

Meeting of the Senatus Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC)
Hybrid meeting held online via Teams and in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House
Thursday 2 May 2023 at 3.00-4:30pm

Confirmed Minute

<p>Present: Dr Aidan Brown Dr Adam Bunni Philippa Burrell Professor Jeremy Crang Professor Jamie Davies Dr Murray Earle Professor Patrick Hadoke (Vice-Convenor) Clair Halliday Karen Howie</p> <p>Professor Antony Maciocia Sarah McAllister</p> <p>Sam Maccallum Dr Paul Norris (Convenor) Callum Paterson Rachael Quirk Dr Deborah Shaw Professor Tim Stratford Dr Uzma Tufail-Hanif Stephen Warrington</p> <p>Substitute members present: Brian Connolly Dr Lisa Kendall Dr Neil Lent</p> <p>In attendance: Lucy Evans Tina Harrison Olivia Hayes (Minutes)</p> <p>Apologies: Dr Donna Murray</p> <p>Dr Kathryn Nicol Kirsty Woomble</p>	<p>Elected member of Senate Head of Academic Affairs (CSE) Head of Academic Administration (CMVM) Dean of Students (CAHSS) Dean of Taught Education (CMVM) Elected member of Senate Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research Experience (CMVM) The Advice Place, Deputy Manager Head of Digital Learning Applications and Media, Information Services Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE) Head of Student Support Operations, Student Systems and Administration Vice President Education, Students' Association Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval (CAHSS) Academic Engagement Coordinator (Co-opted member) Head of Taught Student Administration & Support (CAHSS) Dean of Students (CMVM) Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE) Elected member of Senate Dean of Student Experience (CSE)</p> <p>Academic Policy Manager (Academic Services) Director of Academic and Student Administration (CAHSS) University Learning and Teaching (IAD)</p> <p>Deputy Secretary, Students Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement) Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services</p> <p>Head of Taught Student Development, Institute for Academic Development Head of Academic Policy and Regulation Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS)</p>
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The Convenor formally welcomed members and substitute members to the additional meeting of APRC.

1.	Minutes of the previous meeting - APRC 22/23 8A For approval
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- 23 March 2023 (enclosed)
- March e-business (enclosed)

The Committee approved the minutes of the 23 March and March e-business meeting.

For discussion

2. Industrial action: variations to academic policies and regulations - APRC 22/23 8B

For discussion

Ahead of introduction of this item, the Convener outlined Committee's responsibility as stated in the Taught Assessment Regulations. The Committee are responsible for approving temporary variations to regulations to mitigate against the impact of significant disruption to students, without compromising academic standards. The Committee are not asked to take a view on the reasons for industrial action, rather to establish if significant disruption has occurred and to consider and approve mitigations against this.

The Convener noted that should the Committee approve temporary variations to regulations, the relevant Board of Examiners will continue to retain decision making powers to apply these. The Committee noted that there may be cases where there is insufficient evidence for a Board of Examiners to reach a decision and this may impact on continuing and graduating students.

Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary, Students and Convener of the Academic Contingency Group (ACG), introduced the item. Ms Evans noted that ACG are responsible for monitoring periods of disruption. The Group agree that the upcoming period of industrial action is significant and recommend that APRC approve a range of temporary variations to mitigate against these. Ms Evans reinforced that the temporary variations would be exceptional measures and applied only to courses impacted by industrial action and where Boards have exhausted all other options available to them.

The Committee noted that guidance for staff would be updated by Academic Services, shared with the ACG and circulated to Schools and Colleges by the end of the week. Members were invited to communicate with colleagues locally on the decisions made by APRC ahead of guidance being circulated.

APRC considered the proposed variations outlined in the paper in turn.

The Committee agree that significant disruption has occurred and the Committee approved the continued activation of **Taught Assessment Regulation 70**.

