

Meeting of the Senatus Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC)

**Online meeting via Teams
Monday 31 July 11-12:30pm**

Confirmed minute

<p>Present: Dr Aidan Brown Dr Adam Bunni Professor Jamie Davies Dr Murray Earle Professor Patrick Hadoke (Vice-Convenor) Clair Halliday Carl Harper Karen Howie</p> <p>Sarah McAllister Dr Donna Murray</p> <p>Dr Paul Norris (Convenor) Callum Paterson</p> <p>Rachael Quirk Professor Tim Stratford Dr Uzma Tufail-Hanif Stephen Warrington Kirsty Woomble</p> <p>Substitute members present: Isabel Lavers Katy McPhail Dr Paul Skehel</p> <p>In attendance: Lauren Byrne Lucy Evans Professor Colm Harmon Olivia Hayes (Minutes)</p> <p>Apologies: Professor Jeremy Crang Alexandra Laidlaw Professor Antony Maciocia Dr Deborah Shaw</p>	<p>Elected member of Senate Head of Academic Policy and Regulation, Academic Services Dean of Taught Education (CMVM) Elected member of Senate Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research Experience (CMVM) The Advice Place, Deputy Manager Vice President Education, Students' Association Head of Digital Learning Applications and Media, Information Services Head of Student Support Operations, Registry Services Head of Taught Student Development, Institute for Academic Development Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval (CAHSS) Academic Engagement Coordinator, Students' Association (Co-opted member) Head of Taught Student Administration & Support (CAHSS) Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE) Elected member of Senate Dean of Student Experience (CSE) Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS)</p> <p>Academic Administration Manager (CMVM) Deputy Head of Academic Affairs (CSE) Senior Tutor, Deanery of Biomedical Sciences</p> <p>Vice-President Welfare, Students' Association Deputy Secretary, Students Vice-Principal, Students Academic Policy Officer, Academic Services</p> <p>Dean of Students (CAHSS) Head of Academic Affairs (CSE) Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE) Dean of Students (CMVM)</p>
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1.	Welcome and Apologies
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	<p>The Convener opened the meeting and extended his thanks to the Committee and substitute members for attending the additional meeting of APRC to consider the Exceptional Circumstances Policy.</p> <p>Thanks were extended to the presenters who were in attendance.</p>
2.	<p>Minutes of previous meetings For approval</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 May 2023 (enclosed) - APRC 22/23 13A – CLOSED • 9 June 2023 (enclosed) - APRC 22/23 13B • 23 June 2023 (enclosed) - APRC 22/23 13C – CLOSED <p>The Committee approved the minutes of the 25 May, 9 June and 23 June meetings as presented and no objections were raised. The minutes of the 30 June meeting were not included with the papers for the 31 July meeting.</p>
3.	<p>Update on concessions related to industrial action – Verbal update To note</p> <p>The Committee have received all concessions relating to industrial action since the last meeting of APRC. There are currently seven individual student concessions with the Committee for comment and members were reminded of the 5pm, 31 July deadline for responses.</p>
For approval	
4.	<p>Exceptional Circumstances Policy – ARPC 22/23 13A For approval</p> <p>The Convener outlined the process for considering this item for approval during the meeting. The Convener noted that following discussion of the item there would be an opportunity for discussion without paper authors present and ahead of a final decision being taken on the policy.</p> <p>Ahead of introducing this item, Professor Colm Harmon extended his thanks to Paul Norris for his Convenorship of the Committee.</p> <p>Professor Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students and Ms Lucy Evans, Deputy Secretary, Students introduced the item. They extended their thanks to the Committee for the discussion at the 30 June meeting and noted there is limited scope for substantial revision to the policy. However they have made some changes in response to some comments made by the Committee.</p> <p>The current system is creating a very challenging learning and teaching environment and there is a widespread view that change is needed. These changes are proposed with good intention. Professor Harmon and Ms Evans have met with the Students' Association and committed to addressing challenges experienced by specific cohorts of students, for example disabled and widening participation students, and which are not appropriately managed via the Exceptional Circumstances Policy.</p> <p>They noted that, while the revised policy will not cover every single student and every eventuality, it is intended to provide support to the majority of students. They committed to continuing work to improve service and address the gaps in support for specific cohorts of students covered under the Equality Act and Ms Evans outlined work that is already underway with colleagues across the University.</p>

