Senate Committees'
e-Newsletter

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of the Senate Committees' Newsletter for 2018/19. This publication aims to keep the University community better informed about discussions and decisions occurring within Senate (the University's supreme academic body) and its Standing Committees (the four Committees to which Senate has delegated its authority in particular areas). We hope you find it interesting and informative.

This newsletter is produced by Academic Services.

Please direct any queries or suggestions to Philippa.Ward@ed.ac.uk.

Further information on Senate and its Standing Committees is available at http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/committees.

Report from Learning & Teaching Committee (LTC)

Responsible for undergraduate, taught postgraduate and other forms of academic provision, apart from postgraduate research and higher degrees.

Documentation for the meeting held on 14 November is available at http://edin.ac/1tHNcjB

Key topics considered included:

Research into Undergraduate Non-Continuation
(https://edin.ac/2rxuGwO, Paper B)

Non-continuation statistics for undergraduate students at UK (including Scottish) universities are coming under increasing scrutiny, and the University's non-continuation rates are less positive than our comparators'. LTC considered the outputs of research undertaken by the University to help it better understand its patterns of non-continuation.

The Committee noted that age, gender, ethnicity, disability and University School are broadly not influential in non-continuation. School attended before coming to University, identifying as 'first in family' and socio-economic factors are much more influential. Those in receipt of bursaries are more likely to continue than those who do not receive bursaries. Key reasons for non-continuation identified by Schools were changes in students' academic choices, financial, health and other personal reasons, and within the College of Science and Engineering, difficulties with the Mathematics requirements of programmes.

LTC agreed a number of actions in response to the outputs of the research including investigating the impact of additional factors on non-continuation, gathering best practice and giving further thought to the structure of the Year 1 curriculum.

Proposal to Review the University Common Marking Schemes
(https://edin.ac/2rxuGwO, Paper C)

There is currently dissatisfaction with some aspects of the University's Common Marking Schemes, particularly with the number of schemes (five), and with the schemes themselves when they are being used for qualitative or holistic assessment.

Some work in this area was undertaken by a previous subgroup of Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC), but LTC has agreed that it is timely to look at the schemes again. As such, further scoping work will now be carried out. This work will include consulting staff and students, and will take into account developments within the Higher Education sector. The work will report by the end of academic year 2018/19.

CSPC is also undertaking some exploratory work on taught postgraduate assessment and progression (in particular the relationship between course pass marks and progression hurdles). Those aspects of CSPC's work that can be taken forward without affecting the broader work being undertaken by LTC will continue.

Impact of the Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS)
(https://edin.ac/2rxuGwO, Paper D)

Peer Learning and Support schemes aim to create peer-led, safe, confidential and informal spaces for students to get academic and social support from each other and from more experienced student volunteers. The Department of Peer Learning and Support has undertaken a research project to investigate the impact of the University's Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS). The findings were presented to LTC and showed that there have been increases both in the number of schemes operating, and in the number of students participating in schemes. The research (based on investigation into 5 courses) indicated that satisfaction with schemes is high, and that there is a strong correlation between participation in a scheme and academic success. Students participating in schemes report an increased sense of community and belonging, and those involved as PALS leaders develop strong leadership skills. Barriers to participation include lack of School or staff support in some areas, and limited funding.

Peer support is viewed by LTC as being an essential component of the University's student support structures, and could be of particular value to those students at risk of withdrawing as discussed above.

Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Student Employment
(https://edin.ac/2rxuGwO, Paper E)

LTC agreed that the University's advisory guidance for the maximum number of hours of paid employment to be undertaken by PGT students should be the same as that for undergraduate students, namely 15 hours per week during semester time. It should be noted that this is advisory only, and applies only to full-time, on-campus students.

For further information about any LTC matter, please contact Philippa.Ward@ed.ac.uk

Nov / Dec 2018
Meetings covered by the November / December 2018 Edition

Date	Committee
6 November	REC
14 November	LTC
22 November	CSPC
6 December	QAC

Report from Curriculum & Student Progression Committee (CSPC)

Responsible for the academic regulatory framework, apart from those aspects which are primarily parts of the Quality Assurance Framework.

Documentation for the meeting held on 22 November 2018 is available at http://edin.ac/2y83LIO

Key points discussed included:

Service Excellence and Special Circumstances
(https://edin.ac/2rwk559, Paper A)

CSPC is continuing to engage with the Service Excellence Programme (SEP) on the proposed academic policy changes to the Special Circumstances and Coursework Extension process. The Committee is supportive of the changes in principle, and has highlighted various areas for further work and clarification prior to approving the policy dimensions of the final proposals.

Boards of Studies Terms of Reference
(https://edin.ac/2rwk559, Paper B)

CSPC approved a simplified Boards of Studies Terms of Reference document. This will now be approved by Court and Senate by resolution.

Academic Year Dates
(https://edin.ac/2rwk559, Paper D)

CSPC noted that the pattern of the academic year in 2020/21 will potentially result in a truncated revision and examination diet in Semester 1. The Committee is therefore exploring possible models for the revision and examination timetable to address this issue prior to finalising the dates for the academic year.

