

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Education Committee

Thursday 12th September 2024, 9am-12noon
Hybrid meeting: Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House
and via Microsoft Teams

1. Attendance

Present:	Position:
Professor Colm Harmon	Vice Principal, Students (Convener)
Professor Tina Harrison	Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) (Vice-Convener)
Professor Sian Bayne	Assistant Principal Digital Education
Professor Laura Bradley	Representative of CAHSS (Postgraduate Research)
Professor Mary Brennan	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)
Marianne Brown	Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling
Dr Shane Collins	Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions
Lucy Evans	Deputy Secretary, Students
Shelagh Green	Director for Careers and Employability
Professor Paddy Hadoke	Representative of CMVM (Postgraduate Research)
Professor James Hopgood	Senate Representative
Dr Lisa Kendall	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)
Nichola Kett	Director of Academic Services
Professor Linda Kirstein	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)
Alex Laidlaw	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching)
Professor Jason Love	Head of School, CSE
Professor Velda McCune	Deputy Director, Institute for Academic Development
Callum Paterson	EUSA Academic Engagement and Policy Coordinator
Professor Jamie Pearce	Representative of CSE (Postgraduate Research)
Professor Jo Shaw	Head of School, CAHSS
Dr Tamara Trodd	Senate Representative
Dylan Walch	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Professor Patrick Walsh	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)
Patrick Jack	Committee Secretary, Academic Services
Apologies:	
Professor Gill Aitken	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching)
Dr Melissa Highton	Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Division of Information Services; Assistant Principal (Online and Open Learning)
Professor Mike Shipston	Head of Deanery, CMVM
In attendance:	
Mteeve Amugune	Senate Task and Finish Group Member
Professor Sharon Cowan	Senate Task and Finish Group Member
Teresa Ironside	Director of Data Science Education, Bayes Centre
Stuart Nicol	Head of eLearning Services, Educational Design and Engagement

2. Minutes of meeting held on 9th May 2024

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 9th May 2024.

3. Matters Arising

- **Artificial Intelligence / Edinburgh Language Models**

The Committee was informed that the University is seeking to reframe its staff and student-facing guidance around generative artificial intelligence (AI). Professor Michael Rovatsos will lead on taking this work forward over the course of 2024/25, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of AI's role across the University's areas of business. Members were informed that Information Services (IS) has launched Edinburgh Language Models (ELM), the University's large-language model interface. The platform currently permits users to upload documents, with proposals to roll this out further to include the upload of spreadsheets and websites in due course. ELM provides safeguards around the use of AI, such as preventing the need to share proprietary data with external AI engines, as well as saving staff and student expenditure on external AI systems.

Although ELM has been rolled out to all staff, it was noted that there are mixed staff perceptions to its use by students across the three Colleges. The Convener expressed concern around this reception, noting that ELM should ideally be available to all students in order to prevent inequities in student experience and digital poverty across the University.

While members were informed that the University's revised AI guidance will seek to clarify how to use AI ethically, as well as its wider incentives, it was suggested that revised guidance should be in place prior to a co-ordinated rollout to students across the institution. Members emphasised the need for consistent guidance to be made available across the institution. It was noted that clearer guidance for the use of AI tools in writing PhD theses would be welcomed.

Members raised several further points, including: safeguarding against students unknowingly falling foul of academic misconduct while using AI; the varying degrees of AI use across different formats of assessment; external examiner and professional body interest in the extent and approach to which AI is used in assessment across the University. While the need to guard against plagiarism and to ensure students continue to demonstrate knowledge and original expression within assessment was flagged, it was noted that the University should not be overly prescriptive in terms of assessment format. It was further noted that more of an onus should be placed on the process of assessment rather than its final product.

The Assistant Principal Digital Education informed the Committee of details of project work she is leading on alongside colleagues within the Edinburgh Futures Institute, which centres on supporting and enabling creative teaching innovation via generative AI. The project will seek to develop the University's capacity to reflect creatively about human/machine partnerships in education innovation, while supporting staff skills development and capacity for engaging with AI across teaching, assessment and feedback. Members were further

informed that workshops will be held in November to help staff develop ideas around using AI innovatively within their teaching, as well as building propositions to develop apps over the course of 2024/25. Further details of the project and key dates were shared with members.

The Convener noted the Committee's support for ELM to be made available to all students. It was suggested that the University's Chief Information Officer note the views of the Committee with regard to delivering updated AI guidance and co-ordinated communications to staff and students in advance of the wider rollout of ELM.

