

University of Aberdeen
Internal Teaching Review (ITR)
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, MEDICAL SCIENCES AND NUTRITION
(NON-HEALTHCARE)
Panel Visit: 18 and 19 November 2025

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Internal Teaching Review (ITR) of the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (non-healthcare) was carried out under the [University's published process and procedures for ITR](#).
- 1.2 The School was asked to submit a streamlined Critical Analysis document which addressed the following key areas:
- (i) School context: to include student numbers, demographics and outcomes; highlight any areas of teaching and learning practices that are specific to the School and a summary of the School's response to the previous ITR
 - (ii) Positive aspects of the School's teaching and learning: to include examples of positive practice and particular strengths of the School as well as how this good practice is shared both within the School and beyond
 - (iii) Challenges that have been encountered in the School's teaching and learning provision: to include potential areas identified for improvement and an action plan for how they might be addressed – or whether these were issues for discussion at the ITR
 - (iv) Future plans: to include areas for development in the next few years, e.g. new course/programme developments, partnerships proposed
- 1.3 The ITR Panel was comprised of:
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| Dr William Barras | Chair
School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture
Quality Assurance Committee |
| Dr Rachel Smith | School of Social Sciences
Quality Assurance Committee |
| Dr Heidi Mehrkens | School of Divinity, History, Philosophy, and Art History
University Education Committee |
| Dr Philip Smith | School of Biological Sciences |
| Samuel Seymour | Student Panellist
Vice-President for Education, Students' Union |
| Dr Céline Caquineau | External Subject Specialist
University of Edinburgh |
| Dr Julie Young | External Subject Specialist
Newcastle University |

- 1.4 The Panel considered the documentation provided by the School, by way of an evidence-based Critical Analysis (CA) as detailed in 1.2 above. In addition, prior to the visit to the School, members of the Panel were provided with access to the School's Quality Assurance (QA) repository, containing the School's annual monitoring materials (Annual Course and Annual Programme Reviews (ACR and APR)), Course Feedback and Reflection Forms, minutes from meetings of Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), and External Examiner Reports (EERs), as well as the minutes from various School Committees. Consideration of this documentation, along with the School's submitted CA, enabled the Panel to identify key themes for further exploration.
- 1.5 The Panel conducted a visit to the School, where they met with a range of staff and students. For staff, this included the School's Leadership Team, Discipline and Programme Leads, academic colleagues (including those teaching courses and programmes online and in Qatar), School administrative colleagues, and professional and support colleagues. For students, this included a range of students on programmes across various discipline, levels (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research), campuses (Aberdeen and Qatar), and modes of study (on campus and online) within the School.
- 1.6 The themes for focused discussion agreed with the School prior to and during the visit were:
- (i) **Structure, Governance, Quality Assurance and Future Planning**, particularly in terms of the School's scale and complexity; its response to the challenges faced; and its strategic priorities.
 - (ii) **Staffing**, specifically addressing staff workload management, recruitment challenges, professional development and recognition.
 - (iii) **Teaching, Learning and Assessment**, with an emphasis on staff commitment to pedagogic innovation and dissemination of good practice; addressing assessment concerns; improving engagement in class through interactive teaching and workshops.
 - (iv) **Student Support, Experience, Engagement and Voice**, focusing on support structures, pastoral support at UG and PGT level, strengthening feedback culture and the student voice.
 - (v) **Employability and Skills Development**, mainly in regards to engagement with the Careers Service and opportunities offered; and initiatives to embed and articulate skills development.
 - (vi) **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**, highlighting the School's efforts to embed EDI in all courses in order to make learning more inclusive and responsive to diverse students' need and to reflect the different perspectives that enrich teaching and learning.
- 1.7 This report is split into three sections:
- (i) Part A gives the overall impressions of the teaching provision within the School, formed from the whole ITR process;

- (ii) Part B covers the outcome of various meetings with staff and students, focusing on a small number of themes as outlined above. It also details the Pedagogic Partnership Session, which involved more free-form discussion; and
- (iii) Part C details the School action plan which will form the basis of the annual follow-up reports.

