where this is helpful to students, does not conflict with the return of feedback, does not compromise the ability of academic and professional services staff to meet key deadlines for the effective running of Boards of Examiners, and is compatible with students being able to receive a further 7-day extension.
  - b. This is within the control of Schools to manage.
  - c. Many Schools have already made such adjustments and, therefore, may not be in a position to extend some deadlines further.

### **Special circumstances**

- We are continuing to waive evidence requirements for Special Circumstances applications relating to medical circumstances (introduced last year).
- Additionally, we are waiving evidence requirements for other types of formal documentary evidence that may be more difficult to acquire due to the pandemic (e.g. documentation provided by government, or external agencies).
- We are continuing to invite Special Circumstances applications based on the following grounds (all added as new grounds this session, as a temporary measure), in addition to existing grounds covering the health of students and those close to them, bereavement, and exceptional caring responsibilities:
  - a. Been required to carry out more paid work than usual, as a “key worker” (e.g. in healthcare, retail, delivery);
  - b. Experienced significant and prolonged problems with access to teaching and learning materials, e.g. due to connectivity, power, or equipment issues;
  - c. Experienced catastrophic technical failure preventing submission of an online assessment by the relevant deadline;
  - d. Experienced prolonged exposure to a difficult/challenging home environment;
  - e. Experienced severe financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic;
  - f. Experienced lack of access to library resources where there are no viable alternatives.

### **Pre-honours specific measures (progression)**

- Students in pre-Honours years will be able to qualify for up to 40 credits on aggregate, based on the following principles:
  - a. The expectation is that this would apply to “outside” courses, rather than to “core” courses, except where a Board of Examiners feels that awarding it for a “core” course would not be to a student’s disadvantage in the longer term.
  - b. Students will be required to achieve an average of 40% across 120 credits in order to qualify for the award of credit on aggregate for any failed courses, unless any courses are discounted for progression purposes due to upheld Special Circumstances.

- Requirements for “elevated hurdles” for entry to Honours, should be waived, where these exist, except where they are required to meet the expectations of professional or accrediting bodies, or where students are required to demonstrate language competency in advance of study abroad.

### **Honours, PGT specific measures**

- Honours and PGT students will be able to qualify for up to 60 credits on aggregate (as opposed to the usual 40 credits) in a given stage of study, subject to the requirements of professional or accrediting bodies:
  - a. This applies to Honours Years 3 or 4, or the taught component of a Master’s programme.
  - b. Students will be required to achieve an average of 40% across 120 credits in order to qualify for the award of credit on aggregate for any failed courses, unless any courses are discounted due to upheld Special Circumstances.
  - c. Course results for courses awarded credit on aggregate will be included in classification calculations, unless they have been discounted due to upheld Special Circumstances.

### **Expanded borderline**

- The borderline has been expanded from 2% to 3% for classification, or progression purposes:
  - a. Boards of Examiners should apply their usual rules for the award of a higher classification for borderline cases, which should have been publicised to students.
  - b. Boards of Examiners will still need to see a significant volume of performance in the higher classification for the award of the higher classification.

### **PGT Merit and Distinction**

- We have relaxed the regulation for AY 2020/21 that both the taught and research components should demonstrate the same level of performance in order to qualify for Merit and Distinction:
  - a. Students will be automatically upgraded to the higher class if they fall into the (expanded) borderline for either the dissertation or taught component, and the other component is in the higher class (e.g. 70 and 67 for a Distinction).

### **Reiterating existing Boards of Examiners powers**

- Boards of Examiners have a responsibility to ensure students have a fair opportunity to demonstrate performance against the learning outcomes, and the moderation process empowers them to make marking adjustments where they do not think this has happened, for whatever reason. Under existing provisions, Boards of Examiners can:
  - a. Compare performance on courses with previous years to discern whether performance appears to have been unreasonably depressed;
  - b. Take account of exceptional circumstances affecting the delivery of courses;
  - c. Adjust, scale or discount marks as appropriate, where this is in the interests of students.

## Postgraduate Research

- PGR students may continue to apply for interruption of study or extension where appropriate to take account of the impact of Covid-19. We expect to be sympathetic to cases where students are experiencing the impact of exceptional caring or employment commitments.
- PGR students may also submit Special Circumstances, where they are taking taught courses.
- At the point of examination, students may make the Board of Examiners aware of the impact of Covid-19 on the research by submitting a brief statement to that effect at the point they submit their thesis.

The revised paper was to be circulated to members as soon as possible for information. A formal email communication about this would be sent to relevant staff in Schools and Colleges in the week beginning 25 January 2020. The email would make clear that Academic Services would provide more detailed guidance on implementing the measures in due course, and that colleagues in Schools should provide any information about specific wishes regarding the coverage of the guidance to their College Offices. This email would be followed up with an email to students, which would be supported by web content.

**ACTION: Professor Harrison and Dr Bunni to refine Professor Harrison's supporting paper on mitigating the impact of covid-19 on student assessment and re-circulate to the Committee for information. The relevant information was to be circulated to staff and students as agreed.**

### 6. Virtual Boards of Examiners – amendment to the Taught Assessment Regulations (APRC 20/21 2C)

Dr Adam Bunni presented this paper. The Committee approved a permanent amendment to the Taught Assessment Regulations from 2021/22, permitting meetings of Boards of Examiners to be held in-person or virtually, as considered appropriate by the relevant Convener.

### 7. Coursework extensions – review of current policy (APRC 20/21 2D)

The Committee received this paper which provided information about the first semester of handling of coursework extension requests by the Extensions and Special Circumstances (ESC) service. Whilst it was recognised by the Committee that further consultation around the proposals would be required, it was agreed that it would not be appropriate to take this forward in the current academic year. The Committee agreed to return to this item in 2021/22, when there would be a full year of data available from the ESC service.

### 8. CSE: Geophysics degrees placement year weighting (APRC 20/21 2E)

Professor Judy Hardy presented this paper which was approved by the Committee.

**9. Academic year dates 2022/23 and provisional academic year dates 2023/24 and 2024/25 (APRC 20/21 2F)**

The academic year dates for 2022/23 and provisional academic year dates 2023/24 and 2024/25 were approved.

There were some programmes to add to the non-standard academic year programme list which included the new Masters of Nursing (MN) and the MSc Mathematical Economics and Econometrics degree.

**ACTION: Ailsa Taylor to convey the newly approved academic year dates to Communications and Marketing so that they can publish on the semester dates website, and add the new programmes to the non-standard academic year dates published on the web.**

**10. Any Other Business**

The Committee agreed to create a small sub-group of the existing Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) validation panel to consider some non-credit courses (approx. 5-6) in the short-term, borrowing the process currently used by the Business School.