

## **Academic Standards Committee – 20 November 2020**

### **ASC/2020/15 Matters Arising**

*ASC/2020/15.1 PGT College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2018-19: College of Arts and College of Social Sciences: Adam Smith Business School (ASC/2019/41.2.1 and ASC/2019/41.2.2)*

A response from the College of Arts indicated that discussions had taken place with regard to coordination of the various accommodation requirements for MLitt Technical Art History. MLitt Textile Conservation had indicated that progress was being made in relation to their use of Mahara. Various issues around the management and administration of PGT cohorts and programmes were being looked at with consideration of the possible new post of College Dean of PGT.

The Adam Smith Business School had requested more time to respond to issues that had been flagged in relation to the PGT dissertation student experience. The response would come to the January 2021 meeting of ASC.

*ASC/2020/15.2 PGT College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2018-19: College of Social Sciences (ASC/2020/2.3)*

As concerns regarding English language skills had been raised across AMRs for a number of years, the issue was drawn to the attention of EdPSC and discussed at its meeting on 22 October 2020. The Convener of EdPSC had agreed to raise the issue with Ms Rachel Sandison, Vice Principal, External Relations.

*ASC/2020/15.3 Responses to the PSR of Veterinary Medicine: Graduate Access to Mahara (ASC/2020/2.4 and ASC/2020/5.4.2)*

This issue was also highlighted to EdPSC given the increasing number of subject areas expressing interest in the use of Mahara and the growing importance of preparing students for employment after graduation. In view of the resource implications, the Convener of EdPSC had undertaken to discuss this with Mr Dave Anderson in Information Services. In addition, the Convener of EdPSC had agreed to flag this with Learning & Teaching Committee given the planned commitment within the forthcoming L&T Strategy to students' skills and professional development and the need for students to demonstrate their achievements after graduation.

### **ASC/2020/17 Annual Monitoring**

*ASC/2020/17.1 College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2019-20*

ASC received the reports from Annual Monitoring undertaken by the four Colleges. Arts and Science & Engineering reports covered UG and PGT provision, and MVLS and Social Sciences reports covered UG provision. In response to the exceptional circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Annual Monitoring process had been abridged to focus on key areas.

*ASC/2020/17.1.1 College of Arts (UG and PG)*

Dr McCarthy introduced the Arts report, highlighting themes around the success of transition to online assessment and the implementation of the No Detriment policy, though these were achieved at the cost of a huge staff workload. Staff had been reflecting carefully on the implications for future developments, and one of the issues highlighted was the importance of good and timely communications.

The Convener noted comments in the report around the temporary changes to courses and programmes that had been approved for 2020-21. In many cases the intention now was to make these changes permanent. Clarity was needed on the extent to which the full approval

process had to be followed given the very high workload that this could create. Senate Office would be providing guidance on this shortly.

**Action: Senate Office**

#### *ASC/2020/17.1.2 College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences (UG)*

Dr Rogerson introduced the MVLS report, again noting the very rapid and successful transition that had been made to online teaching and assessment, including online OSCEs. While the experience of open-book assessments had been good, there was demand from the professional areas to use timed exams at future diets. Concerns had been raised by students about the possibility of their peers cheating in online assessments. In MVLS there were particular challenges associated with face-to-face teaching of pre-clinical skills, with the need for delivery in small groups leading to sessions being repeated multiple times. There was a particular risk that the final year group of the BDS would not be able to graduate on time due to a lack of opportunities for clinical experience, with knock-on effects for later cohorts.

Other issues in the report included concerns about the complexity of degree regulations and the Code of Assessment, which had been highlighted by the calculations required by the No Detriment policy. Concerns about student mental health were prominent, as were comments regarding equality of student access to IT provision (laptops, internet connectivity). Staff had identified the need for additional digital technologist support.

#### *ASC/2020/17.1.3 College of Science & Engineering (UG and PG)*

For Science & Engineering, Dr Purchase noted that there was much to celebrate in the significant achievements of staff in the past period.

Several Schools in the College had expressed concerns around online assessment, relating to the potential for cheating and collaboration, particularly in those subject areas where MCQs were a common form of assessment.

Frustrations had been expressed around communication of some of the policy changes over the No Detriment period, particularly in relation to where responsibility for decision-making lay and late communication of some key information particularly for PGT programmes. There were concerns around a shortage of administrative staff, for example in GES where academic staff were increasingly being drawn into dealing with PG enquiries and other non-academic tasks.

#### *ASC/2020/17.1.4 College of Social Sciences (UG)*

Dr Doherty noted a wide range of activities where the staff response to the pandemic had been excellent and for which there had been positive feedback from students. Much of the report focused on a range of issues raised at programme level rather than being matters of concern across the whole College. These included assessment design and the provision of timely feedback, the reliance on part-time staff and GTAs, and the need for good technical support, difficulties with EvaSys, the accuracy of timetables, and challenges in the ethics approval process. In relation to the pandemic, the No Detriment policy had been received positively by staff and students but, as noted elsewhere, had been very demanding to implement.