- **Senate Representative Views**

The Committee noted that two papers had been submitted for discussion by two elected representatives of Senate on Senate Education Committee (SEC), relating to the evaluation of the student support model and the use of in-person examinations. It was further noted that these specific papers were not included within the meeting agenda; rather two similar papers would be covered during the first two meetings of SEC during 2024/25. The Convener informed members of constructive email discussions regarding how best to capture and reflect the views of elected members of Senate across the Senate standing committees and the potential mechanisms in which to achieve this. Various approaches were discussed, such as providing a routine item for Senate representatives under matters arising, or alternatively providing clearer direction for Senate representatives to work with specific colleagues on standing committees to help foster more routine collective feedback. Members noted that Registry Services would take steps to further publicise the deadline for submitting papers to SEC.

The need to ensure consistent practice across the three standing committees was noted. This is particularly challenging for SEC as it receives less routine business annually compared to the other two standing committees. It was highlighted to members that Senate representatives do help set the priorities of the standing committees and can proactively contribute to the SEC forward agenda. Senate members are additionally encouraged to raise issues with School office-bearers and College Deans.

The Convener welcomed the aspiration to better triage items tabled to SEC by Senate members and noted the value of pulse checks with Senate representatives regarding committee business. The Convener informed members that further reflection around this would be required with the Conveners of the other Senate standing committees.

Action: Convener to discuss Senate representative views with APRC and SQAC Conveners.
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Action: Committee Secretary to share the SEC forward agenda via the SEC SharePoint platform.

- **Tutor and Demonstrator Update**

The Committee was informed that the University's Staff Experience Committee has approved the creation of a standing sub-committee to oversee the development of governance underpinning tutors and demonstrators. Work is ongoing to clarify the membership of the sub-committee, which is due to hold its inaugural meeting in November 2024. Sub-committee

activity will be reported back to SEC in due course. Members were further informed that an online training module created by the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) is now live. This module could form part of the University's baseline training for tutors and demonstrators, in alignment with discipline-specific training opportunities within Schools.

The Convener noted the requirement to maintain momentum on the creation and monitoring of training provision for tutors and demonstrators, particularly taking into account the QESR recommendation relating to PGR students who teach. The need to support Colleges in helping embed this new framework once it is in place was noted, ensuring its successful percolation through to the School-level.

4. Substantive Items

4.1 Student Experience Update: Student Support Model Project Closure and Handover

The paper was presented by the Deputy Secretary, Students who noted the project's positive impact on both staff and students. Members were informed that the model was implemented via two phases. Issues arising during phase one, such as responsibilities of student advisors, were addressed prior to the launch of phase two. Members noted that some challenges remain, such as peer support, the rollout of the case management system and the cohort lead role. The need to further support cohort leads to enhance student engagement, as well as the wish to extend the support model to PGR students, was noted.

The Deputy Secretary, Students highlighted an article composed by the School of Informatics which provides reflections on the implementation of the model within the School. The article details positive feedback relating to student advisors, as well as the consistency and reliability of the model. This reinforces wider feedback, where it is felt that progress has been made regarding the previous perceived absence of academic involvement in student support.

Members were informed that University leadership are aware of the importance of continuing to embed this new model and the challenging resources framework is also recognised. The principles of the project will continue to be upheld, with continued oversight at the University and College levels. Feedback is being sought from key roles as part of the continuous evaluation and monitoring process.

Committee members subsequently raised the following comments:

- The project has been regarded positively within CAHSS but it is noted that there is much work still to be completed. The College is seeking to holistically embed and evaluate an all-encompassing model, particularly as the vast majority of student interactions are with teaching teams. Co-ordinated work within the College is being taken forward via its Education Committee.
- Complex concession cases arise at particular points in the academic year. These cases involve students with complex mental health issues and there is concern that these students are at risk of falling between the cracks as the support model is not sufficiently flexible to meet their needs. This issue is amplified for tier four students. Early awareness of these cases has improved via triage by the Student Wellbeing Service.

- Directors of Students within Schools require a strong networking space to work collectively, as well as a platform to develop leadership skills via sharing of best practice.
- From a School perspective, the professionalism of student advisors has added substantial capacity of professional services to deliver rounded support. Challenges remain with regard to the cohort lead role, albeit implementation is still at an early stage. Encouraging students to engage in non-compulsory activity remains a challenge, particularly those from WP and care experienced backgrounds. Cohort lead activities are increasingly being built into workload planning.
- There are concerns around inconsistencies in the application of the model, resulting in some staff experience inequity. The need to extend the model to PGR students and to better cater to online students was raised. Could more flexibility be offered in terms of meetings with cohort leads? One-to-one interviews for 1st year UG and PGT students with cohort leads have been found to be valuable for these cohorts.
- PGR student feedback has highlighted that they would welcome student advisors being made available to them.
- Some students in particular Schools who have experienced both models have highlighted their preference for the former PT system, noting their desire for maintaining personal working relationships with academic staff.
- Success of the model depends on culture changes within Schools. The requirements are resource-intensive for student advisors; further resource is required at the School-level to optimise the benefits of the model. Flexibility for School-level innovation should be present within the model.
- The University should continue to reinforce the importance of the role of academic advice, as part of the student interaction. Academic support for students they teach has not changed with the new model, but it is recognised that this requires further communication.