The Committee discussed the paper. The following points were made:

- There is agreement among the Committee that the existing policy presents significant challenges which is difficult to manage across the University. The Committee welcomed some of the changes made in response to feedback from the previous meeting.
- Student representation on the Committee expressed concern regarding the policy and noted that, whilst they understand it is not the intention, the revised policy could appear punitive and would negatively affect the student experience. They expressed a concern that students do not see the policy as an avenue to resolve their issues and noted that introducing a new policy which they believe to be not fit for purpose in the broader context of a new Student Support Model, Marking and Assessment Boycott would further exacerbate current student issues.

They noted that an open letter signed by 49 representatives of the student body provides commentary on the concerns and has been shared with the Committee.

Further time and engagement with the paper authors and the Committee on this policy is required to address the concerns raised.

Student representatives on the Committee highlighted the following specific areas as requiring further consideration: days available for an extension; minor illnesses are not included as a valid reason and this may disproportionately affect particular student groups; self-certification is not available for examinations; clarification is required on evidence provided by Student Advisors; the requirement for certified translations and the cost associated with these; the requirement to obtain medical evidence and the cost and administrative challenges in getting an appointment with a GP; concerns regarding the suitability of requesting evidence in relation to a close family illness; the ability for student parents to access a GP and evidence for children suffering from common illnesses; ability for students to access evidence employed in particular industries or unstable gig-economy positions; clarification is required on the evidence that can be provided by family or friends; the Sports Union requested clarification is required on how the revised policy interacts with the Elite Athlete policy.

There is an overarching concern that a number of exceptions will be required to allow students to obtain support under this policy.

- College representatives on the Committee noted that Schools are broadly supportive of the new policy and support the general direction of travel whilst also sharing the concerns raised by the Committee regarding systems, workload and communications.
- There are systems changes required to support the implementation of a new policy for the start of the new academic year. It is likely that an off-system solution will be required, such as SharePoint, to support the implementation of the new policy until the system changes required are developed and user testing is undertaken. A clear timetable and scoping document is required to understand the systems changes and timelines involved in these.
- Additional time is required to give adequate consideration to the challenges raised and for systems to be developed to support the implementation of a new policy. There is a concern regarding the introduction of a new policy and the proximity to the start of the new academic year with assessments likely to already be confirmed for the year ahead.
- There are concerns regarding the increased workload required across a number of University departments to support the implementation of a new policy and any associated changes to information, processes or ways of working to support this. This includes, but is not limited to staff in Teaching Offices, Student Advisors, Cohort Leads, the ESC Service, Appeals and Complaints case workers, and the Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS). Particular concern was raised regarding the impact on Student Advisors and the Disability Learning and Support Service.
- The communication campaign required to support the implementation of a new policy requires strengthening. Students are currently on vacation leave and focussed on matters relating to the Marking and Assessment Boycott and progression. Many students will be expecting to access support in line with previous years in the new academic year

and significant work is required to engage with the student population and educate them on a new policy and the processes likely to be associated with implementation of this. Should a new policy be approved, outreach work to target specific student groups which have relied on existing policies for support should be undertaken with a degree of leniency during the implementation period.