PART A: OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

- 2.1 The Panel was impressed by the School's resilience and adaptability in the face of significant challenges. The previous Internal Teaching Review took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then the School has successfully navigated further obstacles, including University-wide financial constraints and RAAC-related building issues, which resulted in the loss of teaching spaces and the top floor of the Foresterhill Health Campus (FHC) Medical Library. Mitigation measures, such as relocating teaching to the Science Teaching Hub, were implemented effectively.
- 2.2 Despite its size and complexity, the School demonstrates a strong sense of community and collegiality. The School's senior leadership leads by example, showing openness to change and prioritising the experience of students and staff. There are good working relationships with other University services, including the Careers & Employability Service, Student Support, Registry, the Online Education Team and the Centre for Academic Development.
- 2.3 The Panel noted efforts to improve transparency in the allocation of roles and responsibilities within the School. Staff expressed appreciation for collaborative working practices and highlighted a willingness among colleagues to assist each other, particularly during periods of pressure, exemplifying a culture of collegiality.
- 2.4 Students expressed a real sense of pride and belonging within the School. They described the environment as welcoming and supportive, praised the attentiveness of academic and support staff, and highlighted the School's commitment to inclusion and mental health support. Staff were commended for their approachability and dedication to enhancing the student experience.
- 2.5 The School fosters a culture of excellence in pedagogic scholarship and research. Staff actively engage in University-wide initiatives such as the Academic Development Symposium and Pedagogical Inquiry Network, and regular scholarship meetings within the School encourage innovation and sharing of good practice.
- 2.6 Teaching is research-driven and of a high academic standard. Students particularly value interactive and practical learning opportunities and authentic assessments, and the Science Teaching Hub provides excellent facilities to support these approaches. Online courses and programmes were highlighted as a particular strength, offering high-quality and distinctive learning experiences.
- 2.7 The School demonstrates strong engagement with employability initiatives. Collaboration with the Careers & Employability Service is effective, internship and industrial placement opportunities are available, and there is clear commitment to embedding skills development in the curriculum to enhance graduate outcomes.
- 2.8 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is embedded in the School's strategy and curriculum. The appointment of a new EDI Lead and efforts to decolonise the curriculum reflect a proactive approach. The School benefits from a diverse staff and student population and strives to ensure cultural sensitivity in teaching practices, including in TNE delivery.

PART B: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT; OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSIONS WITH STAFF AND THE PEDAGOGIC PARTNERSHIP SESSION

3.1 Structure, Governance, Quality Assurance and Future Planning

- 3.1.1 The School is a large and complex unit, comprising five Institutes and an approximate headcount of 850 members of staff, of whom around 260 are academic staff contributing to teaching and assessment. It supports over 2800 FTE students annually, including around 1200 enrolled in non-healthcare programmes considered in this review. Between academic years 2020/21 and 2024/25, the School admitted a total of 4,870 students in non-healthcare programmes: 1,002 undergraduate BSc students, 2,117 postgraduate taught students (both online and on-campus), 280 postgraduate research students, and 80 non-graduating students. Finally, the School has an annual turnover of approximately £90 million.
- 3.1.2 The previous Internal Teaching Review (ITR) took place during the COVID-19 lockdown. Since then, the School has faced new challenges, including financial constraints across the University and issues related to Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), particularly in the Polwarth Building at the Foresterhill Health Campus (FHC). These issues have resulted in the loss of teaching spaces at FHC, as well as the top floor of the FHC Medical Library. As mitigation, some teaching activities have been relocated to the Old Aberdeen campus, notably in the new Science Teaching Hub, which opened in early 2022.
- 3.1.3 Following the previous ITR, the School undertook a substantial review of its BSc programmes, commencing in 2022. Data collection and analysis informed a streamlined curriculum and revised programme offering. The first intake into the new degrees occurred in academic year 2025/26; therefore, these programmes fall outside the scope of this ITR. By the next ITR, the legacy programmes will have been fully phased out, and the first cohort of the new degrees will have graduated, providing data to assess the impact of the BSc programmes review.
- 3.1.4 The Panel noted that the School's Action Plan for all taught provision is regularly updated, drawing on findings from annual student surveys – such as the NSS for final year undergraduate students –, student feedback, and non-completion data. In recent years, common themes identified in the NSS for improvement have included feedback and assessment, student voice, course organisation and management.
- 3.1.5 Upon reviewing the External Examiners' reports, the Panel observed that most were relatively high-level, with only one recent report providing more in-depth analysis. The Panel suggested that the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) may wish to consider encouraging External Examiners to provide more comprehensive and detailed feedback in future reports.
- 3.1.6 The School is exploring opportunities to expand accreditation of its non-healthcare programmes. Accreditation would be a recognition of the School's efforts to help ensure that students develop practical skills as well as transferrable and employability skills through authentic assessments and practicals, such as labs or OSPEs (e.g. in sports science). In addition, this approach provides a valuable counterbalance to the increasing (mis)use of artificial intelligence in assessments.
- 3.1.7 The Panel heard from the Leadership Team that efforts have been made to foster a sense of community, particularly given that most staff are based at the FHC. School-wide communication initiatives encourage contributions and collaboration. Processes for allocation of roles within the School appear to be transparent, and Committees are

