

The University of Edinburgh

Senate Education Committee

Thursday 1st May 2025 2-5pm

Hybrid meeting: Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and via Microsoft Teams

A G E N D A

* Standing item + Committee priority

1.	Welcome and Apologies	
2.	Minutes of the previous meeting To approve <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 27th February 2025	SEC 24/25 4A
3.	Matters Arising <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convener's communications	
4.	SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS	
4.1	Revision of the University-level Student Guidance on the use of Generative AI For discussion and endorsement	SEC 24/25 4B
4.2	Postgraduate Research Strategy 2030 For discussion	SEC 24/25 4C
4.3	Committee Priorities 2025/26 For approval	SEC 24/25 4D
4.4	Student Partnership Agreement 2025/26 For approval	SEC 24/25 4E
4.5	Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy (Microphones Amendment) For approval	SEC 24/25 4F
4.6	Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities Update+ For discussion	SEC 24/25 4G
5.	ITEMS FOR UPDATE	
5.1	Student Voice Update For noting	SEC 24/25 4H
5.2	Assessment and Feedback Groups*+ For noting	Verbal update

6.	ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/NOTING	
6.1	Membership and Terms of Reference 2025/26 For noting	SEC 24/25 4I
6.2	Senate Standing Committees Annual Internal Effectiveness Review For noting	SEC 24/25 4J
7.	Any Other Business	
8.	Date of next meeting Thursday 25 September 2025, 2-5pm Hybrid meeting: Torridon Room, Charles Stewart House & Microsoft Teams	

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Education Committee

Thursday 27th February 2025, 2-5pm
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 Gill Aitken	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching)
Professor Ruth Andrew	Senate Representative
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 Patrick Hadoke	Representative of CMVM (Postgraduate Research)
Lorna Halliday	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)
Professor James Hopgood	Senate Representative
Dr Lisa Kendall	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)
Nichola Kett	Head of Academic Quality and Standards
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
Patrick Jack	Committee Secretary, Academic Quality and Standards
Apologies:	
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
Dylan Walch	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
In attendance:	
Laura Cattell	Deputy Director, UK Outreach & Widening Participation
Lauren Harrison	Senior Project Officer (Students)
Stuart Nicol	Head of eLearning Services, Educational Design and Engagement
Dr Jon Turner	Curriculum Transformation Project Lead

2. Minutes of meeting held on 7th November 2024

With regard to the Approach to Reassessment item, clarification was sought as to when College representatives on the Committee should report back on internal discussions held within Colleges and Schools on this matter. The Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) informed members that it would be helpful if feedback could be provided by the end of the 2024/25 academic year in order to maintain momentum.

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 7th November 2024.

3. Matters Arising

- **Lecture Recordings**

The Convener informed members that captions have been turned on by default on lecture recordings, following approval by Knowledge Strategy Committee and Information Technology Committee. Members noted that work led by EUSA is being undertaken to foster a more collective approach to lecture recordings across the University, with Schools being reminded of the importance of lecture recording and ensuring microphones are routinely switched on. Queries have been raised around the Lecture Recording policy's provision of an opt-out, however it was noted that approvals for opt-out should be taken into careful consideration within Schools. Discussions to help clarify this are ongoing between the University and the University and College Union (UCU).

The Committee noted concerns around students recording lectures via their own devices and uploading recordings to AI translation tools. This is an example of a wider range of issues related to AI which have arisen at pace; however, work is being undertaken in consultation with Colleges and Senate in order to enhance the University's AI guidance and to provide further clarification around what is and is not permissible. It was noted that student misconceptions around ELM tracking their use of AI ought to be addressed in the revised guidance and that student involvement in shaping enhanced AI guidance should be encouraged. College representatives on the Committee were subsequently requested to take forward this discussion via their respective College Education Committees.

Action: The Committee Secretary to add College views on this matter as an agenda item at the next meeting of SEC, as well as inviting Professor Michael Rovatsos who leads the University's AI Adoption Task Force.

- **Skills for Success Framework**

The Convener informed members that the Skills for Success Framework has been finalised and a core set of accompanying contextual slides has been produced. The next phase of work will focus on the implementation plan for the Framework. Members noted that the updated Framework can be accessed here: [Skills For Success Framework \(SFSF\)](#).

4. Substantive Items

4.1 Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030

The Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) presented the Strategy and highlighted to members that the revised Strategy incorporates changes requested by SEC at its meeting in November 2024 and reflects comments received from Senate at its meeting in December 2024. Members noted the key revisions made to the document, which include: a revised introduction; bullet points listed within the *Our Values* section that were initially referenced from the University's Strategy 2030 have been removed and rewritten; the addition of the *Flexible and Inclusive Ways to Study* section; more elaboration has been provided around the enablers that underpin the Strategy.

Members were informed that approval for the Strategy's implementation plan is not being sought at this stage. Two workshops will be held in March 2025 for members of Senate and its standing committees to further discuss the implementation plan. The Committee noted that invitations to the workshops will be circulated in due course and that outcomes from those discussions will be reported to the May 2025 meeting of Senate. The implementation plan will support with reporting of the Strategy to appropriate committees, including Senate, as well as reporting externally, such as to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

Members noted that work is underway with Communications and Marketing (CAM) in order to produce a high-level summary and communication plan for the Strategy, following its approval. CAM will also support work to update the diagram on page 2 of the Strategy to better reflect intersections between the individual sections displayed within the diagram, as well as associated partnership working.

Members subsequently noted the following comments:

- Would it be possible to amend the title of page 8 of the Strategy to, "Supporting Inspiring Teaching and Supervising"? This would help make the Strategy more inclusive to PhD students.
- Within the *Our Values* section (p.2-3), should the listed values of "Excellent" and "Relevant" be changed to "Excellence" and "Relevance"?
- Tenses used throughout the Strategy should be taken into consideration. While the wording of "we will" is used frequently, a lot of good practice already takes place within this context.
- The Future Teaching Spaces Group should be closely consulted during the implementation of the Strategy.
- The implementation plan should consider matters such as the allocation of time for teaching and marking within WAMs, as well as the facilitation of curriculum development via Boards of Studies.

The Committee subsequently approved the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030. The Convener expressed the Committee's thanks to the Deputy Vice Principal, Students

(Enhancement) and to the Senior Project Officer (Students) for all of the work they have contributed in securing approval for the Strategy.

4.2 Curriculum Transformation Programme: PGT Progress Report

The University's Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP) Lead provided the Committee with a verbal progress report on activity related to PGT. Members were informed that, despite delays around recruitment and pressures on staff time and capacity as a result of the current financial context, progress is being made on the identification of the key enabling requirements (regulatory, process and system) for the PGT Curriculum Framework and for gathering cases of PGT archetypes via direct engagement with Schools and Portfolio Review. An initial analysis of the alignment of current provision, covering 554 programmes, to the new PGT programme archetypes has been completed by Colleges via Portfolio Review. This analysis has enabled CTP colleagues to refine their assessment of the number of current programmes that would need to make changes to align with the new PGT Curriculum Framework, down from approximately 20% to no more than 10-15% of current provision. In the majority of cases, any required changes are likely to be minor.

Members further noted that developments arising via Portfolio Review and engagement with Schools regarding future plans and priorities to make changes, scale up provision and develop new programmes will be enabled through adoption of the PGT Curriculum Framework and programme archetypes. This includes using the increased flexibility of archetype A to enable alternatives to traditional 60-credit dissertations, as well as stackable pathways into study (archetype D). The two main areas of interest are around the stackable archetype C which enables greater flexibility in mode and period of study, and specialist pathways or programme clusters (archetype F).

In terms of next steps, members noted that the CTP team are preparing for the introduction of six flexible model programme structures (archetypes) during the 2024-26 transitional phase. Work is being undertaken with individual Schools in order to understand the end-to-end requirements to design, organise and run provision built around each of the archetypes. A major focus of current work on regulatory, process and system enablers is to understand the relative complexity and scale of work required to fully support each of these archetypes and the time that will be needed to consult on and gain approval for the associated regulatory and policy changes. This will inform planning on which archetypes to prioritise for launch in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

The Committee subsequently discussed the progress report, with the following comments being raised:

- How do the ambitions of CTP interact with Portfolio Review, particularly in relation to stackable programmes and potential closures of part-time modes of study? This is particularly pertinent to online programmes which are typically offered part-time.
- Consideration should be taken around bridging the gap between closing part-time routes and transitioning towards more flexible modes of study, as there is danger from a reputational perspective in the University closing part-time routes. Clarity around how this is managed in the interim will be important.

- Processing changes around programme duration and approving programme closures requires considerable support and resource from professional services staff.
- In terms of approval timelines, alignment will be required between CTP targets and School and College-level approval timescales.
- There can be market value in the naming of more specific programmes at the point of entry, such as joint programmes. There could be a negative impact on the courses currently attached to programmes of this nature.
- The School of Chemistry previously reduced their programme offering from 24 down to 6 programmes. There was no impact on student numbers as a result of this activity.
- More programme specialisms require additional options in senior honours. Work should be undertaken to define a programme and identify optimality in terms of its core and optional courses.
- Further clarity around archetypes A and B will be available by the end of semester 2.

The Convener, in turn, provided some clarification in relation to points listed above. Members were notified of the ambition to provide students with greater levels of self-selection within their programme, as well as to diminish the distinction between full-time and part-time students. It was noted that part-time routes through programmes could potentially be more appropriately managed by students undertaking study at their own pace. Colleges are leading work around the market value of promoting specific degree pathways as this requires further investigation. Comments raised around part-time routes will be fed back to colleagues leading Portfolio Review. Members were informed that the University Initiatives Portfolio Board (UIPB) will consider revised business cases related to CTP, as a result of the wider financial context. Without pre-empting the discussion at UIPB, the revised business cases represent a substantial reduction in funding to CTP activity, and additional reductions may be proposed. Consideration will take place when UIPB next meets and further updates will be reported to SEC. The view of some SEC members that the level of expenditure on CTP, even at a reduced level, was at odds with the stated financial challenges at this time was noted.

4.3 Committee Priorities for 2025/26

The Convener introduced the Committee's proposed priorities for academic year 2025/26, noting that the finalised proposed priorities will return to SEC for approval at its meeting in May 2025. In discussing priorities, members were encouraged to be mindful of available resource, as well as the priorities of Senate. Members subsequently engaged in a wide-ranging discussion around the proposed priorities, raising the following comments and suggestions:

- SEC should be involved in simplifying and enhancing the curriculum outwith the confines of CTP. Could the CTP priority therefore be broadened out to include Portfolio Review?
- It is important for SEC to receive updates around key projects such as timetabling and curriculum management.
- There is a lack of explicit reference to PGR across the proposed priorities. Could the priority relating to the student support model incorporate PGR student support?

- The Committee should note the perspectives of members regarding how the University can mitigate the impact of the wider financial context on education and student experience.
- In terms of the assessment and feedback priority, “rubrics” risks being an overloaded term. Confusion can sometimes arise between the use of rubrics and wider marking criteria. Could there be some revised phrasing around this in relation to feedback quality?
- Work is ongoing with the Institute for Academic Development and Information Services to support the development of consistent rubrics across the University.
- Should reference to generative AI be made more explicit within the priorities? This could include the role of AI in assessments, as well as how it will change the delivery of teaching.
- Work will be required to be undertaken across the Senate Standing Committees in order to prepare for the University’s Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review in 2027/28.
- Further clarification should be provided across each of the Senate Standing Committees with regard to which committee will take ownership of certain matters.

4.4 Postgraduate Experience Surveys: 2025 Institutional Questions

The Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling presented the proposed institutional questions for the University’s 2025 postgraduate experience surveys. Members noted that the proposed institutional questions are asked in addition to a core set of questions. The rationale for the proposed changes to the institutional questions is to allow for more comparable data analysis that will build a picture of prioritised themes across NSS, PTES, PRES, and the Student Life Survey (SLS).

4.4.1 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

The Committee approved the two new proposed institutional questions relating to student support and employability.

4.4.2 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)

The Committee approved the two new proposed institutional questions relating to student support and employability.

4.5 Widening Participation Strategy Update

The Deputy Director, UK Outreach & Widening Participation presented an update on progress achieved with the implementation of the Widening Participation (WP) Strategy 2030, launched in January 2024. Members were informed that internal guiding targets were identified during the launch of the Strategy in order to help drive work in this area forward and maintain momentum. Members noted a range of updates including SIMD20 and ACORN targets, progression statistics, work being undertaken to reduce the attainment gap, and an overview of the five priority areas relating to the implementation of the Strategy across the student lifecycle. Work is being undertaken to review the extent to which actions being taken remain sufficient in achieving the targets set out in the Strategy.

Members subsequently discussed a range of points, including: the need to keep PGR student and supervisors in consideration of wider work around WP; the extent to which WP students were more adversely impacted by the 2023 Marking and Assessment Boycott; how this work aligns to that of the Student Data Monitoring Task Group and how it could be better integrated in order to prevent duplication of work; actions which are specific to the University, College and School-levels; addressing grade inflation and protecting academic standards within the context of addressing the awarding gap.

Action: The Committee Secretary to circulate the presentation slides to members.

4.6 Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) – SPS Certificate

The Head of Academic Quality and Standards presented the paper, noting that the HEAR Recommendation Panel considered the SPS Certificate proposal and recommended that the Committee should approve this proposed activity under section 6.1 of the HEAR. The Committee subsequently approved this proposal.

Members noted that, moving forward, the HEAR Recommendation Panel may no longer report to Senate Education Committee and instead report to another of the Senate Standing Committees.

5. Items for Information / Noting

5.1 Committee Priorities 2024/25: Mid-Year Reflection

Members noted the contents of the paper, further noting that an update on SEC's 2024/25 priorities was reported to Senate at its meeting in February 2025 as part of the mid-year reflection on standing committee priorities.

