



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

26th February 2020 (13:00 – 14:30)

Present:

Moses Apiliga, VP GSBS (**Chair**)

Dara Coussot, SCEBE Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Rep

Kirsty Winters, Electrical & Electronic Engineering Department Rep

William Nouwen, Applied Computer Games Department Rep

Zubair Sarwar, Management & Human Resource Management Department Rep

Nicola Gray, Media & Journalism Department Rep

Jennifer Hewitt, Physiotherapy & Paramedicine Department Rep

Seona Halbert, Biological & Biomedical Sciences Department Rep

Monica Allen, Social Sciences Department Rep

Apologies:

Zain Khan, SHLS Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Rep

Gillian Poynts, GSBS Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Rep

John Vasconcelos, Mechanical Engineering Department Rep

Katie Moffat, Occupational Therapy, Human Nutrition & Dietetics Department Rep

Bernadette Prickett, Computing Department Rep

Laura Clark, Cyber Security & Networks Department Rep

Peakay Dennis, Psychology Department Rep

Absent:

Stewart Baker, Applied Science Department Rep

Lucy Starling, Civil Engineering & Environment Department Rep

Claire MacLeod, Construction & Surveying Department Rep

Maggie Wierzbicka, Economics & Law Department Rep

Tanya Fate-Cockbain, Fashion, Marketing, Tourism & Events Department Rep

Viktor Mirchev, Finance, Accounting & Risk Department Rep

Kimberley Brown, Nursing & Community Health Department Rep

Stephanie Slater, Podiatry & Radiography Department Rep

Maria Nagy, Social Work Department Rep

Sophie Robinson, Vision Sciences Department Rep

Ahmed Kutbi, SCEBE Postgraduate (PGR) Research Rep

Ioannis Petrakis, GSBS Postgraduate (PGR) Research Rep

Christopher Glover, SHLS Postgraduate Research (PGR) Rep

In Attendance:

Bethany Stevenson, VP SHLS
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**)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Approval of S.A.G.E. Minutes (20/11/2019)

The chair made reference to the minutes of the previous S.A.G.E. meeting (20/11/2019) and asked for all those who attended that meeting to approve whether this was an accurate reflection or not. The GCU Policy & Development Officer highlighted a number of amendments which the clerk noted to amend. The minutes were approved pending the amendment.

2. Full Time Officers Update**- *VP SHLS Update***

The VP SHLS noted that in addition to attending SHLS School Board meetings that they had been working with the School of Health & Life Sciences to plan a number of sessions to get feedback about the School's Peer Supported Communities initiative. The VP SHLS also noted had been working to promote nominations in this years Teaching Awards campaign.

- *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 the GSBS Learning & Teaching Forum. The VP GSBS also noted that they had attended meetings of the Assessment Regulations working group.

3. Academic Quality & Development Update**- *Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) 4***

The GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that the GCU ELIR4 Planning Visit took place on Thursday 6th February 2020. The GCU Policy & Development Officer also explained that during the Planning Visit that the GCU ELIR4 Review Panel met with members of the

University's senior management team as well as two groups of staff and students that included Student Representatives.

The GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that the planning visit went really well and that themes had been identified for exploration at the Review Visit taking place between 23rd and 27th March 2020. The GCU Policy & Development Officer also thanked those present who gave up some of their time to take part in the ELIR Planning Visit.

The GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that a Mock Review would be held on Wednesday 18th March ahead of the Review Visit taking place between 23rd and 27th March.

The GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that the GCU ELIR4 Review Panel wants to meet with non-Student Rep Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research students during the Review Visit taking place between 23rd and 27th March.

Both the GCU Policy & Development Officer and the VP GSBS noted that any help in identifying non-Student Rep students who might be interested and willing to take part in the Review Visit would be much appreciated, especially and part-time students and any distance learners.