APRC considered the proposed variation to **Taught Assessment Regulation 35: Common Marking Scheme**. The following points were made:

- The award of pass/fail would be applied at course level, rather than to individual students.
- The variation would allow the award of pass/fail in all courses, including those at Honours level.
- Student Systems have confirmed that awarding pass/fail and numeric grades within the same cohort is not easily achieved in APT.
- Students may prefer a pass/fail grade over receiving an unreliable numeric mark, or a need to take further assessment.
- School Boards of Studies may be able to provide Boards of Examiners with guidance on the award of pass/fail grades in courses which normally return a numeric mark. A concern was raised regarding appropriate information being available to Boards of Studies to take a decisions and the rapid decision making required from Boards of Studies ahead of a Board of Examiners meeting.

The Committee considered the scenario where a numeric grade becomes available after a Board of Examiners has reached a decision on a degree classification. The Committee noted that there is no minimum credit requirement on which to base a classification decision.

The Committee agreed that should a Board of Examiners be satisfied that it has sufficient information to reach a classification decision then any further information that becomes available will not detrimentally impact on the outcome awarded..

APRC approved the temporary variation to Taught Assessment Regulation 35, with the stipulation that Schools can use their Board of Studies prior to Board of Examiners meeting to seek guidance on the use of Pass/ Fail courses.

The Committee strongly indicated a wish that the guidance encourage the involvement in Boards of Studies in this decision.

APRC considered the proposed variation to **Taught Assessment Regulation 39: Boards of Examiners**. The following points were made:

- A concern was raised regarding the confidential nature of decisions taken by Boards where there is a smaller proportion of members. It was confirmed that extracts of Board minutes provide decisions relating to individual students and the minutes of and attendance at a Board are not publically available.
- A Board of Examiners must be competent to be allowed to take place, the existing regulations provide detail for ensuring a Board is competent, however both the Convener of the Board and the Head of School can be consulted on a Board's competency.
- There is no defined number of members of a Board of Examiners. A concern was raised by a member with regard to quorum being reduced to two members. It was suggested that the quorum should be based on a percentage of the usual membership of the Board. However, due to the different approach taken to Board membership across the University, it was agreed that this alternative was not an appropriate mitigation.
- Students are less concerned by numbers proportions of Board members for quorum and would prefer that decisions be taken in a timely manner to allow their course, progression or award decisions to be issued.
- The participation of External Examiners in Boards of Examiner processes was discussed and it was noted that External Examiner input is useful where possible. The Committee noted that under existing regulations External Examiner participation does not require attendance at a live Board meeting.
- A concern was raised regarding the complexity of decisions and the potential pressure on Boards of Examiners to reach a decision in challenging circumstances. It was noted in response that Boards take a mechanical approach to reaching many decisions. If a Board member has concerns regarding the competency of a Board, or believes that undue pressure is being placed on a Board to reach decisions, then these should be raised via the appropriate channels, which will be outlined in the guidance.

APRC approved a temporary variation to Taught Assessment Regulation 39 to allow a Board to take place with a minimum of two internal examiners and removed the requirement for participation by an External Examiner.

The Committee agreed that the guidance must address the following concerns raised:

- Escalation of concerns by internal examiners regarding the competency of the Board of Examiners.
- Where there is no external examiner is participating in the Board, the College office should be notified and they will provide support to arrange a member of senior academic staff to provide oversight of, and participation in, the Board processes. Where a course had not been reviewed by an External Examiner the previous time it was run, additional consideration by APRC may be required.

APRC considered the proposal to activate **Taught Assessment Regulation 71: Significant disruption: where only partial results are available to Boards**. The following points were made:

- Clarity should be provided to Boards on how to apply TAR 71.9 to ensure that no double counting or mitigation on a course takes place. Course Boards should flag to Progression or Award Boards where a course is impacted by industrial action, but where no action was available to the Course Board.

The Committee agreed to activate Taught Assessment Regulation 71: Significant disruption: where only partial results are available to Boards.

APRC confirmed that where a Board is able to reach a decision for progression or award under existing regulations, then the normal regulations will be applied. Specifically where a students' profile is unaffected by industrial action, or any impact has been addressed at the course level, their progression or award decision should be made against normal regulations.