5.2 Learning Materials Accessibility Review

The Committee noted the contents of the paper, with members being encouraged to share the paper widely within their localised areas, particularly with Directors of Quality and the Directors of Teaching Network. Members noted that a dedicated accessibility report was produced for each School, providing breakdowns of data and highlighting areas where the School performed well and areas for improvement.

5.3 Assessment and Feedback Groups

The Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) informed the Committee that the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group had not met since the previous meeting of SEC. The next meeting of the Group will take place on 14 March 2025 and will consult on the proposed capping of resit marks, as well as discussing updates around the moderation policy and guidance, and generative AI guidance. Members wishing to provide input regarding any of these items prior to the meeting on 14 March were encouraged to contact the Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) directly.

6. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the communication circulated to students regarding the University's response to financial challenges, dated 25 February. It was noted that Heads of School had not had sight of the communication prior to circulation, which has led to a number of students seeking to meet with student support staff in order to discuss the financial challenges being experienced across the sector. Members were informed that the communication had received support from Heads of College prior to its circulation, however it was noted that it was an oversight not to provide Heads of School with a preview of the communication. It was noted that there is often conflation around student definition of courses and programmes; the reference to courses within the communication may have led to some students confusing this as their degree programme and contributed to the increase in students requesting clarity from Student Advisors. While Schools are permitted to circulate localised follow-up communications, they were encouraged to run any draft communication past their College Office and Legal Services.

Members noted that a separate communication regarding the University's response to financial challenges will be circulated to PGR students on 28 February and will be co-signed by the College PGR Deans on behalf of the Doctoral College. This communication will be sent to Heads of School for preview prior to circulation.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 1st May 2025, 2-5pm. This will be a hybrid meeting, taking place in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and via Microsoft Teams.

Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Revision of the University-level Student Guidance on the use of Generative AI

Description of paper

1. This paper proposes a direction and set of priorities for the revision of the university’s student guidance on the use of generative AI. [The original guidance](#), published in October 2024, is overdue for renewal – the aim is to have this second iteration agreed by end of June 2025.

The paper is a more fully developed version of a short paper which has already been seen and commented on by the CAHSS Education Committee, CMVM Education Committee members and CAMO/SAMOs (it is going to CSE Education Committee on 29th April), the AI Adoption Task Group, EUSA (approximately 60 students via CSSLCs, rep gatherings and other forums) and the Doctoral College/PGR Deans. Feedback on the paper received from these sources has been incorporated.

The paper also includes an overview of critical issues emerging from this consultation which are beyond the immediate task to revise the student guidance, but which are essential to the context of the work.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Promote innovations in learning, teaching and assessment, embrace new teaching methods and consider cross-cutting themes such as research-led and technology-enhanced learning, digital and information literacy, education for employability, internationalisation and lifelong learning. Consider and promote local developments or initiatives with substantial implications for University learning and teaching strategy, policy, services or operations.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students’ academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y
Give specific consideration to instances in which the experience of one particular cohort of students or learners (undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research students, and those involved in non-standard programmes) may diverge from that of others.	Y
Anticipate and prepare for new opportunities and likely future developments in learning and teaching for all cohorts of students and learners.	Y
Consider the implications of the Committee’s work and its decisions in the context of external initiatives and compliance and legal frameworks, particularly in relation to equality and diversity.	Y

Action requested

2. **Endorsement** of the top-level principles and proposed direction of travel for revision of the generative AI student guidelines, and SEC approval to use these as the basis for the revision to be completed by end of June 2025.
3. **Discussion** of the issues raised in the section on 'sticking points prioritised for discussion', as these are important contextual dimensions of the work underway.

Background and context

4. The picture of GenAI use in higher education is volatile. Key factors driving this review include the following.

- a. **Usage**

GenAI use is now normalised within the wider society and among students in higher education. Recent studies (February 2025) suggest levels of use among students being between 64% ([YouGov/Studiosity](#)) and 92% (a smaller study by [HEPI](#)). Given that AI is embedded in many of our core platforms and services, it is now in fact difficult to avoid it on a day-to-day basis.

Our revised guidelines need to acknowledge that student use of GenAI is now likely ubiquitous; they need to provide greater clarity around aspects of usage which are acceptable, and those which are not.

- b. **Misconduct**

The [BBC](#) made a Freedom of Information request (February 2025) for known cases of academic misconduct and 'cheating' through use of GenAI at Scottish universities. This suggested that known cases were overall low – 0.2% of the total Scottish student body. At Edinburgh last year we had 50 cases (i.e. only c0.1% of our student body). Actual misuse levels will be higher – the perception of several members of staff who have fed into the discussion of this paper is that it is widespread. However, input we have from students via EUSA events and consultations suggests that students are mainly using it in benign ways, for example to explain difficult topics, generate ideas for assignments or automate mundane tasks. Overall, the university figures on all forms of student academic misconduct are low, at around 1.65% of the student population (SQAC Annual Report on Student Conduct 223/24).

The revised guidelines need to tread a line between recognising staff concerns around AI misconduct and better supporting them to restrict, disallow or 'design out' GenAI use in assessment, while acknowledging that even though almost all students are likely to be using AI, it is likely a significant minority who do so with the actual intention of cheating. A relationship of trust between staff, students and institution should be the basic underlying principle driving the guidelines.

c. **Lack of clarity**

A linked problem (evident in the two surveys above and increasingly in [peer-reviewed research papers](#)) is that there is increasing student anxiety around the issue of being *seen* to cheat with AI and penalised, despite not intending to do so. Students are experiencing significant uncertainty around acceptable and unacceptable use.

Greater clarity on acceptable and unacceptable use is needed to provide reassurance for students. The university level document should more clearly state that the guidelines are general, and that detailed course-level guidance should be students' primary source.

While acknowledging it as a major issue, in the longer term 'cheating' is unlikely to be the most profound challenge AI poses for universities – these are covered below.

d. **Evidence of negative impact on learning**

There is little convincing evidence that GenAI improves students' learning outcomes, beyond some small, limited-context studies. On the contrary, as more research studies on usage emerge, it is becoming clearer that issues of '[cognitive offloading](#)', '[metacognitive laziness](#)' and [reduction in capacity for critical thinking](#) are being caused by over-reliance on this technology. If students are routinely using GenAI for summarising and breaking-down texts, there is emerging evidence that they are likely to be undermining their longer-term ability to, for example, exercise critical skills in the analysis of long-form documents, or extract key points and synthesise complex ideas using the power of their own intelligence. Over-confidence in – and over-reliance on – GenAI poses a long-term and quite fundamental potential problem for higher education in this regard.

The guidelines should fine-tune the section on the risks of over-reliance, and provide students with evidence of its negative effects. Caution should be emphasised in relation to use of AI to summarise texts.

e. **'Blandification'**

Large language model responses currently tend to select for linguistic features that are commonly used and 'mainstream', rather than those that are original and unusual. [They are 'imitation engines'](#). There is a risk that their routine use amplifies and normalises a shift away from creative, unexpected and inventive modes of knowledge generation toward the generic and bland (AI 'slop') – a problem for the work of higher education which generally requires development of high-level skills in original, critical thought, risk-taking and innovation.

In a light touch way, the guidelines should take into account the broader issues around knowledge construction and generation when using generative AI.

f. **Copyright and data privacy**

The university has its own service – ELM – which allows students and staff to use generative AI in a safe environment with data, privacy and copyright protections. Student sign-ups to ELM in March 20205 were around 8,000 (suggesting that most students are accessing generative AI through other services, e.g. directly from ChatGPT). Data from one internal source (EFI Generative AI Self-Declaration Review, February 2025) confirms this. There is an indication that some students are concerned that ELM interactions are being accessed by the university to identify misconduct issues.

Our guidelines could do more to encourage students to use ELM as their first choice platform for GenAI, and reassure them their interactions with ELM are private.

g. **Environmental and social impact**

The [environmental impact](#) of routine generative AI use is increasingly evident, and a growing concern for staff and students. Human rights, labour and intellectual property issues have also been flagged by students and staff as a major concern. *Basic guidance is needed to help students (and staff) prioritise when and how they use GenAI, and to limit non-essential usage.*

Discussion

5. **Top-level principles**

While the previous section outlines the main issues of concern, there are many positive and creative uses of generative AI in our university. As well as institution-wide projects like [AI for Teaching Innovation](#), which provides academic teams with a small amount of resource to design and build AI apps emerging from teaching need, we have the capacity and security of ELM, students who are actively engaged with this issue, Schools and Colleges which are actively developing discipline-relevant approaches and frameworks, and a body of staff who are making creative and imaginative use of AI in teaching at course level.

The role of the university-level guidelines in this context should be to support and enable this work by clearly setting out a renewed set of top-level, basic principles, which can then be operationalised in the ways that are most appropriate at College, School, programme and course level. They need to take into account staff feedback that the current guidelines are overly permissive, and do not sufficiently support COs to heavily restrict or disallow generative AI use where necessary. They also need to continue to make it clear that it is course-level guidance on assessment that takes primacy.

Does SEC endorse this broad approach?

6. Proposed directions for the revised guidelines

- Retain and place up-front the acknowledgement that the university recognises the importance for students of developing skills in the responsible use of AI and that its use is not uniformly disallowed, ie:

The university recognises that developing skills in the responsible use of AI is important for you and will play a significant part in your future life and work, as well as in your current studies. We want to ensure that you have the knowledge and skills to thrive in a changing world, and we recognise that generative AI can be used creatively, critically and with integrity.

- Place a clear statement of warning up-front (rather than at the end as currently), ie:

At the same time you need to be clear about when the use of AI is inappropriate, or breaches the university's rules on academic integrity. Submitting assessments that are not your original work – including work produced by AI – constitutes academic misconduct, and will be investigated according to the university's academic misconduct investigation procedures.

- Further emphasise throughout that course-level guidance takes primacy, and may include a ban on AI use for assessment.
- Tighten and reduce the section on examples of uses of generative AI that are likely to be acceptable and those that are not.
- Tighten and clarify the section on risks of over-reliance, based on up-to-date evidence.
- Retain the requirement to cite and acknowledge use of generative AI in assessed work.
- Retain the referral to the Library's guide to using generative AI in academic work, while reducing the content of the section on citation.
- Retain the recommendation to use ELM, while reducing content and prioritising the top-level statements above.
- Add a section specific to PGR and the role of AI in research and the production of the thesis.

Is SEC content with this general approach?

7. Sticking points prioritised for discussion

A cluster of particularly tricky issues have been foregrounded during this period of consultation. Some go beyond the immediate focus of the revision of the student guidelines, but are important contextual factors which would benefit from discussion at SEC.

a. Translation

University-published guidance is inconsistent on this issue. 'Translation of texts in other languages' is currently flagged as a potentially acceptable use of generative AI in our student guidance. ELM guidance goes further and states that 'Translation of texts from **or into** other languages' is acceptable. Both statements are at odds with the university's Guidance for [Proofreading of Student Assignments](#) which states that 'Third party proofreaders' must not 'Translate any part of the work from one language into another'.

Anecdotal evidence from colleagues confirms that the issue of translation is highly problematic and needs to be addressed in the revised guidelines. It is particularly a concern where international students are clearly writing assignments in their first language and then running them through a translation AI before submission. While we do not have concrete data on this issue, colleagues report seeing a decline in the development of English language skills over the period of students' time at Edinburgh, possibly due in part to the ease of use of such translation tools.

An approach to this suggested by CMVM SAMOs could be to more clearly prohibit this use of AI, for example stating that translation of sources for research and learning are generally acceptable, but drafting an assignment submission in a first language and then using a tool to translate it to English for final submission constitutes academic misconduct. For example, the University of York uses the following text:

English is the language of assessment on university programmes, unless another language of assessment is clearly stated. For this reason, over reliance on machine translation to the extent that it diminishes your active involvement and understanding, and results in false authorship, is strictly prohibited.

What is the view of SEC on this point?

b. AI detection software

Software is available which claims to enable detection of AI generated content in student assignments. These are in use by some universities – others have evaluated them and found them unsuitable. There is a good body of [research](#) showing that AI detectors in general are not effective and cannot be confidently used for addressing academic integrity issues, for the following reasons:

- they are not able to distinguish between good and bad usage – eg the student who uses an LLM to fine tune an original essay is as likely to be flagged as the student who generates an entire essay from scratch
- they tend to be biased against non-native English speakers (are more likely to flag their work)
- it is very easy to use prompting strategies which bypass existing systems, eg “Include personal reflections, use a mix of long and short sentences, maintain a conversational tone, play around with the sentence structure, include some errors of spelling”
- commercial services exist which are designed to allow users to upload text and check it against multiple detectors
- OpenAI itself has a service called Humanizer, which enables users to quickly re-work text to look more human and impossible to detect

However in consultation, some colleagues are looking to the university to provide AI detection software. While the issue is outside the immediate task of revising our guidelines, it would be useful to have a position from SEC on this point.

What is the view of SEC on AI detection software?

c. Resourcing for assessment re-design and innovation

During this consultation, many staff have said that they are keen and willing to address the challenges to assessment posed by AI by innovating with course assessment design. However this requires active time allocation to this task by Schools, more flexibility and agility from Boards of Studies for approval, and an infrastructure of support to enable the work to take place – staff training, a bank of examples, practice-sharing workshops, learning technologist support and so on.

There are also fundamental issues regarding the place and purpose of assessment of student work in the context of ubiquitous generative AI. A broader conversation on this should accompany the more detailed discussion about acceptable and unacceptable uses.

What sources can we draw on to support this essential work?

d. University staff AI guidance

Our [current staff guidance](#) is almost completely silent on the implications of generative AI for teaching – the focus is entirely research and general academic practice. Revision of these guidelines should be prioritised, and should include concrete guidance on the issues raised in this current paper.

Does SEC support urgent revision of the generative AI guidance for staff?

e. Training for staff and students

During the process of consultation, the issue of lack of suitable training for students and staff has been evident.