4. Review of Mitigating Circumstances Policy & Practice

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that although the University expects students to submit their coursework within the published deadlines and sit their exams when timetabled, it recognises that acute and unforeseen circumstances may result in a student being unable to submit a piece of course work or sit an assessment.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that Mitigating Circumstances (MITS) is the process by which students can submit a request to the University to take their personal circumstances into account when considering their academic progression.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that around 1800 MITS applications are currently made each academic year, all of which require a student to complete a form and submit hard copy evidence. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also explained that approximately 87% of MITS applications submitted are accepted and that a lot of these submissions were from students who had already passed.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that the current process for Mitigating Circumstances was twelve years old and that the current process was becoming unmanageable due to the number of submissions now being received. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also noted that the University felt that the current process

for Mitigating Circumstances was having a negative impact on both staff and students in terms of the amount of time and effort required to submit and process each submission.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that the University was looking at revising its Mitigating Circumstances policy with a view to including a 'fit to sit/ submit' approach within it.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that the idea behind 'fit to sit/ submit' is that when a student submits or complete any assessment they are confirming that they are 'fit to sit/ submit' the assessment and that they want the mark achieved for that assessment.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that under the University's proposal to including a 'fit to sit/ submit' approach within its Mitigating Circumstances policy students would be considered 'fit to sit/ submit' by the University unless they self-declared that they were unfit before or within two working days of the date or deadline of the assessment. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also explained students would not have to provide any evidence or a statement that articulates how a circumstance has impacted their performance when self-declaring that they were 'unfit to sit/ submit'.

The VP SHLS noted that the Full Time Officers had discussed the proposed changes to Mitigating Circumstances at their last Executive Committee meeting and that the Full Time Officers had a lot of concerns with the proposal and were not happy with proposal in its current form.

The VP SHLS explained that although they had originally supported the idea of introduction of a 'fit to sit/ submit' process at APPC, after further reflection they felt they could not support the proposal in its current form due to the concerns they had. The VP SHLS noted that that they felt students wouldn't be able to reflect and make an informed choice on whether they were 'fit to sit/ submit' within two days and without knowing the grade they got. The VP SHLS also noted that they felt that the changes were driven by a desire to reduce the administrative burden on staff rather than assisting and supporting students.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that the proposal to introduce 'fit to sit/ submit' process wasn't just about dealing with the administrative burden of the current system but was also about developing a system that better distinguishes between those students who need more support and assistance and those that don't.

The VP SHLS ask how it would be possible to distinguish between those students who need more support and assistance and those that don't if you removed the need to submit evidence and a supporting statement.

One member questioned how issues will get picked up on if no explanation is required when a student declares that they were 'unfit to sit/ submit'.

One member asked what alternative mechanism would be in place to capture the issues that are causing students to declare that they were 'unfit to sit/ submit'.

One member noted that they felt that if students are given the option to explain or not to explain the reason(s) why they were 'unfit to sit/ submit' most student would choose the simplest option and not give any explanation.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that no final decisions had been made about introduction 'fit to sit/ submit' and that the university was just at the consultations phase about potential changes the Mitigating Circumstances process.

The VP SHLS asked if it was possible to run the a 'fit to sit/ submit' process alongside the current Mitigating Circumstances process.

The VP GSBS asked if there was any evidence that the current Mitigating Circumstances system was being abused by students. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that there was no evidence that the current Mitigating Circumstances system was being abused by students but that one third of Retro MITS were rejected.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that one University had successfully introduced a 'fit to sit/ submit' process. The GCU Business Partner also noted that when this institution first introducing a 'fit to sit/ submit' process they encountered an issue around staff marking work that did not need to be marked, but that they had made changes to the process to ensure that this was avoided.

The VP SHLS asked if the University had got any feedback from the Full Time Officers and students at the institution where a 'fit to sit/ submit' process had been introduced. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that the feedback from the University in question was that the process was positively embraced by students and the Students' Association once implemented. The VP GSBS noted that the Students' Association at the University in question should be contacted directly to find out what student's think about how the 'fit to sit/ submit' process.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that the aim of introducing a 'fit to sit/ submit' process was to reduce the burden and stress on students at a time students were likely to suffering from illness and/ or stress. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that the current Mitigating Circumstances process requires students to spend a lot of

time and effort gathering evidence and producing a statement that articulates how a circumstance has impacted their performance.