The Deputy Secretary, Students thanked members for their rich, valuable feedback. The need for further action around enhancing student engagement was noted, as well as evaluating whether the Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP) provides an opportunity to further embed the model into the curriculum. It was emphasised that it was never the intention of the model to remove academic engagement with students. At the University-level, there is a mindfulness to avoid being overly prescriptive and blocking potential School-level innovation, however this is balanced with the need for consistent application of the model across the institution. Feedback will be fed into discussions moving forward, particularly with relevant College groups to ensure that a collective approach is maintained. Work to continue ensuring all students across the University feel adequately supported remains a priority.

4.2 Student Surveys Update: Student Surveys 2024 Results and Responses

The Deputy Secretary, Students presented the paper, which reports the findings from 2024 national student surveys for taught students, notably the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and presents how the University intends to respond. Members were advised that data for surveys is available via the relevant BI dashboard.

The Committee was informed that NSS results were disappointing overall, with only small positive results in some Schools. Improving student experience is a core priority of the

University and there will be a continued focus on significant areas of work that aim to establish enhanced, long-term fundamental changes to student experience across the University, especially focused on assessment and feedback, student voice and course organisation. Evaluative work is available on the dashboard to show how the University's results compare with other higher education institutions (HEIs).

Members noted the following comments:

- In terms of the section on feedback timeliness, to what extent does this include extension and special circumstances (ESC) and Board of Examiner decisions? Efforts will be made to clarify this within the University's forthcoming revised Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities.
- There is concern amongst students around feedback being provided in sufficient time to be useful for the next assessment.
- The lack of reference to industrial action, and the impact of MAB and the COVID pandemic on feedback timeliness was noted. These were sector-wide challenges. It was noted that other HEIs still returned better scores despite navigating the same challenges.
- Student interpretation of NSS questions remains challenging for the sector. Utilisation of data internal to the University is highly important and building data infrastructures to support this is essential.
- How will we improve the organisation of courses and communication?
- Disheartening comments were noted relating to EDI issues, specifically around language used in the classroom and lack of respect. This should be taken into specific consideration once the University's new EDI Lead is in post.

The Deputy Secretary, Students thanked members for their comments and highlighted the University's commitment to sharing further information on the ongoing work around timetabling and course enrolment as an example of University-wide improvements needed regarding course organisation. Members were informed that a project will be considered by the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB) in due course. Members seeking more information on this project work are welcome to contact the Deputy Secretary, Students directly.

4.3 Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030

The Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) provided the Committee with a verbal update on the progress of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Members were informed that work has continued to develop the Strategy over summer 2024. Two drop-in sessions for Heads of School were held and were well-attended, attracting helpful feedback. Heads of School are broadly supportive of the Strategy and agreed that radically different new practices were not required. The Strategy will serve to align with the endpoint of the University's Strategy 2030, and act as a precursor to an ambitious new strategy post-2030, once Curriculum Transformation is fully in place.

The differentiation between the Strategy and CTP was emphasised to members, as was the Strategy's intention to facilitate innovation at School level. The current lack of clarity within

the Strategy around balancing modes of delivery such as online, on-campus and hybrid was noted. The Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) will discuss this point, as well as balancing interdisciplinarity, directly with the Assistant Principal Digital Education in due course. The need to ensure that work to take the Strategy forward collectively with working groups such as the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDaMOB) was raised.

Schools and Colleges who wish to obtain more information regarding the development of the Strategy are welcome to contact the Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) directly. The Strategy's SharePoint platform was shared, with members being encouraged to engage with its content.

Members were informed that the implementation plan for the Strategy will soon commence. The finalised Strategy will be brought to SEC for approval at its next meeting in November. The Convener noted that the approval of the Strategy will enable it to act as a key point of reference for UIPB when examining project work and change management operations across the University.