Training currently available is useful, but generally lacks specificity to the context our staff and students are working within. For example it is either generic to the sector (the [AI in Higher Education](#) course), or to the wider society (for example the [AI in Society MOOC](#)). ISG offers a wide range of courses, some of which are very useful (for example the introductions to ELM for staff and students), but there is a lack of the short, self-paced, online, Edinburgh-specific training resources that we need.

Stuart King and David Thong in CSE/Bayes have however created an online, self-paced course for professional services colleagues, [Generative AI for Higher Education Professional Services](#), which is practical, accessible and specific to the University of Edinburgh context, including guidance on responsible usage in day-to-day work. Stuart is already beginning work to develop this basic model into comparable training for students and staff. This would help our community understand the specificities of our university's approach to the use of generative AI in teaching.

Ideally this training would be accompanied by a rolling series of College-specific practice-sharing workshops and forums.

How can the university better support and resource this essential work?

f. Learn pages

Finally, colleagues in CAHSS have flagged an issue regarding perceived inflexibility in the ISG deadlines for Learn templates, and how this revised AI guidance can be captured and presented within the 25/26 template given the timelines involved. CAHSS schools need to be able to tailor (and if necessary update) what is presented to students at a course level. Colleagues expressed a need for a mechanism to ensure that the finalisation and roll over of 25-26 Learn templates occurs after these revised student guidelines are agreed, which is expected to be the end of June 2025.

It would be useful if SEC could discuss this issue.

Resource implications

8. In terms of the revision of the student guidelines, no additional resource is required at this point.
9. However, if the university wishes to fully support staff and students through this period of very significant change, resource to properly fund the development of high-quality, context-specific training materials will need to be found or deployed from elsewhere.

Risk management

10. Potential risks associated with the paper's content are significant, including erosion of public trust in the academic integrity of the university, negative effects on student and staff wellbeing and mental health, and – longer term – profound implications for the nature and value of academic knowledge and practice at a

fundamental level.

11. The proposed work to update the student guidelines is one step toward mitigation. However resourcing of further work on staff guidelines, training and assessment re-design is needed to fully address associated risk.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

12. Highlighting the environmental impact of generative AI in student and staff guidelines (and proposed training) will help in terms of cautioning restraint in unnecessary usage of AI, and raising awareness of its negative effects on planetary resources, human labour and the dangers of unregulated big tech.

Equality & diversity

13. Generative AI carries known risks of bias and exclusion which the revised guidelines will help address.



Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

14. Following endorsement from SEC of the direction of travel, a draft of the revision of the student guidelines will be created and shared for further feedback.
15. Guidance from SEC regarding best process for this would be welcome.

Author

*Professor Siân Bayne
22 April 2025*

Presenter

Professor Siân Bayne

Freedom of Information: Open

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Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Postgraduate Research Strategy 2030

Description of paper

1. The Doctoral College is developing a PGR Strategy to cover the next 5 years. The document here consists of the underlying ideas and principles which will make up that strategy. It aligns with all aspects of Strategy 2030.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students’ academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y
Give specific consideration to instances in which the experience of one particular cohort of students or learners (undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research students, and those involved in non-standard programmes) may diverge from that of others.	Y
Consider the implications of the Committee’s work and its decisions in the context of external initiatives and compliance and legal frameworks, particularly in relation to equality and diversity.	Y

Action requested / recommendation

2. SEC is asked to consider the draft strategy and feedback comments.

Background and context

3. Strategy 2030, Research and Innovation Strategy 2030 and Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030 are in place, but they do not directly cover Postgraduate Research and so a Strategy is being formulated to cover all aspects of PGR including programme development and the student experience.
4. The Strategy will be owned by Research Strategy Group but the breadth of it means that much of the detail comes under the remit of SEC and Senate more widely.
5. The current document has been discussed by the Doctoral College Management Group and the views of its members have been reflected in the various drafts.

Discussion

6. The document presented here is not the strategy as such but a “pre-strategy”. It is the contents of the strategy together with expanded explanations and potential directions for implementation.

7. It sets out some key principles:

- a. The key output of a research degree is a researcher who has made a significant contribution to their research domain by supporting them through training and wellbeing support.
- b. All parts of the student lifecycle will encourage and promote diversity and inclusion, and lower barriers to participation.
- c. All PGR programmes will produce autonomous future research leaders able to sustain diverse careers whether in academia, industry, government or third sector.
- d. Our portfolio of PGR programmes will align with the research expertise, research environment and context of our staff, take account of the needs of employers, and foster interdisciplinary, translational and fundamental research with innovative curricula and training.
- e. Our PGR populations will be sustainably determined by local and institutional strategic priorities and there will be no growth for the sake of growth.

8. The subsequent sections of the document detail what these mean and how they can be realised in our institution looking at the value of PGR degrees, research culture as it pertains to our PGR population, programmes and their structure as well as size and shape and non-research aspects of the life of a PGR. The statements align with the values in Strategy 2030 and take account of the student vision as expressed in the Curriculum Transformation Project.

Resource implications

9. None directly but adoption of the Strategy and subsequent implementation plans will have future resource implications.

Risk management

10. N/A

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

11. The Strategy is mindful of environmental and sustainability issues and its adoption should help meet our Institution's objectives in this area.

Equality & diversity

12. There are aspects of the Strategy which have connections with EDI issues and any subsequent implementation would need to be reviewed for EDI impacts and may require Equality Impact Audits.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

13. The comments of SEC will be taken into account as the Strategy is developed.

The draft will be discussed at Research Strategy Group on 8th May with a view to approval in the subsequent meeting of RSG in the summer.

Author

*Antony Maciocia
University Lead for PGR
On behalf of the Doctoral College
11th April 2025*

Presenter

Antony Maciocia

Freedom of Information (*Is the paper 'open' or 'closed'*)

Open

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Postgraduate Research Strategy 2030 – Draft v0.6

1. This paper sets out the University strategy for postgraduate research training from the research and governance environment and funding to the student lifecycle and wellbeing.

Background

2. The paper follows the discussion paper “Strategies to optimise postgraduate research student numbers at the University of Edinburgh” which detailed the context both internal and external and posed questions to help develop this strategy. At the same time, UKRI has developed its “New Deal” for postgraduate researchers. This seeks to enhance the Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) experience and help institutions plan PGR training and support.
3. Changes have already been made to the way the UKRI councils operate their training grants, embodied in their move to Doctoral Landscape and Focal Awards. This is still in transition through the “New Deal”, but the changed funding environment - including rapid stipend increases and a reduction in funded places - requires us to modify our approach to supporting applications. The wider changes require us to enact changes to our programme structures.
4. At the same time the Scottish Funding Council has changed the way the Research Postgraduate Grant operates, with HEIs now required to account for how the money is spent and to demonstrate planning for its use.
5. The discussion paper posed several questions, particularly focussed on “size and shape”, to be answered in the developing strategy:
 - 5.1. How can flexibility and responsiveness of the doctoral training portfolio be maximised while retaining the distinct attributes of University of Edinburgh Doctoral Training?
 - 5.2. Is it desirable to increase remote/distance doctoral training as part of the University of Edinburgh doctoral training portfolio?
 - 5.3. Is it desirable to increase part-time doctoral training, and to consider packaging this with part-time teaching contracts as part of the University of Edinburgh doctoral training portfolio?
 - 5.4. What is the optimal approach to setting and managing PhD stipends?
 - 5.5. Should we aim to increase PGR student numbers, and if so, how should expansion be managed strategically?

- 5.6. How should we optimally manage our provision of scholarships?
6. This strategy will state key principles from which the answers to these and related policy questions can be formulated. The key principles will align with Strategy 2030, the Research and Innovation Strategy 2030, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030. The strategy is endorsed by the Doctoral College community as well as University Executive and has been the subject of wide consultation.
 7. An externally facing strategy document will follow to advertise our principles and strategy and to serve as a foundation for further work.
 8. Implementation of the strategy will be planned within the Doctoral College. This will happen following the scheduled review of the Doctoral College and expected changes to its themes and structure. In the meantime, one aspect of the strategy, namely that around Research Culture, will continue to feed into the ongoing reformulation of the PGR Research Culture action plan.
 9. The key principles for the strategy are
 - 9.1. The key output of a research degree is a researcher who has made a significant contribution to their research domain by supporting them through training and wellbeing support.**
 - 9.2. All parts of the student lifecycle will encourage and promote diversity and inclusion, and lower barriers to participation.**
 - 9.3. All PGR programmes will produce autonomous future research leaders able to able to sustain diverse careers whether in academia, industry, government or third sector.**
 - 9.4. Our portfolio of PGR programmes will align with the research expertise, research environment and context of our staff, take account of the needs of employers, and foster interdisciplinary, translational and fundamental research with innovative curricula and training.**
 - 9.5. Our PGR populations will be sustainably determined by local and institutional strategic priorities and there will be no growth for the sake of growth.**
 10. The questions posed in paragraph 5 above and drawn from the prior discussion document will be answered under six broad headings:
 - 10.1. The Value of Research Degrees (why, when)
 - 10.2. Training programmes (how)
 - 10.3. Programme Structures (what)
 - 10.4. Programme Sizes (how many)

- 10.5. Graduate Researchers Beyond Research (employment during)
- 10.6. Research Culture (environment, transitions)

11. The Value of Research Degrees

- 11.1. In an ever-changing higher educational landscape, the value of research degrees will shift. Previously seen largely as apprenticeships to feed academia, they are beginning to shift to be highly valuable degrees prized in industry and other areas of society. This has meant a change in how we approach their design. Understanding the value of the degree and the associated skills to the PGRs, the supervisors, the disciplines, the HE institutions, employers and the wider society is crucially important.
- 11.2. Future graduate of our degrees should be confident in the discipline, ready to thrive in a changing world, be highly employable and be valued collaborators. These lie at the heart of the student vision in our university.
- 11.3. The aim of a doctoral degree is to train the student to become an autonomous researcher and, as such, should be viewed as the culmination of their education path in higher education. While doctoral training may just be curiosity driven, it is more generally undertaken to enable progression towards a specific career goal or support career progression. The PGR seeks the qualification to demonstrate that they have reached a certain level of disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise as well as a level of independent research ability.
- 11.4. While the main output of a research degree should be a qualified doctoral graduate, there are often other important secondary outputs. The research undertaken will often contribute to wider research plans in research units. This may take the form of design and running of experiments, data gathering, analysis, building relationships with partners, and knowledge transfer. These can contribute directly to the research strength of a research unit (typically within a School) as well as to the supervisory team, both directly and indirectly.
- 11.5. A healthy cohort of PGRs will contribute to a positive research environment. When designing programmes and considering admission arrangements we must always be aware of the cohort and the wider research context. PGRs must have access to research infrastructure such as equipment and seminars as well as wellbeing support and relevant training.
- 11.6. Currently around half of our PGRs are also tutors and demonstrators. The institution values their contribution to our Teaching and Learning and access to teaching is in demand by our PGRs both for financial and experiential reasons. The organisation of tutoring and demonstrating must remain the responsibility of teaching organisations in Schools and should be viewed as independent of the

research component. However, we must be able to take account of PGRs as a teaching resource when we consider size and shape of PGR populations.

11.7. We have a duty to train our students at all levels to be prepared for a changing environment. We also have a duty to ensure potential employers are aware of the benefits of employing our doctoral graduates. In terms of training, we must ensure the PGRs are supported to develop key skills alongside their core mission to become discipline experts, autonomous researchers and research leaders. These skills are valuable both inside and outside the Academy. To ensure our graduates are competitive we must keep our programmes under rolling review.

12. Training Programmes

12.1. PGRs are enrolled on training programmes which are often large and inhomogeneous and cover entire disciplinary areas. They are the responsibility of Schools and include PGRs who may belong to different cohorts. In this section we describe our strategies for developing such programmes.

12.2. The development and maintenance of valuable research degree programmes embodying the values enumerated in the previous section is crucial to our PGR offering. Programmes must balance their often intensive training needs with the wellbeing of PGRs. We value diversity, and programmes must be designed from the start with this in mind.

12.3. While we expect that the vast majority of our PGRs will work on campus, we should consider judicious use of distance doctoral programmes both in full-time and in part-time study modes. Catering for a diverse pool of PGRs will mean making our programmes flexible in these ways, but such flexibility must not be at the expense of ensuring that supervision, training, cohort development and wellbeing support appropriate for distance learning is in place.

12.4. Producing a cohort of future research leaders will mean equipping them with a range of auxiliary training beyond their disciplines. Ethics, Responsible Research, and Equality and Diversity training should be mandatory components of all PGR programmes, but we need to continue to ensure the availability of a much wider pool of skills training, career and professional development opportunities which will equip them to succeed.

12.5. All PGRs should prepare Developmental Needs Analyses at an early stage, and programmes must be sufficiently flexible to enable the goals identified in such DNAs to be realisable. DNAs must be prepared with supervisory input and informed by a well-communicated range of options. They will form a key part of the approach that supervisory teams take to directing the PGR.

- 12.6. Programme design should enable strong PGR communities to be built around the training and other activities within the programme. All PGRs on a should have equal access to this training and they should be supported by their supervisors to engage. Large programmes may have cohorts inside them based around geographical location or funding and programmes need to be able to have mechanisms to ensure that every PGR feels part of some community. Programmes also need to be inclusive and ensure that each PGR feels an equal part of the cohort whatever their background.
- 12.7. Our PGRs must have access to high quality career development opportunities, advice and guidance informed by robust careers data and systems. For those aiming to remain in academia or in intensive research-based industries, transition through postdoctoral positions to provide further training is commonly required. These should provide a range of postdoc opportunities suitable to support a range of careers available on a competitive basis.
- 12.8. Maintaining accurate data on a variety of valid measures of PGR outcomes, careers, engagement, wellbeing, EDI and other such parameters will be key to allowing us to evidence the value of our degrees and will also feed into policy and process development. Management data around scholarships are also vital.

