



Academic Services
September to October 2020

Senate Committees’ e-Newsletter

Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the Senate Committees’ Newsletter for academic year 2020/21. 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 three Committees to which Senate has delegated its authority in particular areas). We hope you find it interesting and informative.

Report from Senate

Overall responsibility for regulating and superintending teaching and discipline, and promoting research.

Documentation for the E-Senate meeting held from 15 to 23 September 2020 and the Senate meeting held on 7 October 2020 is available at <http://edin.ac/1FL8Rrj>

Senate received a presentation on ‘**Adaption and Renewal: Students – Reflections, Lessons and Next Steps**’, led by Vice Principal Students, Professor Colm Harmon. The presentation included reflections on current and near future teaching delivery, information on current and future work on ‘Building ongoing curriculum resilience,’ student support developments, and international opportunities, including the Una Europa collaborative venture with seven European partner universities. The presentation concluded with perspectives from the Students’ Association President, Ellen MacRae. The presenters responded to a range of questions from staff and student representatives, including questions on online teaching resources, preparations for Semester 2, and support for students and staff, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing.

A recording of the presentations and discussions above is available on request from SenateSupport@ed.ac.uk

Further information on the Adaptation and Renewal programme can be found on Sharepoint: [Adaptation and Renewal](#)

Further information on the Una Europa project can be found on the Edinburgh Global website: [Una Europa](#)

This newsletter is produced by Academic Services.

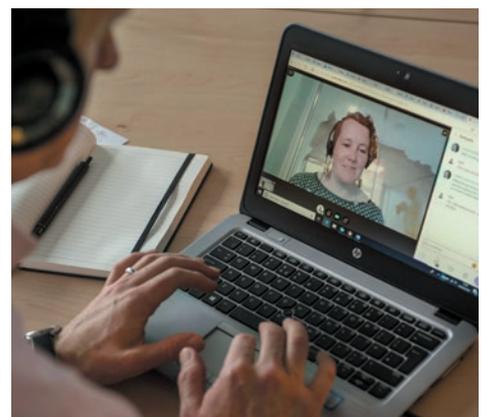
Please direct any queries or suggestions to Philippa.Ward@ed.ac.uk.

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

Meetings covered by the September-October 2020 edition:

Date	Committee
9 September	QAC
10 September	SEC
15-23 September	E-Senate
24 September	APRC
7 October	Senate

On account of COVID-19 pandemic, meetings were conducted via Microsoft Teams.



Report from Senate continued

Senate received and approved:

- the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Reflective Analysis (E-Senate)
- the Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council on Institution-led Review and Enhancement Activity 2019/20 (E-Senate)
- priorities for 2020/21 from the Students' Association VP Education (Senate)

Senate members were notified of the provisional dates for elections of academic staff to Senate in Semester 2 2020/21: nominations will open on 10 February 2021, and the elections will provisionally take place online between 24 and 31 March 2021.

For further information about any Senate matter, please contact SenateSupport@ed.ac.uk



Report from Senate Education Committee (SEC)

Responsible, on behalf of Senate, for taught and research student matters, particularly strategy and policy concerning learning, teaching and the development of curriculum.

Documentation for the meeting held on 10 September 2020 is available at <https://edin.ac/2oR9kfB>

Key discussion items were:

Student Surveys

NSS and PTES (<https://edin.ac/3ivDXxp>, Paper B)

Education Committee considered analysis of the 2020 National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) results. The analysis sought to ascertain whether there were significant differences in levels of satisfaction between different student groups, and what insights could be drawn from feedback in the open comments sections of the surveys. The paper concluded that while there are differences in levels of satisfaction between different student groups, it is unlikely that the University will be able to drive improvement by targeting specific groups. Instead the University will need to address the systemic issues that are driving dissatisfaction overall, which include:

- lack of consistency across Schools and courses;
- lack of structural scaffolding in programmes;
- assessment and feedback;
- lack of a sense of belonging;
- and the need for more investment in mental health support.

Members of the Committee will now develop an action plan to address the issues raised by the surveys.