well attended by staff. However, some staff expressed concerns about the number of committees, noting that this can hinder the dissemination of good practice and create a sense of working in silos. Despite these challenges, mainly due to the size of the School and number of staff, the Panel observed a strong sense of collegiality among staff, exemplified by colleagues volunteering to assist with marking during an exam diet to support a staff member who was unwell. Both students and staff commented on the approachability of staff.

- 3.1.8 Regarding Transnational Education (TNE), the Panel noted that the School is now open to explore opportunities it would not have previously considered. Currently, one MSc programme is delivered in Qatar, with the first intake in 2023/24. Additional international partnership opportunities are being explored for BSc and MSc degrees. For BSc degrees, an articulation agreement is in place with Spectrum Institute of Science & Technology (SIST) in Sri Lanka where students complete two years in Sri Lanka and two years in Aberdeen. The same model is being explored with an Indian University. For MSc degrees, opportunities being explored include a Master of Public Health (MPH) double degree with an Indian university and a 5-year Public Health or Global Health & Management Master degree with a Chinese institution, where students would study 3-4 years in China towards a BSc, followed by one year in Aberdeen to achieve their Master's degree.

3.2 Staffing

- 3.2.1 The Leadership Team explained the School's approach to workload management for academic staff. Rather than imposing a workload model, the School has opted to first collect comprehensive data on current activities. Once this data is analysed, an informed plan will be developed.
- 3.2.2 Workload pressures have increased significantly due to staff reductions following the Voluntary Severance/Enhanced Retirement (VS/ER) scheme and a recruitment freeze, resulting in the net loss of 14 FTE from staff with teaching responsibilities in the School since the last ITR. Additionally, the promotions suspension has had a negative impact on staff morale.
- 3.2.3 The Panel noted the existence of potential single points of failure where certain roles (e.g., placement coordination) rely on individual members of staff. The Panel was informed that, to mitigate this, the School has implemented measures such as ensuring all academic staff are familiar with practical/lab teaching processes in order to distribute responsibilities more widely, or involving junior staff in interview panels. Workload related to industrial placements coordination is also somewhat mitigated, as almost all staff are involved as tutors so could step in if needed.
- 3.2.4 The Panel heard that previous inequities in teaching allocation are being addressed. Course coordinators can now request teaching support, and capacity is reviewed across the School to ensure fair workload distribution. Education Leads from different Institutes collaborate effectively, facilitating course sharing and interdisciplinary teaching, with many courses bringing in expertise from the different Institutes. While the Leadership Team views this positively, some academic staff expressed concerns that, given the School's size, the drive for efficiency may have compromised teaching effectiveness. The Panel noted that there are still some opportunities for enhancement, whilst recognising the size of the School.
- 3.2.5 Every academic member of staff in the School is required to be a Personal Tutor unless there are special circumstances to exempt them. This helps maintaining manageable tutee numbers, although this can be very different for staff who lead PGT programmes.

This is because, at PGT level, there is no formal personal tutor system, so the programme leads currently assume the role of Pastoral Support Leads for all students in their programme. The Panel heard that these concerns have been raised in various settings at University level, as programme leads find it difficult to manage both their UG tutees and PGT students effectively. In addition, it was noted that it can be helpful for PGT students to have a personal tutor who is separate from their programme lead, in cases where there may be conflict of interest. The School suggested that introducing a personal tutor scheme for PGT students, or formalising some form of pastoral support separate from the programme lead, would help address these concerns.

