**Meeting of the Senatus Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC)
to be held at 2.00pm on Thursday 23 January 2020 in the Cuillin Room, Charles
Stewart House**

A G E N D A

1.	**Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 November 2019**	Enclosed
2.	**Matters Arising**	
	For Discussion	
3.	**Students' Association: Wednesday afternoon teaching**	APRC 19/20 3A
4.	**Service Excellence Programme: Special circumstances**	APRC 19/20 3B
5.	**Honours Degree Classification: Weighting of Honours Years**	APRC 19/20 3C
6.	**PhD with Integrated Study: resit assessment**	APRC 19/20 3D
7.	**CMVM: 4-year PhD in Translational Neuroscience**	APRC 19/20 3E
8.	**CAHSS: MSc Mathematical Economics and Econometrics**	To Follow (F)
	For information and formal business	
9.	**Knowledge Strategy Committee**	APRC 19/20 3G
10.	**Any Other Business**	

<u>The University of Edinburgh</u>

**Minutes of the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC)
held at 1.00pm on Thursday 14 November 2019 in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

Present:

Professor Alan Murray (Convener)	Assistant Principal, Academic Support
Dr Jeremy Crang (Vice-Convener)	Dean of Students (CAHSS)
Dr Paul Norris	Associate Dean (Academic Progress) (CAHSS)
Dr Lisa Kendall	Head of Academic and Student Administration
Professor Judy Hardy	Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE)
Stephen Warrington	Dean of Student Experience (CSE)
Heather Tracey	Acting Head of Academic Affairs (CSE)
Dr Antony Maciocia	Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE)
Professor Neil Turner	Dean of Undergraduate Learning and Teaching (CMVM)
Dr Paddy Hadoke	Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research (CMVM)
Stephanie Vallancey	Vice President Education, Students' Association
Gemma Riddell	Advice Place Senior Academic Adviser
Rayya Ghul	Institute for Academic Development (IAD)
Dr Adam Bunni	Head of Governance and Regulatory Framework Team, Academic Services
Sarah McAllister	Student Systems and Administration

In attendance:

Ailsa Taylor	Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services

Apologies for absence:

Kirsty Woomble	Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS)
Dr Geoff Pearson	Dean of Students (CMVM)
Philippa Burrell	Head of Academic Administration (CMVM)

1. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

   The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 September 2019 were approved as an accurate record.

2. **Matters Arising**

   Item 3 Curriculum approval arrangements for Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) (APRC 19/20 1A)

   The Curriculum Oversight Board would now be chaired by Vice-Principal Professor Colm Harmon and the Deputy Convener would be Dr Paul Norris in his forthcoming new Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval role.

3. **Service Excellence Programme – Special circumstances: Request for policy changes for 2020/21 (APRC 19/20 2A)**

This paper requested special circumstances policy changes in order to support the incoming Extensions and Special Circumstances (ESC) team. The proposed changes reflected the fact that the ESC team would review all the special circumstances applications to determine the validity of the case and secure all evidence. The academic impact of supported cases would be determined by the School. The ESC team service was due to launch in July 2020.

The Committee agreed to make the following amendment to the policy change table presented in Paper A:

'Reviewing the size of Board of Examiners committee to determine a maximum size against the current minimum to meet quorum standards' was amended to 'Reviewing the size of Special Circumstances Committee to determine a maximum size against the current minimum quorum standards.' Similarly, the reference to risk was amended in this section to refer to the Special Circumstances Committee (SCC), as opposed to the Board of Examiners.

Subject to the above amendment, the paper was approved as presented.

Under the new processes, if the validity of the case had been accepted, the Convener and members of the SCC would have sight of the full case in order to make decisions on impact. This differed from current practice, whereby the SCC did not have access to the full case.

Members commented that the changes were being made for good reason, and could lead to much greater levels of consistency if handled well, but it would need to be accepted that there wouldn't necessarily be time efficiency gains overall. It was also noted that a key matter to address would be expansion of web guidance, so that students fully understood the processes. In addition, although there could be quick decisions made on the validity of the case, it could still take some time before the student found out about the final decision, so it would be important to manage student expectations. Consideration would also need to be given to the number of Special Circumstances Committees to ensure the greatest levels of consistency.

It was clarified that under the new processes, the Convener of the SCC and a delegated student support staff member could expedite decision making in cases related to applications for waiting late penalties, and extensions applications for more than seven days.

For escalated cases, Sarah McAllister and Adam Bunni would further discuss defining a protocol and drafting policy accordingly. For non-escalated cases applications which were accepted would be passed for consideration by the relevant Special Circumstances Committee in the School(s) responsible for the course(s) to which the application related.

4. **Industrial action – concessions to regulations and policies (APRC 19/20 2G)**

The Committee approved this paper, which gave temporary concessions to regulations and policies in response to the planned industrial action, subject to the following amendment:

Taught Assessment Regulations 2019/20 (External Examiners) Regulation 8 Convener of the Board of Examiners: responsibilities

The Committee removed the reference under Section 8.1 (f) to "participation of External Examiners". The previous concession, under 8.1 (a) "approving the content of examination papers taking account of the comments of External Examiners" would stand.

5. **Proposals for review of the Student Appeal Regulations (APRC 19/20 2B)**

Dr Bunni presented this paper, which presented proposals for the methodology of the forthcoming review of the Student Appeal Regulations, scheduled to take place in semester 2 of 2019/20. The paper was approved as presented.

6. **Non-standard PhD examination arrangements: collaboration with KU Leuven (APRC 19/20 2C CLOSED)**

This closed paper was approved by the Committee as presented.

7. **Collaborative provision: Memorandum of agreement (annual update) (APRC 19/20 2 D CLOSED)**

The Committee noted the contents of the closed report.

8. **Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2020 – Update (APRC 19/20 2E)**

This item was received for information.

9. **Academic year dates 2021/22 and provisional academic year dates 2022/23 and 2023/24 (APRC 19/20 2F)**

The Committee received a paper on academic year dates. Comments had been received in advance from Scott Rosie in Student Administration. Mr Rosie had noted that as part of ensuring the minimum of 10 available days for the December diet, the 2021/22 proposed calendar correctly showed a combined 'revision/exams' week. However, on the basis of this minimum duration, and the commitment to not examine beyond 21 December, Mr Rosie had commented that both 2022/23 and 2023/24 calendars would need to be amended so that they also reflected the need for the hybrid week.

The Committee discussed this matter and agreed that it should not be necessary to curtail the revision period in either 2022/23 or 2023/24, provided that examinations took place on Saturdays (e.g. 10 and 17 December 2022, and 16 December 2023). The agreement that CSPC had made previously for academic year dates in 2021/22 was also contingent on exams taking place on Saturdays.

The Committee confirmed their view that maintaining a full revision week should be a priority, and curtailing the revision week should only be resorted to when it was unavoidable, as it was in 2015/16 and would be again in 2021/22. As part of this, the Committee's view was that the University should consider scaling up support for Saturday examinations, with more examination venues made available, in order to be able to run full-scale exam sessions on Saturdays, which would have resource implications.

The Committee confirmed their view that the benefits of retaining a full revision week outweighed the risks inherent to Saturday exams, and the Committee were therefore supportive of the University ensuring this was resourced appropriately.

The Committee approved the academic year dates 2021/22 and provisional academic year dates 2022/23 and 2023/24 as presented.

> **ACTION: Approved academic year dates to be passed to Communications and Marketing by Academic Services**

The paper also listed the programmes with non-standard academic year dates for Committee approval. This information was available on the website, and College Committee representatives had been asked to check if the information was correct at the time of the meeting.

It was agreed to insert the Access Programme and International Foundation Programme provided through the Centre for Open Learning.

> **ACTION: Any further changes to the non-standard academic year dates to be passed to Academic Services by College representatives on the Committee so that the website can be amended at:**
> www.ed.ac.uk/semester-dates/programmes-with-non-standard-academic-years

It was noted that there was a caveat listed on the relevant website which suggested 'We cannot guarantee the accuracy of this information, if you are unsure about the semester dates for your programme please check with your School.'

10. Any Other Business

Professor Murray extended his thanks to Anne-Marie Scott, the co-opted member of the Committee for her support of CSPC and APRC. Ms Scott would be leaving the University after 18 years of service, therefore this would be her last APRC meeting.

Senate Policy and Regulations Committee

23 January 2020

Students' Association: Wednesday Afternoon Teaching

Description of paper
1. This paper is an executive summary of a survey conducted in October 2019 to gain student opinion about teaching on Wednesday afternoons and their participation in extra-curricular activities.

Action requested
2. APRC is asked to note the outcomes of the survey in the attached summary.

Recommendation
3. The APRC is recommended to discuss if the policy is being upheld rigorously enough.
4. The APRC is recommended to discuss if the policy should include an Undergraduate/ Postgraduate distinction.
    a. It is clear from the results UG/ PG have distinctive opinions on this and the University should be doing more to accommodate for the different experiences of these groups.
    b. Should more research be done to understand the PG experience in relation to this?

Background and context
5. This has been an ongoing topic of conversation within the student body for many years now.
6. This was something I ran on in my manifesto as it is still a key topic of conversation amongst students but I wanted to get clarification as to the direction students wanted the policy to go in.
7. This survey follows on from Eleri Connick's work as the Students' Association President last year and the work of Timetabling and Curriculum.
8. I was interested in how students value and spend their free time and how many participate in different kinds of extra-curricular activities, as this strongly links to a sense of belonging within the university community and beneficial to mental-health and wellbeing.

Discussion
9. Is there evidence to suggest the policy should be upheld more rigorously?

10. Should the policy should include an Undergraduate/ Postgraduate distinction?

Resource implications

11. No immediate implications, but longer-term resource required from Timetabling and Curriculum as well as from the Colleges if any changes were to be made to the policy.

Risk management

12. Low Risk. Key areas of risk will be addressed if they arise.

Equality & diversity

13. No EIA required in respect to the survey itself.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

14. Any action agreed will be written in the Committee minutes. Communication and implementation will be carried out by Timetabling and Curriculum.

Author

Bethany Fellows (Vice-President Activities and Services, The Student Association)
Date 09/01/20

Presenter

Bethany Fellows

Freedom of Information

15. Paper is open.

Wednesday Afternoon Teaching Survey

January 2020

By Bethany Fellows (VP Activities and Services, the Student Association)

About the survey

This paper follows on from one presented to this committee last year on 21st March 2019. Wednesday afternoon teaching has been a key topic of conversation amongst the student body and I have been mandated by the students to work on this project. A survey was carried out in order to obtain clarification and a broader perspective from students on their experiences and how they really felt about teaching on Wednesday afternoon.