APRC considered the proposed variation to **Taught Assessment Regulation 51: Pre-Honours progression**. The following points were made:

- There may be some programmes which do not have professional accreditation requirements, but which have additional requirements to for recognition by professional bodies.

APRC approved the following variation to Taught Assessment Regulation 51: Pre-Honours progression:

- **Taught Assessment Regulation 51** to include provision for Boards of Examiners to award up to 40 credits on aggregate for courses affected by industrial action for pre-Honours students providing the students has an average of 40% over the courses with an available numeric grade.

*If the student has achieved PASS marks in at least 80 credits and has an overall average of 40% or more in the available credits with a numeric grade, then they **can** be awarded credits on aggregate **for the courses affected by industrial action**. Students must also satisfy specific requirements for externally accredited degree programmes (including PRSB), as typically published in the programme handbook.*

The Committee stipulated the following criteria must be reflected in guidance:

- The expectation is that credit on aggregate will be awarded for courses where both the following criteria are met:
 - The course has been affected by industrial action.
 - The Board of Examiners has established that a pass grade cannot be awarded.
- Where a course does not meet the criteria specified above, then a Board should continue to follow its usual processes for confirming course marks. This may include awarding a resit in circumstances where it would normally award a resit assessment.
- The award of credits on aggregate is not likely to be applied to core courses or where external accreditation requirements require specific outcomes to be achieved (i.e. courses which must be taken and passed). However, Boards of Examiners responsible for making progression decisions may also award credit on aggregate for such courses at their discretion.
- Where the Board has insufficient information to apply the above variation, then the progression decision should be deferred.

APRC considered the proposed variation to **Taught Assessment Regulation 52: Honours progression**. The following points were made:

- External accreditation requirements will dictate whether a temporary variation to regulations can be applied. Schools should consult with accrediting bodies ahead of applying a temporary variation to regulations.
- A concern was raised regarding the increase in the credits on aggregate available and the potential impact on preparing students for later years of their programme, particularly where core courses are awarded on aggregate. It was confirmed that Boards of Examiners retain discretion to apply the temporary variations and a Board may determine that a variation cannot be applied. The additional 20 credits on aggregate available under the temporary variation can only be applied to courses impacted by industrial action.
- It was noted that student expectations should be managed where a Board is unlikely to be able to apply the temporary variations. For example, where a course has an elevated hurdle attached.
- Boards of Examiners are required to provide a rationale where they decide not to award the full credits on aggregate as provided for under the temporary variation.
- Advice to Boards on handling the profile of students undertaking a Junior Year Abroad would be provided in the guidance.
- A concern was raised regarding the potential for the missing information to not become available at a future point. It was noted that the Committee can only consider the circumstances as they currently stand.

APRC approved the following temporary variation to TAR 52:

- **Taught Assessment Regulation 52** to reduce the credits which students must pass, relax the requirement for an overall average of 40% or more across 120 credits, and the requirement to satisfy degree specific criteria, with the exception of professional qualifying or PRSB programmes. The revised Regulation is as follows:

- (a) pass at least ~~60~~ **80** credits at SCQF level 9 or above in junior honours and level 10 or above in senior honours for undergraduate Masters degrees; and
- (b) have an overall average of 40% or more ~~for the 120 credits in the available credits which return a numeric grade of study~~ taken in the relevant honours year; and
- (c) ~~must satisfy any other specific requirements for the degree programme, as published in the programme handbook.~~
- (c) *must satisfy any other specific requirements for externally accredited degree programmes only (including PRSB), typically as published in the programme handbook.*

If the student has achieved PASS marks in at least ~~60~~ **80** credits and has an overall average of 40% or more ~~over the full 120 credits in the available credits which return a numeric grade~~ then they may be awarded *up to 60* credits on aggregate. *Only a maximum of 40 of those credits can be awarded for failed courses NOT flagged as adversely affected by industrial action.*

The Committee stipulated the following criteria must be reflected in guidance:

- Where a student meets the criteria outlined above and the Board of Examiners decides **NOT** to award the full 60 credits on aggregate, then the Board must provide a clear rationale for its decision in the minutes of the relevant Board of Examiners meeting.
- In all cases, where a Progression Board has a full profile of marks available to reach a decision in line with the Taught Assessment Regulations, then the Board will consider a student's progression under normal regulations. The temporary variation is an exceptional measure which Boards should only consider when they have exhausted all other options.
- Where the Board has insufficient information to apply the above variation, then the progression decision should be deferred.