Review of the Code of Student Conduct

CSPC noted that Academic Services is in the process of consulting the Students' Association and key staff involved in handling student discipline matters on proposed changes to the Code of Student Conduct. CSPC is due to consider the proposed changes at its meeting in January 2019. If any Schools wish to highlight issues for Academic Services to take into account during the review, please contact Adam.Bunni@ed.ac.uk.

For further information about any CSPC matter, please contact theresa.sheppard@ed.ac.uk

Report from Quality Assurance Committee

Responsible for the University's academic quality assurance framework

Documentation for the meeting held on 6 December 2018 is available at http://edin.ac/1MUwq8L

External Examiner Reports
(https://edin.ac/2rxCij0, Paper C)

QAC considered an analysis of data from the External Examiner Reporting System (EERS) covering undergraduate programmes for the academic year 2016/17. The report noted a high number of commendations across the University and a low number of issues requiring attention. Of the issues highlighted by External Examiners, the most frequently mentioned related to the provision of information to External Examiners, and how Schools had addressed issues External Examiners had raised in previous reports.

Annual Reports on Academic Appeals, Student Discipline and Complaint Handling
(https://edin.ac/2rxCij0, Papers D (closed), E (closed) & F)

The Committee considered the annual reports on Academic Appeals, Student Discipline and Complaint Handling. There are some signs of a plateauing in the volume of academic appeals and academic misconduct cases following an upward trend in recent years. An increasing number of student conduct cases relate to allegations of violent or offensive behaviour, including sexual misconduct, although it should be noted that this remains a very small number, and a small minority of the conduct cases investigated.

Degree Classification Outcomes
(https://edin.ac/2rxCij0, Paper J (closed))

The Committee discussed the recently published UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) report looking at the reasons behind the increase in the number of graduates receiving first and upper-second class degrees. Some of the recommendations coming out of the report are modest, while others are potentially far-reaching. The University will participate in a UK-wide consultation on the subject early in the new year.

QAC continues to monitor Subject Areas across the University for patterns in degree classification outcomes which diverge substantially from either the institution average or disciplinary comparators. To this end, QAC approved responses from four University areas that it had identified as outliers.

For further information about any QAC matter, please contact b.connolly@ed.ac.uk

Report from Researcher Experience Committee (REC)

Responsible for postgraduate research degree training, higher degrees and provision for the training of other, early career researchers.

Documentation for the meeting held on 6 November 2018 is available at http://edin.ac/1Q528n5

Research Excellence Framework – REF 2021

The REF is the system used to assess the quality of research in UK Higher Education institutions. It is undertaken by the 4 UK Higher Education funding bodies: Research England, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE).

Unlike previous REF exercises, the University must submit all eligible staff to REF 2021. Early career researchers who are independent researchers will be included. Governance and Strategic Planning (GaSP) are developing an institutional code of practice on selection, and are collaborating with the Research Support Office on a policy on the responsible use of research metrics. As in previous REFs, the University will submit to the REF the number of doctoral degrees awarded per subject-based unit of assessment. PhD Boards of Examiners should be aware of the deadline (31 July 2020) for recording eligibility to receive a PhD in EUCLID, as this is used to count the number of degrees for the purposes of the REF.

Three Minute Thesis (3MT)

Two of the University's PhD students were successful in the national and international 3MT competitions: Owen James won the UK Vitae competition, and Phoebe Kirkwood was runner-up in the international Universitas 21 competition. The 3MT competition requires doctoral researchers to present their research in 3 minutes using only 1 slide. Edinburgh has run a 3MT competition each year since 2013, and more information on the competition is available on the Institute for Academic Development website: http://edin.ac/2AwzQNq

Excellence in Doctoral Research & Career Development Programme Update

The Excellence in Doctoral Education and Career Development Programme is a comprehensive programme of work approved and governed by REC. The Programme focuses on three specific and interrelated areas of the postgraduate research experience: supervisor support and training; mentorship and wellbeing; and personal and professional development record.

- *Supervisor support and training* – A task group of REC has consulted with stakeholders on CPD framework concepts. The consultation closed recently, and the task group is in the process of analysing responses.

- *Mentorship and wellbeing* – establishing training routes for supervisors dealing with students with mental health issues continues to be a priority.

- *Personal and professional development record* – recommendations are being considered by the Service Excellence Programme.

Service Excellence Programme (SEP) – Postgraduate Research Strand

This strand of work is in the design phase, and REC members have participated in process workshops looking at appointment of supervisors and milestones, student progression review, and thesis submission and examination.

For further information about any REC matter, please contact susan.hunter5@ed.ac.uk

Senate Committee Dates for 2018/19

Senate	E-Senate	LTC	CSPC	REC	QAC
6 Feb 2019	15-23 Jan 2019	23 Jan 19	24 Jan 19	15 Jan 19	28 Feb 19
		13 Mar 19	21 Mar 19	12 Mar 19	25 Apr 19
29 May 2019	7-15 May 2019	22 May	30 May 19	14 May 19	23 May 19

Further Information

The next University of Edinburgh Learning and Teaching Conference will take place on Wednesday 19 June 2019 in the John MacIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls of Residence. Please save the date.