This survey was conducted October/November 2019. It was sent out to all students except Vets, Medics, Teachers, distance learners and students on placement or on year abroad.

It should be noted that due to an error in administration the survey was not sent out via a personalised link to each student in order to track their year of study, gender etc. as initially requested.

Executive Summary

- 5,075 students responded both Undergraduate and Postgraduate (13% of the student body)
- From where we can tell we see there is a mix of years of study and courses (excl. Medics, Vets, Distance learners, students on placement or year abroad).
- 71% of respondents did not have teaching on Wednesday afternoons.
- 29% of respondents did have teaching on Wednesday afternoons (a higher percentage than the current policy implies).
- When students were asked if they supported having Wednesday afternoon free of teaching whilst being informed of the potential impacts (an increase in scheduled teaching between 5pm and 6pm on other days, more scheduled teaching on Friday afternoons and a possible impact on curriculum choice for students) their responses were:
    - 66% of students were in favour of keeping Wednesday afternoons free of teaching.
    - Within this, the students who are not currently taught on Wednesday afternoons, 71% were in favour of keeping them free.
    - The students who are currently taught on Wednesday afternoons 55% were in favour.
- Key themes from free text comments were having a Wednesday afternoon free of teaching would be good as a set period of time to spend catching up on work, life administration and some time to look after ones wellbeing. In addition comments were about the ability to participate in extra-curricular activities such as sport or society activities enabling students to have a more holistic and positive student experience.
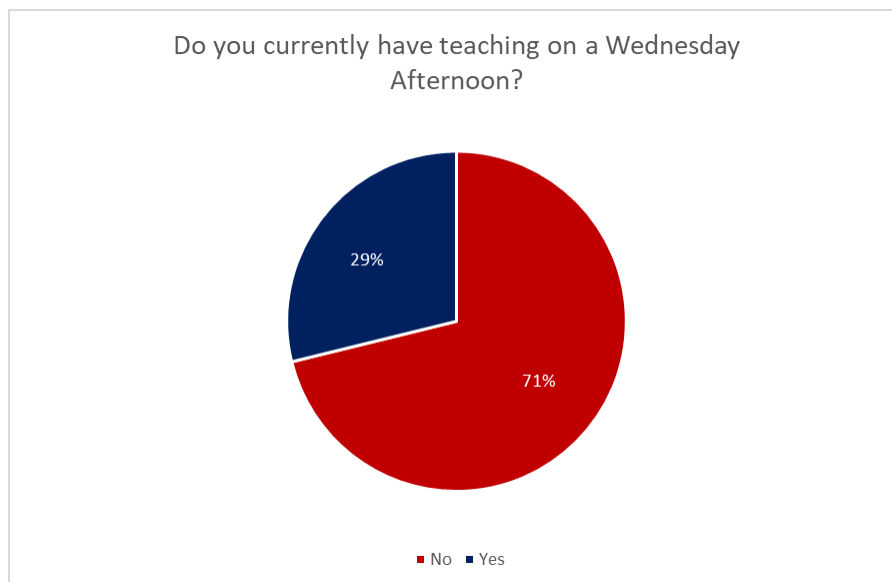
Recommendations

- The APRC is recommended to discuss if the policy is being upheld rigorously enough.
- The APRC is recommended to discuss if the policy should include an Undergraduate/ Postgraduate distinction.

- o It is clear from the results UG/ PG have distinctive opinions on this and the University should be doing more to accommodate for the different experiences of these groups.
- o Should more research be done to understand the PG experience in relation to this?

Areas for Discussion

1. Is there enough evidence in the survey to show the current policy should be more rigorously upheld?

The current policy states "Only in exceptional circumstances will core lecture or class slots be scheduled on Wednesday afternoons when no alternative can be found. Scheduling such a class at this time must be approved by the relevant College Learning and Teaching Committee. This does not preclude schools from offering classes (e.g. laboratories) on a Wednesday afternoons, provided that alternative times are offered at other points in the week."

Sample size: 5075

The data from this survey suggest that this is not being upheld rigorously enough as 29% of students surveyed are being taught on Wednesday afternoons.

Further evidence:

Data given from Timetabling and Curriculum to show how many students were affected by Wednesday afternoons teaching last year, this includes all forms of teaching.

2018/19	
Percentage of all teaching schedules on Wed PM	4.5%
Percentage of whole-class scheduled on Wed PM (of all teaching)	1.5%
Wed PM UG out of all	48%
Wed PM PG out of all	52%
Percentage of students affected by Wednesday PM teaching	37%
Percentage of UG students affected by Wednesday PM Teaching	39%
Percentage of PG students affected by Wednesday PM Teaching	35%

However, as the policy relates explicitly to "core lecture or class slots" here are some additional figures relating to CORE (i.e. only attendance option) Weds pm teaching:

- 12.1% of all students were affected by core teaching on Wednesday
- 3.9% of UG students were affected by core teaching on Wednesday
- 24.2% of PGT students were affected by core teaching on Wednesday

Although the Undergraduate figure is low, the 24.2% of PGT students affected by core teaching on Wednesday afternoons suggests the policy is not being upheld rigorously enough. This also puts into question whether the policy for UG students should extend beyond core teaching, as so many students (39%) are still experiencing teaching on Wednesday afternoons.
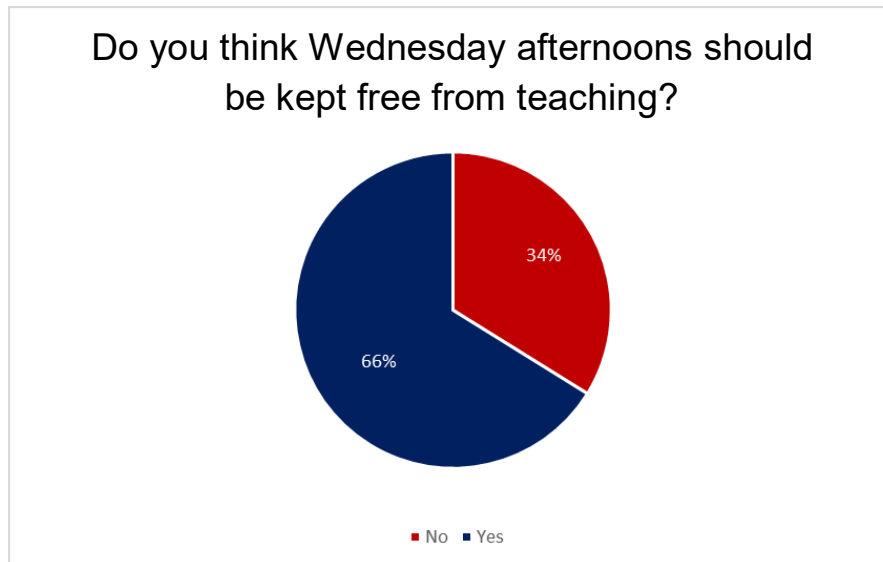
Top themes of student free text comments reflect the benefit of keeping this afternoons Wednesday free:

- "I support the initiative for a break on Wednesday afternoons to allow us time to catch up with our schoolwork, and life administration, as well as to have some time to take care of our own well-being."
- "It is a good opportunity for students to socialise and handy to know you'll always have some set time free so you can plan ahead"

In addition, further analysis from Timetabling and Services reveals that the most popular reason for requesting a timetable change was to for a 'work/life balance' (22%).

2. Should we have an Undergraduate/Postgraduate distinction within the policy?

Students were prompted to consider what the impact having Wednesday afternoon free would have on their teaching including: An increase in scheduled teaching between 5pm and 6pm on other days, more scheduled teaching on Friday afternoon and a possible impact on curriculum choice for students.

Do you think Wednesday afternoons should be kept free from teaching?

■ No ■ Yes

Sample size: 5075

Bearing this in mind, 66% of all students thought that Wednesdays should be kept free from teaching.

Some comments from individuals who support the initiative for Wednesday afternoons with no scheduled teaching:
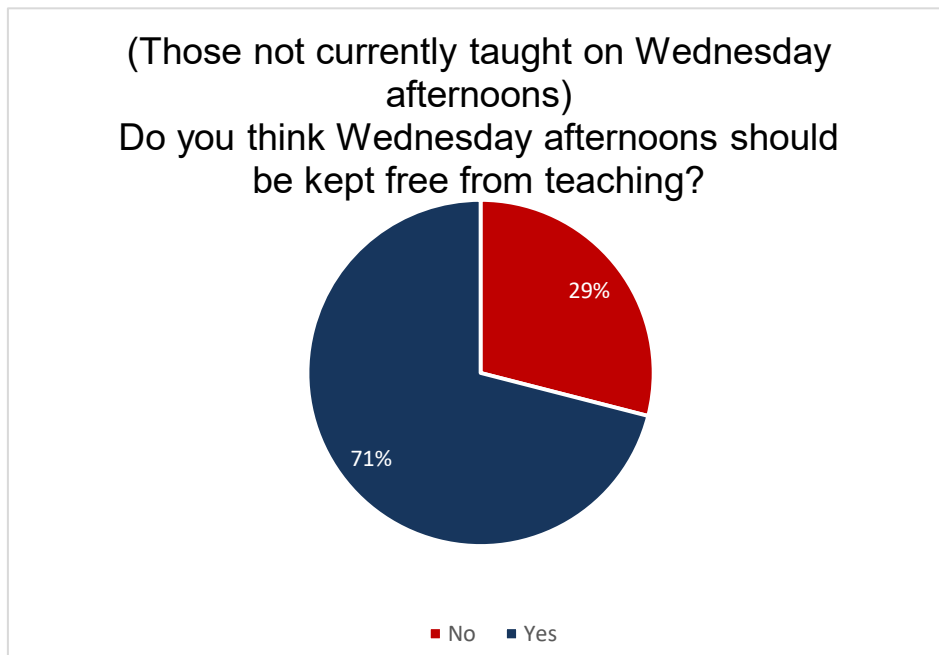
- "[It] is great to have half of the day in the middle of the week to catch up with your personal life- I would say is VITAL for good functioning over all- students/staff need this I need this."
- "Extra-curricular activities taking place on Wednesdays have been the bed-rock of my interaction with other students while at University."
- "Keeping Wednesday afternoons is crucial for a University student's holistic university experience. Without the opportunity to stretch their experience into society and club-based activities in this time the student experience would be affected in a significantly negative way."

Some comments from individuals who do not support the initiative for Wednesday afternoons with no scheduled teaching:

- "I value having a Friday off and enjoying a longer weekend far more than I would benefit from a Wednesday afternoons off."
- "I prefer having all classes spread out throughout the week, in the afternoons.   It's better to have classes consistently every day, than emptying Wednesday and cramming other days. I prefer all classes to be in the afternoons."

