

The University of Edinburgh

**Minutes of the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) meeting
held online on Thursday 27 January 2022 at 2.00pm**

Present:

Dr Paul Norris (Convener)	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval (CAHSS)
Professor Judy Hardy	Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE)
Stephen Warrington	Dean of Student Experience (CSE)
Alex Laidlaw	Head of Academic Affairs (CSE)
Philippa Burrell	Head of Academic Administration (CMVM)
Professor Jamie Davies	Dean of Taught Education (CMVM)
Dr Deborah Shaw	Dean of Students (CMVM)
Professor Patrick Hadoke	Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research Experience (CMVM)
Charlotte Macdonald	Advice Place Deputy Manager
Dr Cathy Bovill	Senior Lecturer in Student Engagement, Institute for Academic Development (IAD)
Dr Adam Bunni	Head of Academic Policy and Regulation, Academic Services
Sarah McAllister	Student Systems and Administration

In attendance:

Ailsa Taylor	Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services
Stuart Lamont	Observer, Students' Association
Hannah Jones	Director of English Language Education, Centre for Open Learning
Gill Aitken	Programme Director, MSc Clinical Education, CMVM
Dr Sharron Ogle	Programme Director, MSc in Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health, CMVM
Dr Darren Shaw	Director of Postgraduate Taught, R(D)SVS
Rosie Edwards	Senior Design Lead
Rebecca Shade	Policy and Projects Officer – Student Experience

Apologies for absence:

Professor Jeremy Crang	Dean of Students (CAHSS)
Kirsty Woomble	Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS)
Professor Antony Maciocia	Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE)
Tara Gold	Vice President Education, Students' Association

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 November 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising

APRC 25 November 2021 - Item 6 (Including Publications in Postgraduate Research Theses – Updated Guidance) – At the November 2021 APRC meeting, there was an action point under this agenda item, for Susan Hunter and Kirsty Woomble to seek advice from the library about replacement wording in relation to copyright. Susan Hunter had confirmed that this action point was in progress, and she was anticipating receipt of this information by the end of the month.

Convener's Action had also been taken by Dr Norris since the previous meeting in November in relation to the following items:

Appeal Committee membership (Dr Chris Mowat was appointed as Vice-Convener of the Undergraduate Appeal Committee, and Professor Tonks Fawcett had also joined the Committee as a member).

Student Discipline Committee membership (Ailidh Mackay joined the Student Discipline Committee, following a nomination from CAHSS).

3. Centre for Open Learning - International Foundation Programme (APRC 21/22 3A)

Hannah Jones, Director of English Language Education at the Centre for Open Learning introduced this item. The paper recommended that the Committee approve the proposal presented, which would grant flexibility in relation to Taught Assessment Regulation 27.4 for International Foundation Programme students who scored above the pass mark of 40 on Foundation English for Academic Purposes 1 and/or 2 but less than the 60 score needed for progression to undergraduate studies (allowing the Board of Examiners to recommend a resit). This would require an opt-out from the relevant Taught Assessment Regulation, because under Taught Assessment Regulation 27.4 students were not allowed to resit a course, or components of a course, that they had passed, unless the Board of Examiners had permitted this under special circumstances by granting a null sit for the attempt that the student had passed). The resit score would be used for progression purposes only, and would not therefore replace the original mark which contributed to the students' overall mark on the International Foundation Programme programme.

The Committee discussed the position regarding the Extended Common Marking Scheme in relation to the International Foundation Programme. The marks were reported for the programme under the Common Marking Scheme, and were marked on the basis of global criteria, but were technically not being marked directly against the Common Marking Scheme. The reasons for this position were discussed further, and the Committee were reassured that the criteria for marking was made very clear to the students involved, and that this situation was highly programme specific. It was agreed that the Centre for Opening Learning would benefit in the longer term from having a deeper discussion with colleagues in Academic Services and Student Systems about their assessment processes and the use of the Common Marking Scheme. However, the paper offered a pragmatic workaround for the current issues, offering an appropriate degree of flexibility for this particular programme.

The Committee approved the proposal outlined in the paper, therefore granting an opt-out from Taught Assessment Regulation 27.4 for Foundation English for Academic Purposes.

4. CMVM - MSc Clinical Education Year 3 (APRC 21/22 3B)

Gill Aitken presented this paper. APRC was being asked to consider alternatives to the current 60 credit dissertation for the third year of study on the the MSc in Clinical Education programme. The proposal was to still offer a 60 credit dissertation, but also to offer an entirely taught third year (3x20 credit courses) or a 20 credit literature course and a 40 credit Quality Improvement course (20+40 credit quality improvement project).

