APRC 24/25 4A

Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee
Thursday 23 January 2025 at 2:00pm
Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House / Teams

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Present:	
Professor Gill Aitken	Dean of Education (CMVM)
Dr Matt Bell	Senate representative (CSE)
Victoria Buchanan	Director, Disability and Learning Support Service
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)
Lucy Evans	Deputy Secretary, Students
Amanda Fegan	Head of Postgraduate Research Student Administration (CSE)
Dr Valentina Ferlito	Senate representative (CMVM)
Professor Mohini Gray	Dean of Students and Alumni (CMVM)
Professor Patrick Hadoke (Convener)	Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Research Experience (CMVM)
Clair Halliday	Deputy Manager, The Advice Place
Karen Howie	Head of Digital Learning Applications and Media, Information Services
Professor Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education (CSE)
Isabel Lavers	Academic Administration Manager (CMVM)
Katy McPhail	Head of Taught Student Administration (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)
Professor Stephen Warrington	Dean of Student Experience (CSE)
In attendance:	
Patrick Jack	Academic Policy Officer, Registry Services
Apologies:	
Dylan Walch	Vice President Education, Students' Association
Kirsty Woomble	Head of Postgraduate Research Student Office (CAHSS)

1.	**Welcome and apologies**
	The Convener welcomed members to the meeting. It was noted that Victoria Buchanan had joined the Committee as a co-opted member and that Dr Matt Bell was attending his first meeting as an elected member of Senate on the Committee.
2.	**Minutes of the previous meeting (Paper 2A)** To approve • 21 November 2024 Members noted two minor amendments made to the originally circulated draft minutes regarding a change in title to one member and the specific wording of the action recorded under section 5.1. No other comments had been received or were raised by members. The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.
3.	**3.1 Matters Arising** • **Convener's Communications** The Convener had no communications to share with members. • **Actions Log** The Convener noted that no updates had been made to the Actions Log. **3.2 Report of Convener's Action** • **Student Appeal Committee** The Convener informed members of the approval of 17 new members to the Student Appeal Committee. • **Posthumous Diploma** The Convener highlighted approval of a posthumous Diploma on 20 December 2024, noting that it was appropriate in this case to issue expedient approval. • **Summary of Approved Concessions** **Since the last meeting (November 2024):** Number of individual student concessions approved: 14 (12 PGR, 1 UG, 1 PGT) Number of cohort concessions approved: 0 The most common type of approved concession requests (12 out of 14) was for extensions and authorised interruptions of study (AIS), predominantly due to health reasons.
4.	**SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS**
4.1	**Updates to the Authorised Interruption of Study Policy (Paper 3B)** To approve. The paper was presented by Dr Adam Bunni, Head of Academic Policy and Regulation. The paper proposed amendments to the Authorised Interruption of Study (AIS) Policy, due for review this academic year, with members asked to approve proposed amendments. Should approval be issued, the revised policy would come into effect from 2025/26 onwards. In introducing the paper, the Head of Academic Policy and Regulation informed members that the proposed amendments are the result of initial consultation with Colleges and subsequent consultation with

colleagues in Schools, EUSA and relevant support services. Members were informed that there was strong engagement and indication of support for the direction of travel of these proposals throughout the consultation process.

The Committee was asked to note the key proposed amendments to the policy, including: providing greater clarification that the AIS Policy is a supportive policy as opposed to an exceptional process; the separating out of the process between taught and research students due to varying processes; the provision of a clearer definition of AIS; clarifying the support available to interrupted students; providing more detail around the return to study process. Members further noted that the policy will be supplemented by an updated guidance document in due course.

The Committee proceeded to have a wide-ranging discussion on the proposed amendments, with the following points being raised by members:

Definition of AIS

- It was noted that some AIS do take place retrospectively in practice. It could be considered unfair on students when they are refused retrospective interruptions due to inconsistent application, which may in some cases create a substantial financial impact on students. Similarly, there are often instances where it is highly reasonable to apply retrospective AIS.
- Retrospective AIS could also serve to benefit students based in conflict zones, as well as online students more generally.
- It was requested that text be added to cover these issues relating to retrospective AIS.