- "I recognise the idea behind keeping Wednesday afternoons free for other activities; it's very important that students have some time available to do other activities/sports/work/life admin/etc. Also, if everyone only had Wednesday afternoons off and e.g. went to the gym then, it would be packed and put too much pressure on the CSE's resources. Wouldn't it be better if the large number of students at this university spread out a bit more and went (again, as an example) to the gym whenever their personal timetable allowed best for it."
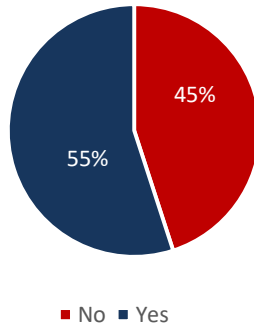
Most students when asked if Wednesday afternoons should be kept free agreed that they should be, however there was a differentiation between those who currently have afternoons free and those who don't.

(Those not currently taught on Wednesday afternoons)
Do you think Wednesday afternoons should be kept free from teaching?

29%

71%

■ No   ■ Yes

Sample size: 3612

71% of students not currently taught on Wednesday afternoons think that Wednesdays should be kept free from teaching.

(Those currently taught on Wednesday afternoons)
Do you think Wednesday afternoons should be kept free of teaching?
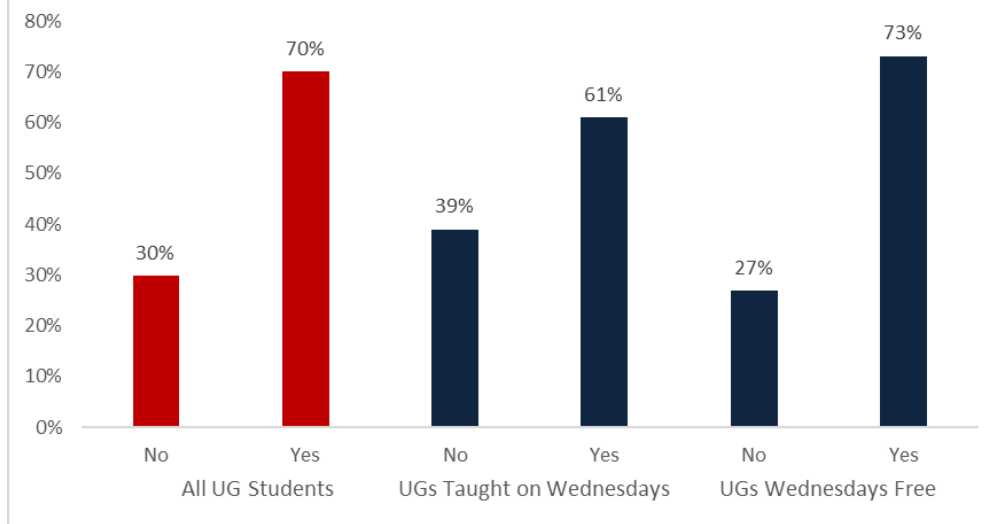
Sample size: 1463

55% of students currently taught on Wednesday afternoons think that Wednesdays should be kept free from teaching.

Overall there is a majority for both groups, but the difference is much closer for those who are unable to take advantage of those benefits.

Further analysis shows there is a difference between Undergraduate and Postgraduate students on whether they thought Wednesday afternoons should be kept free.

(Due to administrative errors in the survey the sample size for PG/UG split is 2243 cumulatively, which is 44% of total sample population)

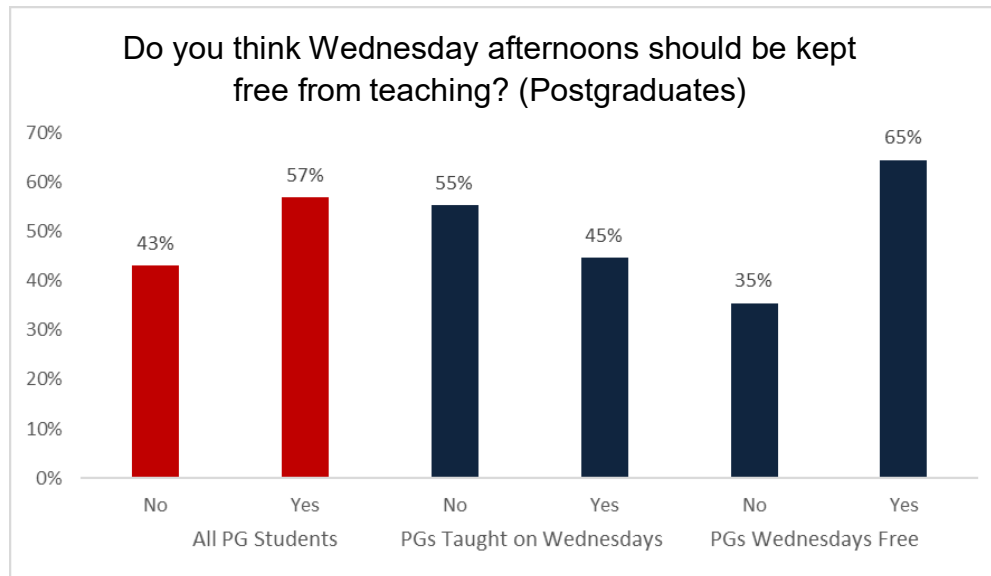Do you think Wednesday afternoons should be kept free from teaching? (Undergraduates)

Sample size: 1587.

Undergraduates are more likely to believe Wednesdays should be kept free from teaching than postgraduates.

The cohort that shows the strongest support for keeping Wednesdays free from teaching are undergraduates who do not currently have teaching on a Wednesday (73%).

However, 61% of those currently taught on Wednesday afternoon still support that it should be kept free.

Sample size: 656

65% of Postgraduates with Wednesday afternoons free support keeping the afternoons free of teaching.

However 55% of Postgraduates who are currently taught on Wednesday afternoons (therefore those who would be most impacted from a change in the policy for postgraduates) are not in favour of Wednesday afternoons being free of teaching.
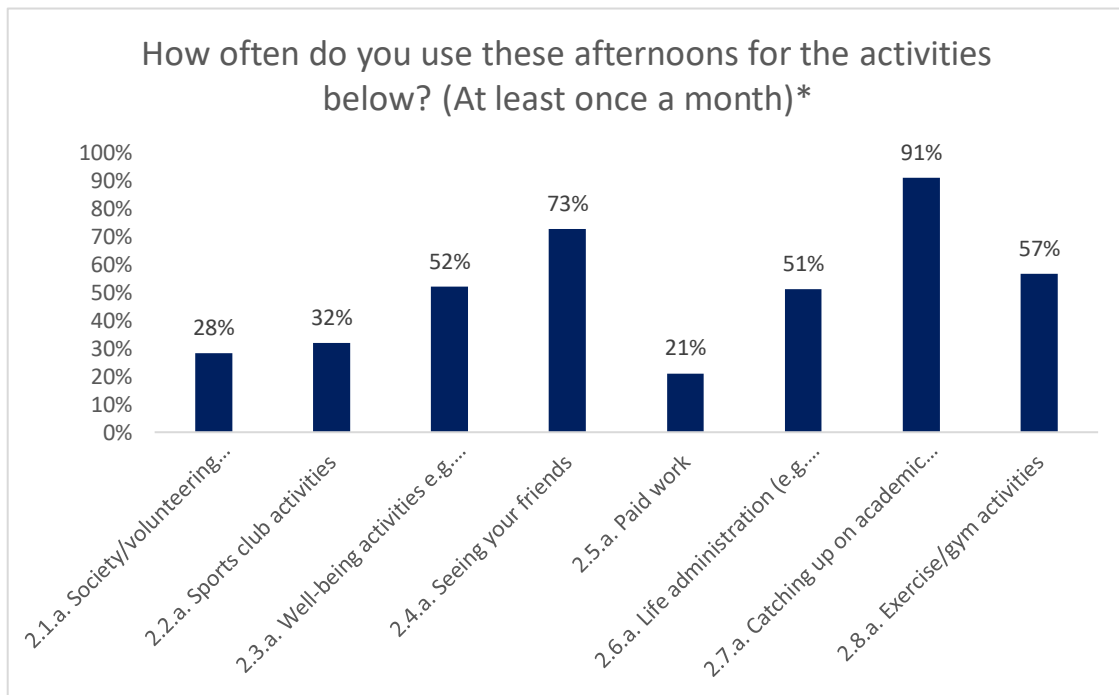
Although due to the administration error we could not differentiate within the postgraduate group between PGT and PGR, many of the free text comments clearly show experiences of a PhD students are very different and they marked themselves as having Wednesday afternoons free but not possible for them to have it free because of lab work or meetings:

- "As a Ph.D student, my schedule is varied and self-driven (I have no contact hours). As such, I don't believe that my views are representative of the "average" student. As someone who went through an undergrad in Edinburgh and has been heavily involved in sports, I think that keeping Wednesday afternoons free are important for wellbeing and developing well rounded graduates!"
- "I am a PhD student who does not have class but works in a lab that maintains standard working hours (8am-6pm). Thus, removing class from Wednesday afternoons will not assist me. Can anything be provided for research based PG students?"

Although the sample size is small, this gives an indication that further research should be done into the distinctive experience of postgraduate students, including PGT & PGR.

3. What do students use their free time for? What are the most popular extra-curricular activities for students?

Those who currently have Wednesday afternoons off chose to do a multitude of things with their afternoons.

How often do you use these afternoons for the activities below? (At least once a month)*

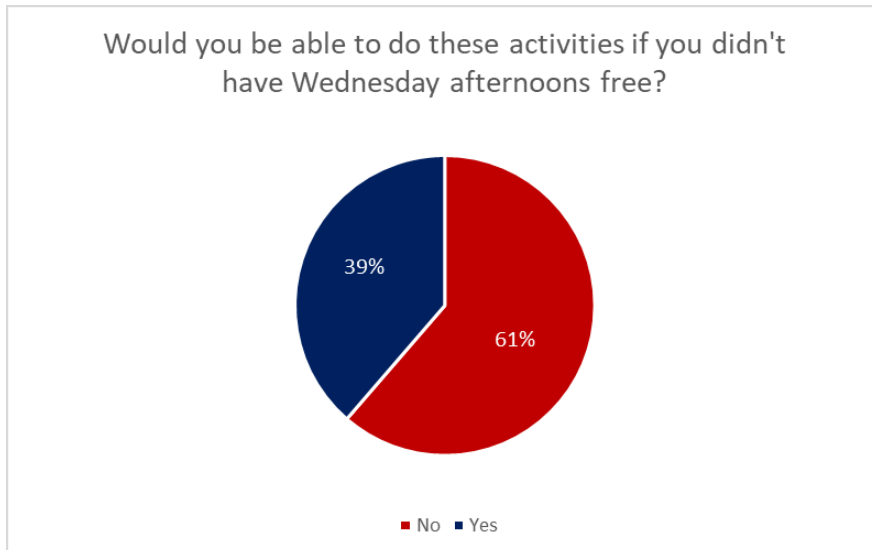| Activity	Percentage
2.1.a. Society/volunteering...	28%
2.2.a. Sports club activities	32%
2.3.a. Well-being activities e.g...	52%
2.4.a. Seeing your friends	73%
2.5.a. Paid work	21%
2.6.a. Life administration (e.g...	51%
2.7.a. Catching up on academic...	91%
2.8.a. Exercise/gym activities	57%

*At least once a month aggregates all those who ticked 'Every Wednesday', '2/3 times a month' and 'once a month'. Students could tick multiple activities.