This paper was discussed at length by APRC. APRC had previously considered alternative pathways to the dissertation for other PGT programmes within the University, including 20/40 credit alternative courses, and APRC had granted approval for these, therefore the discussion for APRC in relation to the MSc in Clinical Education proposals was centred more upon the Committee's views of the three 20 credit course option.

It was noted by the Committee that Professor Richard Andrews was currently leading on a Postgraduate work-stream under the Curriculum Transformation project, which reported to a Curriculum Transformation Board. It was anticipated by the Committee that PGT modelling would be something that would likely fall under this work-stream, but this had not been confirmed.

The Committee agreed that it was supportive of this proposal as an alternative pathway to dissertation for the MSc Clinical Education programme, given the level of confidence that the programme team had about both the fulfilment of the appropriate learning outcomes, and the equally challenging nature of the three 20 credit courses (all at SCQF Level 11). The Committee recognised that students on this programme would still have the option to pursue a dissertation if they wished. The paper was approved by the Committee.

On a more general level, the Committee recognised that such flexibility could be supportive both of the learning outcomes for a particular programme and the needs of prospective students, and agreed that this remained consistent with broader expectations for Edinburgh Master's degrees. On this basis, the Committee agreed that similar proposals need not be subject to the same level of scrutiny in the future.

5. CMVM - MSc Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health (non-standard dissertation) (APRC 21/22 3C)

Dr Sharron Ogle presented this paper, which presented a proposal for an alternative route to Masters for the online postgraduate programme in Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health. The proposal was for the addition of an alternative route, in parallel with the existing 60 credit Written Reflective Element. Students opting to take the alternative route would engage in a 30:30 split between taught and compulsory

research elements in the final year of study. The 30 taught credits would be taken in semester 1 and 2, selected from the elective course portfolio, as well as a new 10 credit course 'Planning Applied Interdisciplinary Research in Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem health'. All students taking the alternative route would finish together in semester 3 by completing a new 20 credit capstone course 'Applied Interdisciplinary Research in Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health'.

The proposals outlined in the paper were approved by the Committee.

6. CMVM - Professional Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine (APRC 21/22 3D)

Dr Darren Shaw presented this paper, which proposed changes to the current credit weighting of a number of non-standard courses within the Professional Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine programme, effective from the 2022/23 academic year.

The Committee discussed this paper, and it was noted that one of the main reasons to have standard credit volumes was to allow for portability between programmes, but that the courses here were bespoke for this particular programme, and there would be no expectation that the clinical skills courses would be swapped out for any electives.

It was clarified that students already on programme would continue with the existing credit weightings, and no student would have their assessment credit weightings changed part way through their programme of study.

The proposals outlined in the paper were approved by the Committee.

7. Student Support Model (APRC 21/22 3E)

Rosie Edwards presented this item, which proposed draft regulation changes for the Committee to review in relation to the Taught Assessment Regulations 2022/23, Undergraduate Degree Regulations 2022/23 and Postgraduate Degree Regulations 2022/23. These changes were being proposed through the Student Support Project.

Proposals for review of the Support for Study Policy had also been made through the Student Support Project, but this was being considered by the Committee as a separate agenda item (Paper F).

It was noted by the Committee that the degree regulations were expected to be reviewed at the March 2022 meeting of APRC, and that assessment regulations would be reviewed at the May 2022 meeting of APRC. The proposed changes would be incorporated into the drafts for consideration at those meetings. It was noted that role descriptions had not been approved as yet, therefore role titles could be subject to further change.

It was further suggested that it would be preferable in some cases to refer to responsibilities in the regulations, rather than refer to role titles – for example to state that a Director of Teaching is responsible/has the authority for X but that they may choose to delegate to another person, and that the School will let the students know who they should go to for this.

8. Support for Study (APRC 21/22 3F)

Rebecca Shade presented this item.

The Committee agreed to review the Support for Study Policy as per the proposed changes presented in the paper, with the exception of the proposed change in section 7.4 where it referred to “making clear reference to the relevant section of this policy with regards to the case”. This change was not to be made at this time, but would be kept under review.

The Committee discussed the insertion of the reference in Section 8.1 to students being referred directly to stage 3 (in a minority of cases). The policy had already indicated previously in Section 3.1 that in situations where the issues/adverse impact was judged to be particularly severe (and the University had reasonable grounds to believe that earlier stages of the policy would not be effective in addressing these issues), the University could proceed to a later stage of the policy without working sequentially through the stages. Therefore the Committee took the view that the insertion of the reference in section 8.1 to students being referred directly to stage 3 in a minority of cases did not represent a shift in policy, and could be approved.

