



Student Action Group for Engagement (S.A.G.E.)

21st October 2020 (13:00 – 14:30)

Present:

Adil Rahoo, VP GSBS **(Chair)**

Elizabeth Shaw, Management & Human Resource Management Department Rep

Sarina Vlaytchev, Media & Journalism Department Rep

Zalha Abasi, Economics & Law Department Rep

Ike Odukudu, Computing Department Rep

Nikolay Naydenov, Finance, Accounting & Risk Department Rep

Muhammad Ayub, Electrical & Electronic Engineering Department Rep

Mary Welsh, Occupational Therapy, Human Nutrition & Dietetics Department Rep

Harrison Elue, Construction & Surveying Department Rep

Fiona Reed, Psychology Department Rep

Alexander Van De Rose, Biological & Biomedical Sciences Department Rep

Ewan Batty, Civil Engineering & Environmental Management Department Rep

Yasmin Sweeney, Mechanical Engineering Department Rep

Laura Clark, Cyber Security & Networks Department Rep

Apologies:

Kimberley Brown, Nursing & Community Health Department Rep

Georgina Smith, Podiatry & Radiography Department Rep

Louise Dunn, Physiotherapy & Paramedicine Department Rep

Rob Eadie, Applied Computer Games Department Rep

Nabila Khan, Applied Science Department Rep

Catherine Mackie, Social Sciences Department Rep

Absent:

Hannah Einarson, Vision Sciences Department Rep

Yonca Goecer, Fashion, Marketing, Tourism & Events Department Rep

Louise Thompson, Social Work Department Rep

In Attendance:

David Steed, GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality)

Lesley McAleavy, GCU Policy & Development Officer

Sara MacLean, Student Voice Team Leader

Paul Stalker, Academic Rep Co-ordinator **(Clerk)**

Scarlett Hooper, Students' Association Coordinator (GCU London)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Approval of S.A.G.E. Minutes (26/02/2020)

The chair made reference to the minutes of the previous S.A.G.E. meeting (26/02/2020) and asked for all those who attended that meeting to approve whether this was an accurate reflection or not. The minutes were approved.

2. Full Time Officers Update

- *VP GSBS Update*

The VP GSBS noted that in addition to attending meetings with the Dean and Associate Dean of Learning, Teaching & Quality (ADLTQ) in the Glasgow School for Business & Society that they had attended a number of Programme Approval events as a student panel member. The VP GSBS also noted that they had been lobbying the University to improve its tuition fee instalment plan options available for international students.

3. Academic Quality & Development Update

- *Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) 4*

The GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that every five years every Scottish University is reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland through an Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). The GCU Policy & Development Officer also explained that at the end of the review process QAA Scotland will generate a report for the University, identifying areas of good practice as well as recommendation for enhancements to the learning experience. The GCU Policy & Development Officer noted that in its last Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) in 2015, GCU was judged to have effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.

The GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that the ELIR process involves two visits from QAA Scotland, a Planning Visit and a Review Visit. The GCU Policy & Development Officer also explained that the University submitted to QAA Scotland in November 2019 a Reflective Analysis (RA) and Advance Information Set (AIS) to help the ELIR Review Panel to identify themes for discussion with staff and students during these two ELIR visits.

The GCU Policy & Development Officer noted that the Planning Visit was successfully held on Thursday 6th February 2020 but that the Review Visit that was scheduled to take place during March 2020 was postponed due to the Covid-19 campus closure. The GCU Policy &

Development Officer also noted that the Review Visit had been rescheduled to take place online via Microsoft Teams on the week commencing the 16th November 2020 and that a Reflective Analysis update paper had been produced to provide the ELIR Panel with an account of the university's response to Covid-19.

The GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that unlike the ELIR Planning Visit, academic reps would likely not be needed for the Review Visit as the ELIR Review Panel wanted to speak to non-student reps on this occasion.

4. Mitigating Circumstances

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that the University was currently in the process of looking to revise its Mitigating Circumstances (MITS) policy, with a view to introducing a 'Fit to Sit' approach. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also explained that outwith this process the University made temporary adjustments to the operation and application of the University's MITS process during the 2019-20 academic year to deal with the impact of Covid-19.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that although work was continuing around making long term revisions to the MITS process, the University had decided to temporarily suspend the requirement for students to provide evidence as part of their MITS application due to the current issues and problems around obtaining Doctors Notes. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also noted that although the suspension to provide evidence as part of their MITS application was currently for only Trimester A, it was looking more and more likely that it would be extended to Trimester B.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that although students would not need to provide evidence as part of their MITS application they would still need to submit a statement with their application on how their circumstances meet with the existing and established MITS criteria of being *exceptional*, *serious*, *acute* and *unforeseen*. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also explained that although the University was aware and would take into account that Covid-19 will create additional impacts and complications to illness on students, the University would not consider the general impact of life in the current situation due to Covid-19 as meeting the *exceptional*, *serious*, *acute* and *unforeseen* criteria for MITS.