Sample size: 3612

91% of students, use the Wednesday afternoons to catch up on academic work at least once a month.

Students who currently use their Wednesday afternoons for extra-curricular activities were asked if this would be possible without them.

Would you be able to do these activities if you didn't have Wednesday afternoons free?

39% Yes
61% No

■ No ■ Yes

Sample size: 3612

61% of students who currently get Wednesday afternoons off, would not be able to do their chosen activity if Wednesday afternoons were not available to them.

70% or more of students who participate in society and volunteering activities, sports activities or wellbeing activities every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesday a month indicated that they would not be able to do this without Wednesday afternoons free.

From the free text comments many students agreed that a mid-week break was necessary for their wellbeing and gave them time to catch up on work or to unwind for some time during their hectic schedule.

What would Wednesdays be used for?

Students who did not have Wednesday afternoons off at the time the survey was run were asked what they would spend their Wednesday afternoons on if they did have that time off.

- **85%** of respondents agreed that they would **catch up on academic work** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.
- **62%** of respondents agreed that they would **see their friends** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.
- **61%** of respondents agreed that they would partake in **gym or exercise based activities** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.
- **50%** of respondents agreed that they would partake in **wellbeing activities** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.
- **29%** of respondents agreed that they would partake in **sports club activities** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.
- **29%** of respondents agreed that they would partake in **life administration** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.
- **26%** of respondents agreed that they would partake in **paid work** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.

- **16%** of respondents agreed that they would partake in **society and volunteering based activities** every Wednesday or 2/3 Wednesdays a month.

4. Barriers to Taking Advantage of Afternoons Off

Some students have barriers to being able to utilise afternoons off which was indicated in the free text comments. These included care responsibility but also the type of degree they do.

There was a reoccurring theme between taking a science degree and being unable to participate in sport or social activities.

- "As a final year Maths student this is the first semester I have had a Wednesday afternoons off and already frequently have classes on Friday afternoons. It feels unfair that under different disciplines they get more time off during the week to pursue social activities as I feel I have never had the time to do so."
- "As a science postgraduate research student I am unable to leave the lab on a Wednesday afternoons. This is very frustrating when all the university society sports training activities and sessions are on a Wednesday afternoons."
- "In my first two years of university I missed out on a lot of sports I wanted to be a part of as they trained on Wednesday afternoons but as a science student I always had 2-5pm labs. I'm sure anyone, especially in their first year of uni, would not mind having classes timetabled later on other days if it meant they'd be able to make friends in sports teams."

Some students encountered different barriers to taking any time off during the week and it is important that these concerns do not go unaddressed:

- "Very concerned about increased teaching on Friday afternoons and after 5. This would be a real barrier for students with childcare."
- "I'm a part time student with an only slightly less than full time job and a young family. Having any weekday afternoons free is a luxury I cannot afford. Later teaching (5-6pm) would not be compatible with already difficult childcare arrangements. I would simply not be able to attend classes after 5pm. Please consider accessibility of higher education for students such as myself when considering whether there should be a 'free' afternoons on Wednesdays for those lucky enough to benefit from it."
- "I have carer responsibilities so evening teaching is very challenging. I'd prefer to use up the day times."

Moving around scheduling is a difficulty for those with caring responsibilities or those with children, which is a consideration to factor in.

Conclusion

Across both undergraduate and postgraduate students, a majority of those who currently have Wednesday afternoons free want to keep it free and value this time (73% undergraduate and 65% postgraduate from the sample taken).

A key take away from the survey is that, students who currently have Wednesday afternoons free of teaching utilise this time to take care of their mental health and wellbeing by participating in various activities. They value this time and this should be safeguarded.

The importance for students to maintain a good work life balance is also reflected in the fact that this was the most popular reason (22%) for students to request a timetable change.

However, there is a clear differentiation between undergraduate and postgraduate experiences.

The current policy is not being upheld rigorously enough for PGT students as 24.2% were impacted by Core Teaching on Wednesday afternoons last year, in comparison to 3.9% of UG students. However, 39% of UG students are still affected by all forms of teaching on Wednesday afternoon.

From the sample it is clear that the majority of Undergraduate students are in favour of having Wednesday afternoons free of teaching, both those currently taught on Wednesday (61%) and those with it free (73%), despite the consequences this could have. However, this distinction as clear for Postgraduate students.

As a result of this, I recommend, further research is carried out into the nuanced opinions of PG students and how access to free Wednesday afternoons impacts their experiences. But, given the UG support for Wednesday afternoons being free, I recommend the committee discuss if a UG/PG distinction should be made in the policy and that the UG policy extends beyond core teaching.

Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

23 January 2020

Service Excellence Programme – Special Circumstances: Request for policy changes for 2020/21

Description of paper

1. The paper requests changes to the Special Circumstances policy in order to support the incoming Extensions and Special Circumstance (ESC) Team. The changes reflect the ESC Team reviewing all special circumstance applications to determine the validity of the case and to secure all evidence. The academic impact of supported cases will be determined by the school.

Action requested / recommendation

2. For discussion and approval.

Background and context

3. The ESC Team, previously known as SCEC is part of the Student Administration Strand of the Service Excellence Programme. It moves the coursework extensions and special circumstances application process to an online system. The framework for decision making will remain the University Assessment Regulations.

Discussion

4. Comments sought on the changes made to the policy by Adam Bunni, Academic Services; Faten Adam, incoming ESC Manager, and Sarah McAllister, Head of Student Services. The changes reflect the ESC service deciding on the validity of cases and changes to the Special Circumstances Committee.

5. Comments sought on the first draft of an escalated/serious case map previously discussed (November 2019).

Resource implications

6. The resource implications lie within the new service which has allocated budget. It is hoped the recommendations and changes to policy will enable a reallocation of time to provide focused support.

Risk management

7. The system relies on assessment and deadline date being updated in the APT. Failure to have this information will impact on the student's application and potential outcomes.

Equality & diversity

8. We have worked closely with a variety of stakeholders to ensure there will be no negative impact on particular cohorts of students. Once the service is running, we will have access to University and School level data to review service impact and identify student cohorts requiring additional support. We would hope the service will expedite support and outcomes for students.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

9.   Should the requested changes in policy be agreed, I will work with APRC to agree updating wording in the Special Circumstances policy and any related text in the University Assessment Regulations.

Author
Sarah McAllister
Faten Adam
16th January 2020

Presenter
Sarah McAllister
Faten Adam

Freedom of Information Open

Special Circumstances Policy

Purpose of Policy

The University should respond in an equitable and consistent way to requests from students for special circumstances to be taken into consideration for course, progression and award decisions made by Boards of Examiners.

Overview

The policy provides a definition of what constitutes special circumstances, sets out the guiding principles for the consideration of special circumstances, the role of the Special Circumstances Committee and the role of a Board of Examiners in dealing with special circumstances. It also provides details of the actions Boards of Examiners may take in response to special circumstances requests.

Scope: Mandatory Policy

The policy applies to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, and to the taught components undertaken by research postgraduate students.

Contact Officer	Adam Bunni	Head of Academic Policy and Regulations, Governance and Regulatory Framework Team	adam.bunni@ed.ac.uk

Document control

Dates	Approved: 30.05.19	Starts: 16.09.19	Equality impact assessment: 02.06.16	Amendments: 22.03.18 30.05.19	Next Review: 2020/21

Approving authority	Curriculum and Student Progression CommitteeAcademic Policy and Regulations Committee (CSPCAPRC)
Consultation undertaken	Curriculum and Student Progression CommitteeAcademic Policy and Regulations Committee (CSPC)
Section responsible for policy maintenance & review	Academic Services
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Taught Assessment Regulations, Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations/assessment Guidance on policy, principle and operation of Boards of Examiners: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/assessment/boards-examiners Degree Regulations & Programmes of Study: www.drps.ed.ac.uk/ Special Circumstances Form: www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/special_circumstances_form.docx
UK Quality Code	UK Quality Code Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning
Policies superseded by this policy	Special Circumstances Policy approved on 29th August 2013
Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 650 2138.

Special Circumstances Policy

Keywords	Special Circumstances, Special Circumstances Committee, Board of Examiners

Special Circumstances Policy

1   Introduction

1.1   The University is committed to supporting its students. ~~Special Circumstances Committees (SCCs)~~ The University will seek to take account of illness, accident or other circumstances beyond students' control that have adversely affected their performance in assessment. Decisions about how to take account of these circumstances in individual cases are made by Boards of Examiners responsible for students' courses and programmes, following input from the Extensions and Special Circumstances (ESC) service and Special Circumstances Committees.

2   Definitions of special circumstances

2.1   Special circumstances are circumstances which are exceptional for the individual student, are beyond that student's control and for which there is sufficient evidence to show that they had a significant adverse impact on the student's performance in an assessment, or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for a scheduled assessment.

2.2   Examples of circumstances that ~~a SCC is~~ the University is likely to accept include:

- Significant short-term physical illness or injury;
- Significant short-term mental ill-health;
- A long-term or chronic physical health condition, which has recently worsened temporarily or permanently;
- A long-term or chronic mental health condition, which has recently worsened temporarily or permanently;
- Bereavement or serious illness of a person with whom the student has a close relationship;
- A long-term relationship breakdown, such as a marriage;
- Exceptional (i.e. non-routine) caring responsibilities;
- Experience of sexual harassment or assault;
- Experience of other types of harassment;
- Victim of a crime which is likely to have significant emotional impact;
- Military conflict, natural disaster, or extreme weather conditions.

> **Commented [BA1]:** Update as needed.

