APRC 24/25 1

Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee
Thursday 19 September 2024 at 2:00pm
Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House, Central Area / Teams

Unconfirmed minutes

Present:	
Professor Gill Aitken	Dean of Education (CMVM)
Dr Adam Bunni	Head of Academic Policy and Regulation, Registry Services
Professor Jeremy Crang	Dean of Students (CAHSS)
Lisa Dawson	Academic Registrar, Registry Services
Dr Murray Earle	Senate representative (CAHSS)
Amanda Fegan	Postgraduate Research Manager (CSE)
Dr Valentina Ferlito	Senate representative (CMVM)
Professor Patrick Hadoke (Convener)	Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research Experience (CMVM)
Clair Halliday	The Advice Place, Deputy Manager
Professor Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education (CSE)
Isabel Lavers	Academic Administration Manager (CMVM)
Cristina Matthews (Secretary)	Academic Policy Officer, Registry Services
Katy McPhail	Deputy Head of Academic Affairs (CSE)
Catriona Morley	Head of Taught Student Administration & Support (CAHSS)
Dr Donna Murray	Head of Taught Student Development (IAD)
Callum Paterson	Academic Engagement Coordinator, Students' Association (Co-opted member)
Dr Emily Taylor (Vice-Convener)	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Validation (CAHSS)
Dylan Walch	Vice President Education, Students' Association
Professor Stephen Warrington	Dean of Student Experience (CSE)
Kirsty Woomble	Head of PGR Student Office (CAHSS)
Substitute members:	
Dr Patrick Walsh on behalf of Dr Matt Bell	Senate representative (CSE)
In attendance:	
Dr Peter Adkins	Senate Task and Finish Group observer
Professor Richard Blythe	Senate Task and Finish Group observer
Apologies:	
Dr Matt Bell	Senate representative (CSE)
Lucy Evans	Deputy Secretary, Students
Professor Mohini Gray	Dean of Students and Alumni (CMVM)
Karen Howie	Head of Digital Learning Applications and Media, Information Services

1.	**Welcome and apologies**	
	The Convener welcomed all members to the first meeting of the academic year 2024/25, and welcomed the new College representatives, the new Students' Association VP Education, the new Senate representatives and a substitute member.	
	The Convener also welcomed the two members of the Senate Task and Finish Group who were observing this meeting.	
2.	**Minutes of the previous meeting** To approve • 23 May 2024	**APRC 24/25 1A**
	The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting from the 23 May 2024, with the addition of one member to the list of members present.	

3.	**3.1 Matters Arising**
	• **Convener's communications**
	
	Issue regarding PG Degree Regulation 85: The Committee was notified of a discrepancy between PG Degree Regulation 85, which is a degree-specific regulation for the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice, and an amendment to this regulation which has been approved by the School's Board of Studies and is being implemented for 2024/25. Registry Services were made aware of the change after the Degree Regulations had been approved by the Committee in March 2024, and agreed to fit this in as a late amendment before the Regulations were reviewed by Senate and then approved by Court. The amendment was however subsequently missed and not included in the next set of papers for Senate.
	
	The Convener presented two options for next steps:
	1. **Request an amendment from University Court of the current Degree Regulations 2024/25:** We have consulted with Court Services and established that amending the Degree Regulations at this stage is possible, but that it is not straightforward given that Court Resolutions are subject to legislation that lays down specific processes for this, and it is not clear how long this may take.
	2. **Accept the discrepancy between this regulation and School-level regulations for 2024/25, and amend for 2025/26:** Registry Services have reviewed the amendment and note the following:
	   a. These sorts of changes to programmes would not normally require APRC approval – they only require approval because they are included in the degree-specific regulations section, which is a non-comprehensive list of all degree-specific regulations.
	   b. The changes made are more generous relative to the current regulations, i.e. the pass mark comes down from 60% to 50% and students now have two resit attempts rather than one attempt. If the amendment to the regulation were to make it more stringent, this could present difficulties for any appeals, but given that it is the other way around the risk of any appeals on this is very low.
		Verbal Update

	c. The Law School has also confirmed that they don't foresee any other issues with leaving regulation 85 as it is for 24/25, and that their main concern was the fact that there would be grounds for appeals due to the discrepancy in the information. The Committee agreed to proceed with the second option, i.e. to accept the discrepancy for 2024/25, and amend this for 2025/26. If there were to be any queries regarding the discrepancy, the Committee agreed that the information provided by the Law School in their handbooks would take precedence. **Action:** Committee Administrator to follow up with Court Services. • **Actions log** The Convener reviewed the actions log and noted the actions which were ongoing. **3.2 Report of Convener's Action** • **Student Discipline Committee members** The Committee has previously agreed that the annual membership of the Student Discipline Committee can be approved by Convener's action. The updated membership has been approved for 2024/25. • **Summary of approved concessions** **2023/24 (from last meeting in May 2024-end of July)** Total number of individual student concessions approved: 15 (12 PGR students, 2 UG students, 1 PGT student) Total number of cohort concessions approved: 0 **2024/25 (since start of August 2024)** Total number of individual student concessions approved: 14 (10 PGR students, 4 UG students) Total number of cohort concessions approved: 0	