APRC considered the proposed variation to **Taught Assessment Regulation 56: Postgraduate Taught progression**. The following points were made:

- The Committee agreed that when determining a student's eligibility for the final award, the decision to allow a student to progress to the dissertation component represents a decision that their performance in the taught component is satisfactory for the award of the degree.
- The Committee agreed that no change to the provision of credit on aggregate is required for Postgraduate Taught students.
- The Committee noted that where it is not possible for a student to be awarded a progression decision, for example, due to missing information or a Board of Examiners being unable to meet, then the progression decision should be deferred and the student provisionally permitted to commence their dissertation. The Board will revisit the progression decision as soon as it has sufficient information to reach a decision in line with Taught Assessment Regulation 64.
- Schools should take care in communicating permission to provisionally commence the dissertation to students and highlight the possibility that a Board may determine that a student is not eligible to progress to the dissertation once the Board has sufficient information to reach a progression decision.

APRC approved the following temporary variation to Taught Assessment Regulation 56: Postgraduate Taught progression:

- **Taught Assessment Regulation 56: Postgraduate assessment progression:** temporarily vary the requirement to attain an average of at least 50% for the 120 credits of study examined at the point of decision to account for the volume of disruption which has the potential to lead to a high level of course results being unavailable for Boards to reach decisions under the existing regulations.

For programmes where there is an identifiable taught component followed by a project or dissertation component, students must pass the assessment requirements of the taught stage at an appropriate level at the first attempt before progression to the dissertation. In order to progress to the masters dissertation students must:

(a) pass at least 80 credits with a mark of at least 50% in each of the courses which make up these credits; and

~~(b) attain an average of at least 50% for the 120 credits of study examined at the point of decision for progression; and~~

~~(c) satisfy any other specific requirements for the masters degree programme, that are clearly stated in respective programme handbooks.~~

(c) must satisfy any other specific requirements for externally accredited degree programmes only (including PRSB), typically as published in the programme handbook.

When all the marks for the taught components of the programme (120 credits) are available, if the student has achieved PASS marks in at least 80 credits and has an overall average of 40% or more over the full 120 credits *or in the available credits which return a numeric grade where courses are affected by industrial action*, then they will be awarded credits on aggregate for the failed courses.

For programmes where the taught and project or dissertation components are taken in parallel, or where there are not identifiable taught and research project or dissertation components, the requirements for progression are determined at programme level, stated in the Programme Handbook.

The Committee stipulated the following criteria must be reflected in guidance:

- Where a Board determines that even after applying the above variation, it still has insufficient information to reach a progression decision, then the progression decision should be deferred and the student permitted to commence their dissertation. The Board will revisit the progression decision as soon as it has sufficient information to reach a decision in line with Taught Assessment Regulation 64.
- The decision to allow a student to progress to the dissertation component represents a decision that their performance in the taught component is satisfactory for the award of the degree.
- When undertaking the calculation of a student's final classification, the calculation will be undertaken using a minimum of 80 taught credits.

APRC considered the proposed variation to **Taught Assessment Regulation 53: Award of undergraduate Ordinary and General degrees.**

APRC approved the following variation to Taught Assessment Regulation 53:

- **Taught Assessment Regulation 53: Award of undergraduate Ordinary and General degrees:**
Where a student has missing or unreliable marks due to industrial action, if the student has achieved PASS marks in at least 80 credits and has an overall average of 40% or more over the available credits, then they can be awarded credits on aggregate for the courses.