13. Programme Structures

- 13.1. We will provide a comprehensive suite of programmes that have been thoughtfully curated to support differing doctoral training needs. Programme developers will be supported through regulations and guidance to select the most appropriate model for their training programme.
- 13.2. There is an increasing diversity in research degree programme types across the sector. The “standard” PhD, consisting of three years of intensive research, preparation of a thesis and a viva examination are becoming increasingly rare. This is in part due to the need to provide additional training but is sometimes a recognition that the creation of an original piece of work at doctoral level takes longer than the usual three years. In addition, time often needs to be found to collaborate with industry and other partners.
- 13.3. The current alternative model of “PhD with Integrated Study” has been effective but is rather limited due to the constraints imposed by such rules as requiring exactly 180 visible credits of additional study. It will continue to have a role especially for Doctoral Focal Awards and other scholarship programmes where there is well defined disciplinary training linked to the research. It also provides an alternative to the so called “1+3” model in which students graduate with a master’s degree after a year and then seamlessly continue into a 3-year PhD. However, there is a need for more flexible doctoral degrees of other lengths, with varying amounts

of course based training. Our systems need to be sufficiently flexible to enable such models and further innovation in programme design.

- 13.4. Whatever the length of the degree, supervisors play a key role in ensuring that their PGRs are on track to complete within their prescribed period, and must correctly balance timely completion with other developmental opportunities. Longer programmes may have implications for a student's ongoing wellbeing and mental health.
- 13.5. A common reason to seek additional time for programmes is to allow inclusion of internships and other forms of experience in industry, policy, third sector and beyond. These will be encouraged and facilitated wherever possible, and programmes will be developed to incorporate such time away. One benefit of this is that it allows students on visas to participate. Industrial experience can contribute to the research outputs of the doctorate, but equally may be completely independent, providing a broadening experience and promoting career opportunities. Professional and industrial doctorates will also be considered where appropriate for the discipline.
- 13.6. Although applications for part-time doctorates are proportionately small overall, this market has potential to grow. The University is unable to sponsor student visas for those wishing to study part-time, but some demand is likely for PGRs which will permit working while studying, accommodating caring and other external responsibilities such as employment. We will thus ensure that our programmes can be adapted to flexible timelines.
- 13.7. Provision will be made for prospective PGRs already embedded in industry and other areas who wish to enhance their qualifications with a research degree. These are likely to be studying in a part-time mode and may have projects linked to their employer.
- 13.8. We shall continue to introduce and review our Master by Research degree provision. These must be carefully delineated from taught degrees through ensuring that there is a core major research component. There will always be a role for MScR degrees as an exit from a doctoral degree or as an outcome of doctoral examination where the candidate does not qualify for a doctoral degree.
- 13.9. MPhil degrees will also remain a key part of our compensatory scheme for doctoral degrees. There may be a role for a small number of externally visible degree programmes at MPhil level, but there is no appetite to expand provision at this level.
- 13.10. For many programmes, PGRs will be supported by scholarships. Indeed, some programmes will be created purely to support scholarship schemes. We will only

create new programmes where there is a robust academic and business case. There will be no bar to programmes supporting PGRs funded in a variety of ways. The training experience of the PGR and access to facilities should not depend on their funding source.

- 13.11. Scholarship provision is linked closely to research strategy, but programmes and their structure are fundamentally built around the training offered and must observe the regulations governing PGR degrees. Innovative and dynamic programmes form a key component of our portfolio and make us competitive in winning training grants and attracting funding. There will sometimes be a need for enhanced stipends, often matching external funders' provision or market conditions, and processes are in place to approve these where the discipline sees a value.
- 13.12. Major training grants such as the UKRI Doctoral Landscape Awards and Focal Awards provide opportunities to innovate our PGR curricula and training while also providing scholarships and sometimes administrative support.
- 13.13. We are committed to paying a fair stipend to all funded students and mechanisms exist to ensure that these are paid at the UKRI minimum rate where we are responsible for their administration or by agreement.
- 13.14. Doctoral and Research Masters programmes will continue to be owned by Schools and overseen at a local level by Graduate Schools/PGR Offices. This is essential to ensure that those enrolled on the programmes are properly supported. Graduate Schools/PGR offices are overseen by a senior academic who acts as PGR Lead/Director/Head of Graduate School and by members of professional services as appropriate. Approval of PGR programmes happens at College level with new programme archetypes approved by Senate and its committees.
- 13.15. The staff in Graduate Schools/PGR offices and professional services staff in the university services are supported centrally by the Doctoral College, however it cannot own programmes and is not a service having no direct resources. The Doctoral College will also have a role in ensuring that interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary doctoral research is facilitated. It will also facilitate exchange of ideas for programme innovations across the institution.

14. Programme Sizes

- 14.1. The number of PGRs enrolled on each programme will depend on several key factors. Those linked exclusively to externally-funded scholarships will have their numbers controlled by the number of scholarships funded by the award, but most of our programmes will feature a variety of modes of funding and so will not be limited in this way. Costs beyond scholarships themselves will nevertheless still be an important factor constraining numbers balanced against the need to ensure the PGR

experience is as high as possible. The need to provide a supply of tutors and demonstrators will be another factor in determining how we invest in PGR numbers and there will conversely be constraints arising from finite research and study space as well as availability of supervision. Further strategic factors influencing PGR numbers include the desire to support selected collaborations and partnerships, and/or to building local research environment/capacity.

- 14.2. The University is committed to maintaining the Edinburgh Doctoral College Scholarship scheme until at least 2030 at the current level of 22 Scholarships per annum. These incentivise Schools to consider broad base-line training and to extend the period of the Scholarship to up to four years.
- 14.3. It will remain a matter for local budget areas to decide on appropriate PGR numbers as a key part of the planning round. Local provision of scholarships is always encouraged to support local strategies, and all areas will actively seek external funding through new training grants and external partners, sponsors and donors. They will be aided in this by the Doctoral College, Edinburgh Innovations, Student Recruitment and Admissions and the Development and Alumni Office.
- 14.4. Costs of PGR training encompass obvious direct costs in the form of stipends, research training support grants and other research costs. There are also important and quantifiable indirect costs in the form of supervisory time and study/research accommodation and facilities. Other indirect costs include infrastructure costs (TRAC costs) not included in the above.
- 14.5. Costs are offset by income, and the degree to which indirect income is considered to offset indirect costs will be a key factor in determining desirable PGR numbers. As well as the direct income attributable to PGR training in the form of training grants, fees and partner contributions, considerable indirect income streams that accrue from a healthy PGR population need also be considered. These arise from PGR students' contribution to research power through research outputs, contributions to the research environment, teaching and other activities paid at the lower end of the pay scales. The considerable reputational benefit from a large PGR population moreover feeds into external quality metrics.
- 14.6. While many costs and income are quantifiable, there are considerable complexities in seeking to make this quantification exact. Fees must be set at a level which is both competitive and assigns reasonable value to our programmes. However, since the bulk of our funded PGRs are funded by external providers, it is usually impossible to charge the full fee due to funders' terms and conditions. A typical example is that the full overseas fee differential needs to be waived for certain PGRs funded by certain sponsors. Since these account for around a third of all PGRs, this has a significant impact on our income. At the same time, discounts to

external sponsors or donors may be offered for a range of strategic reasons. In these cases, local budget holders must be made aware of and can choose to participate in such schemes as appropriate.

- 14.7. In areas where we perceive large indirect benefits from PGRs we should support applications for training grants. The Doctoral College will play a key role in supporting such applications. On the other hand, we should carefully assess the financial implications of those training grants which contribute considerably less than the full economic costs of the proposed programme.
- 14.8. According to current Scottish Funding Council rules, we receive a considerable fee income stream from the Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG). This is roughly in proportion to the number of Scottish students we recruit, but also includes a component related to the total number of students. Again, it is not easy to attribute this to local areas, and we should consider the grant as a contribution to core funding.
- 14.9. While budgetary capacity will remain an important factor in determining PGR numbers, other factors must also be considered. Availability of space is a key factor. We must strive to ensure that all PGRs have adequate access to appropriate research space, whether that is laboratory, desk or library. Where this is heavily limited, then maximum numbers on the programme will need to be set accordingly. Study space is also highly desirable, and we should strive to ensure that all PGRs across the institution have equitable access to study space, which may include “hot” or “warm” desking.
- 14.10. Another key factor in determining PGR number is the availability of suitable supervision. All PGRs must have at least two assigned supervisors, one of whom has primary responsibility. Supervisors must also be supported in their activities. This includes mandatory supervisor training as well as access to resources to help with the training and promotion of the wellbeing of their PGRs. We will facilitate networking opportunities and actively consider other forms of continuing professional development for supervisors.
- 14.11. Promotion criteria and incentives through enhancing the research environment and workload models where used will continue while ensuring that supervisors only take on suitable candidates.
- 14.12. Graduate Schools/PGR Offices may set limits on PGRs assigned to supervisors, but we will continue not to impose a universal limit. It will also be up to local areas to improve and monitor the effectiveness of supervisors and to remove the right to supervision where this is deemed necessary.

14.13. The scale of our scholarship provision must be auditable. Management data must be maintained to facilitate strategic planning for scholarships and to enable external reporting and wider planning. It is important that we can disaggregate protected characteristic information and home/overseas status.

15. Graduate Researchers Beyond Research

15.1. Almost half of our PGR population have guaranteed hours contracts, almost all of which are for tutoring and demonstrating (T&D). This is a helpful development opportunity for the PGR as well as providing essential additional teaching resource for Schools. Consequently, we should work to ensure there are adequate opportunities available as equitably as possible across the institution and to facilitate the employment of PGRs across School and College boundaries. The use of fractional contracts should be encouraged as an alternative to guaranteed hours contracts. Access to staff services is additional to access to student services and staff contract terms and conditions will always supplement those covered by any scholarship they may have.

15.2. We will continue the policy that payment for T&D work is separate from payment for research. This also applies to the administration of T&D which should not be the responsibility of Graduate Schools/PGR Offices. Supervisors are not permitted to prohibit their students from taking on T&D roles, but it is appropriate for the supervisors, to take an interest and provide advice. There must be an upper bound on the average number of hours of additional work undertaken by a PGR. This is currently capped at an average of 9 hours a week.

15.3. While tutoring and demonstrating will remain the largest single “employer” of PGRs outside of their research projects they can access internships and other work experience both inside and outside our institution. These can be directly linked to the PGR projects or may be separate. The availability of work is especially acute for our self-funded students where there is generally a need to earn money to live and pay fees.

15.4. Other good opportunities for work experience available both inside and outside the organisation often take the form of internships. As with T&D work, these are valuable for both PGR and the prospective employer, and we should continue to promote their availability. Likewise, we should facilitate external internships through flexible options for the timeline of doctoral degree and through introduction of degree programmes which include mandatory periods at external partners. Wherever possible, such periods should be salaried.

- 15.5. We will stimulate close ties with external industrial, third sector and other partners in relation to providing opportunities for our PGRs and building partnerships. These can be in the form of internships, placements, co-supervision and co-creation of research projects as well as through direct funding of scholarships and research costs. We must continue to provide mechanisms to grow such links and actively keep them healthy.
- 15.6. There is a route to a doctoral degree for existing staff who can undertake the degree part-time, but there is also a potential demand for bespoke salaried positions which finish with the award of a degree, in the form of research assistantships or “pre-docs”. Since a salary must be paid these are not so cost efficient, but they do have significant benefits for the PGR. Some EU funding requires that we employ the PGR in this mode. While we can pay tax-free stipends it is unlikely that demand will grow significantly. Nevertheless, we should ensure that they remain permitted in our regulations and processes. Postdoctoral positions or Research Assistantships can also be used to extend funding towards the end of the doctorate where they are even more valuable for the PGR.

16. Research Culture

- 16.1. A key priority in relation to PGRs is to ensure that we care for their wellbeing and intellectual development. We can achieve this through high quality supervision, access to good research facilities, access to adequate wellbeing services, and robust governance structures which support the individuals and pro-actively improve their environment.
- 16.2. We will ensure that the terms and conditions of scholarships are supportive of the PGR and challenge external providers to adopt a similar principle. At times we may need to refuse externally funded scholarships if their values do not sufficiently align with ours.
- 16.3. The emphasis of the intellectual component of PGR training should be on developing autonomy. In many disciplines, especially those that are largely not laboratory based, the output of a doctoral degree is typically a fully autonomous researcher ready to create and lead their own research projects. This is only rarely true in laboratory-based disciplines, where further postdoctoral training is usually needed to achieve this goal. However, in all disciplines, programmes should be structured and assessments devised to promote research autonomy, all while supporting the individual’s wellbeing and wider development.
- 16.4. It is the policy of our institution that the intellectual property of the PGR is held by the PGR and not by the institution or its employees. In practice, where external agents are involved in the research project this may need to be modified, and mechanisms are in place to accommodate this. Whatever arrangements are

made, part of the intellectual property related to the original material in the thesis or artefact will be held by the PGR and exploitation of this IP should only be undertaken with the permission of the PGR. This applies especially to supervisors and research collaborators, who must always consider the PGR when they use the work of the PGR in publications or other products. The University will have a role in advising and managing the IP in relation to external stakeholders and PGRs may need to assign its management to us.