2.3   Examples of circumstances that ~~a SCC is~~ the University is unlikely to accept include:

- A long-term or chronic health condition (including mental ill-health) which has not worsened recently, or for which the University has already made a reasonable adjustment;
- A minor short-term illness or injury (e.g. a common cold), which would not reasonably have had a significant adverse impact on assessment;
- Occasional low mood, stress or anxiety;
- Circumstances which were foreseeable or preventable;

Special Circumstances Policy

- Holidays;
- Pressure of academic work (unless this contributes to ill-health);
- Poor time-management;
- Lack of awareness of dates or times of assessment submission or examination;
- Failure, loss or theft of data, a computer or other equipment;
- Commitments to paid or voluntary employment;

3 Requesting consideration of special circumstances

3.1 It is the responsibility of students to submit their ~~request~~ application for consideration of special circumstances to the ~~Convener of the relevant~~Extensions and Special Circumstances ~~Committee~~ service using the online system as soon as possible and not more than a week after the student's final assessment for the semester. ~~SCCs~~ The ESC service will only consider accepting submissions after this deadline where students provide evidence of exceptional reasons for having been unable to submit on time.

3.2 ~~Students should submit the Special Circumstances form in consultation with their Personal Tutor, Programme Director, or Student Support Team.~~ In the~~ir form~~ application ~~they~~ students should describe the circumstances, state when the circumstances affected them, and all assessments and courses affected. Students should ensure that they provide sufficient documentary evidence (see Section 6 below). This can include statements from University staff.

3.3 In their application, students are able to indicate where they have a preference for a particular outcome, e.g. whether or not they would wish to resit a component of assessment, if this were offered. Boards of Examiners will determine the proportionate outcome(s) in relation to each application, but will take this information into account where relevant. ~~The form is available at:~~

~~http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/special_circumstances_form.docx~~

4 Confidentiality

4.1 ~~Schools~~ The University will treat the information provided by students as confidential in line with the University's Data Protection Policy, and will only share it with staff and External Examiners who have a legitimate need to access the information in order to consider the student's case or to provide students with support.

4.2 Students can opt out of sharing their full application with staff in their School for the purposes of providing additional support (i.e. beyond the consideration of their special circumstances case), on the understanding that this may prevent the School from being able to offer relevant guidance and support. Where information provided in an application raises serious concerns about the welfare of a student, this may be shared without the student's consent.

> **Commented [BA2]:** Wording would need checking.

5 Long-term or chronic physical or mental health conditions

Special Circumstances Policy

5.1 The University supports students with long-term or chronic health conditions, including mental ill-health, if a student is deemed to be disabled as defined by the Equality Act 2010, by putting in place a 'Learning Profile' to provide reasonable adjustments to study and assessment support arrangements. Students are responsible for contacting the Student Disability Service to discuss the adjustments and support that they need.

5.2 Where a student has received reasonable adjustments in recognition of a long-term or chronic health condition, ~~a SCC~~the ESC service would not support a case for special circumstances in relation to the condition, unless the condition has worsened significantly (whether temporarily or permanently) during the period relating to the special circumstances case. Where a student submits a special circumstances case on the basis that there has been a significant change in their circumstances, they must provide evidence regarding this change in their condition. Where a student has had reasonable opportunity to contact the Student Disability Service (SDS) to discuss the adjustments they need for a long-term or chronic health condition, but has not done so, ~~a SCC~~the ESC service would not support a case for special circumstances in relation to the condition.

5.3 Where students submit repeated requests for special circumstances relating to the same health condition, the ~~School~~ESC service should advise them to discuss the adjustments and support that they need with the Student Disability Service.

6 Evidence to support special circumstances cases

6.1 In order for ~~a SCC~~the ESC service to ~~support~~accept a student's special circumstances case, the ~~SCC~~ESC service must be satisfied that the student has provided sufficient evidence regarding the circumstances and the impact they had on the student's performance in an assessment.

6.2 The following can be acceptable forms of evidence, although some will carry greater weight than others:

Greater weight:

- An independent assessment of the student's illness by a medical practitioner, obtained at or immediately after the time of the circumstances;
- Evidence from another professional service, e.g. Student Counselling, obtained at or immediately after the time of the circumstances;
- Death certificate, order of service, or newspaper death announcement;
- Written accounts from University staff who have directly witnessed the circumstances, or their impact on the student's wellbeing or ability to perform in assessment, e.g. Personal Tutors, Student Support Officers, Residence Life Wardens;
- Written account from an independent third party from outside the University who directly witnessed the circumstances, e.g. notary;

- Documentary evidence from other sources, e.g. police report, legal documents.

Less weight:

- Written account from University staff whom the student has informed of the circumstances but who have not directly witnessed the circumstances, or their impact on the student's wellbeing or ability to perform in assessment;
- Medical certification, or evidence from other professional services, which merely restates the student's own account rather than providing an independent assessment of the student's illness;
- Written account from the student's family or friends who have directly witnessed the circumstances, or their impact on the student's wellbeing or ability to perform in assessment;
- Student's own word~~, where the student provides good reason for not providing corroborating evidence from a third party (only admissible for circumstances lasting up to seven days)~~.

6.3   The following are unlikely to be acceptable forms of evidence:

- Medical certification, or evidence from other professional services, obtained a significant period of time after the circumstances;
- Written accounts from the student's family or friends, if they have not directly witnessed the submitted circumstances, or their impact upon the student.

6.4   Where possible, students should provide corroborating evidence from a third party. In some circumstances, where the student has demonstrated good reason for not providing corroborating evidence from a third party, the student's own account can be sufficient evidence. ~~However, for circumstances lasting more than seven days, students should always provide corroborating evidence.~~

6.5   In weighing the evidence, the ~~SCC~~ ESC service should consider what evidence it was reasonable for the student to have obtained.

6.6   The strength of evidence required to support a student's special circumstances case is proportionate to the volume of assessment affected. So, if the submitted circumstances affected a single component of assessment with a relatively low weighting for a 20 credit course, the ~~SCC~~ ESC service may be satisfied with relatively modest evidence, whereas if the submitted circumstances affected all components of assessment for a 40 credit course, the ~~SCC~~ ESC service would require stronger evidence.

6.7   In some cases, General Practitioner practices may ask students to obtain written confirmation from the University that it requires medical documentation to support requests for consideration of special circumstances. A model letter that Schools may give to students whose GP practices need this is available at:
http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/special_circumstances_medical_request.docx

---

Formatted: Strikethrough

Commented [BA3]: No longer appropriate. We will always want this evidence.

Formatted: Strikethrough

Formatted: Strikethrough

Any fee charged by a GP practice for the provision of medical documentation needs to be paid by the student. If students are in financial hardship and are not able to pay any fees for these GP letters, they should be encouraged to contact Scholarships and Student Funding Services. www.ed.ac.uk/student-funding/financial-assistance

6.8   All written documentation must be submitted in English.

7   Membership and operation of decision-making bodies

Extensions and Special Circumstances (ESC) service

7.1   The ESC service will operate according to…

Special Circumstances Committees (SCCs)

7.2   Each School is responsible for having one or more Special Circumstances Committees (SCCs) to consider requests for consideration of special circumstances and report to its Boards of Examiners in relation to students on its courses and taught programmes. Schools may set up one SCC per Board of Examiners or SCCs which cover a number of Boards of Examiners.

7.3   To be quorate, a SCC will consist of an academic Convener along with at least two other academic members of staff. Schools can include additional members, including professional support staff. Any Special Circumstances Committee considering a specific application will not normally be larger than six people.

7.4   If a Board is very small and wishes to operate as its own SCC, this requires College approval. The Board sets up a SCC as a sub-committee of the Board. The Convener of the Board of Examiners may also convene the SCC but this is not a requirement.

7.5   SCCs will meet before the relevant Board of Examiners meetings take place. SCCs can also conduct business by correspondence where it is necessary to consider cases submitted after the scheduled SCC meeting, as long as all decisions are confirmed by a quorate membership (see 8.3).

Special Circumstances Committees: expedited decisions

7.6   Where the ESC service has accepted an application from a student requesting disregarding of late penalties, or an extension to a coursework deadline of more than seven days (where this will not lead to a deadline beyond the end of the next examination diet), SCCs are able to make expedited decisions (i.e. in advance of the next scheduled meeting of the SCC). The Convener of the SCC, acting with a member of professional services staff within the School, has delegated authority on behalf of the

Convener of the Board of Examiners to decide to disregard late penalties for submission of assessed coursework (see 10.2 c)).

Boards of Examiners

7.7   The operation of Boards of Examiners (including quorum) is defined in the Taught Assessment Regulations, and Handbook for Boards of Examiners for Taught Courses and Programmes.

8~~8~~   ~~Roles of Special Circumstances Committees and Boards of Examiners~~Process for consideration of applications

Extensions and Special Circumstances (ESC) service

~~8~~8.1   In relation to each request for consideration of special circumstances, taking into account all information available to it, the ~~Special Circumstances Committee~~ESC service determines:

- Whether there is sufficient evidence regarding the submitted circumstances and their impact on the student's performance in an assessment;

- Whether the submitted special circumstances were exceptional for the individual student, whether they were beyond the student's control, and whether it is reasonable to conclude that they would have adversely affected the student's performance in an assessment (with reference to Section 2);

- When the submitted special circumstances happened;

8.2   Based on their assessment, the ESC service will determine whether the application is accepted. The ESC service will forward accepted applications for consideration by the relevant Special Circumstances Committee(s) in the School(s) responsible for the course(s) to which the application relates. The decision by the ESC service to accept an application is binding on a Special Circumstances Committee.

8.3   Where the ESC service does not accept an application, they will inform the student of this, providing an explanation for their decision.

Special Circumstances Committee

8.4   On receipt of an application from the ESC service, the Special Circumstances Committee will consider all of the information available to it, which will include information regarding the student's performance (including provisional marks) in the affected assessment(s), and their performance in other assessments (as relevant).

> **Formatted:** Font: (Default) Arial, 12 pt
>
> **Formatted:** Indent: Left: 1.27 cm, Space After: 10 pt, Line spacing: Multiple 1.15 li, No bullets or numbering

> **Commented [BA8]:** Have changed this a lot, not only in the sense of saying they have sight of marks, but also that they aren't really assessing "impact", as opposed to just deciding what to do about it. This is much simpler to understand alongside what the ESC service is doing.
>
> **Formatted:** Font: (Default) Arial, 12 pt

Exactly what impact the submitted special circumstances had on the student's performance in an assessment, for example, whether they had an adverse impact on assessment(s) or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for relevant scheduled assessment(s).

8.28.5 The Special Circumstances Committee will make a recommendation to the Board of Examiners regarding the appropriate action to take with regard to the affected assessments, courses, or programme, in the light of the reported special circumstances. The SCC can either make a specific recommendation or recommend a range of options to the Board of Examiners. These recommendations are not binding on the Board of Examiners.