Return to Study

- In instances where an interrupted student requires visa sponsorship to study, it was noted that the return to study plan should include advice provided to the student by the Student Immigration Service (SIS). A member asked why SIS would provide this information in a template format directly to students, as opposed to providing this directly to their Student Adviser or Research Supervisor, citing the risk that such advice may be misinterpreted by the student.
- Concern was noted with regard to a number of concession cases involving students returning to Edinburgh, whereby the student has not obtained their visa on time. If SIS had been able to consult students in timely manner, this may have helped address this issue. A managed return to study process could also help address this, ensuring that a student's immigration status is communicated clearly at the start of an AIS.
- In terms of SIS input into the return to study process, it was argued that responsibility around visa status should rest with the student. There is a suite of compliance reports in place and a supportive reporting process involving students and Schools to ensure that visas do not lapse, providing students with an effective safety net.
- A member asked whether the policy could mandate that return to study plans must be completed before a student resumes study at the University, noting the benefit this may provide to return to study panels.
- The return to study process is essential for disabled students and students with interruptions relating to their mental health. Additional text which reinforces the need for engagement with return to study planning would be welcome.
- Should students be permitted to return if they have not engaged with the return to study process, or submitted medical evidence when required? It was noted that students who have demonstrated that they are capable of interacting with the return to study system generally succeed once they return and vice versa. It would be reasonable to request medical evidence where necessary.
- There are cases where students carry over assessments over too many sessions, thus potentially blocking AIS.

Changes to Programme

- In terms of students being aware of any relevant changes to courses or programmes during return to study conversations, does this include changes to elective courses? If so, this may prove challenging.
- The proposed text in section 6.1 could be amended to avoid confusion around when changes to courses and programmes have taken place. "Substantial changes" to the curriculum as well as programme and course closures should be included within the policy.

General Comments

- The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) is fully supportive of the amended policy as it is more flexible and supportive to students.
- Successive periods of maternity leave require APRC approval. Does this need to be made more explicit within the policy in order to avoid misinterpretation? If this practice is retained, more clarity should be provided around AIS requests of this nature always being approved.
- Section 11.3 references *dangerous materials or substances*. It could be clarified whose definition applies here, noting that this is at each School's discretion.

The Head of Academic Policy and Regulation thanked members for their helpful input and noted that the following changes to the draft presented would be taken forward:

- Add a line to section 11.2 to clarify that in instances where a return to study plan has not been completed pre-interruption, a plan should be completed prior to returning to study, albeit that this would not act as a mandatory requirement.
- In terms of the provision of medical evidence, it is agreed that the policy should remain as drafted. However, there may be benefit in providing additional guidance around this issue on relevant web pages.
- Text would be added in section 2.3 clarifying that AIS cannot be applied retrospectively without the approval of the relevant College. Further clarification would be provided that retrospective applications cannot be made for visa-holding students.
- Sections 8.2 and 10.2 would include a statement noting that requests for interruption may be refused where they would not be compatible with other University regulations or policies.
- Add a footnote under sections 8.2 and 10.2 to clarify that requests for interruption for maternity leave would not be refused.
- The word order in the final sentence in section 6.1 would be reversed for purposes of clarification.
- Section 6.2 would be amended to capture both significant changes and closures to courses and programmes.
- No changes are required within section 11.2 with regard to the process for issuing visa advice. SIS will provide advice in a template format, for students to share directly with their School, unamended. Further work will be undertaken with SIS to develop the process around this, with consideration given to the potential to make use of the notes function in EUCLID.

The Committee agreed to **approve** the proposed amendments to policy, subject to the additional revisions noted above being made. It was noted that once the further amendments are made, approval will be issued via Convener's Action.

Action: The Head of Academic Policy and Regulation to take forward the agreed revisions and resubmit the amended policy to the Convener for approval.

4.2	**Undergraduate Progression Boards Policy (Paper 3C)** To approve. The paper was presented by Dr Adam Bunni, Head of Academic Policy and Regulation.

The Committee noted that the Undergraduate Progression Boards policy (UG PBP) is scheduled for review during the current academic session. The Policy was introduced in 2015 in order to address perceived issues with inconsistent practice across Schools at that time with regard to confirmation of undergraduate students' progression status and required that Schools hold Progression Boards to make decisions about students' progression status at least once per year. In 2016, the first iteration of the Handbook for Boards of Examiners (BoE) for Taught Courses and Programmes was approved. Upon the introduction of the Handbook, other policies were discontinued; however, this policy persisted due to its prominence and recent introduction at that stage.

Members were informed that, upon review, it has been considered whether it would be more effective for the UG PBP to be incorporated into an amended BoE Handbook, helping simplify the suite of documents for those supporting and attending BoEs. Most content within the UG PBP is covered by existing content with the Handbook with some additions to the Handbook being proposed within the paper to help cover any gaps. Members were requested to approve the removal of the UG PBP and to approve the amended BoE handbook, both from 2025/26 onwards.