- 16.5. We expect all PGRs to conduct their research to high ethical and moral standards. Reported research misconduct will be investigated through the established staff research misconduct processes. Where complaints are upheld we will take appropriate action, but we must always be mindful that for PGRs, as trainee researchers, penalties should be calibrated accordingly. The use of AI in research will be governed by the rules for research staff, but explicit guidance for the use of AI by PGRs will be developed and supervisors will be made aware of the implications for their students.
- 16.6. All PGRs need to be aware of the ethical implications of their research and to understand what it means to conduct research responsibly and with integrity. Consequently, all PGRs will receive training in these areas. This may require bespoke training for the discipline where there are substantial ethical issues and complemented by more general ethics training for all. We expect all supervisors to be adequately trained in these areas, and supervisor training will reflect both the needs of the supervisor and the role they can play in guiding their students.
- 16.7. The research environment, both physical and non-physical, plays the biggest role in the research culture experienced by the PGR. The supervisory team, larger laboratory or equivalent staff, including postdocs, PIs and other academics, and professional services staff form the key non-physical environment. Ensuring that everyone is supportive, respectful and caring is key to the success of every PGR. Early intervention when problems arise is key and timely processes are vital to keep individuals and projects on course. Setting out expectations for both PGRs and supervisors is important. This is seen in the Code of Practice as well as in induction for both PGRs and supervisors.
- 16.8. The physical environment is also important. Access to study and research space may need to be prioritised for PGRs who are disproportionately affected by problems of access. All PGRs must be adequately trained in health and safety associated with their environment.
- 16.9. All PGRs are monitored annually for progression purposes. Such Annual Reviews must be both supportive and evaluative. Their primary purpose is to consider the individual PGRs achievements in the context in which they have been

working and to help them to plan for the coming year. They should align with developmental needs analyses (DNA) already undertaken and be used as a mechanism to update the DNA which we aim to adopt across the institution.

- 16.10. Consideration of the training and other activities needed to achieve the potential career ambitions of a PGR forms the core of the DNA and not just the requirements to complete the degree. Access to opportunities and advice to gain insight and experience of potential careers is key and will be provided through a variety of sources including the supervisory team and the Careers Service.
- 16.11. The University is committed to promoting equality of access and experience and to the diversity of its staff and student populations. Recruitment and selection of PGRs will aim to promote diversity in their methods and practice. Numbers will be monitored and where necessary action plans will need to be created to address major imbalances to reduce barriers to participation as well as to actively rebalance. Scholarship provision will continue to target minority groups appropriately and encourage diversity, especially around widening participation. The work environment must also support diversity.
- 16.12. It is vital that mechanisms are in place to ensure that the opinions and views of PGRs can be heard. This will require a robust student representative system, representation on committees and frequent sessions for the Doctoral College, Graduate Schools/PG Offices to seek views of the representatives and/or the PGRs directly.
- 16.13. The University is also committed to ensuring that PGRs with a disability have equitable opportunities to undertake research within established reasonable grounds. Reasonable Adjustments are available for both the research path and assessments of research degrees, and we are committed to ensuring that these are observed and acted upon and that PGRs are directed to the Disability and Learning Support Service as appropriate including prior to arrival.
- 16.14. PGRs need to have access to suitable independent people they can approach to raise issues. Mechanisms in the Annual Review can be helpful but there need to be suitable trustworthy individual for PGRs to take forward issues they may have. These individuals need to be sufficiently far from the PGR's research to be viewed as independent to foster this trust. Schools will make sure PGRs know who this is and such individuals need to be adequately trained and networked with the Wellbeing Services as well as Graduate Schools/PGR Offices. There must be clear escalation routes for problems raised. The Advice Place will also have a role.
- 16.15. Peer support is also key to the success of many PGRs and formal schemes to foster active peer support are encouraged. Peer representation is important to ensure that the PGR voice is heard, and the Students Association is key to

developing a robust cohort of representatives. PGR societies and the like will also be facilitated and promoted.

Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Committee Priorities 2025/26

Description of paper

1. The paper asks the Committee to approve the final proposed priorities for academic year 2025/26, for noting by Senate.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Promote innovations in learning, teaching and assessment, embrace new teaching methods and consider cross-cutting themes such as research-led and technology-enhanced learning, digital and information literacy, education for employability, internationalisation and lifelong learning. Consider and promote local developments or initiatives with substantial implications for University learning and teaching strategy, policy, services or operations.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students' academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y
Give specific consideration to instances in which the experience of one particular cohort of students or learners (undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research students, and those involved in non-standard programmes) may diverge from that of others.	Y
Anticipate and prepare for new opportunities and likely future developments in learning and teaching for all cohorts of students and learners.	Y
Consider the implications of the Committee's work and its decisions in the context of external initiatives and compliance and legal frameworks, particularly in relation to equality and diversity.	Y

Action requested / recommendation

2. The Committee is asked to approve the proposed priorities for 2025/26, outlining areas of focus and objectives.

Background and context

3. In semester two of each academic year, Senate Standing Committees discuss and agree priorities to focus on throughout the following academic year. The process for development and agreement of committee priorities has been further enhanced this year to include a specific request for contributions from Senate.
4. The following have been taken into consideration when proposing priorities across the Standing Committees:
 - Committee remits
 - Feedback from Senate and standing committees

- University strategic priorities
- External and regulatory requirements
- Outcomes of quality processes, including external review

5. Member input (including from the constituencies they represent) is critical to shaping the proposed priorities and the associated areas of focus and objectives. Members are therefore invited to shape the draft priorities below or to suggest additional priorities to reach agreement on a set of proposed priorities which are relevant to the [committee remit](#) and the University’s strategic priorities, and are achievable within resources. As such, members are asked to consider SMART criteria when discussing and agreeing the proposed priorities. Ideally, the objectives of the priorities should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

6. The timeline for discussion and agreement of standing committee priorities is as follows:

	Mid-year reflection update + input to priorities	Mid-year reflection + priorities discussion	Agree priorities (standing committees)	Senate notes agreed standing committee priorities
SEC	5 Feb	27 Feb	1 May	20 May
APRC	5 Feb	20 March	By electronic business (by end April)	20 May
SQAC	5 Feb	20 Feb	3 April	20 May

Discussion

DRAFT Committee priorities 2025/26

Proposed priority	Curriculum Transformation
Rationale and fit with remit	Curriculum Transformation is a major University strategic priority which aligns to Strategy 2030. It is also relevant to the committee remit: 2.1 Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners 2.2 Promote innovations in learning, teaching and assessment, embrace new teaching methods and consider cross-cutting themes such as research-led and technology-enhanced learning, digital and information literacy, education for employability, internationalisation and lifelong learning. Consider and promote local developments or initiatives with

	substantial implications for University learning and teaching strategy, policy, services or operations
Area of focus and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee to contribute to and guide development and adoption of UG and PGT Curriculum Frameworks (including Challenge Courses and experiential learning) • Committee to have oversight of priority areas for enhancement linked to Curriculum Transformation (e.g. programme level assessment, sustainability & climate, accessibility & inclusion)
Regulatory/external requirement?	No

Proposed priority	Learning and Teaching Strategy implementation and evaluation
Rationale and fit with remit	<p>Relevant to committee remit:</p> <p>2.1 Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners</p> <p>2.2 Promote innovations in learning, teaching and assessment, embrace new teaching methods and consider cross-cutting themes such as research-led and technology-enhanced learning, digital and information literacy, education for employability, internationalisation and lifelong learning. Consider and promote local developments or initiatives with substantial implications for University learning and teaching strategy, policy, services or operations.</p>
Area of focus and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the effective implementation of the Strategy • Inform the ongoing development of an evaluation plan for the Strategy • Consider outcomes of the evaluation of the Strategy relevant to the Committee remit, discuss and support proposed amendments to policy and practice in response. • Reporting to Senate as appropriate on the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy
Regulatory/external requirement?	Yes – This was a recommendation in the QAA ELIR 2021 Report and has been re-emphasised in the QAA QESR Report (published January 2024).

Proposed priority	Assessment and feedback
Rationale and fit with remit	Relevant to committee remit 2.3: Oversee policy relating to students' academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.
Area of focus and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the improvement of feedback quality, including (but not limited to) the consistent use of assessment rubrics. • Supporting and approving the development of the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities into policy. • Committee to focus on the development of assessment practice in the context of generative AI. • Work with APRC to review and enhance policy and regulations relating to assessment resit and resubmission. • Supporting the development of policy and guidance regarding moderation of assessment.
Regulatory/external requirement?	Yes – This was a recommendation in the QAA ELIR 2021 Report and has been re-emphasised in the QAA QESR Report (published January 2024).

Proposed priority	Student support model – support for ongoing implementation
Rationale and fit with remit	<p>Relevant to the committee remit:</p> <p>2.1 Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.</p> <p>2.3: Oversee policy relating to students' academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.</p>
Area of focus and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider outcomes of the evaluation of the student support model relevant to the Committee remit, discuss and support proposed amendments to policy and practice in response e.g. Student Support Framework • To work with the Doctoral College on how we can enhance support for PGR students. PGR students are not included in the model, although benefit from the Student Wellbeing Service.
Regulatory/external requirement?	Yes – This was a recommendation in the QAA ELIR 2021 Report and the QAA QESR Report (published January 2024).

Resource implications

7. Standing Committees' work has implications not only for Registry Services, but also for the membership and stakeholders the Committee may need to consult and work with in relation to a particular priority including in relation to implementation and evaluation. Resource implications should be outlined and considered on an ongoing basis as work on priorities progresses.

Risk management

8. Work on priorities is vital to the Committee fulfilling its remit. Failure to fulfil its remit raises potential risks associated with the University's framework of academic policy and regulations and the student experience.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

9. This paper does not respond to the climate emergency or contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Equality & diversity

10. Equality and diversity implications should be outlined and considered on an ongoing basis as work on priorities progresses.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

11. The final priorities will be reported to Senate in May for noting. Additionally, the Senate Committees' Newsletter provides information on standing committee business.

Author

Lucy Evans (Deputy Secretary Students),
Professor Colm Harmon (Vice Principal Students),
Professor Tina Harrison (Deputy Vice Principal Students (Enhancement)),
Nichola Kett (Head of Academic Quality and Standards)

Presenter

Colm Harmon and Nichola Kett

May 2025

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Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Student Partnership Agreement

Description of paper

1. This Paper presents an updated Student Partnership Agreement format created in a cross-University short life working group led by the Vice President Education at the Students Association.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Promote innovations in learning, teaching and assessment, embrace new teaching methods and consider cross-cutting themes such as research-led and technology-enhanced learning, digital and information literacy, education for employability, internationalisation and lifelong learning. Consider and promote local developments or initiatives with substantial implications for University learning and teaching strategy, policy, services or operations.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students’ academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y

Action requested / recommendation

2. Senate Education Committee is invited to approve this new format for the agreement.

Background and context

3. In previous years, the Senate Education Committee reviewed our student partnership agreement priorities. Although resources were used in consulting on these priorities and in committee discussions, these efforts did not change how the partnership operated at the University or how the Student Partnership Fund allocated its resources.

Discussion

4. Following a four-meeting working group chaired by the Vice President of Education, a revamped partnership agreement and approach were developed. The group included members from all three colleges, the Institute of Academic Development, the Students’ Association, Lucy Evans and Tina Harrison.
5. The group examined best practice examples from across the United Kingdom and discussed the challenges faced at Edinburgh. It was agreed that the new agreement should both reflect the organization’s needs and serve as an active, year-round document. After a detailed analysis of the current agreement, several drafts were created until the final format was agreed.

6. The revised agreement emphasizes how the University and the Students' Association work in partnership by establishing and reviewing annual aims and objectives. It also recognizes the collaborative efforts between staff and students at all levels through the "Partnership in Practice" section.
7. Each year, the aims and objectives will be approved by the University and Students' Association Forum, which serves as the official channel for managing the relationship between the two organizations. Throughout the year, the Forum will provide opportunities to review the progress of the agreement. At the end of each academic year, a reflection session will assess this progress and may lead to adjustments in the agreement's format and shape the subsequent year's agreement. The renewed agreement will be signed annually by the sabbatical team and the senior leadership team.
8. The partnership will focus on four key areas, each with one aim and two to three specific objectives. These aims represent high-level, multi-year ambitions designed to transform the student experience and may change annually based on the partners' priorities. During the second annual renewal, the partners might decide to maintain consistent aims for a few years; however, this has not yet been formalized.
9. The objectives are defined as SMART (specific, measurable, accurate, realistic, and time-bound) goals that advance the relevant aim. They may be updated each year depending on their completion status and whether the associated aim is revised.
10. A glossy document, similar to the one used at [Heriot-Watt](#), will be produced to share the aims and objectives with the wider University community.
11. To demonstrate the impact of student partnership activities at the University, a short annual report will be prepared. This report will showcase various best practice examples from the previous academic year across the full spectrum of partnership activities. Although the author has not been finalized, the goal is to capture the full scope of the student partnership.
12. There have been discussions regarding the launch of both the glossy document and the annual report, as well as how we could use existing reporting work to contribute to the report.
13. The proposed timeline for this annual cycle is outlined in the "Reviewing Student Partnership Agreement" section.
14. With the revamp of the agreement, questions have arisen about where its owned in University governance, especially given that both the University and the Students' Association will be responsible for its upkeep at the, implementation, and review at the forum. Considering the strategic importance of this document, it may also be prudent for the Senate, University Executive, and Court to acknowledge its significance

Resource implications

15. This work uses existing governance structures. Resource is needed for the creation of the report on "Partnership in Practice" and glossy form of the agreement. There are discussions taking place on how we can do this efficiently but impactfully.

Risk management

16. A significant strategic risk is that uncoordinated efforts can reduce institutional effectiveness and lead to a waste of resources. Without a clear, shared direction, the relationship between the two institutions may become strained. Coordinating our efforts through this agreement will help mitigate this risk.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

17. Although this paper does not directly address the climate emergency or contribute to the sustainable development goals, the agreement may prompt faster action on these critical issues.

Equality & diversity

18. Although this paper does not directly address equality and diversity, the agreement may prompt faster action on these critical issues. Additionally this work may make the university a more inclusive place through a structured format of allowing both students and staff contribute equally to the agreement and work in partnership on a wider range of issues.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

19. The implementation and evaluation of this work will take place at the University and Students' Association forum and other governing bodies will be able to comment on the agreement. Additionally, the agreement will be communicated via blog posts, launch events, committees, and social media.