The Committee further agreed to amend the following wording in the policy immediately in relation to the following:

- References to the Senatus Academic Progression Regulations Committee to be amended to Senatus Academic Policy and Regulations Committee.
- Section 8.5 (“evidence that the student’s behaviour is causing significant risks to the wider University community...” to be amended to more closely reflect the language of Section 1.2 so that it referred to evidence that the student’s behaviour “has an adverse impact on the health, wellbeing or safety of other members of the University community...”
- Section 9.5 to be amended to include reference to the whole url (currently hyperlinked) here, in case the document was printed.

Finally, it was agreed that at the first APRC meeting of the academic year in 2022/23 in September 2022, the policy would be on the agenda for review again to ensure that it remained fit for purpose (especially bearing in mind that fundamental changes were currently being proposed to the University’s student support model). If, at that point in September 2022, a decision was taken to continue with the policy in its current format, then the following items could be listed for review:

- Language - use of language in general, to ensure the language was appropriate for students who may be vulnerable.
- Postgraduate Research (PGR) students - a check that PGR students were properly represented and covered by the policy.
- Job titles – any job title changes to be reflected– for example when Wellbeing Advisers were in post.
- Section 9.2 Students detailed under the Mental Health Act - the wording inserted in this section could be further reviewed, to ensure that the changes reflected the issues that had been raised/ to see if there was an alternative mechanism for very short periods of interruption.

- Section 7.4 Notice periods in advance of a stage 2 student case conference – whether the change from 10 working days to five (or giving as much notice as possible) was working in practice. (However, the Committee recognised that the word “ideally” contained in this paragraph in relation to the invitation being “ideally” sent within X working days was relevant. Given that this word “ideally” had already been included in the previous version of the policy, it had already been accepted that there may be situations where staff could act more quickly without being non-compliant with the policy - and it was further recognised in the policy that in urgent situations it may be necessary for the Dean of Students to act sooner).

9. ESC Review - Coursework Extension Update for Semester 1 2021/22 (APRC 21/22 3G)

Sarah McAllister presented this paper, which gave information about coursework extensions in semester 1 of 2021/22, with a reflection on coursework extension applications including reference to volume, trends and challenges. APRC had requested regular updates as part of the ESC review to reflect on service demand and project outcomes. APRC was being asked in the paper to consider whether the policy in relation to coursework extensions was meeting student and staff needs. It was clear that students were struggling with multiple competing deadlines through the ‘bunching’ of assessment and staff involved in marking were having to adjust their marking time, particularly for courses where up to 60% of the class cohort had coursework extensions. Currently, the policy was very broad to cover the acceptable reasons that may affect attendance and submission of assessment, and students were self-reporting with no evidence required.

Committee members discussed this item at length. There was a general consensus among members that the coursework extension policy in its current form was unsustainable in the long-term. Members agreed that the huge increase in volume and proportion of coursework extensions presented urgent concerns about the student and staff experience. There was strong support amongst members for changes to be made to the relevant policies and regulations, but that this could not be disaggregated from consideration of Special Circumstances, and would require consultation across the University and involvement from the relevant work-streams and Committees. The ESC Review outcomes would be crucial to any future developments, and are not due until early summer 2022. In addition, the Assessment and Feedback working group, which reports into the Curriculum Transformation board, is considering the University’s approach to assessment, and should encompass the University’s approach to deadlines. Based on these factors, the Committee agreed that a substantive review of the relevant policies could not be concluded in time for 2022/23.

10. Deadline for Submission of Special Circumstances (APRC 21/22 3H)

This paper proposed an amendment to the deadline for late submission of special circumstances applications, and to the wording of the Special Circumstances Policy regarding the standard deadline for applications.

The Committee approved the proposed amendment to section 3.1 of the Policy regarding the initial deadlines for applications, set out in section 7 of the paper.

As to the deadline for late applications, the Committee decided not to set a specific deadline within the Policy, but to approve deadlines on an annual basis for the subsequent year, based on proposals from the ESC service. The Policy would therefore state that “No late applications will be considered after the deadline for the relevant Semester published on the ESC web pages.”

11. Academic Year Dates 2023/24 and Provisional Academic Year Dates 2024/25 and 2025/26 (APRC 21/22 3I)

The academic year dates for 2023/24 and provisional academic year dates for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were approved as presented, and would be passed to Communications and Marketing for publishing on the website at:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/semester-dates>

Dr Deborah Shaw noted that she was aware of an undergraduate programme in the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences which had non-standard academic year dates, therefore she would pass the information on to Ailsa Taylor so that it could be published on the relevant webpage:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/semester-dates/programmes-with-non-standard-academic-years>

12. Any Other Business

There was no further business.