#### *ASC/2020/17.1.5 Summary*

ASC received the summary report prepared by the Senate Office. The report identified the following themes:

What worked well:

- Response of staff to the challenges of online delivery: across the University staff had responded very well to the challenges brought by the pandemic.

- Online exams: these were delivered successfully and students had adjusted and provided much positive feedback on their experience of this.
- The effect of the No Detriment Policy: feedback indicated that this had worked well resulting in student performance not being adversely affected by the pandemic.
- Staff support: various approaches had been adopted to support staff to deliver the required changes.

Themes for University attention:

- IT/remote delivery: Many concerns had been expressed in relation to the support and equipment required by staff to deliver teaching and assessment remotely. In addition many questions had been raised about the extent to which students had equal access to computer and online services and whether particular groups were disadvantaged by the move to online teaching and assessment.
- Staff workloads: The current situation had created significant additional workloads for staff. Reports referred to the freezing of key posts and the need for additional IT support posts. There were significant concerns around staff well-being both in relation to workloads and to the conditions under which they would be required to return to working on campus.
- University policies: While the effect of the No Detriment policy had broadly been welcomed, its implementation had been challenging, with some information not communicated clearly in a timely way. Implementation of the No Detriment policy had highlighted some of the complexities in the Code of Assessment and degree regulations, which were now subject to review. In connection with the move to online assessment there were a number of questions as to how this would be managed in the longer term (e.g. clarity on types of exams that would be permitted and strategies for ensuring integrity of the assessment).
- University systems: Comments had been received on ways in which the course evaluation system could be improved. In light of the shift to online assessment, comments had also been made regarding the functionality, capacity and reliability of Moodle.
- Timetabling and teaching accommodation: As in previous years, there were many problems reported.
- Student support and mental health: Concerns were widely noted regarding the numbers of students who were struggling with poor mental health and reporting insufficient support being available. This was noted to be putting additional strain on academic and support staff from whom students often sought support.
- University communications: A number of general comments were made regarding the need for clear and timely communication from the University on policy matters, with specific issues raised in connection with recruitment and admissions activities.
- In addition to the matters noted in the summary, it was agreed that the concern regarding the process and workload associated with making temporary course changes permanent in the coming session should be noted.

ASC was satisfied that the themes identified were an accurate reflection of the issues raised by the Colleges. The Senate Office would seek updates and responses from the relevant sources to these University-wide matters.

**Action: Senate Office**

## **Academic Standards Committee – 22 January 2021**

### **ASC/2020/30 Matters Arising**

*ASC/2020/30.1 PGT College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2018-19: College of Social Sciences: Adam Smith Business School (ASC/2019/41.2.2)*

In response to concerns regarding English Language skills, the ASBS had provided information about additional support being provided to students.

In relation to expressions of dissatisfaction with the dissertation experience, ASBS had indicated that this related to restrictions on the nature of permitted projects. However, comments in the monitoring reports had also related to the student experience of project supervision. ASC had previously been made aware that ASBS were looking at the academic rigour and quality of supervision and equity of student experience. It was agreed that in his role as Quality Officer for the College, Dr Doherty would continue to monitor developments on this issue at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

*ASC/2020/30.2 Annual Monitoring: College of Arts (UG and PG) (ASC/2020/17.1.1)*

Clarity had been requested on whether temporary changes to courses made for session 2020-21 in response to the pandemic, which were now intended to continue into future sessions, needed to be confirmed through the full approval process. Ms Butcher advised that a decision on this was imminent and advice would be made available as soon as possible.

*ASC/2020/30.3 Annual Monitoring: Summary (ASC/2020/17.1.5)*

The annual monitoring summary noted a number of comments in relation to the move to on-line exams, including concerns regarding the integrity of assessment and the amount of time to be made available to students to complete the exams. A special meeting of Education Policy and Strategy Committee had taken place on 16 January 2021 to consider some of these issues, and it had been confirmed that, with a very limited number of exceptions, double time would be available for all timed exams taking place in the remainder of 2020-21.

It was noted that there were a number of issues still being addressed in relation to online exams. For example, clarity was needed on what now constituted an 'exam' in terms of course approval, and where responsibility for timetabling fell in relation to different forms of assessment. There was on-going debate in relation to redesigning assessments for the online format, and the concerns of some technical subjects (maths, science, finance, economics) around the integrity of online exams. Connectivity problems and students being based in other time zones were also relevant. Professor Morrison acknowledged that there were issues still to be resolved and that communication to both staff and students of the University's position on these matters was of key importance.

*ASC/2020/30.4 Audit Report on Programme Approval Activity Undertaken by Colleges (ASC/2020/21.1)*

Feedback arising from the Senate Office audit had been provided to Colleges.

### **ASC/2020/34 Annual Monitoring**

*ASC/2020/34.1 PGT College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2019-20*

*ASC/2020/34.1.1 College of Social Sciences*

Dr Doherty introduced the report, noting the current heavy workloads which had resulted in the report being submitted late. While the report still noted positives associated with the way that staff had embraced the recent changes, there appeared to be a change of tone since completion of the undergraduate report, with staff having been working under pressure for a longer time and being more aware of the on-going challenges arising from the pandemic.