Author

Dylan Walch

Vice President Education 2024-25
Edinburgh University Students'
Association

Presenter

Dylan Walch

Vice President Education 2024-25
Edinburgh University Students'
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STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT 2025-26

Introduction

What is a Student Partnership Agreement?

Student Partnership Agreements were first outlined in the Scottish Government's 2011 paper *Putting Learners at the Centre – Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education*, which proposed the development of a document setting out how students and their institutions interact. Sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) subsequently published guidance in 2013 for the development of student partnership agreements for universities. Student Partnership Agreements have since become commonplace across the sector.

Our Student Partnership Agreement is an explicit statement of the ways in which the University and the student body are working, and will continue to work, in partnership. It is a living document which is reviewed and reflected on annually by members of University Senior Leadership and the Sabbatical Officer team from the Students' Association. Its purpose is not to silo student and staff responsibilities, but to focus on where partnership working can and should occur.

The University's commitment to working in partnership with students is articulated at the highest level in the University's Strategic Plan. Staff at the University of Edinburgh often work in partnership with Edinburgh University Students' Association to ensure that students are central to governance and decision making; quality assurance and enhancement; providing opportunities for students to become active participants; and fostering collaboration between students and staff.

Benefits of a Partnership Agreement

The University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh University Students' Association have enjoyed a long and productive partnership, which has been commended in successive external reviews from the Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland.

Since the first Student Partnership Agreement in 2013, we have continued to work closely together. Now, over a decade since the first Agreement, this revamped Agreement will allow us to make enhancements to our partnership now and into the future.

The priorities in the Student Partnership Agreement align with University and Students' Association priorities and strategy. The Agreement serves to highlight ways in which all students and staff can effectively work together to enhance the student experience. It sets out our values, our approach to partnership and the priorities we have agreed to work on.

A key benefit of a Student Partnership Agreement is the ability to engage and communicate with the wider student body, beyond the Students' Association. A Student Partnership Agreement can:

- Map and promote student engagement opportunities across the University and provide evidence of partnership working between students and staff;
- Provide space to reflect on the ways in which staff and students interact and highlight potential enhancements;
- Prompt a review of the effectiveness of student engagement, and identify areas of best practice

Our shared vision of partnership

The term 'partnership' reflects a mature relationship, based on mutual trust and respect. Partnership working recognises that members of the partnership have legitimate, though sometimes different, perceptions and experiences. By working together towards common goals, we can achieve positive outcomes which benefit all concerned.

Our partnership is underpinned by a shared aspiration to: deliver and recognise high-quality teaching; foster a learning approach based on inquiry and research; encourage student-led and co-created learning; produce independent and critical thinkers; celebrate and cultivate a sense of belonging in our diverse community; behave in a just and equitable manner; and work together to enhance the student experience.

Student partnerships can be implemented in various meaningful ways. For instance, student representatives work closely with staff and use student feedback to drive enhancements to the student experience. Additionally, projects involving both students and staff—ranging from event organization to joint initiatives—offer valuable opportunities for mutual growth and innovation. Finally, partnerships in research allow both students and staff to explore ideas together, ensuring diverse perspectives are included in the research process. See 'Partnership in Practice' for further examples.

Institutional Student Partnership

The University and the Students' Association work in partnership to improve the student experience at Edinburgh. Hence the areas of partnership activity are taken from the [Students' Association's Student Experience Framework](#). The purpose of this section is to specify the areas on which the two partners will focus their efforts.

This section of the Agreement may change each academic year, once priorities have been agreed by members of University Senior Leadership and the Sabbatical Officers at the Students' Association, following engagement with relevant stakeholders. The Aims are high level multi-year ambitions that will transform the student experience. Objectives are specific, measurable, accurate, realistic and time-bound (SMART) goals that make

progress on the realization of the aim. Two or three objectives should be agreed for each area.

Excellent Learning Experience

- Aim
 - ...
- Objective
 - ...

Strong Sense of Belonging

- Aim
 - ...
- Objective
 - ...

Accurate Expectations & Empowered Student Voice

- Aim
 - ...
- Objective
 - ...

Supported Transitions & Navigating the University

- Aim
 - ...
- Objective
 - ...

Partnership in Practice

These projects are either recent or ongoing examples of partnership working between staff and students. Some are led by the University, some by students, and others are jointly led by students and staff. If you're interested in student partnership but also need funding for a project, you can find more information by visiting the Student Partnership Fund [webpage](#). Below are the three areas that are the most common themes of student partnership work.

Community building

Student partnership activities that help students and staff come together to build a stronger community from small groups to university wide initiatives.

Previous partnership activities:

- Informatics Forum Roof Gardening club “Thyme to Grow”
- Mature and Access Student Society

Transforming student experience

Projects in this area bring together students and staff to trial innovative ideas aimed at enhancing the student experience—from navigating the university to refining expectation accuracy. For guidance on designing impactful projects that will improve the student experience you could consult the [Student Associations' Student Experience Framework](#).

Previous partnership activities:

- Co-creating an assessment that promotes collaborative learning
- Thriving at the University of Edinburgh Student Guide

Research and Inquiry

Students and staff evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches for identifying best practices and gaining insights into how current systems operate so that they can share this knowledge with others.

Previous partnership activities:

- Understanding the impact and effectiveness of the Academic Families scheme in Informatics
- Mapping the Student Journey: Empowering students to navigate and thrive in university

Reviewing the Student Partnership Agreement

Institutional Student Partnership

The Agreement will be reviewed in two phases. Between June and September each year, University Senior Leadership and Students' Association Sabbatical Officers will agree on a set of shared aims and objectives and co-sign this Agreement. A shortened version of the Agreement (of roughly one page) will be shared with the University community to aid visibility of our shared aims.

Then, by May of the same academic year, The University and Students' Association will review progress on these and reflect on the impact this work has had on the student experience. Their reflections will be included as appendices to this report and will be replaced each year. Reflections will be an honest account of the process of working in partnership and explain the progress on the aims and objectives. The reflection should conclude with recommendations for improvements to achieve next year's aims and objectives.

The content of the Student Partnership Agreement should be complementary to the external Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP), which is submitted to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in November each year.

Partnership in Practice

To demonstrate impact and reflect on the student partnership activities that take place at The University, an annual report will be written. It will give a range of examples of best practice across the breadth of partnership activities that took place over the previous academic year.

Statement of Partnership

I confirm that this report and action plan have been produced in partnership between the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh University Students' Association and reflect our shared values and ambitions. I further confirm that the University and the Students' Association will work together in partnership to implement the aims and objectives outlined.

Signatures:

Appendices

- Reflection from previous year

Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy (microphones amendment)

Description of paper

1. This paper proposes minor changes to the May 2023 revision of the [Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy](#) (AILP), to correct the literal reading of its statement on use of radio microphones to match the intention of the policy better.
2. The proposal should support Strategy 2030 outcome ix) We will have more user-friendly processes and efficient systems to support our work. The policy itself continues to support several outcomes previously detailed in the paper to the September 2023 meeting.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Oversee policy relating to students’ academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y
Anticipate and prepare for new opportunities and likely future developments in learning and teaching for all cohorts of students and learners.	Y
Consider the implications of the Committee’s work and its decisions in the context of external initiatives and compliance and legal frameworks, particularly in relation to equality and diversity.	Y

Action requested / recommendation

3. The Committee is asked to **approve** the revised policy.

Background and context

4. The Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy was introduced in 2013 and underwent major review in 2022/2023. It includes aspirational principles that are now being developed through the Curriculum Transformation project.
5. The policy requires lecturers to use microphone technology provided in classrooms and lecture theatres in anticipation that there may be students with hearing difficulties and that amplification is indeed of benefit to all students in the class.
6. Ceiling microphone technology is already capable of better sound pick-up than a lapel microphone and such systems may be rolled out in some University spaces over the next few years.

Discussion

7. The revised policy proposal is appended, with the proposed track changed in section 7.2 of the Baseline Standards. It clarifies that lapel microphones where provided must be used during the lecture.

8. We have added a footnote in anticipation that microphone technology has advanced and that the University may install, for example, modern ceiling microphones that better captures the teacher's voice.

Resource implications

9. None.

Risk management

10. This amendment addresses potential legal and reputational risks in the literal meaning of a policy not matching its intention or in addressing specific technology that may become outdated.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

11. SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Equality & diversity

12. The change the policy aims to improve the University's offering across all protected characteristics and particularly for those who are Deaf/deaf.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

13. The change will be communicated to academic staff through regular Senate committee bulletin channels.

Author

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Educational Technology Policy Officer*

Presenter

*Professor Tina Harrison
Deputy Vice Principal Students
(Enhancement)*

March 2025

Freedom of Information: Open paper

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Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this Policy is the provision of accessible and inclusive teaching and assessment to all students⁺, through consideration of their different requirements in the design, approval, delivery and review of programmes, courses and assessment.

Overview

This Policy contains principles for improving accessibility and inclusivity of teaching and assessment at the University. It provides some detailed baseline requirements, including mainstreaming some adjustments recommended for disabled students whose universal adoption benefits all students.

Scope: Mandatory Policy

This Policy applies in respect of all students of the University and to all staff and external guest teachers who teach, assess or support students. Unless there is a justified pedagogic reason for not doing so, it applies to all teaching and assessment within all programmes and courses. A justified pedagogic reason must be made clear to students in advance in the [Degree Regulations and Programmes of Studies](#) or another School-specified standard location for publishing essential information about each programme or course.

Contact Officers	Victoria Buchanan	Director of Disability and Learning Support Services	Victoria.Buchanan@ed.ac.uk
	Tina Harrison	Deputy Vice Principal Students	Tina.Harrison@ed.ac.uk

Document control

Dates	Approved: 30.01.13	Starts: 01.08.13	Equality impact assessment: 13.08.13	Amendments: 10.1001.05.254	Next Review: 2026/2027
Approving authority	Senate Learning and Teaching Committee				
Consultation undertaken	The original policy was developed from work of a Task Group of the Quality Assurance Committee, at the request of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Student Disability Service, Edinburgh University Students' Association and the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance led the consultation.				
Section responsible for policy maintenance & review	Disability and Learning Support Services				
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Estates Accessibility Policy , Estates Accessibility Policy Guidance , IAD Guidance on mainstreaming , Lecture Recording Policy , Virtual Classroom Policy , Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities				
UK Quality Code	QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapters B1 and B4				
Policies superseded by this policy	The Policy was reviewed in May 2016 (no changes were made). Additions and amendments were made in May 2023 and a minor update in May 2025 .				
Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 651 4490.				
Keywords	Accessible learning, inclusive learning, audio recording, recording lectures, equality, disability, universal design, equality impact assessment.				

Introduction

Under legislation including the [Equality Act 2010](#) the University has a legal duty as an education provider to take positive steps to ensure that students with protected characteristics can fully and equitably participate in the education and enjoy the other benefits, facilities and services which it provides for students. The University meantime aims to foster a welcoming community, where its students feel proud to be part of the University. The University community has a responsibility to:

- (a) Recognise and anticipate the barriers to equitable participation in teaching, learning and assessment for each student,
- (b) Recognise that in many cases we can design, remove, reduce or overcome these barriers through or by making changes, and
- (c) Recognise and anticipate that it must address situations where a barrier may be insurmountable, whether in whole or in part or for the time being, and still maintain the student's opportunity to participate.

This policy addresses accessibility and inclusion for teaching, learning and assessment. It covers every context, including field trips, study abroad, digital classes and student research. It operates in tandem with the [Estates Accessibility Policy](#) and [Estates Accessibility Policy Guidance](#), the accessibility principles in the Digital Strategy, and the [Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities](#) that cover universal design and upgrade of the physical and digital estate to comply with relevant legislation and regulation and to promote accessibility and belonging.

Definitions

- **Universal design** is 'design that's usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.'¹ Universal design for learning comes from the systematic consideration of the effects of teaching, learning and assessment practice and policy at the each of the planning, implementation and evaluation stages to ensure that teaching and learning is accessible to all students.
- **Reasonable adjustments** are specific types of additional academic support that are mandated for individual disabled students by the Disability and Learning Support Service.
- **Mainstreaming** means applying a specific adjustment universally to benefit students generally.
- An **Equality Impact Assessment** is a method for carrying out the statutory duty to assess the impact of applying the University's policies and practices to people with protected characteristics. The **protected characteristics** are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation².

Principles for accessible and inclusive learning

The University shall in the first instance seek to anticipate barriers to student participation and address these by designing programmes, courses and facilities and designing or procuring services and resources that are accessible to all. It recognises that this will not always be possible and that specific adjustments may then have to be made to remove remaining barriers for individual students.

¹ Attributed to [Ron Mace](#).

² These are defined in [Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Equality Act 2010](#).

- A. **Those creating or delivering Programmes, Courses or teaching materials shall apply the principles of universal design for learning and adhere to recognised standards for accessibility and inclusion.** They shall design Courses and Programmes to be accessible to all students, avoiding any unnecessary barriers to students with protected characteristics.³
- B. **Course and Programme Organisers shall offer opportunities for students with protected characteristics to contribute** to Programme and Course design and review.
- C. Course and Programme Organisers shall assess the **equality impact** of new or updated Courses and Programmes, including postgraduate research programmes, and Schools shall critically review these assessments as part of the approval process.³
- D. **Reasonable adjustments** will be made where design cannot eliminate a barrier to student participation. Colleagues should bear in mind that an individual adjustment may lead to perceived or actual stigma. It is recognised that some barriers cannot be anticipated before students are accepted onto a course or programme.
- E. Where a reasonable adjustment is made for a disabled student, it will often be appropriate to consider whether this can be **mainstreamed** for the benefit of all students.
- F. The knowledge and skills required for making teaching and assessment accessible to all students and learners are considered a standard part of normal academic and professional practice. The University shall make **training and guidance** available for all staff, so that they can be confident that they understand and can engage with issues of accessibility.³
- G. Schools shall **monitor** accessibility and inclusion of their teaching, learning and assessment through appropriate methods including systematic audit.