4.	**SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS**	
4.1	**Students' Association Sabbatical Officer Priorities 2024/2025** For discussion The paper was presented by Dylan Walch, Vice President (VP) Education 2024/25 Students' Association. This paper notes the priorities of the Students' Association VP Education and the Sabbatical team for 2024/25: - To advocate for transparency and accountability in University decision-making, giving students more power to make informed decisions and empowering student representatives with data so that they can provide more effective representation.	**APRC 24/25 1B**

	- To enhance students' experience of interacting with the University, by streamlining key processes and setting high standards of service delivery. This includes making student support services easier to identify and navigate, making course choices easier, and ensuring students know their rights, e.g. support available for transport, housing, food. - To empower student leaders to create positive change within Schools, through developing strong student partnerships, and ensuring staff engage meaningfully with student feedback as part of quality assurance processes. This includes exploring pay and reward for student representatives, and ensuring they are key components of the feedback loop. The Committee discussed various aspects relating to the priorities, including: - Challenges in **pay and reward for students** have some similarities to pay and reward issues for ad hoc staff - Ensuring there is better **student representation and support for the postgraduate online student community**, taking into account that this student population is often challenging to engage with due to the distance from Edinburgh and their lack of time. Members noted that support for online students does not match the level of support provided to students who live on campus. There would be benefit from looking at areas of good practice across the University and developing student support resources that are tailored to the online student community. - Often there is support available, but students and/or staff are not aware of it, so it is critical to ensure that **support services are visible and accessible** - The VP Education confirmed that there is a dedicated **budget for supporting students in crisis**, and that EUSA want to ensure it is used appropriately and in full - **Collecting and using data** in the University can be challenging, but EUSA are keen to work with Schools and services to make the best use of the data that is available. The Academic Registrar provided an update on a project regarding making better use of data across the University in order to enhance processes and the student experience.	
4.2	**Doctoral programme length and submission periods** For discussion The paper was presented by Professor Patrick Hadoke and Dr Adam Bunni. The paper provides an overview of standard doctoral programme models across the University, as well as more recent developments across the Colleges, whereby the length of doctoral programmes has been amended due to external funding requirements. These new programme models include non-integrated PhD programmes of 3.25, 3.5, 3.75, or 4 years in duration, and these may or may not have a submission period beyond the prescribed period of study. The Committee had a discussion which covered the following:	**APRC 24/25 1C CLOSED**

Regulations: The range of programme durations is not currently reflected in the regulations or the prescribed periods of study for PhDs, as stated in the Study Period Table. Members agreed on the need for the regulations and practice to be in alignment.

Members noted that often the design of the PhD programme is within the regulations; however, practice may in some cases deviate from the regulations. Discussions covered student lifecycle and the importance of consistent implementation of regulations at key progression points.

Academic rationale and consistency: Members agreed on the need for standardised models of PhD programmes in order to ensure consistency of academic requirements and equity of student experience. While funders are increasingly funding four-year PhD programmes, there is concern that such changes do not adequately consider academic requirements, and could potentially lead to inequities for students in different areas. The standard 540-credit PhD is designed to be completed in three years; however, increased expectations of supervisors, e.g. publishing papers and conducting larger experiments, can sometimes push this timeline to four years. Members noted that PhD duration for many students in some areas had increased to six or seven years, even before Covid, with students taking a number of extensions and/or interruptions of study. Having standardised models would also be very helpful for Colleges when reviewing and approving new PhD programmes. Members agreed that there is value in having diversity which allows for interdisciplinarity and innovation, but that the diversity should be coherent and justified, rather than due to ad hoc decision-making. There was also recognition that the University must continue to align with broader UK PhD frameworks.

The Students' Association VP Education raised the possibility of using a 'PhD Archetypes' approach to help categorise programme types. The Convener noted that the he is currently using a PhD archetypes approach to try to categorise the current PhD portfolio in all three Colleges. Initial efforts have shown that this is not straightforward, given the variety of models currently in use. There was agreement regarding the need to include the PhD student voice in this work, which is already being considered.

Risks and inequities: Members noted that the current lack of consistent PhD models carries risks and the potential for unintended consequences. Students and supervisors are not always clear on the duration and expectations of the programme for which they are signing up. There are inequities for students and supervisors arising from the lack of consistency as to why some PhD programmes have longer durations than others, why some have integrated study and others have not, and why some PhD programmes have an additional submission period while others do not. The differences in the duration of the study period also result in equity issues when it comes to interruptions of study entitlement.