Having considered these specific issues, the SCC will make a summary decision regarding whether the relevant Board of Examiners should consider taking action regarding the student's course outcome or progression / award decision in the light of the student's special circumstances.

8.38.6 The Special Circumstances Committee will provide a written report of its decisions on these mattersrecommendations to the relevant Board of Examiners through the relevant online system. The decisions made by a Special Circumstances Committee on these matters are **binding** on a Board of Examiners, and on other bodies (for example, Colleges) that may have to decide on appropriate action in relation to the student's course outcome or progression / award decision.

8.4 The Special Circumstances Committee can also make recommendations to the Board of Examiners regarding the appropriate course outcome or progression / award decision to take, in the light of the reported special circumstances. The SCC could either make a specific recommendation or recommend a range of options to the Board of Examiners. These recommendations would not, however, be binding on the Board of Examiners.

8.58.7 When considering special circumstances cases, SCCs should take into account whether students were granted permission for a coursework extension as a result of the same special circumstances (see Taught Assessment Regulation 28).

7 **Membership and Operation of the Special Circumstances Committee**

7.1 Each School is responsible for having Special Circumstances Committees (SCCs) to consider requests for consideration of special circumstances and report to its Boards of Examiners in relation to students on its courses and taught programmes. Schools may set up one SCC per Board of Examiners or SCCs which cover a number of Boards of Examiners.

Special Circumstances Policy

7.2 To be quorate, a SCC will consist of an academic Convener along with at least two other academic members of staff. Schools can include additional members, including professional support staff.

7.3 If a Board is very small and wishes to operate as its own SCC, this requires College approval. The Board sets up a SCC as a sub-committee of the Board. The Convener of the Board of Examiners may also convene the SCC but this is not a requirement.

7.4 SCCs will meet before the relevant Board of Examiners meetings take place. SCCs can also conduct business by correspondence where it is necessary to consider cases submitted after the scheduled SCC meeting, as long as all decisions are confirmed by a quorate membership (see 7.2).

7.5 SCCs will not consider information relating to students' marks when making a decision on Special Circumstances.

8   Roles of Special Circumstances Committees and Boards of Examiners

8.1 In relation to each request for consideration of special circumstances, taking into account all information available to it, the Special Circumstances Committee determines:

- Whether there is sufficient evidence regarding the submitted circumstances and their impact on the student's performance in an assessment;

- Whether the submitted special circumstances were exceptional for the individual student, whether they were beyond the student's control, and whether it is reasonable to conclude that they would have adversely affected the student's performance in an assessment (with reference to Section 2);

- When the submitted special circumstances happened;

- Exactly what impact the submitted special circumstances had on the student's performance in an assessment, for example, whether they had an adverse impact on assessment(s) or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for relevant scheduled assessment(s).

8.2 Having considered these specific issues, the SCC will make a summary decision regarding whether the relevant Board of Examiners should consider taking action regarding the student's course outcome or progression / award decision in the light of the student's special circumstances.

8.3 The Special Circumstances Committee will provide a written report of its decisions on these matters to the relevant Board of Examiners. The decisions made by a Special Circumstances Committee on these matters are **binding** on a Board of Examiners, and on other bodies (for example, Colleges) that

10

~~may have to decide on appropriate action in relation to the student's course outcome or progression / award decision.~~

~~8.4   The Special Circumstances Committee can also make recommendations to the Board of Examiners regarding the appropriate course outcome or progression / award decision to take, in the light of the reported special circumstances. The SCC could either make a specific recommendation or recommend a range of options to the Board of Examiners. These recommendations would not, however, be binding on the Board of Examiners.~~

~~8.5   When considering special circumstances cases, SCCs should take into account whether students were granted permission for a coursework extension as a result of the same special circumstances (see Taught Assessment Regulation 28).~~

9   Special circumstances: general points about Board of Examiners decisions

9.1   In coming to a decision where special circumstances are considered, Boards of Examiners should act in the best academic interest of the student without disadvantage or advantage in relation to their peers.

10   Special circumstances: decisions regarding course outcomes

10.1   Where ~~the SCC has concluded that the Board of Examiners should consider taking action in the light of the student's special circumstances~~ a student's special circumstances application has been accepted, the relevant Board of Examiners decides on one of the options set out in the table below, taking into account the ~~specific determinations of the SCC regarding the case, and any~~ recommendations ~~for action that the SCC may have made~~ of the SCC.

10.2   For certain categories of decision, the Board will need to seek approval for the action from the relevant College committee. Where this is necessary, this is indicated below.

Action	College approval required?
a) No action – for example, circumstances already addressed through actions already taken	No
b) No action at course level; flag for consideration in relation to progression or award decision	No
c) Disregard penalties for late submission of coursework	No
d) Disregard missing component(s) and derive overall mark/grade from completed work (see 10.3)	No
e) Disregard unreliable component(s) and derive overall mark from completed work if to the student's benefit (see 10.3)	No

f) For pre-Honours courses, if the student has failed the course, allow further re-assessment attempts in line with Taught Assessment Regulation 27	No
g) For pre-Honours courses, record the course as a 'null sit', with the option of allowing the student to be examined at a subsequent diet, and / or to submit missing assessment and / or repeat some or all assessments, on a first sit basis	No
h) For Honours and postgraduate taught level courses, record the course as a 'null sit', with the option of requiring the student to be examined at a subsequent diet, and / or to submit missing assessment and / or repeat some or all assessments, on a first sit basis	No - If in current session (August resits count as the current session) Yes – College approval required if in next session
i) In exceptional cases, permit the student to resubmit a revised dissertation for a postgraduate Masters programme	Yes – College approval required
j) In exceptional cases, permit the student to take specially prepared alternative assessments, including oral assessment	Yes – College approval required
k) If course result is borderline (within 2 percentage points of the pass mark), award pass	No

10.3 Where marks/grades for specific components of assessment are missing or deemed unreliable, a Board of Examiners can only derive an overall mark/grade for the course from the existing assessed work if it is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence of attainment of the Learning Outcomes in other components of the course.

10.4 Boards of Examiners cannot adjust marks / grades as a consequence of special circumstances.

11   Special circumstances: decisions regarding progression and award

11.1 Where a student's special circumstances application has been accepted, the relevant Board of Examiners decides on one of the options set out in the table below, taking into account the recommendations of the SCCWhere the SCC has concluded that the Board of Examiners should consider taking action in the light of the student's special circumstances, the relevant Board of Examiners (including Progression Boards) decides on one of the options set out in the table below, taking into account the specific determinations of the SCC regarding the case, and any recommendations for action that the SCC may have made.

11.2 For certain categories of decision, the Board will need to seek approval for the action from the relevant College committee. For very exceptional actions, the relevant College committee would need to seek approval for the action from

the Senate ~~Curriculum and Student Progression Committee~~Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (~~CSPC~~APRC).

Action	College or CSPC approval required?
a) No further action – for example, adequate action already taken in relation to the outcome of individual course(s);	No
b) For Honours level year of programme, if the student has satisfied requirements in line with Taught Assessment Regulation 52, award credit on aggregate for relevant courses of that year of the degree programme	No
c) For postgraduate taught programmes, if the student has satisfied requirements in line with Taught Assessment Regulation 56, award credit on aggregate for relevant courses	No
d) Where a mark for a course is missing or deemed unreliable, exclude the affected course(s) from the classification calculation	No
e) Take account of special circumstances for progression, degree classification, award of merit/distinction, and/or award	No
f) Exceptionally, to allow a student to graduate without the required number and / or level of credits for the degree	Yes – College and CSPC approval required

11.3   For decisions regarding *aegrotat* degrees and posthumous degrees, see the relevant Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degree Regulations.

12   Notifying students of the outcomes of requests for consideration of special circumstances

12.1   The ESC service will notify students of the decision regarding whether or not their special circumstances application has been accepted within five working days. ~~Within one week of the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners decision, the~~ The School will notify students of ~~the decision regarding~~any action taken by the Board of Examiners in relation their special circumstances ~~request~~application within five working days of the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners. The School will also inform the student's Personal Tutor of the decision.

Special Circumstances Policy

13 Reporting and maintaining records on requests for consideration of Special Circumstances

13.1 ~~The School will minute SCC meetings (including meetings conducted by correspondence), recording all decisions in the minutes.~~ Where the ~~SCC~~ ESC service decides not to support the request for consideration of special circumstances, the ~~School~~ service will ~~minute~~ record the reason for this decision in the relevant online system.

13.2 The School will minute SCC meetings (including meetings conducted by correspondence), recording all decisions and recommendations in the relevant online system. The SCC will report its decisions and recommendations to the Board of Examiners in as concise a form as is consistent with clarity and the student's interest, where possible maintaining the anonymity of the student.

13.3 The ESC service and the School will maintain records in line with Data Protection guidelines.

14 Sources of further guidance

14.1 Further guidance for students regarding the special circumstances process is available at: https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/students/assessment/special-circumstances

14.2 Edinburgh University Students' Association provides further guidance to students regarding special circumstances, and the Students' Association Advice Place can provide independent advice to students regarding the preparation of their requests for consideration of special circumstances. http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/support_and_advice/the_advice_place/academic/special_circumstances/

14.3 In order to support consistency of handling of student requests for consideration of special circumstances, Colleges and Schools must not produce their own supplementary guidance.

~~30 May~~15 November 2019

> Commented [BA9]: Will need updated.
>
> Commented [MS10R9]: Faten to coordinate with Academic Services.
>
> Commented [BA11]: Out of date.
>
> Commented [MS12R11]: Faten to coordinate with EUSA.
>
> Formatted: Font: Bold, Font color: Red
>
> Formatted: Font: Bold, Font color: Red

ESC Escalated Case Response

Case received by the service	Notification received from school
ESC staff review case – decision is made on accepted or not accepted	**Schools notify ESC service of an escalated case where there is an imminent threat to life and/or where a student is unable to complete an Special Circumstances Application**
An internal validation process within the ESC team will take place with a senior team member	
ESC staff notify Senior Personal Tutor and Head of Student Services/Teaching Organisation Manager (Schools can nominate alternative contacts). Notification will be by phone, however, where contact is not possible with designated contacts an email will be sent.	ESC staff complete and application with input from the school and student (as far as possible)
	An internal validation process within the ESC team will take place with a senior team member.
Where the case suggests an imminent threat to life, Andy Shanks, Director of Wellbeing will be contacted.	The School will notify Andy Shanks, Director of Wellbeing or appropriate University Support Services.
Closing the loop?? *Feedback needed on expectations.*	Closing the loop?? *Feedback needed on expectations*

Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

23 January 2020

Honours degree classification: weighting of Honours years

Description of paper

1. The paper seeks confirmation from APRC regarding the appropriate way to calculate a student's average mark for the purposes of degree classification, on programmes involving two Honours years.