Detailed baseline standards

The following seek to increase accessibility of learning and teaching for all students.

1. Course outlines and reading lists shall be made available at least **four weeks** before the start of the course.
 - 1.1. This means providing an outline of the course in terms of the indicative content, nature of assessments and indicative reading. This information is likely to be communicated in course handbooks and reading lists. The provision of this information will facilitate course choices, where available, and provide students with an early opportunity to engage with the course requirements and familiarise themselves with the subject and learning material. Reading lists at this stage may focus on the core texts only, where core texts are used.
 - 1.2. It should be stressed that the requirement is for an outline and that further course details can be provided nearer to or at the start of the course. Additional reading may also be provided nearer to the start date of the course.
 - 1.3. In some subjects, the compilation of a resources list may be central to the assessment task and it may therefore not be appropriate to provide a set resources list. Where this is the case, it shall be signalled clearly to students.
2. Reading lists shall indicate priority and/or relevance.
 - 2.1. The key purpose is to help students prioritise their own reading.

³ The University recognises that a transition may be required to implement these principles fully. It will seek to implement them over the lifetime of this revision of the Policy (2023-2026) with or as part of its Curriculum Transformation project.

- 2.2. Where resources lists are provided to students, these should clearly indicate those readings that are key to the course or particularly relevant to a session or theme within the course. It is not necessary for the whole reading list to be ordered. Neither is it expected that students should read only from the reading list provided; they will be expected, through their own research, to identify further readings.
 - 2.3. Materials indicated on reading lists shall be accessible and available in alternative formats. Course teams shall seek advice from Library colleagues where necessary, for example where there are pedagogical reasons for using materials not available in multiple formats.
3. Lecture outlines or presentation slides for lectures and seminars shall be made available to students at least **24 hours** in advance of the class for all students to access as required.
 - 3.1. The key purpose is to inform students of what they will be taught so that they can prepare in advance in their own time.
 - 3.2. Teaching staff will not be expected to produce presentation slides if these are not normally used. In such cases, an outline of the lecture will be required that may take the form of a bullet-pointed list of the key themes and content of the class: it is not required that detailed notes are provided.
 - 3.3. Where lecture outlines or presentation slides cannot be provided through the VLE, students must be informed how to access the materials.
 - 3.4. Lecture outlines or presentation slides for lectures and seminars shall be designed with accessibility in mind using accessibility settings, appropriate sizes, fonts, ALT text, hyperlinks and adjustable sizing.
 - 3.5. Judgement will need to be exercised in such cases where confidential or 'spoiler' information is contained within materials so as not to compromise confidentiality or impinge on the pedagogical experience. In such cases students should be informed of the presence of such information and may be provided with only a partial set of slides in advance of the class; with the full materials to be made available following the class.
 4. Key technical words, terms or formulae used in a class shall be provided to students at least **24 hours** in advance of the class that they are being used in.
 - 4.1. The key purpose is to facilitate students' participation by ensuring that they fully understand terms and formulae used in the class.
 - 4.2. Where technical words, terms or formulae cannot be provided through the virtual learning environment, students must be informed of how to access the materials.
 - 4.3. In many cases technical words and formulae are likely to be embedded in the presentation slides and are likely to be covered by the provision of lecture outlines or slides detailed in point 3 above⁴. In other cases, it may be necessary to produce a supplementary hand-out for students.
 - 4.4. The use of technical words, terms or formulae may not be relevant to all subjects and judgement needs to be exercised.
 - 4.5. In the same way, where maps, complex graphs or detailed images are used in a class, it will normally be appropriate to provide these to students **24 hours** in advance of the class.

⁴ Providing a glossary slide with technical terms at the start of a presentation is also likely to help students interpret imperfect automated captions on a recording of the class.

5. Students shall be notified by email announcement of changes to any teaching arrangements, for example changes to courses, room changes or class cancellations.
 - 5.1. The key purpose is to ensure students do not miss essential information and have sufficient time to respond to changes.
 - 5.2. Students should be notified of changes to courses or classes as soon as possible.
 - 5.3. The official form of communication is the University email system and this should be the primary method of communication. This may be supplemented by other forms of communication as available and appropriate, bearing in mind the proportion of students that may be reached by these.

6. A student shall be permitted to make audio recording of their lectures, tutorials and supervision sessions using their own equipment for the sole purpose of their own personal learning.
 - 6.1. The University records taught Course lectures and other teaching in accordance with the [Lecture Recording Policy](#) and the [Virtual Classroom Policy](#). Where the University intends to record a session, the student may still make an audio recording but shall delete this once the University has provided them with a recording that meets the purpose of the student's own personal learning.
 - 6.2. The student recording may only be used by the individual student for the purpose of their personal study. It shall be a disciplinary offence to use the recording for any other purpose, including sharing or distributing it.
 - 6.3. Video recording and photography shall not be permitted without the explicit permission of the member of staff involved.
 - 6.4. The University, the lecturer and any student recorded making a contribution to the class will retain their intellectual property rights in the recording.
 - 6.5. The recording must be done in an unobtrusive manner by the student using their own equipment.
 - 6.6. The recording must be destroyed once its purpose has been met. This will always be before the student leaves the University and shall normally be by the end of the assessment diet to which the course relates.
 - 6.7. Teaching staff have the right to insist that recording stops in certain circumstances. An example might be to protect confidentiality where sensitive or personal information is being discussed.
 - 6.8. Students agree to these terms and conditions as part of the contract between the University and its students and assent to it on matriculation.

7. All teaching staff shall ensure that microphones are worn and used in all lectures **regardless of the perceived need to wear them**.
 - 7.1. The key purposes are to reduce the effort involved in concentrating in the class for all students, not only students with a hearing impairment, and help improve their attention; and **to avoid making students identify publicly that they have a hearing impairment**.
 - 7.2. Where radio microphones are made available in teaching rooms these ~~must~~shall be worn and used during lectures by all teaching staff, including external guest presenters,

regardless of the perceived need to wear them⁵. Table-top microphones are not always sufficient on their own.

7.3. Maintenance of the microphones is everyone's responsibility and teaching staff should report promptly any faults that they encounter to the IS Helpline (for central rooms) or to the relevant School support team (for rooms operated by Schools; if in doubt, contact IS Helpline).

8. Teaching staff and examiners shall ensure their materials such as slides, lecture outlines, examinations and other electronic documents are accessible.

8.1. The key purpose is to ensure as many students as possible can utilise these materials in their learning or assessment without the need for further adaption or support.

8.2. Students use multiple methods to interact with their digital teaching materials, including through screen readers, through a range of devices and different screen sizes, and with variable bandwidth. Staff should familiarise themselves with the range of likely methods and variations.

8.3. It is a legal requirement that staff shall make their digital materials⁶ accessible. This will involve taking the following measures, although it is recognised that this list is in no way exhaustive.

- a. Ensure that filenames, folders and hyperlinked text provide an explanation of the linked material when read out of context by, for example, a digital screen reader.
- b. Provide titles and headings within documents, images, graphs and tables, using template heading styles where available.
- c. Use text and background colours that contrast well.
- d. Avoid overlaying text on textured backgrounds.
- e. Avoid fully-justified text, as this has uneven spaces between words or characters.
- f. Use a plain font of sufficient size, and avoid *italic* or CAPITALISED text.
- g. Avoid using colour alone to communicate information within text, images or diagrams.
- h. Provide alternative text explanations on non-decorative images and diagrams. If the image is a hyperlink then the alternative text shall also include the link information.
- i. Avoid flashing or moving text or images, and give the user complete control over any scrolling text.
- j. Make audio and video resources more accessible to blind, deaf and Deaf students, for instance using audio description, captions, or a transcript.
- k. Provide a statement indicating how to obtain the resource in an alternative format.

8.4. Standard applications for preparing digital materials often include an accessibility checker that can assist the authors by highlighting some of the common issues.

8.5. Training and guidance shall be available to support accessible use of standard and popular tools and formats in teaching and learning and to support provision of non-digital materials in accessible formats.

~~10-October-2024~~ 01 May 2025



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⁵ However if the University installs a more advanced microphone technology in the teaching space, one that picks up the lecture better than a lapel radio microphone, then this should be used instead.

⁶ [Further information on creating accessible digital resources](#) is available from Information Services.

Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Review of Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Description of paper

1. This paper provides an outline of initial plans for a substantial review of the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities that is scheduled for AY 2025/26.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students’ academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y

Action requested / recommendation

2. SEC are invited to comment on the paper.

Background and context

3. The Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities have been in operation since September 2022. They were updated for AY 2024/25 at the request of Colleges via the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDaMOB), to improve clarity and also to offer further guidance on the application of some of the principles. These changes were designed to enable us to continue to support our action in response to the QESR recommendation relating to the quality and timeliness of feedback.
4. The Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities were developed in response to a recommendation from the last ELIR and QESR reviews to develop a holistic and strategic approach to the design and management of assessment and feedback and subsequently to monitor feedback turnaround times and quality.
5. Since the initial development, there has been considerable work through SEDaMOB and Colleges to implement the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities, in particular gather data and develop dashboards to monitor feedback turnaround times. Focus on feedback quality is being take forward through increased expectations of the provision of rubrics, with support from IAD for the development of rubrics. Colleges have developed local guidance and set local expectations aligned with the overall Assessment Feedback Principles and Priorities.
6. The Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities are due for a scheduled review by the end of AY 2025/26. Given the substantial activity that has taken place since the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities were first developed, this provides an opportunity to conduct a more comprehensive

review, and be clearer about the current and future institutional expectations for assessment and feedback building on the considerable developments that have taken place.

Discussion

7. The existing Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities document makes it difficult to identify which elements are mandatory. Furthermore, there remains confusion across the institution as to whether these principles constitute formal policy, despite some elements being explicitly required.
8. To address this, it is proposed that we develop a clear and consolidated **Assessment and Feedback Policy**. This policy would formally set out all mandatory elements/minimum expectations, accompanied by **guidance** to support effective implementation in practice.
9. The following mandatory elements are already embedded within the current Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities practices and would form the basis for a new policy:
 - a. Feedback must be returned no later than **three weeks** from the date of submission.
 - b. Assessment tasks must **clearly articulate the criteria** by which students will be assessed.
 - c. All assessments must include a **marking rubric** or **detailed grade descriptors**.
 - d. Students must be given **clear information on the timing and method** of feedback delivery.
 - e. Time must be **allocated during class sessions** to discuss assessment expectations and criteria, and to reflect on and learn from feedback received.
 - f. Wherever practical, assessments should be **submitted, marked, and returned digitally**.
 - g. Moderation practices must align with the **Taught Assessment Regulations (TAR)**.
10. The review will also consider incorporating further expectations to enhance clarity, consistency, and student experience. These may include (but are not limited to):
 - a. Specifying and mandating the use of an **Assessment Information Pack** to be provided to students in advance of each assessment.
 - b. Setting clearer expectations regarding **assessment load** and balance across modules.
 - c. Further defining the **quality and depth of feedback** expected.
 - d. Clearly communicating the **purpose of each assessment** to students.
 - e. Ensuring assessments are **diverse and balanced** across a programme, providing a variety of assessment types and approaches.
 - f. Coordinating assessment deadlines to support **manageable student workloads** across programmes.

- g. Embedding **inclusive assessment practices**, such as offering choice to support equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).
11. There is likely to be a benefit in considering the expectations through an **assessment lifecycle** lens, being clear about expectations and responsibilities from design of assessment through to feedback.
12. The aim is for the new Assessment and Feedback Policy to be approved and ready for implementation at the **start of the 2026/27 academic year**.
13. The proposed timeline to achieve this is as follows:
- **Review and consultation period:** June 2025 – November 2025
The review will begin in June 2025 and include broad consultation with academic staff and relevant stakeholders. Engagement will take place through College structures and with Senate members.
 - **Committee updates:**
Progress updates will be provided to the Senate Education Committee (SEC) at its September and November 2025 meetings.
 - **Approval process:**
A final draft of the policy will be submitted for approval at the February 2026 meeting of SEC. This will allow sufficient time for any further amendments and formal sign-off by Senate ahead of the 2026/27 academic year.

Resource implications

14. Support for the review will be provided by Academic Quality and Standards. This support will be prioritised by the department as assessment and feedback is an institutional priority. There may be resource implications from expanding the mandatory elements/expectations of staff in assessment and feedback practice.

Risk management

15. Failure to address student concerns around assessment and feedback is a risk to the student experience. This would mean we have not met our strategic ambitions as set out in Strategy 2030, nor fulfilled the related QAA recommendation in the recent ELIR and QESR reviews. It carries reputational risk and continues to affect the University's standing in national league tables. The Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities is a significant mitigating activity to respond to this risk.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

16. This paper supports the SDG "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" as part of the strategic objective to improve the student experience. The proposals would not hinder the achievement of any other UN SDGs or exacerbate the Climate Emergency

Equality & diversity

17. Equality and diversity is inherent to the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities. One of the Principles specifically relates to fair, inclusive and equitable assessment practices.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

18. The launch of the review and consultation will be communicated with relevant stakeholders. Actions and implementation will follow the timeline proposed, unless altered by SEC.