Upon considering the proposals, members raised the following points:

- In terms of sections 4.18 and 4.19, the Handbook specifies that at least one external examiner must participate in exam boards but they are not required to approve individual decisions. The role of the external examiner in the BoE decision making process should be clarified.
- Could it be further clarified that the BoEs do not require the presence of an external examiner to be quorate? The current wording of "participate" does not indicate whether external examiners are required to be present at BoE meetings.
- The process around the releasing of BoE minutes upon request, as detailed within sections 8.7-8.14, is often not currently managed well within Schools and the process is unclear for students to submit Subject Access Requests. Could section 8.13 be clearer in signposting students to where they can request minutes, as well as providing turnaround times?
- There is a role for the Colleges in terms of communicating proposed updates to Schools, such as BoE briefing events, sharing guidance and signposting to relevant information available on SharePoint.
- Could Colleges relay information to students around helping demystify BoEs? The Deputy Secretary, Students noted their strong support for this and informed members of the ambition to provide a simple reference point for students who wish to know more about BoEs, with Schools taking ownership of this work moving forward.
- Could these requirements be extended to cover PG progression boards?

The Head of Academic Policy and Regulation thanked members for their helpful input. The points around the role of external examiners in BoEs more generally and extending these requirements to PG progression boards were noted; however, it was suggested that the ongoing BoE Project would be better placed to take these discussions into consideration. Notwithstanding the Curriculum Transformation Programme, it was agreed that these are points that should be clarified moving forward and could also be revisited by the Committee at a later date. Similarly, the Head of Academic Policy and Regulation suggested that a separate discussion take place to address the challenges noted around information compliance and how best to take this forward.

The Committee **approved** the deletion of the Undergraduate Progression Boards Policy and **approved** the proposed amendments to the Handbook for Boards of Examiners for Taught Courses and Programmes, to accommodate content from the existing Undergraduate Progression Boards Policy, subject to an amendment being made in section 4.19 to clarify that the External Examiner is not part of the quorum for Undergraduate Progression Boards.

5. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION / NOTING**

5.1	**Committee Priorities – Mid-Year Reflection (Paper 3D)** To note and comment The paper was presented by the Convener. Members noted the actions taken against each of the Committee's priorities and were informed that the paper will be reported to Senate in February 2025 as part of the mid-year reflection on standing committee priorities. The mid-year reflection will also inform the Committee's work on the priorities for the remainder of the academic year. The scheduled review of policies during 2024/25 was summarised. In relation to future amendments to the Taught Assessment Regulations (TARs), it was noted that moderation is a recurring theme within CAHSS, with moderation specifically remitted to the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group which reports to Senate Education Committee. It was queried how this work will align with the review of the TARs. The Head of Academic Policy and Regulation noted this point and agreed to look into this further, particularly as the moderation process is directly relevant to the role of Boards of Examiners. **Action:** The Head of Academic Policy to query the status of development around moderation guidance with the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group.
6.	**Any Other Business** The Committee noted the following items of any other business: **APRC and Senate** A Senate representative noted that a recurring question is being raised by some members of Senate around whether Senate should be issuing final approval for certain papers which are currently being approved at APRC, such as the amendments to policy considered at this meeting. The Convener reiterated to members that APRC has delegated authority from Senate to take decisions regarding the regulatory framework for the University's educational activities and to approve proposals for new or revised academic policy or regulation. There is a threshold around the policies that APRC considers within its delegated authority, with more high-level strategic matters being appropriate for Senate to consider and approve directly. There are three representatives of Senate on each of the Senate Standing Committees which strengthens the links between Senate and the committees. It was noted that the Senate External Review report judged that Senate Standing Committees are operating well and fulfilling their remits. It has been recognised that the terms of reference vary across each of the standing committees and members were informed that work is being led by the Vice Principal (Students) to review these terms of reference in partnership with the Senate External Review Task and Finish Group. It is currently hoped that terms of reference will be updated by May 2025 for consideration by Senate. It was further noted that Academic Quality and Standards will ensure that Senate members are notified regarding the publication of Senate Standing Committee papers moving forward. Senate members had not been notified of the issue of APRC papers for this meeting due to an error, for which the Head of Academic Policy and Regulation apologised. **2025/26 APRC Convenorship**

The Convener informed members that he will be demitting from his College role at the end of 2024/25 and consequently will no longer be a member of APRC. This will necessitate the installation of a new Convener of APRC for the next academic year. Members were encouraged to consider nominating themselves for the role. Any member interested would be welcome to discuss this with the current Convener or Vice-Convener. Should a vote be required for the next Convener of APRC, this will take place during the final APRC meeting of 2024/25 on 22 May 2025.

Date of next meeting
Thursday 20 March 2025, 2-5pm, Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House / Microsoft Teams