The VP GSBS noted that they felt that the phrase '*exceptional*, *serious*, *acute* and *unforeseen*' was too long and complicated. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that one of the aims of developing a new revised Mitigating Circumstances (MITS) policy was to make the process simpler and easier for students to understand. The GCU Business Partner

(Academic Quality) also explained that moving away from the current MITS policy at this time wasn't practical due to the upheaval Covid-19 was having across the institution and that the University was aiming to make the current policy clearer to students until a new revised policy could be implemented.

The VP GSBS asked what indirect Covid-19 situations and circumstances would constitute as being *exceptional, serious, acute* and *unforeseen*. The VP GSBS also asked whether the impact of lockdown restriction changes on the accessibility of learning resources and facilities or on a student's childcare provision would be covered by the *exceptional, serious, acute* and *unforeseen* criteria. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that those types of situations would be covered by the *exceptional, serious, acute* and *unforeseen* criteria and that students should submit a MITS application in those circumstances as those types of situations would not fall within the established 'new normal'.

One member noted that they felt that it was debatable whether lockdown restriction changes were really unforeseen or exceptional in the current climate and that they were concerned that it wasn't very clear what is currently meant by unforeseen or exceptional.

One member asked if mental health issues relating to the impact of Covid-19 would be covered by the *exceptional, serious, acute* and *unforeseen* criteria for MITS. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that the impact of mental health issues would continue to fall under the scope of MITS.

A number of members noted that they felt that the language used to explain Mitigating Circumstances was confusing and wasn't particularly student friendly. A number of members also noted that they felt that the language used seemed downplayed the fact that there was scope for students to submit a MITS application in relation to indirect Covid-19 impacts. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that a more student friendly version of the information contained in this policy paper would be created for students that would be significantly easier to understand.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that updated information and guidance about the MITS application process for Trimester A would be updated on the GCU website as soon as the 2019-20 academic year MITS cycle was completed. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also noted awareness activities would take place to inform Programme Leaders of the temporary MITS application process for Trimester A as well as to give guidance on the other mechanisms that are available to support students who may be encountering difficulties, such as short extensions to submission deadlines.

One member asked why it was necessary to wait until 2019-20 academic year MITS cycle was completed before publishing information and guidance about the MITS application process for Trimester A on the GCU website. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that

the University wanted to avoid creating any confusion among Postgraduate students who may need to submit a MITS in relation to assessments taken in Trimester C of the 2019-20 academic year.

One member asked what would happen if a student submitted a MITS in relation to Trimester A of the 2020-21 academic year based on the current information and guidance about the MITS application process. Another member asked whether those submitting MITS for Trimester A based on the current information and guidance on the GCU website would end up being disadvantaged in anyway. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted very few if any students would be applying for MITS this early in the Trimester as most would not have undertaken any assessments yet. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also noted that in the unlikely event a student was to submit a MITS application now for Trimester A based on the information and guidance for 2019-20 that a member of the team who deal with MITS would get in touch with student to advise them on the MITS process for 2020-21 academic year.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that they would return to SAGE with an update on the work being undertaken around making long term revisions to the MITS process.

5. Revised Criminal Convictions Policy

The VP GSBS explained that the University was looking to revise its Criminal Convictions Policy and Procedures for Applicants & Registered Students in order to bring it in to line with the University and UCAS's decision to remove the criminal convictions question for programmes that do not require an enhanced disclosure at point of application and to only ask it of applicants who firmly accept an offer.

The VP GSBS asked those present if they any questions or feedback about the proposed changes to the Criminal Convictions Policy and Procedures for Applicants & Registered Students.

6. Guidance For Staff For Responding To Student Breaches Of Covid-19 Regulations & Guidance

The VP GSBS explained that the University had drafted guidance for staff on how to respond to complaints about student breaches of the Covid-19 pledge. The VP GSBS noted that the guidance was drafted to give staff members examples of Student Covid-19 Pledge breaches as well as wording that could be used in communications to students to address informally any breach that has been considered unintentional and minor in nature.

The VP GSBS asked those present if they any questions or feedback about the drafted guidance for staff on how to respond to complaints about student breaches of the Covid-19 pledge.

The VP GSBS noted they had a concern about whether or not the University should be punishing students for actions or behaviours off campus. One member noted that they felt it really depended on whether or not the actions or behaviours off campus involved putting other GCU students at risk.