Author

Professor Tina Harrison, Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement)

Presenter

Professor Tina Harrison, Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement)

Freedom of Information: Open

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Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Student Voice Update

Description of paper

1. This paper outlines planned activity to improve how student voices are listened to and acted upon across the University. This work supports the University’s strategy for enhancing the student experience, through ensuring student voices are valued and embedded across the institution.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students’ academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y

Action requested / recommendation

2. The committee are asked to note the activities outlined in the paper.

Background and context

3. Our students continue to identify a gap in how they perceive we value and respond to their feedback. Surveys and focus groups indicate that students feel their opinions are not valued, and there is a lack of clarity on how their feedback is acted on. The satisfaction with the student voice at the University is notably lower compared to our sector peers, with a 5.9% deficit against the Russell Group and Universities UK peers, according to the NSS 2024. Specifically, only 45.3% of our students feel clear on how their feedback is acted upon, which is 14% lower than Russell Group peers and 13.7% lower than Universities UK peers.
4. Postgraduate taught students express higher satisfaction levels than undergraduates in terms of “how feedback on my course is listened to”, with a notable difference of 15.8%. However, this remains the area of lowest satisfaction for postgraduates, with only 61.2% expressing contentment in the January 2025 Student Life Survey.
5. Current analysis focuses on taught students, given the different mechanisms for gathering postgraduate research feedback. To better understand and improve the postgraduate research student experience, further in-depth analysis is needed.
6. Student Voice and partnership are key considerations in the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework. The University’s Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP), which is co-signed by the University and Students’ Association, commits us to “continue work of the Student Voice Continuous Improvement Group, review the implementation of various student voice policies and develop a shared vision for student voice.”

Discussion

7. To understand the experience of taught students further, a baselining exercise was undertaken to learn more about student voice activity within Schools. Each School provided information on the delivery of course level feedback, Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC), School mechanisms such as Townhalls/Student Forums and communications to student about feedback actions. The key insights from this work were:
 - There is variation in student voice practice across all core student voice mechanisms, including what mechanisms are used and who is responsible for them;
 - There is a lack of visibility, across and within Schools, of student voice practice, feedback outcomes and themes and methods for communicating to students about feedback;
 - There is a lack of clarity about what is expected across student voice practices and a lack of clarity across governance and escalation routes, in particular where feedback relates beyond the School (e.g. to the College or a central service);
 - There exists a skills gap in analysing feedback and effectively communicating the themes and actions derived from it. While efforts are being made to improve how feedback actions are communicated to students, there remains a lack of understanding about what constitutes effective communication in this context. Addressing this gap is crucial for ensuring students feel their voices are valued and their feedback leads to tangible changes.
8. To respond to this feedback from students and staff a package of work has been identified to support the enhancement of student voice across the University. This work aims to provide clarity, consistency and visibility across the collection of feedback, reporting on feedback and communication to students in response to feedback.
9. This work will be developed using the insights gathered through engaging with staff and students and will be developed in partnership with Colleges, Schools, central services, students and the Edinburgh University Students' Association.

Student Voice Framework

10. A Student Voice Framework will be developed to provide clarity and consistency across core student voice practices, from data collection to communication to students. This will:
 - Establish minimum requirements for each School and Professional Service in student voice practices, setting clear expectations for staff and students;
 - Establish roles and responsibilities across mechanisms, ensuring there is clear accountability across all parts of the process and at all levels of the University;
 - Establish clear reporting and escalation routes to enable the identification of key feedback themes and to ensure timely responses to feedback;

- Enable timely, effective communications to students about feedback outcomes.

Student Voice Policies

11. The Student Voice Framework will outline the practical application of institutional student voice policies. To ensure the framework and policies are aligned, current policies will be reviewed and updated to ensure they are fit for purpose. This will include ensuring appropriate measures are in place to monitor and evaluate adherence to the policy and framework.

Student Voice Guidance

12. Guidance will be developed to support the implementation of the framework, ensuring staff and students have the appropriate training and skills to fulfil their roles across student voice activities effectively. This guidance will be developed in collaboration with Edinburgh University Students' Association and with Schools and Professional Services, building on existing areas of good practice.

13. These activities will be developed alongside on-going work within Registry Services to review central student voice mechanisms (sector surveys, Student Life Survey, ad hoc survey processes) and student voice governance, ensuring a holistic approach to student voice across the University.

Resource implications

14. Resource to progress and coordinate this work has been secured for one year through Student Experience Services and will be led through Registry Services. Development of policy, framework and guidance will be undertaken in consultation with the Student Lifecycle Management Group – Student Voice Continuous Improvement Group to draw on expertise from Schools, Colleges and central services.

Risk management

15. This work responds to the reputational risk of continued low student satisfaction with student voice activity and broader student experience.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

16. n/a

Equality & diversity

17. This work aims to ensure that the voices from all students are heard, listened to and responded to. This objective will be embedded within the design of the policies, framework and guidance which are developed.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

18. A communication will be shared with Colleges, Schools, central services and the Edinburgh University Students' Association to update on this work when the Design Lead is in post. A communication to students will be shared at the end of the current academic year to update them on this work.

Author

*Marianne Brown
Head of Academic Planning, Registry
Services*

Presenter

Marianne Brown

*Callum Paterson
Academic Engagement and Policy
Coordinator*

March 2025

Freedom of Information (*Is the paper 'open' or 'closed'*)

Open

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Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Membership and Terms of Reference 2025/26

Description of paper

1. The paper outlines Senate Education Committee's (SEC) Membership and Terms of Reference for 2025/26.

Fit with remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Promote innovations in learning, teaching and assessment, embrace new teaching methods and consider cross-cutting themes such as research-led and technology-enhanced learning, digital and information literacy, education for employability, internationalisation and lifelong learning. Consider and promote local developments or initiatives with substantial implications for University learning and teaching strategy, policy, services or operations.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students' academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	Y
Give specific consideration to instances in which the experience of one particular cohort of students or learners (undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research students, and those involved in non-standard programmes) may diverge from that of others.	Y
Anticipate and prepare for new opportunities and likely future developments in learning and teaching for all cohorts of students and learners.	Y
Consider the implications of the Committee's work and its decisions in the context of external initiatives and compliance and legal frameworks, particularly in relation to equality and diversity.	Y

Action requested / recommendation

2. The Membership and Terms of Reference are presented to SEC for members to note and advise of any forthcoming changes not already highlighted.

Background and context

3. The membership for SEC is presented to Senate annually for approval. Any subsequent amendments to the membership are reported to Senate at the next Ordinary meeting, usually held in October.
4. Senate Standing Committees formally report to Senate annually in addition to providing updates on upcoming business at each ordinary meeting of Senate. These committees feed into and out of College level committees (Undergraduate Education, Postgraduate Education, Quality Assurance) and specialist Support Services (the Institute for Academic Development, Careers Service, Student

Recruitment and Admissions, Registry Services) via committee membership. Therefore, a number of committee roles are ex officio, to ensure that committee members have the appropriate knowledge, expertise, responsibility and accountability to fulfil the committee remit. In October 2022, Senate agreed to expand the membership of each Standing Committee to include three elected Senate members. An election is held annually to fill the three positions. All committees include student representation.

Discussion

5. The Committee membership for SEC will be presented to Senate for approval at its May meeting.
6. Changes to membership to take effect from 1 August 2025 are highlighted.
7. The SEC webpages will be updated with membership once all positions are confirmed.
8. The SEC Terms of Reference remain unchanged and are published via the following Academic Quality and Standards webpage:
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/education/terms-reference>

Resource implications

9. No amendments with resource implications are proposed.

Risk management

10. Effective academic governance assists the University in managing risk associated with its academic activities.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

11. N/A

Equality & diversity

12. The composition of the Senate Committees is largely determined according to defined role-holders (e.g. defined Assistant or Vice-Principal, Director of a defined Support Service or delegate) or as representatives of particular stakeholders (e.g. a College or the Students' Association). The membership of SEC is therefore largely a consequence of decisions taken elsewhere to appoint individuals to particular roles. Ensuring that appointment processes support a diverse staff body is part of the broader responsibility of the University.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

13. SEC's Membership and Terms of Reference are communicated via the following Academic Quality and Standards webpage: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/education>

Author

Patrick Jack
Academic Quality and Standards
April 2025

Presenter

Professor Colm Harmon
Vice-Principal Students

Freedom of Information: *Open*

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Name	Position	Term of Office
Professor Colm Harmon (Convener)	Vice-Principal Students	Ex Officio
Professor Tina Harrison (Vice-Convener)	Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement)	Ex Officio
Professor Mary Brennan	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)	
Dr Lisa Kendall	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)	
Professor Laura Bradley	Representative of CAHSS (Postgraduate Research)	
Professor Gill Aitken	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching)	
Alexandra Laidlaw	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching)	
Professor Ruth Andrew	Representative of CMVM (Postgraduate Research)	
Professor Linda Kirstein	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)	
Lorna Halliday	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)	
Professor Jamie Pearce	Representative of CSE (Postgraduate Research)	
Katya Amott	Vice President Education, Edinburgh University Students' Association	Ex Officio
TBC – election held in October	Postgraduate Research Student Representative	
Callum Paterson	Academic Engagement Coordinator, Edinburgh University Students' Association	Ex Officio
Professor Jason Love	Head of School, CSE	
Professor Jo Shaw	Head of School, CAHSS	
Professor Mike Shipston	Head of School / Deanery, CMVM	

Nichola Kett	Head of Academic Quality and Standards	Ex Officio
Dr Velda McCune	Deputy Director, Institute for Academic Development (Director's nominee)	Ex Officio
Dr Shane Collins	Representing Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions	Ex Officio
Dr Melissa Highton	Director of the Learning, Teaching and Web Services Division of Information Services	Ex Officio
Shelagh Green	Director for Careers and Employability	Ex Officio
Marianne Brown	Co-opted member (Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling)	1 August 2024 - 31 July 2027
Professor Sian Bayne	Co-opted member (Digital Education)	1 August 2023 - 31 July 2026
Lucy Evans	Co-opted member (Student Experience)	1 August 2025 - 31 July 2028
TBC – election outcome not yet known	Representative of Senate (CAHSS)	1 August 2024 - 31 July 2025
TBC – election outcome not yet known	Representative of Senate (CMVM)	1 August 2024 - 31 July 2025
TBC – election outcome not yet known	Representative of Senate (CSE)	1 August 2024 - 31 July 2025
Patrick Jack	Committee Secretary	

Senate Education Committee

1 May 2025

Senate and Standing Committees Annual Internal Effectiveness Review

Description of paper

1. This paper notifies the Committee of the plans for the annual internal review of Senate and its standing committees' effectiveness which Senate will be asked to approve at its May meeting.

Action requested / recommendation

2. The Committee is asked to note the plans.

Background and context

3. The Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance 2023 (64) states:

“The governing body is expected to review its own effectiveness each year and to undertake an externally facilitated evaluation of its own effectiveness and that of its committees, including size and composition of membership, at least every five years. As part of these processes or separately, the effectiveness of the academic board (also known as Senate, Senatus Academicus or academic council) is expected to be reviewed similarly. These reviews should be reported upon appropriately within the institution and outside. Externally facilitated reviews should be held following any period of exceptional change or upheaval (allowing suitable time to see the effects of changes made), the usual timetable for externally facilitated review being brought forward, if necessary in these circumstances.”

4. Previously, the Senate annual internal effectiveness review process has involved a self-reflective survey of members which runs over summer. Response rates to these surveys have typically been low, with a response rate of 16% of members for 2023/24. For Senate standing committees, the process has also previously involved a self-reflective survey of members which runs over summer. Whilst response rates have been better than for Senate member surveys, they vary and are not consistently high. Surveying of committee members is not a requirement for internal effectiveness review.
5. A post-meeting survey for Senate, which is sent to members after each ordinary meeting, has been implemented for 2024/25. Meeting metrics and an analysis of the results are shared on the [Senate members' portal](#) alongside points of learning.
6. Senate members also received a survey on Senate and its committees as part of the work of the External Review Task and Finish Group in 2024/25, with outcomes informing actions in response to recommendations.

Discussion

7. For 2024/25 it is felt there is sufficient information available to conduct this year's internal effectiveness review of Senate and its standing committees without the need to issue a further survey to members. Additionally, there is a high risk that running a member survey and identification of actions as had been done in previous years will create overlap and/or duplication with the extensive work and changes that have been undertaken and are planned as a result of the externally facilitated review of Senate.
8. The internal effectiveness review for Senate and the standing committees for 2024/25 will therefore consist of the annual report from the standing committees to Senate (which has been

significantly enhanced over previous years in response to feedback from Senate¹) and a summary report of the findings and action taken as a result of the Senate post-meeting survey. These will be presented to the October 2025 meeting of Senate.

9. Going forwards, Academic Quality and Standards will lead work to develop proposals for how internal effectiveness review processes can be enhanced, with key considerations being:
- How these processes can meaningfully support the evaluation of changes implemented in response to the externally facilitated review of Senate;
 - Engaging processes which encourage and enable participation;
 - How to capture a holistic view across Senate and its standing committees, so members are not being asked solely about their own committee; and
 - Internal and external benchmarking to ensure alignment with good practice and external requirements.

Resource implications

10. There are no additional resource implications as a result of the plans for internal effectiveness. Additional resource has been required in 2024/25 from Academic Quality and Standards to design, run and analyse the post-meetings survey and to identify and implement changes in response to feedback. If any additional actions are proposed, either in terms of the internal effectiveness review processes themselves or as a result of the review, the resource implications of these will need to be outlined and agreed.

Risk management

11. The annual effectiveness review process assists the University in ensuring that its academic governance arrangements are effective.

Equality & diversity

12. Equality and diversity implications of committee work are considered on an ongoing basis. Consideration will be given to ensuring that enhanced internal effectiveness review processes are equitable and inclusive. Action to improve equality, diversity and inclusion on Senate is being progressed separately by the University Lead, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in response to recommendations arising from the AdvanceHE external review of Senate effectiveness.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

13. Two reports (the annual report from the standing committees to Senate and a summary report of the findings and action taken as a result of the Senate post-meeting survey) will be presented to the October Senate meeting, with any associated proposals for actions. Academic Quality and Standards will update Senate and the standing committees on work to enhance annual internal effectiveness review processes.

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¹ 2023/24 report (Paper I) <https://registryservices.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/9%20October%202024%20-%20Agenda%20and%20Papers.pdf>