- 3.2.6 Teaching and Scholarship staff appear to be supported in their professional development and career progression. At University level there is now a transparent promotion track for scholarship staff, with clearly defined criteria and evidence requirements, reflecting a cultural shift over the past decade. Junior staff receive mentoring and support for professional development, including guidance on scholarship activities and advice regarding conferences.
- 3.2.7 Staff across the School actively engage in University-wide initiatives such as the Academic Development Symposium and the Pedagogical Inquiry Network (PIN), which focus on teaching innovation and sharing good practice. Regular Scholarship meetings within the School further support this culture, encouraging staff to develop pedagogic scholarship with national and international reach. However, the Panel noted that staff on Teaching and Research (T&R) contracts often lack the capacity to participate in these activities, despite their potential interest.
- 3.2.8 The Panel was informed that, since last ITR, changes have been made to the administrative team to enable more collaborative working in supporting both healthcare and non-healthcare programmes, in order to reduce some of the workload pressure on academics. Challenges remain due to the departure of senior staff, but efforts have been made to grow the team and diversify experience. The team currently includes four UG administrators, four PGT administrators, additional administrative staff supporting healthcare programmes, and one PGR administrator (with some PGR responsibilities shared across the UG and PGT teams too). The administrative team appears to be quite stretched, with duties including invigilation, clerking academic misconduct hearings, and managing inclusion adjustments (e.g., arranging a large number of private rooms for exams). It was noted that CAD provides University-wide invigilator training and updated invigilator guidance available online.
- 3.2.9 Technical staff are now primarily based at the Science Teaching Hub (STH). Following the STH opening in 2022, technical staff working in different Schools (MMSN, SBS, Chemistry and Geosciences) were all consolidated in one site. Technical staff provide pastoral support and act as first points of contact (as no academic staff are based at the STH), referring students to other services when necessary. Their responsibilities include maintaining facilities, preparing teaching spaces, and supporting academic delivery. Academic staff rely heavily on this support, as they are based at the FHC and go to the STH only for teaching. However, the Panel heard that the retirement of experienced technical staff has resulted in some knowledge gaps.
- 3.2.10 Opportunities for professional development and career progression exist for non-academic staff. However, at School level there are limited opportunities for input into staffing and operational decisions regarding technical staff, as they fall under SBS rather than MMSN. Career progression for non-academic staff is managed through a regrading process rather than a promotion pathway.

3.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 3.3.1 The School benefits from a strong culture of pedagogic scholarship, with staff demonstrating innovation and commitment to teaching. The Panel heard that the School Leadership Team is keen to further encourage this culture. However, staff noted that the size of the School makes supporting innovation in teaching challenging. While there are pockets of excellent practice, there is scope to explore mechanisms for wider dissemination. Peer observation was suggested as one possible approach, although no formal process currently exists.
- 3.3.2 The School has made efforts to ensure consistency across its programmes. For example, most undergraduate students take common courses during their first and second years before progressing to more specialised, discipline-specific courses in their honours years.
- 3.3.3 School staff collaborate with colleagues across the University – including the Centre for Academic Development, Registry, Careers and Employability Service, Student Support, and the Library – to enhance teaching practice. This year, the School adopted the institutional course template on MyAberdeen, although student feedback indicates mixed experiences with its implementation.
- 3.3.4 Students reported that MyAberdeen is often used primarily for assignment submission and accessing course handbooks, with lecture slides and notes rarely uploaded in advance. Some students attempted to use discussion boards for questions but did not receive responses, and were unsure whether course coordinators had been notified of their new posts.
- 3.3.5 Students generally reported that course content meets expectations, and they particularly value the variety of course options and the flexibility offered. Both online and TNE students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to study a University of Aberdeen programme in their respective settings. Online courses and programmes were highlighted as a particular strength, offering high-quality and unique learning opportunities.
- 3.3.6 Staff noted occasional friction between School-level practices and University-wide policies. For example, Programme Leads who were asked to introduce a January intake for PGT students felt that, while they had adapted as much as possible, structural limitations – such as the nature of the third term – mean that the experience for the January intake differs from the September intake. These differences are exacerbated by timetabling constraints.
- 3.3.7 Students also expressed that the differences between January and September intakes are sometimes unexpected. For instance, the January intake has a stronger focus on placements, but some courses are unavailable to them because prerequisite courses can only be taken later in the programme. Some students reported choosing to start in January due to visa delays and were unaware of these differences at the time of enrolment.
- 3.3.8 Staff highlighted some challenges in delivering the programme in Qatar due to government regulations. As the degree must align with University of Aberdeen standards – including EDI requirements – courses share a common MyAberdeen area to ensure consistency, with disclaimers added where necessary. It was noted that staff are working closely with the Qatar partner, and progress is being made. Students at the Qatar campus were grateful for the cultural sensitivity shown while maintaining academic standards and requirements. In addition, marking is shared between Aberdeen and Qatar lecturers to ensure parity of experience.

