APRC 23/24 5

**Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee
to be held on Thursday 25 January 2024
at 2:00pm via Teams**

Confirmed minutes

Present:	
Dr Aidan Brown	Elected member of Senate
Dr Adam Bunni	Head of Academic Policy and Regulation, Academic Services
Professor Jeremy Crang	Dean of Students (CAHSS)
Lisa Dawson	Academic Registrar, Registry Services
Dr Murray Earle	Elected member of Senate
Lucy Evans	Deputy Secretary, Students (Co-opted member)
Professor Patrick Hadoke (Convener)	Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research Experience (CMVM)
Clair Halliday	The Advice Place, Deputy Manager
Karen Howie	Head of Digital Learning Applications and Media, Information Services
Alexandra Laidlaw	Head of Academic Affairs (CSE)
Professor Antony Maciocia	Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE)
Callum Paterson	Academic Engagement Coordinator, Students' Association
Rachael Quirk	Head of Taught Student Administration & Support (CAHSS)
Dr Deborah Shaw	Dean of Students (CMVM)
Professor Tim Stratford	Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE)
Dr Emily Taylor	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Validation (CAHSS)
Dr Uzma Tufail-Hanif	Elected member of Senate
Professor Stephen Warrington (Vice-Convener)	Dean of Student Experience (CSE)
Kirsty Woomble	Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS)
Substitute members:	
Lauren Byrne on behalf of Carl Harper	Vice President Welfare, Students' Association
Philippa Burrell on behalf of Isabel Lavers	Head of Academic Administration (CMVM)
In attendance:	
Cristina Matthews	Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services
Apologies:	
Professor Jamie Davies	Dean of Taught Education (CMVM)
Carl Harper	Vice President Education, Students' Association
Isabel Lavers	Academic Administration Manager (CMVM)
Professor Antony Maciocia	Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE)
Dr Donna Murray	Head of Taught Student Development (IAD)

1.	**Welcome and apologies**	
	The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the substitute members present. Reminder to the Committee that members can propose a substitute member, to be approved by the Convener, if they are unable to make the meeting.	
	The Convener proposed that next academic year, members would be asked to nominate substitute members at start of the year, so that they can be included in the induction briefing. If there is a need for substitute members who have not attended the induction briefing to attend a meeting throughout the year, the aim will be to provide a short induction prior to the meeting, where there is sufficient time to do so.	
	The Convener noted that the CSE representatives would need to leave the meeting at 15:00 following the discussion of item 3.	
2.	**Minutes of the previous meeting** To approve • 23 November 2023 (open minutes) The Committee approved the minutes. **Approved.**	**APRC 23/24 5A**
3.	**Exceptional Circumstances policy - update** To comment **Presenters:** Dr Adam Bunni and Lisa Dawson The paper presents an updated draft of a proposed Exceptional Circumstances policy. The proposed policy is looking to address issues raised when this was considered by the Committee previously in June and July 2023, as well as to consider the work of the APRC task group, convened in 2022/23. The paper also provides the Committee with an update regarding the systems and process changes required to implement such a policy. If the Committee were to agree to progress with this draft policy in principle, the systems work could commence in order to achieve the implementation of changes for 2024/25. The paper includes a proposal to set up an informal stakeholder group to work with the project team in Registry Services over the coming months. The purpose of the group would be to consider and advise on how the policy, process and systems would work in a range of detailed and complex scenarios, and to build and test the system in partnership. The Convener clarified that the draft policy is for comment and for agreement in principle so that the systems development can progress. The paper will return to the Committee with a final policy for approval in March. Key points discussed in relation to the proposed policy: - **Groups of students and circumstances not covered by the policy:** Noting the discussion at previous meetings, it was reiterated that the purpose of this policy is to support students who have short-term,	**APRC 23/24 5B**

unexpected, exceptional circumstances that could impact on their ability to undertake their assessments. In addition, the Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS) work with Schools on providing reasonable learning adjustments for their assessments, and other aspects of teaching. Previous discussions had highlighted a set of students with particular needs that are currently falling through the gaps and feel unsupported, such as student parents and carers.

The Deputy Secretary Students has commissioned a review focussing on these groups of students. A report is expected to outline actions we may be able to take urgently to understand any gaps and how these may be addressed. It was noted that a longer-term set of recommendations linked to our Widening Participation Strategy as to how we achieve greater inclusive and connected support for our underrepresented students across the University is also expected. The Deputy Secretary Students noted that she would update the Committee on this work, but that this was not the purpose of this Policy.