NSS and PTES data can be accessed at <https://edin.ac/34o38gt>

PGR Covid Survey (<https://edin.ac/3ivDXxp>, Paper C)

The University ran a PGR Covid Survey between 23 June and 7 July 2020. Many of the findings were in line with those of previous University PGR surveys, with key themes being:

- the quality of the supervision experience;
- lack of study space;
- lack of access to resources;
- the need to embed careers development;
- and the need for more investment in mental health support.

The Doctoral College will now use the survey's findings as the basis for its development plan.

PRES

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) runs every other year and is due to be run in academic year 2020/21. A number of universities are choosing not to run the survey this year due to Covid-19, but Edinburgh has decided that the survey will be run as normal to allow issues to be identified and to ensure continuity.

Report from Senate Education Committee (SEC) continued

Course Enhancement Questionnaires

Two new questions have been inserted into this year's Course Enhancement Questionnaires in order to allow the University to gather information from students about their experiences of hybrid teaching.

PGR Supervision

In line with the guidance that has been put in place for taught students meeting with their Personal Tutors, the Adaptation and Renewal Team (ART) has agreed that in-person supervision can now be offered to PGR students where it is safe to do so.

Remote Vivas

The University is in the process of considering policy changes around remote vivas. At present, vivas should not be run in person, but historically, remote vivas have been discouraged. It is hoped that, going forwards, a more flexible approach will be possible and that both in person and remote vivas will be permitted under the regulations.

Students' Association Vice-President Education Priorities 2020/21 (<https://edin.ac/3ivDXxp>, Paper D)

The Students' Association Vice-President Education outlined for Education Committee their priorities for the coming academic year, which are:

- improving the quality and consistency of teaching and feedback;
- ensuring that all students have access to high quality academic support;
- and creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment.

Education Committee noted that the Vice-President Education's priorities are well-aligned with the issues raised by the 2020 student surveys, as discussed above.

Online Examinations and Assessment (<https://edin.ac/3ivDXxp>, Paper E)

It is essential that the University has robust, fair and defensible arrangements in place for online examinations and assessment. Both staff and students are concerned about the potential for unfairness and misconduct to arise from a move to more online assessment.

Education Committee considered the paper, which included a number of clustered recommendations for assessment in academic year 2020/21. Members gave particularly careful consideration to the use of vivas in online assessment; upload times; the consistent application of late penalties; and online proctoring, which the Committee noted would only be used exceptionally. The importance of ensuring that any decisions taken to address current issues do not create unintended, long-term issues for the University was discussed by the Committee. Education Committee approved the recommendations, and further work will now be done to ensure that the recommendations work in practice.



Virtual Classroom Policy (<https://edin.ac/3ivDXxp>, Paper F)

A new Virtual Classroom Policy has now been approved. Some concerns have been raised about the potential editing effort required if students ask for their contributions to be deleted from recordings after the event. Education Committee has therefore agreed that the frequency of requests for deletion of contributions will remain under review this Semester.

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

Report from Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC)

Responsible, on behalf of Senate, for the University's framework of academic policy and regulation, apart from those aspects which are primarily parts of the Quality Assurance Framework.

Documentation for the meeting held on 24 September 2020 is available at <http://edin.ac/2pAaOv7>

Key points discussed included:

Expected Behaviour Policy (<https://edin.ac/33nLkTd>, Paper A)

The Committee discussed a draft policy setting out expectations for behaviour by parties involved in Appeals, Complaints and Student Conduct procedures, and specifying how cases of problematic behaviour will be managed. Following suggestions from the Students' Association, some further amendments will be made to the policy before publication.

Academic Misconduct Investigation Procedures (<https://edin.ac/33nLkTd>, Paper B)

APRC approved minor revisions to the Academic Misconduct Investigation Procedures.

Authorised Interruption of Studies

A list of instances where authorised interruption of studies requests can be approved is being compiled and will be circulated to Schools via College Offices in the near future.