One member noted that they were concerned that the proposed 'fit to sit/ submit' process would instead of improving student well-being end up having an overall negative impact on student well-being as issues would not be being picked up.

A number of members noted that they felt two working days was too short a period of time to give students to decide whether they were 'fit' or 'unfit' for an assessment.

The VP GSBS and VP SHLS noted that they felt that although the two working days might work from the point of view of reducing staff workload by eliminating unnecessary marking, two working days was not enough time for students to be able to make an informed decision on whether to declare that they were 'not fit to sit' for an assessment, especially in circumstances where a student maybe suffering from mental health issues.

The VP GSBS asked what would constitute an exceptional circumstance where a student was unable to self-declare within the two-day window.

One member noted that they felt most students won't know whether it would be more beneficial to declaring themselves to be 'unfit to sit/ submit' or to submit a RMITS and asked whether guidance would be developed to help students to decide on whether they should go down the route of declaring themselves to be 'unfit to sit/ submit' or the RMITS process.

A number of members noted that they felt that the deadline by which students have to decide whether they were 'fit' or 'unfit' for an assessment should be long enough for students to be able to seek independent support and advice about their options.

The VP GSBS noted that felt that given the level of concerns among SAGE members any draft Mitigating Circumstances policy developed following the University's consultation period should come to SAGE for approval before going to APPC and Senate for approval.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that they were happy for SAGE members to email them with any other comments or questions they might have about the proposal.

5. Early Retrieval Pilot

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that the University was currently undertaking a small pilot to allow final year Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students who have failed a module in Trimester A due to a single piece of failed coursework to resubmit

during Trimester B rather than wait until August. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that the purpose of giving final year Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students the opportunity to resubmit coursework in Trimester B was to give students to an opportunity to graduate as normal.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that six programmes were taking part in the pilot and that only students within these programmes who met the eligibility criteria for the pilot would be offered the opportunity to resubmit coursework in Trimester B.

The VP GSBS explained that the eligibility criteria for what types of coursework could be resubmitted was specifically developed to help avoid setting students up to fail by having too much coursework to complete in Trimester B. The VP GSBS also explained that students who were eligible to take part in the pilot were sent a letter to inform them of the option of resitting their failed coursework in Trimester B.

One member asked the GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) a question about who had made the decision(s) about which programmes to include in the Early Retrieval Pilot. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that the Associate Deans of Learning, Teaching & Quality (ADLTQ's) had selected the programmes for the pilot.

The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) explained that at the conclusion of the pilot the University would undertake a review to evaluate whether it was something that could be rolled out to all final year Undergraduate and Postgraduate students in the future.

The VP SHLS noted that they felt that the Early Retrieval Pilot was a step in the right direction and that having the opportunity to resubmit coursework in Trimester B was particularly useful for final year students as it allowed them to graduate with the rest of their classmates.

One member asked whether any negative implications or unintended consequences had been identified during the pilot, as well as if any feedback from students about the about the pilot has been received. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that there would be a review at the end of the pilot to see if there were any negative implications or unintended consequences for students and staff in allowing students to resubmit coursework in Trimester B. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) also noted that they would be looking for student and staff feedback involved in the pilot as part of this review.

One member asked the GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) if there had been much uptake to resubmit coursework in Trimester B among the students who were eligible to take part in the pilot. The GCU Business Partner (Academic Quality) noted that they didn't know the exact number of students who were eligible to take part or how many eligible students had taken up the opportunity, but that information would include in the review at the end of the pilot.

6. UCU Industrial Action Update

The VP GSBS noted that in addition to continuing to take action short of a strike, the University and Colleges Union (UCU) had decided to undertake strike action on a number of days between the beginning of week five and the end of week seven of Trimester B.

The VP GSBS explained that the Students' Association supports the reasons behind UCU's industrial action due to the negative impact that poor pay and conditions for university staff has on students' learning experience at university.