The Committee will receive an update on this project at its March meeting, alongside the Exceptional Circumstances policy.

Members agreed that there should be signposting to students on what other policies or types of support are available for these groups of students and for circumstances not covered by the Exceptional Circumstances policy.

- **Supporting evidence and self-certification:** Members expressed a range of views regarding changes to self-certification and the requirements for medical evidence; some members viewed the changes as necessary in order for the policy to be fit for purpose, whilst others viewed them as punitive to students.

Student representatives from the Students' Association and The Advice Place reminded the Committee of the difficulties and cost of obtaining non-routinary types of evidence, such as GP letters, certified translations, and letters from employers. It was noted, for instance, that some types of employers would not provide letters. Where certified translations are necessary, it should be considered whether students or the ESC team could provide their own translations. The Academic Registrar noted a follow up meeting with the Students' Association would be arranged to discuss the approach to evidence.

Amongst members who were supportive of the changes, there was still concern about the requirement for evidence in particularly sensitive cases, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, and there was discussion regarding whether the set of circumstances for which no evidence is needed (i.e., bereavement) could be widened to include these situations. Members expressed concerns regarding the viability of escalating all such cases to the Deputy Secretary, Students, and suggested that these types of cases could instead be incorporated into the policy.

College representatives noted that there were significant workload implications for student support teams if Student Advisers and Wellbeing Advisers were to be asked to provide letters of support as evidence of students' Exceptional Circumstances. It was also noted that the reference in

the policy to accounts provided by friends and family was confusing, and that it would be best to either fully accept these or not accept them.

- **Period for coursework extensions:** Members welcomed a decision on the period for coursework extensions, given the current discrepancies on this across the University. Members also welcomed the allowance for part-time programmes to allow seven-day, rather than three-day, extensions.

  Notwithstanding, a number of concerns were expressed regarding the impact of the shorter period for extensions on students. Student representatives would have liked to see the recommendation from the APRC task group to allow a single self-certification to cover up to seven days, rather than three days. One member noted that most other Russell Group universities allow at least seven-day extensions. Another member noted that the rationale for this change was to address issues regarding the volume and impact of extensions in some areas of the University, but that for other areas the longer period for extensions was unproblematic.

  Another member noted that seven-day extensions were important for parents and carers, although it was acknowledged that being parent or carer is not an exceptional circumstance and that appropriate policies and adjustments need to be in place for these students outside of this policy.

  One member proposed that feedback could be collected on how the three/four-day extension period has been working so far in 2023/24, and incorporate reflections on this into the rationale for the policy amendments.

  There was also some reflection on the reasons under-pinning the volume of extensions, and that some of these are the University's responsibility to resolve, e.g., under-provision of assessment guidance, over-assessment. The Convener noted however that the volume of assessment is not within the remit of the Committee to resolve.

- **Assessments not eligible for extensions:** Members noted that Schools must retain the option for some assessments to not allow extensions, for pedagogical reasons.

- **Late submissions and ESC expedited decisions:** Members noted that it was desirable to give early outcomes to students where possible. There was discussion about whether or not this would save any workload for Schools and also about how this would operate, e.g., if the ESC team are expediting decisions, it is not clear how they would distinguish cases where there has been an impact on the quality of the assessment.

  Members agreed it will be important for the stakeholder group to work through late submission scenarios in detail and establish the routine practices for these scenarios.

- **Concerns about the complexity of the policy and its implementation:** Members noted a general concern regarding the complexity of the policy and how this would affect its implementation, as well as staff and student understanding of the policy. The paper authors noted that the points of complexity were considered to add value, but agreed that if there was complexity that was not adding value, that these points could be simplified. In terms of the systems implementation, colleagues in Registry Services

have been modelling the changes that would be required to the system, and there are resources allocated and ready to begin the work. The Committee member representing ISG noted that consideration should also be given to how these changes may impact on marking and release of feedback.

- **Need to define "best academic interest"**: Members noted that staff and students may have different views on what constitutes "best academic interest" and that this should be defined. Consideration should also be given to any impact on allowances for credits on aggregate, especially for disciplines accredited by professional bodies.