Special Circumstances and Covid-19

In 2019/20, APRC agreed to extend the range of grounds for special circumstances and to reduce the evidence requirements in response to Covid-19. The Committee agreed that it will be appropriate and necessary to take similar steps in the current academic year, and to apply these as a concession to the Special Circumstances Policy. Further proposals will be considered by APRC by electronic business and then communicated more widely across the University.

For further information about any APRC matter, please contact Ailsa.Taylor@ed.ac.uk



Report from Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)

Responsible, on behalf of Senate, for the framework which assures standards and enhances the quality of the student learning experience.

Documentation for the meeting held on 9 September 2020 is available at <http://edin.ac/1MUwq8L>

Key topics discussed included:

Internal Periodic Review Themes 2019/20

(<https://edin.ac/3noDlrz>, Paper E)

QAC approved actions in response to areas for further development arising from Internal Periodic Reviews in 2019/20. Academic Services will inform areas and individuals that have been allocated specific responsibilities, and the areas for further development will also be reported to University Executive. Consideration will be given to how the examples of good practice identified in Reviews can be shared across the University in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thematic Review (<https://edin.ac/3noDlrz>, Papers F and G)

The Committee considered updates on progress to implement the recommendations from the 2017-18 'Thematic Review of Support for Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers', and 2018-19 'Thematic Review of Support for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Students'. A number of actions were approved and in particular, it was agreed that QAC will seek regular updates on progress in relation to the 2018-19 Review during the current academic year.

Monitoring Retention, Progression, and Attainment Data

(<https://edin.ac/3noDlrz>, Paper H)

The Committee agreed to task a small group (led by the Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval (CAHSS) and the Head of Student Data and Surveys (Student Systems)) to examine data sets and methodological options for monitoring student retention, progression and attainment. This action is in response to recommendations from the Thematic Reviews discussed above, and the task group will report initial findings to the December meeting of QAC.

Personal Tutor (PT) System Oversight Group

(<https://edin.ac/3noDlrz>, Paper J)

The Committee agreed that the PT System Oversight Group will remain in place to provide oversight for student support during the current year and for the eventual transition to a new system of student support on completion of the Personal Tutor and Student Support Review.



Covid-19 related enquiries and complaint handling

The University has identified a number of routes through which issues relating to Covid-19 are being raised, primarily by parents / supporters and members of the public. Some of these issues are complex or multifaceted, and most fall within an identified set of themes.

In response to the high volume of contact, and in order to provide ongoing support to students, the University is providing Covid-19 information along with extra general and wellbeing support. This is being delivered by front-line response teams across several areas including a Virtual Contact Centre (VVC), a Covid-19 inbox, Academic Services staff and (on a temporary basis) colleagues within the Enquiry Management team.

Schools receiving queries should deal directly with any School or Course-specific issues. However, Schools are NOT expected to deal with issues for which there is a general, agreed University position. Please refer issues of this type to Covid19@ed.ac.uk.

Issues that should be referred include:

- Policy on online learning
- Refund requests
- General comments alleging poor provision
- Comparison with other institutions
- How we plan to do things in the future
- Questions about when we will be 'back to normal'

A detailed process map and accompanying notes explaining how we are dealing with enquiries is being published on staff [SharePoint](#) pages and promoted via internal communications.



Enhancement-Led Institutional Review

The University's Reflective Analysis (RA) for the forthcoming Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) has now been approved. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this. The RA will now undergo a final tidy-up and graphic design process before publication in December. The RA and a supporting Advanced Information Set will then be given to the ELIR review team in advance of their visits, where they will meet with students and staff.

- Planning visit: Wednesday 3 February 2021
- Review visit: Monday 22 to Friday 26 March 2021

Further information is available at <http://edin.ac/2tBdhaZ>

Remaining Senate Committee Dates for 2020/21

Senate	E-Senate	Education	APRC	QAC
–	–	18 Nov 2020	26 Nov 2020	03 Dec 2020
10 Feb 2021	19-27 Jan 2021	27 Jan 2021	21 Jan 2021	25 Feb 2021
–	–	17 Mar 2021	25 Mar 2021	22 Apr 2021
02 Jun 2021	11-19 May 2021	26 May 2021	03 Jun 2021	20 May 2021