Action requested / recommendation

2. APRC is asked to approve the interpretation of the relevant regulations set out in the paper.

Background and context

3. Student Systems have identified an inconsistency in the manner in which Schools are interpreting the Taught Assessment Regulations relating to calculating a student's average for the purposes of degree classification on Honours programmes involving two Honours years.

4. The relevant section of Taught Assessment Regulation 55 states:

   "The Board of Examiners for assessment of students in their final year is responsible for deriving the classification for award of an honours degree. Degree classification is derived by calculating the mean of marks of the individual courses, weighted by the number of credit points of each course. Exceptions are outlined in the guidance on the regulation."

   "55.1 The assessment weighting of a course within a year is proportional to its credit value.
   55.2 For degrees with two honours years, including degree programmes with an obligatory period of residence/study abroad, the classification is based on performance in both honours years, which are equally weighted…"

5. There are a number of exceptions to the standard approach to classification calculations, which are also set out in the regulations. These include programmes in Biological and Biomedical Sciences, and Integrated Masters degrees, which apply an unequal weighting to the different Honours years for classification purposes.

Discussion

6. Student Systems have indicated that Schools are taking two, distinct approaches to calculating degree classification, based on different interpretations of the regulations:

a) Calculating a weighted average of all of the course results for the junior and senior Honours years;

b) Calculating a weighted average for each Honours year separately; then calculating an average of the two year averages, with each weighted equally.

The Assessment and Progression Tools system in EUCLID currently uses approach b) as its default method.

7. In general, these two approaches will deliver the same programme average. However, where a course mark is disregarded from the classification calculation due to special circumstances, this has a different impact upon the final average, depending upon whether approach a) or b) is taken. The Appendix to this paper provides an example, in which a hypothetical set of course marks would result in a student's average for classification purposes either falling in the borderline, or not, depending upon whether approach a) or b) is used.

8. There is no limit defined in the Taught Assessment Regulations, or the Special Circumstances Policy, on the volume of credits which a Board of Examiners can disregard from a student's classification calculation due to special circumstances; the Board is responsible for ensuring that it has sufficient evidence to award a specific class of degree. This can mean that, for example, a student could have as much as 80 credits' worth of courses disregarded from Year 3. In this situation, use of approach b) would lead to the 40 remaining credits in Year 3 having the same weight as the 120 credits taken in Year 4. This increases the impact of the reduction in the volume of credit used, and can lead to greater disadvantage or advantage for the student, depending on their performance in the remaining credit in the affected year. Use of approach a) means that the impact of the reduction in the volume of credit used for classification is reduced, the average being based upon all of the credits taken, weighted equally.

9. **We propose that approach a) should be the agreed approach to deriving the average for classification purposes, i.e. calculating a weighted average of all of the course results for the junior and senior Honours years. APRC is asked to approve this approach.**

Those programmes which use differential weightings for Years 3 and 4 (or Years 3, 4, and 5 in the case of Integrated Masters), as set out in the exceptions defined in the regulations, would continue to operate on that basis.

Resource implications
10. Student Systems would be required to change the default approach within the Assessment and Progression Tools system in EUCLID. Making this change is estimated to take 2-3 days to complete, and is manageable within existing staff resources in Student Systems.

Risk management
11. Although students on the same Honours programme will be subject to the same approach when it comes to calculating their degree classification, the existing variation in approach may be leading to inconsistent treatment of students on

different Honours programmes across the University. Agreeing a single approach to calculating averages for the purpose of classification is important to eliminate this inconsistency. As explained above, use of approach b) also has the potential to lead to students with special circumstances being disadvantaged, or unreasonably advantaged, relative to other students.

Equality & diversity

12. Affected course marks may be disregarded from the classification calculation of students with special circumstances. Students in this situation will most often be those affected by significant health issues, including mental health issues. As above, students who have courses disregarded from their classification calculation can suffer disadvantage where undue weight is given to remaining credits in a year affected by special circumstances. The proposed approach is fairer, producing a degree classification based on an average of their marks for all courses which were not affected by special circumstances.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

13. Academic Services will clarify the Taught Assessment Regulations for the 2020/21 session, removing reference to equal weighting of Honours years. The changes to regulations will be communicated in the annual New and Updated Policies and Regulations communication (and associated web resource) to staff in Schools and Colleges. Continuing students will be notified of changes to relevant regulations and policies during the annual registration process.

14. Student Systems will make changes to the default calculation method for degree classification in the Assessment and Progression Tools System in EUCLID.

Author

Adam Bunni, Academic Services
Richard Arkless, Student Systems Partnership

14 January 2019

Presenter

Adam Bunni, Academic Services

Freedom of Information

Open

Appendix

Sample course marks profile

	Marks	Credits
Year 3	50	40
	60	40
	70	40
Year 4	50	40
	60	40
	40	40

Classification calculations

Method a)

(40×50+40×60+40×40+40×50+40×60+40×70) / (40+40+40+40+40+40) = 55 - Mark for classification

Method b)
Year 3 - (40×50+40×60+40×70) / (40+40+40) = 60
Year 4 - (40×50+40×60+40×40) / (40+40+40) = 50
Year marks average (1×50+1×60) / (1+1) = 55 - Mark for classification

Now if we exclude a mark (giving it a 0 weighting):

Method a)

(40×50+40×60+0×40+40×50+40×60+40×70) / (40+40+0+40+40+40) = 58 - Mark for classification

Method b)

Year 3 - (40×50+40×60+40×70) / (40+40+40) = 60
Year 4 - (40×50+40×60+0×40) / (40+40+B) = 55
Year marks average(1×55+1×60) / (1+1) = 57.5 - Mark for classification

Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

23 January 2020

PhD with Integrated Study: resit assessment

Description of paper

1. The paper seeks agreement from APRC to allow PhD with Integrated Study programmes to offer resit assessment for taught courses at SCQF level 9 or above, without seeking additional approval from APRC.

Action requested / recommendation

2. APRC is asked to approve the request to allow PhD with Integrated Study programmes to offer resit assessment for taught courses as appropriate.

Background and context

3. The University has an increasing number of PhD with Integrated Study programmes, which involve students undertaking a defined number of taught courses (usually 180 credits) alongside producing a PhD thesis, over a period of four years. Some of these programmes are offered on a collaborative basis with other institutions as part of Centres for Doctoral Training.

4. On some PhD with Integrated Study programmes, taught courses are "front-loaded", being completed by students in the first year of study; on other programmes, taught courses are spread across all four, or two to three years of study.

5. There are also some examples of "traditional" PhD programmes (i.e. not PhD with Integrated Study) which incorporate compulsory taught elements.

Discussion

6. In 2019, Senate Researcher Experience Committee produced guidance (developed by a task group of the Committee) regarding the operation of PhD with Integrated Study programmes (https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/phdintegratedstudy.pdf), in order to support their continuing development and explain how the University's academic regulations could be applied appropriately within these programmes.

7. In developing the guidance, members of the task group expressed the importance of ensuring that students are not unreasonably penalised for failure in a single element of the taught component. All other programmes at the University, including undergraduate Honours and postgraduate taught programmes, allow some means for students to redeem failure in a course, generally through offering resits (at pre-Honours level), or through the award of credit on aggregate (at Honours and postgraduate taught level). As such, the guidance includes suggested options for redeeming failure in taught courses:

"Redeeming failure

5. If taught and research skills elements are required for progression, students must have the opportunity to redeem failure in these elements. This is important to ensure that students can progress and obtain the core skills needed. Programme information should explain how arrangements for redeeming failure will operate. These may include:
• The award of credit on aggregate, where a student achieves passes in a defined volume of other courses and achieves an overall passing average in all taught and research skills courses.
• Offering a defined number of resits/resubmission attempts.
• Offering alternative courses to make up missing credits."

8. The Taught Assessment Regulations do not include specific provisions regarding resit entitlement for postgraduate research students or programmes, but state the following regarding postgraduate taught programmes:

"27.10 Re-assessment attempts are not generally permitted for courses at SQCF level 9 and above for Honours and taught postgraduate students since Honours and taught postgraduate programmes permit the award of credit on aggregate (see Taught Assessment Regulations 52, 54, 56, 57). Where resits are permitted for Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements, any classification decision must use the result obtained on the first attempt.

27.11 The Curriculum and Student Progression Committee decides whether a programme may offer resits which are required for Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements for courses at SCQF level 9 and above for Honours and taught postgraduate students. This decision is based on a case proposed by the relevant College."

9. PhD with Integrated Study programmes are not classified, so there is no risk of students gaining advantage over their peers, should they be offered the opportunity to resit assessment. Some taught courses offered on PhD with Integrated Study programmes are part of existing Masters programmes, and therefore taken alongside students on those programmes. In general, Masters students are not entitled to resit assessment; they are, however, eligible for the award of credit on aggregate. Although offering resit assessment to PhD with Integrated Study students on these courses would place them in a different position to those members of the cohort on Masters programmes, this is directly analogous to undergraduate students on General or Ordinary degrees taking courses alongside Honours students (General/Ordinary students are entitled to resits at SCQF levels 9 and 10; Honours students are not). Where programme teams responsible for PhD with Integrated Study programmes wish to offer courses from existing MSc programmes to their students, and permit resits, they need to ensure that course organisers for these courses are willing to support this.

10. Use of resit assessment is likely to be a more appropriate method of redeeming failure than the award of credit on aggregate where programmes involve taught

courses spread across multiple years. On these programmes, use of credit on aggregate would prevent students from having clarity regarding their entitlement for the award until they had completed all of their taught courses, potentially at the end of the programme as a whole.

11. In line with the guidance on redeeming failure for PhD with Integrated Study programmes, **we would therefore propose that these programmes should be permitted to offer reassessment to students for taught courses, where this is regarded as appropriate, without the need for additional approval from APRC. This exemption would also apply to "traditional" PhD programmes which incorporate compulsory taught elements. APRC is asked to approve this proposal**. Programmes and their assessment arrangements would continue to require approval from Boards of Studies and relevant College bodies as normal.

12. Those PhD with Integrated Study programmes which are currently offering resit assessment generally permit students one resit attempt. APRC may wish to define entitlement to resit assessment for PhD with Integrated Study programmes as being two attempts overall (one initial attempt, and one resit attempt), or be content to leave this to Schools and Colleges to determine, when developing programmes.

Resource implications

13. There are no significant resource implications associated with the proposed approach. Where Schools and Colleges wish to offer resit assessment to students on PhD with Integrated Study programmes, they will need to ensure that they have sufficient staff resource to support this.