Members representing the Colleges, IAD and some of the members representing Senate were broadly supportive of the changes, and the direction of travel of the proposed policy. The College leads for academic administration agreed to send a list of more detailed questions and scenarios via email following the meeting, for further consideration.

Student representatives from EUSA and The Advice Place noted that improvements had been made since this policy was last reviewed in July 2023 and that notable efforts had been made to incorporate some of the points from the APRC task group. Nevertheless, the student representative members of the Committee did not support the proposed policy. Members noted that students perceived the changes to the existing policy as punitive to students. The key features they would like to see in the policy, as stated in an open letter from EUSA sent to members of APRC in July 2023, still apply to the revised proposal:
- Self-certification to apply for seven days, rather than three days
- Four-day extensions
- Relaxation of evidence requirements

Student representatives also highlighted the importance of having associated or additional policies in place in order to support students whose circumstances are not covered by the Exceptional Circumstances policy.

The Deputy Secretary, Students, thanked members for the feedback and also thanked colleagues who have been working hard on the amendments to the policy and systems requirements. There was an acknowledgement that no policy will be able to cover every circumstance, but that we will need to agree on a policy that covers the majority of circumstances, whilst also covering gaps in support by other policies. It was also noted that the current policy, and the interim local workarounds (e.g., College-defined extensions), were not fit for purpose and were not providing a consistent student experience.

The Convener summarised the key points of the discussion and noted that discussions on aspects of the policy where there was disagreement (e.g., requirements for evidence, period of extension) would continue to be reviewed. There was agreement that these discussions should not have an impact on the fundamental changes required to the systems, and that the systems work required should progress.

A revised policy, an update regarding system and process readiness and confirmation of communications resource to build and execute a communication plan, is expected to be brought to the Committee for approval at its next meeting in March.

	CSE representatives left the meeting at this point in order to attend another meeting.	
4.	**4.1 Matters Arising** • **Convener's communications** - **Update regarding Assessment and Feedback groups**: Senate Education Committee (SEC) approved last week a proposal to dissolve the Assessment and Feedback Guidance, Procedures, Data, Systems and Evaluation (AFGPDSE) Group and reconstitute the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group with a refreshed membership and remit focused on delivering the outcome of the QESR and longer-term ambitions for assessment and feedback. This Group will continue to report to SEC. - **Updated Guidance for Senate Standing Committee members**: Following feedback from members of Standing Committees, further information has been added to the Senate Standing Committees' Members' Guidance to clarify members' constituencies and methods of consultation for ensuring representation of these constituencies. Any member who is uncertain about their responsibilities, or about representing their constituency, should discuss these with the Convener of the relevant Committee. The guidance is published on the Committee website and Sharepoint. - **Ongoing consultation on amendments to the student appeal regulations:** Student representatives on APRC will be invited to meet with colleagues working on the student appeal regulations to discuss the proposed amendments. The regulations are expected to come to the Committee for approval at the meeting in March 2023. • **Actions log** The Convener provided a brief update on the action log, which is available on the Committee's new Sharepoint site. **4.2 Report of Convener's Action** • **Summary of approved concessions since last Committee meeting in November 2023** - Total number of individual student concessions approved: 13 (10 PGR, 2 PGT, 1 UG). One of these cases was reviewed by the full Committee due to impact from industrial action. - Total number of cohort concessions approved: 1 (UG cohort). The case was reviewed by the full Committee as it related to the role of an External Examiner, which affected a cohort of students. • **Updates to membership of Student Appeal Sub-Committees:** There are new members from CMVM on both the Undergraduate and the Postgraduate Student Appeal Committees. The updated membership was approved by both the Convener and Vice-Convener by Convener's Action in December 2023.	**Verbal Update**