Members also expressed concerns about removing the submission period, and noted that it would be helpful to clarify both to students and to supervisors the purpose of the submission period.

	Fees: Members expressed concerns about fee implications of extending the duration of programmes, particularly for self-funded students and for students whose funders would not extend the duration of their funding. There was also acknowledgement that the current arrangement whereby students pay only the cost of matriculation in their fourth year does not adequately cover the cost of supervisor time. **Action:** PH to provide an update to the Committee regarding any progress on University-wide PhD archetypes. **Action:** Academic Services to bring proposals to the Committee regarding the specific regulatory issues presented in the paper, i.e. entitlement to authorised interruption of study; early submission.	
	The Committee had a short break.	
4.3	**Amendments to policy on University use of email as a method of contacting students** To approve The paper was presented by Cristina Matthews, Academic Policy Officer. The paper proposes minor amendments to this policy in order to reflect current practices and terminology. One member noted that the amendment to section 4 was not sufficiently clear regarding whether this applied to the forwarding rule or to individual emails. The paper author agreed to amend this. There was discussion regarding IS providing more information on how they review these requests for exemptions. Members noted that it is outwith the remit of this Committee to determine the process which IS should use, but that a communication could be sent on behalf of the Committee requesting that IS consider providing more information on their webpages about the process to be followed. The Committee agreed to **approve** the amendments, including the clarification to section 4. **Action:** Committee Secretary to request IS consider providing more information on their webpages about the process regarding exemptions for email forwarding rules.	**APRC 24/25 1D and 1D Appendix 1**
5. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/NOTING		
5.1	**Senate Committees' Internal Effectiveness Review 2023/24** To note and comment The paper was presented by the Committee Convener. This paper provides the Committee with analysis and proposed actions drawn from the responses received to the Committee internal	**APRC 24/25 1E**

effectiveness review conducted in summer 2024, which is intended to aid continuous improvement of our approach to academic governance.

The internal review indicates that members consider the committee functions effectively to fulfil its remit. One point of note was the low response rate, which has been similarly low for other Senate Standing Committees. In order to address this issue, one of the actions proposed is to allow time during the last Committee meeting of the academic year to provide members the opportunity to complete the survey. The Convener proposed to allow time during the last meeting, and additional time for completion afterwards in case members need more time or would prefer to complete it afterwards. The purpose of this is to increase the response rates to the survey and ensure it captures feedback from all members.

Responses highlighted that effectively communicating the work of the Committee to the wider University remains challenging. The Convener noted it is important that all members of the Committee communicate effectively with their constituencies.

| 5.2 | **Committee Administration:**
• APRC Membership
• APRC Terms of Reference
To note

This information is approved by Senate on an annual basis and was provided to members for information.

Committee Priorities 2024/25:
To note

The priorities for 2024/25 were provided as a reminder to the Committee.

• Curriculum Transformation Programme (policy and regulatory arrangements)
• Postgraduate research students
• Scheduled review of policies
• Students with support needs beyond the scope of the Exceptional Circumstances policy

The Convener provided some additional context for new members regarding the priority on students with support needs beyond the scope of the Exceptional Circumstances policy. The Academic Registrar, Registry Services, noted that progress had been made on recommendations following the project Watch that Gap, which the Committee received updates on in 2023/24, and that the aim was to implement a number of recommendations during the current academic year 2024/25. Members from the Committee noted that they had not received updates on this, and the Academic Registrar agreed to provide an update on this at the next meeting.

The Convener also provided a summary of the work of the Committee's PGR sub-group for 2023/24, in the context of the priority on PGR students. The original aim of this group was to review whether individual concessions for PGR students could be handled in a better way, | |

	particularly given the increase in the number and complexity of cases. The PGR sub-group will continue this work in 2024/25 and will review its priorities for the current year, particularly in light of the discussion of paper 1C on duration of doctoral programmes.	
6.	**Any Other Business** The Committee received five concession requests from the School of Mathematics. As previously agreed, these requests were circulated to the Committee for review (rather than for review by Convener's action) because industrial action was a factor in the requests. The concession requests were presented by Professor Linda Kirstein, Dean of Learning and Teaching (CSE). The Convener acknowledged the comments of members submitted via email. The Committee agreed to approve these concessions, and also agreed that: - The College should ensure that the School has adequate arrangements in place to support these students throughout this academic year - Registry Services will work with CSE and CAHSS in order to determine whether there may be students in other Schools whose circumstances were similar to those of the students considered in these concession requests. CMVM confirmed that they would not have students in similar circumstances given the limited impact of industrial action in the College. If any students were identified who may benefit from similar concession requests, Colleges should consider submitting these to the Committee for review. Where future cases are substantially similar to those approved at this meeting, the committee agreed that they can be approved by Convenor's action.	
Date of next meeting Thursday 21 November 2024, 2-5pm, Boardroom at Chancellor's Building, BioQuarter / Teams		