The VP GSBS noted that the Full Time Officers appreciate the impact UCU's industrial action is having on some students. The VP GSBS also noted that the Students' Association position might change depending on the length of the dispute and/ or if there was any escalation in the type of action taken.

The VP GSBS explained that the Full Time Officers had been lobbying the University to make sure that no students are disadvantaged as a result of UCU's industrial action. The VP GSBS also explained that if anyone encounters a situation where students were being disadvantaged as a result of UCU's industrial action they should let the Full Time Officers know so they can raise it with University.

7. Teaching Awards Campaign

The VP SHLS noted that the nominations for this academic year's Teaching Awards campaign launched on the 9th December.

The VP SHLS explained that the Teaching Awards is GCU Students' Association's annual campaign to gather positive feedback about the learning, teaching, and support at GCU which can be then used by the University to further improve the learning experience. That the Teaching Awards are an opportunity for GCU students to thank and promote outstanding teaching and non-teaching staff members who have made a positive impact on their learning experience. The VP GSBS also explained that there were six awards students could nominate staff members for: *Terrific Teaching*, *Fantastic Feedback*, *Creative Curriculum*, *Super Support (teaching staff)*, *Super Support (non-teaching staff)*, and *Sensational Supervision & Support*.

The VP SHLS noted that students nominate a GCU staff member by completing the online nominations form at www.gcustudents.co.uk/teachingawards. The VP SHLS noted that the nominations for this year's Teaching Awards will close in just over one months' time on Thursday 9th April at noon (12:00).

The VP SHLS noted that a total of 263 nominations have been submitted by 151 students so far, nominating 114 individual GCU staff members.

The VP SHLS highlighted that they needed the help of Department Reps and PGT Student Representatives to encourage Class Reps to promote the Teaching Awards to the Student that they represent. The VP SHLS also highlighted that they needed all S.A.G.E members to like and share Teaching Awards Facebook posts in order to help promote the awards to their fellow students, noting that there would be one post each week on the run-up to the close of nominations.

The VP SHLS explained that they would be looking for one student rep to sit on the Teaching Awards short-listing panels that will be taking place during the Trimester B Study Period, Monday 20th April to Friday 24th April. The VP SHLS also explained that a student rep from each of the Schools was needed on each short-listing panel. The VP SHLS noted that once the dates and times of the short-listing panels were confirmed that the Academic Rep Coordinator will be getting in touch to ask for volunteers.

The VP SCEBE noted that the Teaching Awards Ceremony will be taking place on Thursday 14th May in the Re:union Bar & Grill from 4pm.

GCU Policy & Development Officer explained that GCU staff members really valued the Student's Associations Teaching Awards campaign and that staff members really appreciated being nominated for a Teaching Award.

8. Spring 2020 Academic Rep Gathering

The VP GSBS noted that the Spring Academic Rep Gathering will be taking place on Wednesday 18th March 2020 between 1 pm and 5pm. The VP GSBS also noted that the event was going to be held in the Govan Mbeki building.

The VP GSBS explained that the Academic Rep Coordinator would be sending out an email to all Class Reps the following day with details on how to sign-up to the event.

The Academic Rep Coordinator advised that any Department Rep or PGT Student Representative wanting to attend would need to book a place by email to representation@gcustudents.co.uk as they would not be able to book a place online as it was only set-up for Class Reps to use.

The Academic Rep Coordinator noted that places for the Spring Academic Rep Gathering needed to be booked by noon (12:00) Monday 16th March.

The VP GSBS explained that they were looking for Department Reps and Postgraduate Taught Reps to come forward and volunteer to help set-up the rooms for the event from 12pm as well as volunteers to run the post-Gathering social in the Re:union Bar & Grill between 5pm and 6pm.

The Management & Human Resource Management Department Rep noted that they were willing and able to volunteer to help-set up the rooms for the event and to help run the post-Gathering social in the Re:union Bar & Grill.

The VP GSBS noted that if anyone else was willing and available to volunteer to email him by Thursday 12th March.

9. AOCB

The next meeting for S.A.G.E. is scheduled to take place on 1st April (13:00-14:30)