5.	**Academic Year dates 2025/26 and Provisional Academic Year Dates 2026/27** To approve	APRC 23/24 5C
	Presenter: Cristina Matthews	
	The paper requests Committee approval for the academic year dates for 2025/26, which were approved as provisional dates at the 26 January 2023 meeting of APRC. The paper also requests Committee approval to amend the provisional academic year dates for 2026/2027. The dates for 2026/27 will remain as provisional and the period for revision and for the examination diet in December 2026 will remain as 'to be confirmed' pending the outcomes of an on-going review of the Exams Service.	
	The Committee agreed to carry forward the point made at previous meetings that a two-day revision period is not adequate, and this should be reflected when the dates for 2026/27 come back for final approval. The Committee did not agree on what the adequate minimum period would be, and this will need to be considered once there is more clarity on what options are available for the examination period.	
	Members noted that there needs to be at least one working day between the end of the December examination period and the winter closure of the University, in order to allow Schools to collect and receive examination papers. It was noted that the Committee has not previously been consulted on the University winter closure dates, but that this can be noted when the dates for 2026/27 return to the Committee for approval.	
	There was discussion regarding the need to have a later date for Welcome Week 2026, as requested by ACE (Estates and Accommodation, Catering and Events), and whether it was the Committee's responsibility to accommodate the requirements of the Fringe Festival. The Convener noted that while the Fringe Festival was not the business of the Committee, it is the responsibility of the Committee to approve dates that the University will be able to implement.	
	There was also discussion of how the October break in teaching for online PGT programmes align with the different sets of school holidays. It was clarified that the academic year dates approved by the Committee do not include a break week in October, and that Colleges and/or Schools have the ability to determine when those breaks should be.	
	The paper also lists the programmes with non-standard academic year dates, and members were asked to check if this information is still correct at the time of the meeting. One member noted that the online MBA programme is not included in the appendix, but is listed on the website. Another member noted that the MSc Veterinary Epidemiology (Online Learning) should be removed from the list as the programme is no longer running.	
	The Committee agreed to **approve** the academic year dates for 2025/26. The Committee agreed to **approve** the provisional academic year dates for 2026/2027 as proposed, and noted that these dates will need to return to the Committee for approval as final dates, including further detail regarding the period of revision and examination diet for December 2026.	
	Action: APRC administrator to update the list of programmes with non-standard dates and request an update to these on the University website.	

	Action: APRC administrator to request an update to the provisional academic year dates for 2026/2027 published on the University website.	
6.	**Committee priorities - mid-year reflection** To comment **Presenter:** Professor Patrick Hadoke The Convener noted that the purpose of the mid-year reflection was to provide further insight to Senate on the Committee's activities this year and an update on progress of the Committee priorities. Members were invited to comment on the paper before the update to Senate. The Convener noted that the induction to Senate members may not provide sufficient information on what the Committee does. Members welcomed the paper and agreed that it should provide helpful information to Senate members. There was discussion regarding the approvals process for papers related to the Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP) and members agreed that the approvals process had not been clear at the Senate session on CTP in January. The Convener clarified that the next step will be for the archetypes and framework papers to go to SEC, who would make recommendations to Senate. The papers would then go to Senate for approval. The policies within the remit of APRC that have an interaction with CTP (see paper APRC 23/24 5D) are an enaction of, and therefore dependent on, the information in the archetypes and frameworks that are to be approved at Senate. The Convener noted that there would be further opportunity to discuss this in more detail at the next Senate meeting in February. The Convener noted that the amendment to the Committee priorities that was approved at the Senate meeting in October 2023 was an amendment in relation to quality assurance, which would be within the remit of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) rather than the remit of this Committee. Although the paper that carried the amendment was not approved by Senate, the reflection of the impact of industrial action in 2022/23 on quality assurance is being addressed and has been explicitly included as part of the School and College Quality Assurance reports. No further comments.	**APRC 23/24 5D**
7.	**Any Other Business** - The Committee discussed the two concessions that had been circulated for comment via email to members. The concessions had been circulated to members, rather than reviewed by Convener's action, either because the concession affected a cohort of students, or because the concession was in the context of industrial action. Members at the meeting agreed to approve both concessions, although the deadline for comments via email had not yet passed, so the outcome of the concession requests would be confirmed via email.	

	- One member noted that approval of one of these concessions would have been more straightforward if information supplied by the Convener at the meeting had been available on the form. The Convener agreed that revision of the forms should be considered to ensure appropriate information was supplied by the College requesting the concession. **Action:** APRC Convener and Administrator to review and update APRC concession forms. - One member noted a paper that came to the Committee in May 2023 about updates to the Programme and Course Approval and Management policy. The paper was accepted in May 2023 but progress has stalled. **Action:** Academic Services to follow up with Nichola Kett regarding updates to the Programme and Course Approval and Management policy.	
Date of next meeting Thursday 21 March 2024, 2-5pm, Boardroom, Chancellor's Building, BioQuarter campus		