The Committee stipulated the following criteria must be reflected in guidance:

- The expectation is that credit on aggregate can be awarded for courses where the Board of Examiners has established that a pass grade cannot be awarded.
- Where the Board has insufficient information to apply the above variation, then the award decision should be deferred.

APRC considered the proposed variation to **Taught Assessment Regulation 54: Undergraduate honours degree award**

- External accreditation requirements will dictate whether a temporary variation to regulations can be applied. Schools should consult with accrediting bodies ahead of applying a temporary variation to regulations.
- The award of additional credit on aggregate to graduating students was discussed and the potential impact on preparing students for further study. It was confirmed that Boards of Examiners retain discretion to apply the temporary variations and a Board may determine that a variation cannot be applied. The additional 20 credits on aggregate available under the temporary variation can only be applied to courses impacted by industrial action.
- Students are eager to see their hard work reflected in the award of their final degree. Schools should give consideration to the sequencing of communications with students who may be eligible for the award of credit on aggregate. Some students may prefer to wait for information to become available for all grades to be included in their final degree award.
- The Board of Examiners are expected to reconvene once missing information becomes available. Where a Board has previously determined that it had sufficient information to reach an award decision, then any further information that becomes available will not detrimentally impact on the classification awarded. A degree classification should be revised if the new information results in a higher classification than that previously awarded.
- There may be circumstances where a Board determines that there is insufficient information for a Board to reach an award decision. Careful, sensitive and timely communication with the student is required. The Academic Contingency Group will be undertaking further discussions regarding this.

APRC approved the following variation to Taught Assessment Regulation 54:

- **Taught Assessment Regulation 54: Undergraduate honours degree award:** a temporary variation to the requirement to attain an average of at least 40% for the 120 credits of study.

The Board of Examiners has the responsibility to decide which students can be awarded a classified honours degree. To graduate students must:

- (a) pass at least ~~60~~ 80 credits at SCQF level 10 or above in their final honours year; and
- (b) have an overall average of 40% or more for *courses which return a numerical mark* ~~the 120 credits of final honours~~; and
- ~~(c) must satisfy any other specific requirements for the degree programme.~~
(c) *must satisfy any other specific requirements for externally accredited degree programmes only (including PRSB), typically as published in the programme handbook.*

If the student has achieved PASS marks in at least ~~60~~ 80 credits and has an overall average of 40% or more ~~over the full 120 credits in the available credits which return a numeric grade~~ then they may be awarded *up to 60 credits on aggregate. Only a maximum of 40 of those credits can be awarded for failed courses NOT flagged as adversely affected by industrial action.*

The Committee stipulated the following criteria must be reflected in guidance:

- Where a student meets the criteria outlined above and the Board of Examiners decides **NOT** to award the full 60 credits on aggregate, then the Board must provide a clear rationale for its decision in the minutes of the relevant Board of Examiners meeting.
- In all cases, where a Board has a full profile of marks available to reach a decision in line with the Taught Assessment Regulations, then the Board will consider a student's award under normal regulations. The temporary variation is an exceptional measure which Boards should only consider when they have exhausted all other options.
- Where the Board has insufficient information to apply the above variation, then the progression decision should be deferred.

The Convener noted that this concluded the consideration of temporary variations and invited comments from the Committee.

There is discomfort among some Senate members with the temporary variations originally proposed. It was requested that a revised draft be circulated to Senate for comment ahead of a decision being taken by full Senate on 24 May.

It was noted in response that APRC are responsible for the activation of Taught Assessment Regulations 70 and 71. The Committee needs to act on the basis of its existing powers as outlined in the Regulations.

The Convener noted that no further concessions relating to industrial action had been received since the 23 March meeting, however they would continue to handle any concessions received in the coming period in line with the approach agreed in January and March 2023.

The next meeting of APRC would be held on 25 May.

Action: The Convener of APRC would update the Convener of Senate on the actions taken by APRC to be outlined at Senate on 24 May.

Action: Academic Services to prepare guidance on the approved temporary variations and issue this to Schools as soon as practicable and by the end of the week.