

**Meeting of the Senatus Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC)
Online meeting via Teams
Friday 30 June, 12:00-1:30pm**

Confirmed minute

<p>Present: Dr Aidan Brown Dr Adam Bunni Professor Jeremy Crang Dr Murray Earle Professor Patrick Hadoke (Vice-Convenor) Clair Halliday Isabel Lavers Professor Antony Maciocia Dr Paul Norris (Convenor) Callum Paterson</p> <p>Rachael Quirk Professor Tim Stratford Dr Uzma Tufail-Hanif Stephen Warrington</p> <p>Substitute members present: Lauren Byrne Paula Jezierska Escobar Dr Philip Larkman Dr Neil Lent Dr Kim Picozzi</p> <p>In attendance: Lucy Evans Professor Colm Harmon Olivia Hayes (Minutes)</p> <p>Apologies: Professor Jamie Davies Carl Harper Sarah McAllister Dr Donna Murray</p> <p>Alexandra Laidlaw Kirsty Woomble Dr Deborah Shaw</p>	<p>Elected member of Senate Head of Academic Policy and Regulation, Academic Services Dean of Students (CAHSS) Elected member of Senate Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research Experience (CMVM) The Advice Place, Deputy Manager Academic Administration Manager (CMVM) Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE) Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval (CAHSS) Academic Engagement Coordinator, Students' Association (Co-opted member) Head of Taught Student Administration & Support (CAHSS) Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE) Elected member of Senate Dean of Student Experience (CSE)</p> <p>Vice-President Welfare, Students' Association Extensions and Special Circumstances Service Manager Director of Teaching, Biomedical Teaching Organisation University Learning and Teaching (IAD) Postgraduate Director of Teaching & Senior Tutor – Edinburgh Medical School</p> <p>Deputy Secretary, Students Vice-Principal, Students Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services</p> <p>Dean of Taught Education (CMVM) Vice President Education, Students' Association Head of Student Support Operations, Registry Services Head of Taught Student Development, Institute for Academic Development Head of Academic Affairs (CSE) Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS) Dean of Students (CMVM)</p>
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1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>The Convener opened the meeting and extended his thanks to the Committee and substitute members for attending the additional meeting of APRC to consider the Exceptional Circumstances Policy.</p> <p>Thanks were extended to the presenters who were in attendance.</p>
2.	<p>Update on concessions related to industrial action – Verbal update</p> <p>To note</p> <p>There were no concessions on industrial action to report to the Committee since the last meeting of APRC.</p> <p>The Convener confirmed that he has taken forward the Committee’s request for information on the impact of the temporary variations across a range of outcomes and characteristics. He has discussed with the Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement) and Interim Head of Academic Services. This work would be led by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) to provide APRC with updates as this develops.</p>
For discussion	
3.	<p>Exceptional Circumstances Policy – ARPC 22/23 12A</p> <p>Ahead of introduction of this item, the Convener confirmed that the Committee is receiving the Exceptional Circumstances Policy for discussion, ahead of receiving the Policy for approval at a future meeting.</p> <p>Ms Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary, Students and Professor Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students introduced the item. They noted that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the current Special Circumstances policy and processes attached to this. A significant and comprehensive review of the current system has taken place, comprising three strands of work: an APRC task group responsible for reviewing the Special Circumstances policy; an ESC review set up by the Deputy Secretary, Students in response to the significant dissatisfaction surrounding the policy; and a service level review of ESC which reviewed systems and communications. Ms Evans noted her thanks to the colleagues who oversaw and supported these three strands of work. In addition, benchmarking work has been undertaken to establish sector norms.</p> <p>The Exceptional Circumstances Policy presented to the Committee is based on feedback received via the three strands of review, and on sector norms established via benchmarking. The existing policy has evolved in a way which is increasingly unworkable. This is a complex area and is challenging to achieve a policy which is acceptable to all stakeholders and which covers every eventuality. However, the policy presented aims to improve on the current position.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the paper. The following points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a very challenging area and there is widespread dissatisfaction with the current approach to special circumstances. The Committee was broadly supportive of the direction of travel and noted that the Exceptional Circumstances Policy presents an improvement on the current position. A new policy is welcomed by Schools who have struggled to support the previous policy. The Committee requested that clarification on specific concerns and areas raised be provided when the policy is returned for approval. • Student representation on the Committee expressed their frustration at not having an opportunity for co-production of the policy nor an opportunity to receive a draft and feed comments in ahead of this being presented to APRC. There is concern that the new policy is more punitive than the previous Special Circumstances policy.