4.4 Students' Association Sabbatical Officer Priorities 2024/25

The Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) VP Education presented the paper, detailing the priorities of the Students' Association VP Education and the Sabbatical team for 2024/25. Across the priorities, members were informed that emphasis is being placed on enhancing transparency in the University's decision making, setting high standards of service delivery and ensuring that students feel adequately supported to navigate the University's services. Further aims include strengthening student and staff partnerships at all levels of the University, as well as enhancing the provision of data available to Sabbatical Officers. The VP Education noted that EUSA and the University should work collectively in enhancing the impact of student voice, as well as better engaging with alumni.

4.5 Senate Education Committee Business 2024/25

The Convener presented the paper, outlining the current priorities and areas of focus identified by SEC for 2024/25 and how these will be progressed via committee business across the forthcoming academic year. Attention was drawn to members that the paper templates for each of the Senate standing committees now contain their remit, which helps ensure that items align with committee priorities. Members were informed that the forward agenda for SEC has been shared, which helps outline committee business and alignment with agreed areas of focus.

Members raised the following points relating to SEC's areas of focus and committee business across 2024/25:

- SEC should discuss international communities, as well as revisiting student mobility and study abroad.
- The proposition to remove estates and space as an area of focus was queried, as it is important for SEC to receive updates from the L&T Advisory and Space for Students groups, and how their work aligns with SEC's priorities. There is a strong connection

between education endeavours and space, while limitations on estate can prevent innovation.

- The physical and digital estate will be key enablers for the new L&T Strategy, for example via timetabling.
- Space, staff development and small group teaching all have an impact on student experience. SEC's priorities do not capture the more granular details of these matters.
- It is not currently clear how SEC should communicate discussions around space to relevant groups.
- There is a potential gap in terms of committee structures relating to L&T space. There must be a defined platform to raise issues and take matters forward relating to this matter. SEC must be the voice of the University from an educational perspective and should provide influence in decision making in order to minimise educational risk.
- It would be helpful to view the terms of reference of the University's Estates Committee and L&T Space Advisory Group in order to better understand SEC's responsibilities relating to the L&T space and how these groups can communicate with one another.
- Interest was noted in understanding how the University compares regarding estates management approaches with other HEIs that have a comparable student population. SEC could discuss this matter via this lens.
- There is a high volume of data available relating to teaching space, however this will be refined during 2024/25 in order to align with the new L&T Strategy.
- SEC should support extending these discussions to include PGR space. It would be helpful if surveys led by the University's Head of Space factored in PGR space. University strategy relating to space caters more to students who work in various locations across the University campus, whereas PGR students often work in one set space. While the Doctoral College is exploring this issue, it does not have the same weight as SEC.

The Committee agreed to retain all areas of focus as currently listed. The Convener noted that, while neither Senate or SEC controls resource, SEC could help control impetus over certain matters in order to help inform and influence groups that do have some control over resource. The Committee further agreed to explore how SEC can efficiently scale up items to become priorities for SEC or other committees as and when required.

5. Items for Information / Noting

5.1 Senate Committees' Internal Effectiveness Review 2023/24

The Committee noted the contents of the paper and endorsed its proposed actions. The actions were drawn from the responses received to the Senate standing committees internal effectiveness review conducted in summer 2024. Work will be undertaken to extend future review activity to relevant colleagues outwith Senate standing committees.

5.2 Learn Ultra: Evaluation Report

The Head of eLearning Services within Educational Design and Engagement presented the paper, providing members with an executive summary of the Learn Ultra evaluation report. Members were informed that the three-year Learning Ultra upgrade is complete. External

consultants have been reviewing the upgrade work which has helped provide recommendations for future change projects relating to IT. The link to the full report is provided within the paper and members were encouraged to share the full report with interested colleagues.

Members noted that the benefits to students as result of this project should be detailed within the executive summary. It was suggested that it would be helpful to align nomenclature to ensure that the consistency is applied across the University in terms of methodology. Functional issues have arisen in some areas during the transition from Learn to Learn Ultra, however Educational Design and Engagement are aware of this and are already in direct discussion with impacted colleagues.

It was noted that projects of this nature may meet the criteria for major strategic change project work applicable to UIPB. The Convener noted that it would be helpful if SEC received a presentation from the University's Interim Director of Strategic Change in order for members to better understand the workings of UIPB.

Action: The Convener to liaise with the Interim Director of Strategic Change in order to invite her to SEC to present on UIPB.

5.3 FLORA (Digital Exams) Update

The Committee noted the contents of the paper which contained a high-level summary of completed work and a summary of the recommended next steps for the project. Members noted that the paper had previously been discussed at the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group earlier in the month, during which a lack of consistency around terminology and understanding of what constitutes a digital exam was discussed. It was further noted that the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group intend to bring a paper on this matter to a future meeting of SEC.