A comment recording a perception that the IT hardware on the Dumfries Campus was relatively poor and inferior to that on the main campus was noted, and Dr Doherty agreed to ask for clarification on this, as to whether it was only a perception or whether there was an issue that needed to be addressed.

The Summary provided by the Senate Office identified the following as themes identified in the 'What Worked Well' section: Response of staff to the challenges of online delivery; Online exams processes; the No Detriment policy; Staff support – teaching; External Examiner responses.

The following were identified as issues for University attention:

- IT/remote delivery – including provision of equipment and support for staff, access to software, hardware and internet connectivity for students
- Staffing – including workloads and related welfare issues
- University policy – covering issues such as the future nature of PGT programmes, format of future exams, concerns regarding plagiarism and collusion.
- Suitability and quality of teaching spaces – noting particularly the continued increase in student numbers.
- Student support/mental health
- University communication – issues were identified with timeliness and consistency of messaging, particularly in relation to the No Detriment policy and Good Cause.
- Library resources, particularly in relation to the pivot to online delivery.
- Continued concerns about students' English language skills in the Adam Smith Business School. This was echoed in the School of Social and Political Sciences.

The Committee also noted that, under the heading of 'Student support – IT', the summary had included reference to Chinese students having faced racism in the context of the pandemic, and a concern that awareness of racism and other forms of discrimination should have a higher prominence in the University. It was agreed that this should be highlighted as a theme of its own.

ASC was satisfied that the themes identified were an accurate reflection of the issues raised by the Colleges. The Senate Office would seek updates and responses from the relevant sources to these University-wide matters.

**Action: Senate Office**

## **Academic Standards Committee – 19 March 2021**

### **ASC/2020/41 Matters Arising**

*ASC/2020/41.2 Annual Monitoring: PGT College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2019-20 - College of Social Sciences (ASC/2020/34.1.1)*

In follow up to the point noted in the Social Sciences Annual Monitoring Summary regarding the perceived poor quality of IT hardware at the Dumfries campus, it was reported that staff were primarily supported by UWS but this would shortly be changing so that support would in future be provided by Glasgow. All members of staff would be provided with a laptop and would then access Glasgow systems and desktop support directly.

### **ASC/2020/43 Annual Monitoring**

*ASC/2020/43.1 PGT College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2019-20*

*ASC/2020/43.1.1 College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences*

Mr Rogerson introduced the Annual Report from MVLS. The report mirrored some of the issues and concerns raised in the other PGT college AMRs. Mr Rogerson highlighted the

success of online delivery of teaching and application of the No Detriment policy. One item raised in the report concerned plagiarism in online exams and student misunderstanding of this. It was also noted that, despite such concerns, overall results had been similar to those achieved in previous sessions.

There was a question around whether weekly Covid testing was to be introduced, in order to allow students to return to campus. Professor Morrison advised that this was under review, with in-principle agreement for twice weekly testing, though this would take time to roll out. There was discussion of the concerns around timetabling. Ms Broad noted that the scale of the changes to teaching delivery in the last twelve months had created significant challenges in relation to timetabling and that this was on-going. Central timetabling was also conducting a review of courses that could be withdrawn.

Members noted that there were important issues around the format of teaching delivery for future years, such as whether all lectures should be available for remote as well as in-person attendance, and whether the appropriate technology would always be available to support this, to allow real-time remote participation as well as simply recording sessions. Professor Morrison noted that blended learning was a prominent feature of the Learning & Teaching Strategy but there were various principles around what this meant that needed further discussion.

#### *ASC/2020/43.1.2 Overview*

The following were identified as having worked well: response of staff to the challenges of online delivery; online exams processes; No Detriment policy; staff support; use of Zoom for lectures.

The following were identified as themes for the University's attention:

- IT/Remote Delivery: There were many comments pertaining to various aspects of IT provision for staff and students, including in relation to remote and blended-learning as noted in the discussion above.
- Staffing/Staff Workloads: the significant additional workload that the pandemic had created for staff was evident, with concerns around staff wellbeing. While staffing and workload issues were matters for College resourcing, the following comment was noted: 'Adapt PDR expectations for all staff, at all levels, engaged in the teaching process.'
- Timetabling: As noted above there were significant concerns around timetabling where the pandemic had resulted in substantially revised teaching schedules.
- Student Support/Mental Health: while there was acknowledgement of the support and information now being provided by the University, concerns were raised around the time taken for registration with the Disability Service and for mental health support to be obtained. Professor Morrison noted that a review of the Disability Service had just been published and it was anticipated that the recommendations would lead to some significant improvements in the Service's processes.
- Communication of policy: Concerns had been expressed by students regarding communication about the No Detriment policy (particularly for the MRes programmes).
- Masters programmes without independent work: demand had been expressed for the development of entirely taught Masters degree programmes. ASC agreed that the College should be asked to provide more information on this.

ASC agreed that the above themes were an accurate reflection of the issues raised by the College and that the Senate Office should seek updates and responses from the relevant sources to these University-wide matters.

**Action: Senate Office**