- Significant systems changes are required to support the new policy with at least nine system and process changes identified to date. The ESC Service leads are considering what specific modifications can be made for shorter term implementation. The Head of Student Support Operations, Registry Services is undertaking work to establish what changes are required and would update key staff once this detail is available. A concern was raised that the approval of a new policy ahead of systems being adequately equipped will exacerbate existing challenges.
- Further consideration to the proposal to allow three (3) self-certified exceptional circumstances was requested. Self-certified applications are permitted in the specific circumstances outlined in the policy and will be treated as equal to an application supported by evidence.
There is concern regarding the equity of this approach having a disproportionate impact on students with a higher volume of assessments and it was suggested that the policy consider framing self-certificated applications in terms of events that affect numerous assessments.
- A clarification was sought on the proposal to permit extensions of three (3) calendar days and in particular how this would interact with deadlines falling on a weekend. A task group member highlighted that following extensive discussion the group reached a compromise of four (4) calendar days and expressed a desire to see this reflected in the policy. The deadlines set for coursework will vary depending on the course and format of assessment. The three (3) day extension allowed in the policy will not be sufficient for specific student cohorts; for example, those working as medical professionals which will force those students to seek longer extensions via the policy.
A concern was raised regarding the use of longer extensions as approved by expedited School Exceptional Circumstances Committees and ensuring a consistent student experience.
It was suggested that consideration be given to retaining a seven (7) day extension for part-time and online learners.
In response to a question, Ms Evans confirmed that the policy will define the duration of a coursework extension, a decision taken in response to the significant concerns regarding consistency of the student experience where extensions of varying length are available.
- There is concern regarding the evidence requirements in the policy, it was felt that some groups of students may find it harder than others to provide the required evidence. Specific points raised include the requirement for parents to provide evidence of their child where they do not share a surname; the feasibility of requesting an independent verification of caring responsibilities; a need for a defined employee policy for students to reference when seeking to provide evidence of a bereavement; the cost incurred by students when obtaining medical evidence; the requirement for certified translation services and potential costs incurred in having documents translated; the absence of reference to family members being able to provide verification in specific circumstances; and the absence of specific reference to evidence provided by mental health professionals.
- There is concern that providing a defined list of extenuating circumstances in the policy does not support students whose circumstances are exceptional but sit outside those listed.
The policy does not explicitly list mental health difficulties as a valid reason, this was raised as a concern by the ESC Service who are required to make a judgement on circumstances and who are not specialist mental health professionals. A present, a very high volume of applications are submitted under the short-term mental health category.
The policy does not recognise work commitments as a valid reason for full-time students and this is a challenging area for the University. The current approach to

	<p>students working is not realistic, and Professor Harmon agreed that further discussion around students working and the University's systems evolving to support this are required. These discussions will not be had in time for the policy to be presented for approval.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee expressed concern that Widening Participation, student carers and care-experienced students are not adequately supported by current systems, and these students fall outside the boundaries of support provided by the policy and Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS). Ms Evans agreed that support for these student groups requires consideration; however, the Exceptional Circumstances Policy is not the best means to provide this and does not adequately address the gap experienced by these students. Ms Evans agreed that work is required and hopes to be able to provide the Committee with an update on plans in this area when presenting the policy for approval. • Robust, timely and clear communications to staff and students will be required to support the roll out of the policy. There is a need for staff training and briefings targeted at specific staff including student advisors and academics ahead of the new academic year. • The feedback on comparable policies and the student experience at institutions used in benchmarking was raised. Ms Evans confirmed that this area is a challenge across the sector and that no one institution has 'got it right'. In undertaking benchmarking, experience at other institutions and networks have been used to help formulate the policy. • A request that Colleges be given time to consult with Schools to ensure that any specific challenges are raised ahead of the final policy being received for approval. <p>In addition to the comments raised, a number of drafting points were raised by the Committee. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The appeals statement included in the policy is incorrect. • A request for clarification of how the policy applies to Postgraduate Research students who undertake taught components is required. • Clarification of the definitions included in the policy was requested • Clarification of how the policy interacts with the support provided by DLSS was requested. In particular, the example of where a student does not declare their circumstances to DLSS where DLSS would normally provide support. Additionally, if a student has provided evidence to DLSS of their circumstances, do they need to provide evidence again if they experience a worsening of their condition or symptoms? • A request for clarification around possible outcomes, including deferral to next diet. • A request for case studies to support the implementation of the policy <p>The Convener thanked the Committee for their comments and suggested that discussions to address the clarifications and concerns raised by student representatives be taken outside the meeting.</p>
4.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>The Convenor provided an update on upcoming meetings of APRC. He confirmed that the 6 July meeting would be cancelled; it is likely that the 20 July meeting will also be cancelled and the Committee would receive an update on this next week. The Committee will reconvene on 31 July to receive the Exceptional Circumstances policy for approval. The Committee will receive the policy one week ahead of the 31 July meeting. A further meeting of APRC has been scheduled for 8 August.</p>