The Head of eLearning Services within Educational Design and Engagement informed members that phase one of FLORA involved a platform review to help reduce the overlap between varying digital exam platforms. Varying platforms impact student experience and create challenges for colleagues who are tasked with providing support across multiple platforms. There is an aim to enhance training for staff around digital exam practice, as well as working with timetabling to explore cross-University support with regard to digital exams.

Members noted that it would be helpful to receive a better indication of the timescales attached to this work. Members were informed that timescales were not yet agreed as funding-related discussions are ongoing with Estates. Confusion was also highlighted around the definition of digital exams, which extends to scanning exam scripts and electronic marking. Conversely, it was suggested that other aspects such as moderation and the provision of feedback could be included, as well as listing relevant systems alongside their purpose and sustainability. While retaining exams as a fundamental format of assessment was noted, concerns were raised around the rise in digital exam requests, as well as their resource requirements and students using sub-standard hardware equipment.

5.4 Learning Analytics Policy Review 2024/25

The Committee noted the contents of the paper, detailing the remit and proposed membership for a group to review the University's learning analytics principles, policies and governance arrangements. Members were informed that the existing policy has not been reviewed since 2016/17, with a review now timely due to renewed focus within the University on data and learning analytics.

5.5 Membership and Terms of Reference 2024/25

The Committee noted the contents of the paper. It was noted that one vacancy on SEC remained following the elections for Senate representative to join Senate standing committees during 2024/25. Interest from Senate members in another opportunity being present to nominate themselves to vacant positions was noted.

Action: The Convener to raise the vacant position with the Chair of Senate.
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5.6 Assessment and Feedback Groups

The Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) provided a verbal update to the Committee, informing members that the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group met earlier in the month. The meeting covered a discussion on exams, agreeing that a University-wide position on the use of exams would be helpful. The Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) will work with colleagues in Academic Services to draft a paper detailing this position and associated guidance. This will be brought to SEC in due course for wider discussion. Further discussion is also required regarding the resit diet, as there is a need to address students being required to travel to Edinburgh in summer to attend in-person resits and the resulting financial pressures this causes.

Members were informed of details relating to the ongoing audit of feedback quality. Work is being undertaken with Internal Audit colleagues in order to build on a previous model successfully delivered in the Deanery of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences. It is hoped that two Schools will pilot the new model in semester one of 2024/25, with progress being reported to SEC in due course.

Members were informed that work is being undertaken to revise the University's Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities. There will be no substantive changes, however some minor enhancements will be proposed relating to feedback turnaround times and the operationalisation of this in relation to ESC, as well as further clarity around rubrics. The Committee agreed that the revised Principles and Priorities could be taken forward in liaison with College Deans and approved by Convener's Action once finalised.

5.7 Curriculum Transformation

The Convener informed members that the full business case for PGT received approval from UIPB and University Executive in July. This approval has resulted in the commencement of the two-year transitional phase for PGT from 2024/25. The outline business case for UG was also

approved by UIPB and this will lead to the completion of the design of the UG curriculum framework. This completed UG framework, as well as the finalised versions of the Edinburgh Student Vision and Skills Framework will come to Senate Education Committee (SEC) and Senate later in 2024/25.

Some changes have been made to the CTP governance structure to reflect the shift in focus now that the business case for PGT has been approved. This includes changes to the membership of the CTP Board, which reports to UIPB and University Executive. It was noted that the Board is looking for an elected Senate representative to join the Board moving forward. This would ideally be a Senate representative on SEC, or a Senate representative from one of the other two Senate standing committees who is close to this process. Colleagues interested in joining were requested to contact the Convener.

6. Any Other Business

It was noted that the University's new Menopause Policy does not extend to students; as HR policy it only applies to staff. It was queried what the mechanism would be for considering this to be extended to students. Students at all levels of study are affected by menopause and in some cases, this is not necessarily age related. This is not currently addressed effectively in ESC practices. The Deputy Secretary, Students agreed that this was a very fair suggestion and that this should be explored further.

Action: Deputy Secretary, Students to request that Academic Services lead work on exploring extending the Menopause Policy to students.

It was highlighted that some learning adjustments are not perceived as adequate to support students with physical disabilities. The Convener noted that members should raise this with School colleagues in the first instance. If this requires escalation, colleagues should raise this with relevant colleagues in College and / or with the Deputy Secretary, Students. Similar cases were noted involving PGR students which were addressed by the Doctoral College and the University's Disability and Learning Support Service.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 7th November 2024, 2-5pm. This will be a hybrid meeting, taking place in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and via Microsoft Teams.