- The Committee reflected on the risk of maintaining the status quo as an alternative to approving a new policy where systems and processes are not yet ready to support implementation. The Committee considered the widespread and significant concern raised with the existing policy and known associated challenges in contrast with the concerns raised regarding the new policy, the unknown challenges this may present and the preparedness of systems and services to support the implementation of this.
- The Committee acknowledged the risk that if a new policy is not approved and the status quo remains, Schools and Course Organisers may take individual action to address challenges experienced under the existing system, such as limiting or not permitting extensions for particular courses or assessments.
- The Curriculum Transformation project is currently underway and this is expected to affect assessment design. Future changes to policies relating to assessment are likely to be required to respond to any changes arising from Curriculum Transformation and the pedagogical implications of this. It was highlighted the divergence of student experience across programmes with one example given where students in a particular programme having 52 assessments compared with 10 assessments over the course of a year.
- Concerns were raised regarding the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) prepared alongside the new policy. The EqIA does not provide statistics to allow the Committee to adequately assess the impact or accessibility of the new policy and associated processes on specific student groups, including disabled students. Inadequate consideration of the EqIA presents a risk to the University and where students with protected characteristics are not considered. A member shared a series of links to additional information on good practice for supporting disabled students and which are not featured in the policy.
- There were a series of agreements reached within the CE & SC Task Group and which some members noted they would like to see considered for future implementation. These included a revision to the wording of special circumstances outcomes; a sliding scale of late penalties; a justification for why an extension of three days instead of four days; and that self-certification to covering a limited time period, rather than a single day.
- The duration of extension was highlighted as inappropriate for students on a part-time online programme. These students require extensions of seven days to support the format and specific student type.

In addition to the comments raised, a small number of drafting points were raised by the Committee. These included:

- The use of 'case-by-case' in the policy requires further consideration.
- Additional signposting information is required in section 7 of the policy.

The Convener invited the paper authors to respond to the comments raised and they made the following points in response:

- A strong commitment to address the gaps in support for specific student groups has been made and there is work underway with individual colleagues to progress this work.
- The paper authors noted the concerns raised regarding workload, systems and communications and reiterated their commitment to addressing these.
- The policy as proposed has the support of the Heads of Colleges and Heads of Schools have also expressed their support for the policy as presented.
- The policy brings the University into closer alignment with the approach taken across the sector but maintains a more generous approach than is offered by many institutions across the UK.

	<p>Professor Harmon and Ms Evans left the meeting at the conclusion of the general discussion and the Convener agreed to update them once the Committee reached a decision on this item.</p> <p>In final discussion, the following points were raised::</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an acknowledgement that policies at other institutions within the UK are more conservative than the policy currently in place at Edinburgh; however, the systems and processes are likely already in place to support these policies. • The challenges associated with the existing policy are known and are a less daunting alternative to the points raised with regard to the new policy. • There is insufficient time to adequately address the concerns relating to operational and systems readiness, student communications and preparedness and significant administrative workload required to support implementation of a new policy for the start of the new academic year. • There is general support for the policy to return to the Committee to consider for implementation in 2024. • There is strong support to continue any work towards closing the gap for specific student groups including disabled and widening participation students. • The Committee normally reaches decisions by consensus and would not routinely vote on items unless a clear consensus cannot be reached. <p>In summing up the Convener noted that there is support among members of the Committee for the general direction of travel of the policy, and reservations among others regarding the policy as presented. There was support among some members for introduction of the policy in 2023 however those members in favour agreed that a decision by consensus was preferable and therefore a vote would not be necessary unless a clear consensus could not be reached. There is consensus across the Committee that the concerns raised regarding the operational elements relating to systems, workload and communications required to support implementation are significant and therefore the Committee agreed that they are not in a position to approve the policy for implementation in 2023.</p> <p>The Committee did not approve the policy as presented for implementation in September 2023 and no objections to this decision were raised.</p> <p>Action: The Convener agreed to inform the paper authors of the decision taken by the Committee following the conclusion of the meeting.</p>
5.	<p>Student Discipline Committee Membership – APRC 22/23 13B For approval</p> <p>The Convener, Dr Paul Norris invited the Committee to approve this item as presented.</p> <p>The Committee approved the paper and updated membership as presented and no were objections raised.</p>
6.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Thanks to departing members Thanks and best wishes were extended to Sarah McAllister for her service on the Committee. The Student Administration representative on APRC would be finalised in due course.</p> <p>Thanks and best wishes were extended to Dr Paul Norris for his service on the Committee and special thanks were extended for his service as Convener of APRC. Dr Norris reflected on his experience on the Committee and extended his thanks to members for their support during his term as Convener.</p>

Date of the next meeting

The first meeting of the 2023/24 Academic Year will take place on Tuesday 8 August. Members were invited to contact Olivia Hayes if they have any questions or have not received the invitation.