The VP GSBS noted that they had a concern about whether the Covid-19 Pledge infringes on a student's right to privacy. One member noted that they felt that the Covid-19 Pledge didn't really infringe on privacy and that the pledge was more about promoting open and honest actions or behaviours as dishonest actions or behaviour could potentially put others at risk.

A number of members noted that they had concerns about the Covid-19 pledge being imposed on students, especially on continuing students that had registered to join the University before the pledge was in existence.

One member asked if the Covid-19 Pledge was applicable to students that were currently studying at home abroad given that they would not be going on to campus and were subject to different restrictions and laws than in Glasgow.

7. Class Rep Recruitment

The Academic Rep Coordinator noted that before the start of the new academic year the Students' Association had developed and delivered a workshop containing guidance and advice on how to recruit Class Reps in a remote working environment for Programme Leaders.

The Academic Rep Coordinator explained that the workshop contained guidance and advice on how Programme Leaders could run an online nominations process for Class Reps as well as how they could run online elections where only one Class Rep was being recruited and where more than Class Rep was being recruited. The Academic Rep Coordinator highlighted that the guidance and advice to Programme Leaders was to run their Class Rep nominations/ applications process during weeks one and two of Trimester A. The Academic Rep Coordinator also highlighted that the guidance and advice to Programme Leaders was to run any elections during week three of Trimester A.

The Academic Rep Coordinator explained that the workshop also contained guidance and advice on the number of Class Reps that should be recruited for each level of each Programme

as well as details of the support the Students' Association could provide Programme Leaders to recruit Class Reps. The Academic Rep Coordinator highlighted that the guidance and advice to Programme Leaders was recruit no more than one Class Rep per 50 students.

One member noted that they had not seen any communications go out about Class Rep recruitment for the level of their programme. The Academic Rep Coordinator noted that they had received reports that some Class Reps were being recruited without the roles being advertised to the whole class and that the Full Time Officers were following this up with the Schools to find out if this has been the case.

The Academic Rep Coordinator highlighted that the Students' Association had supported around twelve Programme Leaders to recruit Class Reps for their programmes and that these Programme Leaders had received a high number of Class Rep nominations/ applications. The Academic Rep Coordinator noted that for example Level One Nursing had received a record 14 nominations for the five Class Rep roles available.

The Academic Rep Coordinator noted the deadline for Programme Leaders to recruit and register the details of their Class Reps with the Students' Association so that the Class Reps could be invited to attend induction training was at the end of week three of Trimester A, 5.30pm Friday 23rd October. The Academic Rep Coordinator also noted that real-time Class Rep Induction training would be taking place online via Collaborate Ultra, Monday to Friday, during weeks four and five of Trimester A and that there would be three induction training sessions a day, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening.

The Academic Rep Coordinator explained that the Undergraduate Class Rep lists for Department Reps would be created one week after the deadline for Programme Leaders to recruit and register the details of their Class Reps with the Students' Association.

The Academic Rep Coordinator noted that the aim was to get Department Reps a list of their Class Reps to them by the end of week five trimester. The Academic Rep Coordinator also noted that they would advise Department Reps if there would be a delay in them receiving their Class Rep lists and that as previously advised Department Reps should not get in touch to request details of Class Reps.

8. 2020-21 Academic Rep Gathering Events

The VP GSBS and Academic Rep Coordinator explained that Academic Rep Gathering events are an opportunity for all UG Class Reps, PGT Class Reps, Department Reps and Postgraduate Taught Reps to come together to discuss the learning experience at GCU. The VP GSBS and Academic Rep Coordinator also explained that Academic Rep Gathering events were also

opportunity for taught academic reps to attend development training workshops and take part in University and Students Association feedback activities.

The Academic Rep Coordinator noted that this year's Autumn Academic Rep Gathering would be taking place on Wednesday 18th November 2020 between 1pm and 5pm and that the Spring Academic Rep Gathering was currently scheduled to take place on Wednesday 24th February 2021 between 1pm and 5pm. The Academic Rep Coordinator also noted that due to Covid-19 both these events would be held online using Collaborate Ultra and/ or Microsoft Teams.

The Academic Rep Coordinator explained that currently the Academic Rep Gatherings included a school based networking session, a Student Engagement Café session, followed by an opportunity to attend two development training sessions out of a selection of sessions.

The Academic Rep Coordinator noted that the Students' Association currently ran development sessions around public speaking, how to influence others and creative ways to get feedback from students. The Academic Rep Coordinator also noted that the University had ran development sessions around employability and unconscious bias. The Academic Rep Coordinator asked those present if there were additional areas they would like development sessions on.

9. AOCB

The next meeting for S.A.G.E. is scheduled to take place on 16th December (13:00-14:30)