Risk management

14. Section 9 of the paper identifies a risk relating to a difference in resit entitlement for PhD with Integrated Study students relative to Masters students.

Equality & diversity

15. Offering resit assessment for courses provides all students with a route to redeem failure.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

16. Colleges will communicate APRC's decision to staff who are currently developing, or may wish in the future to develop PhD with Integrated Study programmes. Academic Services will assess whether it may be beneficial to propose an amendment to the Taught Assessment Regulations, or to the PhD with Integrated Study Guidance, in order to reflect APRC's decision. APRC will be asked to consider any proposed changes to the Taught Assessment Regulations at its May meeting.

Author
Dr Adam Bunni
Academic Services

Presenter
Dr Adam Bunni
Academic Services

14 January 2019

Freedom of Information

Open

Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

23rd January 2020

**CMVM - Wellcome Trust 4-year PhD in Translational Neuroscience
(PRPHDWISTN1F)
Request to allow a single resit opportunity for taught components**

Description of paper
1. This paper seeks a Senate concession to allow students on this programme a single resit opportunity for any failed assessment for the taught components in Years 1, 2 and 3.

Action requested / recommendation
2. For approval

Background and context
3. The 4-year PhD programme in Translational Neuroscience is hosted by the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences,University of Edinburgh Medical School. Funding is provided by the Wellcome Trust and 6 places are offered each year.

   Under Taught Assessment Regulation 27, taught postgraduate students are entitled to one assessment attempt for courses at SCQF level 9-12.

Discussion
4. This 4-year PhD with integrated study comprises a 3-year PhD project and 5 compulsory taught courses: three courses in Year 1, one in Year 2 and one in Year 3.

5. All taught courses are pass/fail and must be passed in order to progress to the next year of study. Students are not allowed to be awarded credits by aggregation.

6. A concession allowing students one resit opportunity for any failed assessment would avoid a student failing a taught assessment having no option other than to leave the programme, which could happen as late as Year 3.

7. The Curriculum and Student Progression Committee meeting on 23rd November 2017 approved a similar concession for the Zhejiang 4-year PhD degree programme in Integrative Biomedical Sciences with integrated study.

Resource implications
8. None

Risk management

9. No risks identified.

Equality & diversity

10. There are no equality and diversity implications.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

11. If the concession is granted, students will be advised in the Programme Handbook that single resits of assessments are allowed.

Author   **Presenter**
Professor David Price   Professor David Price
23/01/20

Freedom of Information Open

Background

The Wellcome Trust 4-year PhD in **Translational Neuroscience: Life course influences on human brain health** (PRPHDWISTN1F) was established in 2016 to train non-clinical students to marry cutting-edge experimental animal modelling, cellular, regenerative, computational, genetic technologies and analytical tools with comprehensive knowledge of the clinical brain research environment. It aims to equip students with the distinct skills required to bridge the knowledge gap between the design, execution and interpretation of cellular/animal experiments and the challenges of experimental medicine.

The PhD comprises a 3-year PhD project (540 credits) and 5 compulsory taught courses at SQF levels 11 or 12 (180 credits). Three of the compulsory courses are taken in Year 1, one in Year 2 and one in Year 3. All taught courses are pass/fail and must be passed in order to progress to the next year of study. Students are not allowed to be awarded credits by aggregation. An overview of taught assessments is provided in Appendix 1.

Under the current arrangements, students are given at least one round and usually multiple rounds of formative feedback on their work leading up to each assessment. The overall ethos is to provide maximum feedback at all stages. Assessments are seen primarily as teaching and learning opportunities. This makes it almost certain that work that might fail at the formal assessment stage will be detected before formal assessment is carried out. Where such an outcome is anticipated, students will be supported in their efforts to correct deficiencies by their immediate supervisors, their mentor (in first year) and the programme directors. **This application is to enable us**

to deal with the extremely unlikely event that a student fails despite the existing support mechanisms.

Request

Under Taught Assessment Regulation 27, taught postgraduate students are entitled to one assessment attempt for courses at SCQF level 9-12. For the 4-year PhD in Translational Neuroscience, this would mean that a student failing any component of the taught assessments would have to leave the programme and this could happen as late as Year 3. Given the intense competition for the six places available annually, and the high calibre of the students selected, we consider it unlikely that a student would fail an assessment but the possibility cannot be ruled out.

We are therefore seeking a concession from the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) to allow students on the programme one resit opportunity for any failed assessment for the taught component in Years 1, 2 and 3.

Based on similar principles, the Curriculum and Student Progression Committee meeting on 23rd November 2017 approved this concession for the Zhejiang 4-year PhD degree programme in Integrative Biomedical Sciences with integrated study.

This concession request received support from the Biomedical Sciences Board of Studies on 13th November 2019.

Proposed resubmission arrangements

The deadline for any resubmission will be set to coincide with the submission of NEBM11010: PhD Grant Application, which is the final element of Year 1 assessment with a deadline in August. The main meeting of the Board of Examiners (BoE) will be held in June/July and will precede the submission of the Grant Application and any resit material. This main meeting will ratify all the outcomes for NEBM11008, NEBM11009, NEBM12001 and NEBM12002. A second BoE meeting in September will ratify the outcomes for: NEBM11010 (i.e. Grant Application, prior to starting the main PhD project in Year 2) and any resits and consider progression for all students in Years 1-3.

Appendix 1: Overview of taught summative assessments

Year 1

NEBM11008: Introduction to Disorders Discussions & Key Methodologies – 3 assessments (40 credits in total)

NEBM11009: Research Training – 2 assessments (100 credits in total)

NEBM11010: PhD Grant Application – one assessment (10 credits)

Year 2

NEBM12001: Disorders Discussions & Key Methodologies II – one assessment (15 credits)

Year 3

NEBM12002: Disorders Discussions & Key Methodologies III – one assessment (15 credits)

REPORT FROM THE KNOWLEDGE STRATEGY COMMITTEE

11 October 2019

1   **City Deal – World Class Data Infrastructure**

Mark Parsons, Professor of High Performance Computing, presented on the World Class Data Infrastructure (WCDI) element of the City Deal's Data-Driven Innovation programme. WCDI will underpin the Data Driven Innovation programme and build on existing investment in the University's Advanced Computing Facility with a new high resiliency data centre room to support work with complex, high volume, real-time datasets from across the City Region and beyond. Points raised in discussion included:

- Expanding academic engagement with WCDI and City Deal hubs – a relatively small number of projects are under development in the first instance, with the intention to expand more widely in future. An academic engagement plan has been developed for the College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine and will be developed for the other Colleges;
- Possible impacts if the UK leaves the European Union, particularly in a 'no deal' scenario – impacts for WCDI might include data legislation, although it is not currently expected to manage data from EU sources and supply chains for equipment, although supply chains in this area are global, with little sourced from EU member states; and,
- Managing the environmental impact of high performance computing such as the University's use of a green electricity tariff.

2   **Purchase of Sir Charles Lyell's scientific notebooks**

The Chief Information Officer reported on the University's success in raising £966,000 to purchase pioneering Scottish geologist Sir Charles Lyell's (1797-1875) 294 scientific notebooks. The notebooks had been listed for sale abroad but a temporary export bar had given the University and over 1,100 supporters the opportunity to raise funds for their purchase. £200,000 of the purchase price will be met from the University's own Heritage Collection fund, with the public appeal raising one third of the purchase price and the remaining sum met by external bodies. It was agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Information Officer to sign the agreement with Sotheby's to purchase the notebooks subject to final review by the Convener of Knowledge Strategy Committee of an accompanying paper. The Committee expressed gratitude to all contributors to the fundraising appeal and discussed plans to display some of the notebooks in the Main Library, using the notebooks within teaching and research activities and lessons learned from the success of the public appeal and alumni involvement.

Post-meeting addendum: following review of the paper by the Convener, the delegation of authority was granted and the purchase agreement signed.

3   **Sustainable IT: Personal Computing Devices Policy**

A draft Sustainable IT: Personal Computing Devices Policy was reviewed prior to submission to the University Executive for approval. The intent of the draft policy is

to reduce the carbon and environmental impact of University-purchased personal computing devices and reduce the overall cost to the University of these devices; and the associated software, maintenance and power costs. An earlier draft had been the subject of a University-wide consultation and attracted 160 comments. The comments have fed into the current draft, e.g. recognition that homeworkers may require multiple computing devices.

Points raised in discussion included:
- The estimated 600 different types of computing devices used on campus hampers ethical and clean disposal, is costly and inefficient and increases information security risks;
- Communication of the new policy should also consider raising awareness to both staff and students (working with the Students' Association) of the environmental impacts of personal computing devices, advertising the University's work on ethical supply chains and addressing concerns of centralisation and reduced choice in local areas; and,
- Concerns that some academic staff may purchase their own devices if the choice of University approved devices on offer is restricted and does not allow for what an individual academic believes to be the best device for their own research – undermining efforts to improve information security and improve IT support.

4 Collections Management Policy 2020-2030

A Collections Management Policy 2020-2030 for the University's Collections was reviewed. Noting that the Policy is required for compliance with the Museums Accreditation Scheme (UK) and had been reviewed and supported by the University Collections Advisory Committee, it was agreed to recommend the Policy for approval by Court.

5 HPE Superdome Flex High Performance Computer System Purchase

The purchase of a £600,000 HPE Superdome Flex shared memory system and the delegation of signing authority to the Chief Information Officer was approved. It was noted that the purchase will be fully funded by a capital grant awarded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council with recurrent funding for staff to manage the service provided by Information Services Group.

6 Data-Driven Innovation: Internet of Things Service Data Platform Appliance Purchase

The purchase of an Internet of Things Service Data Platform Appliance at a price not exceeding £330,000 and the delegation of signing authority to the Chief Information Officer was approved. It was noted that the purchase follows the capital spending plan agreed within the City Deal's Data-Driven Innovation programme, with revenue funding for staff in place.

7 Digital Research Services Project Programme 2019/20

The proposed 2019/20 Digital Research Services project programme was reviewed. Noting that the programme supports the most commonly used data services for

academic research, with some income from grant recovery where applicable, the proposed budget allocation was endorsed.

8   **Learning Analytics: Pilot of OnTask Data-Driven Feedback Tool**

A proposed pilot of a data driven feedback tool (OnTask) to be used within two School of Mathematics courses and six School of Business MicroMasters courses was considered. It was noted that the proposal had been reviewed and accepted by the Learning Analytics Review Group convened as per the Learning Analytics Policy and was now submitted for approval by the Committee. The Committee approved the pilots within the School of Mathematics and the School of Business, with an evaluation of the pilots to be submitted to the Committee before extension to other courses or Schools.