- 3.3.9 Students indicated a preference for more practical teaching sessions, such as learning in laboratories, noting that traditional lectures are not the most effective learning method. Interactive sessions and workshops were considered more engaging, and lectures incorporating Vevox were particularly valued. Students expressed support in staff exploring other uses of Vevox to enhance participation.
- 3.3.10 One discussion focused on students' reluctance to speak up in class due to fear of peer judgement, even when lecturers themselves are described as friendly and approachable. Vevox was suggested as a possible tool to help overcome this barrier.
- 3.3.11 Some PGT students provided suggestions that could improve their academic experience. For example, ensuring that weekly seminars and practicals are more aligned or that assessments are more connected to lecture content. A student also suggested providing greater research exposure, particularly for those who do not come from a research background, before agreeing their research project. Finally, some students felt restricted by the low word limit for dissertations, which they felt limited their ability to explore their chosen topic in more depth.
- 3.3.12 BSc students expressed some concerns about the general essay and data analysis assessments. Students perceive these as unfamiliar forms of assessment and reported being unsure about how to prepare for them and about what the consequences of failing these would be. The Panel understood that these assessments, listed as zero-credit in the programme specifications, carry an effective weighting of 15 credits (for the general essay) and 30 credits (for the data analysis) for degree calculation purposes, and the data analysis paper is used for decisions about borderline candidates. The Panel noted that the assessments do provide value in testing transversal thinking skills, although the set-up appears to be rooted in tradition, with staff themselves finding it quite complex to describe and explain. Students reported anxiety about these assessments due to unclear guidance. The External Examiners have commented that while they support the concept, the data analysis paper seems too long for the time available.
- 3.3.13 The Panel noted that BSc Honours projects/dissertations appear to be marked by the project supervisor as well as an anonymous marker. One External Examiner Report commented on the significant contribution by the supervisor to the final grade, with the School responding that this practice has the potential to introduce positive bias and disproportionately high grades. The Panel understands that this is currently being addressed by the School, as part of the BSc programme review.

3.4 Student Support, Experience, Engagement and Voice

- 3.4.1 Students described the School as welcoming and easy to settle into. They expressed pride in being part of the School and praised the supportive environment, infrastructure, and the availability of both School-level and University-wide support services. Support from course teams was highlighted as a particular strength.
- 3.4.2 Students at the Qatar campus appreciated timetabling arrangements that allow classes in the afternoon, enabling them to maintain normal working hours while attending classes. The opportunity to study at an international university was particularly valued by women who cannot travel independently.
- 3.4.3 The Panel heard that the School benefits from two excellent Senior Personal Tutors who are proactive, work closely with Student Support, and encourage sharing of good practice and expertise. However, students reported varied experiences with their personal tutors, with some being very proactive in engaging with their tutees, while others not responding to emails in a timely manner. Tutors can seek guidance from

senior personal tutors if they are unsure about how to best support a student, but there is currently no formal incentive or consequence for engagement in the role. However, Senior Personal Tutors can liaise with the Dean for Student Support and Experience and the Senior Pastoral Support Group should they need to raise any concerns. Some discussion occurred as to whether the Personal Tutoring system would be more effective if tutors were from the same discipline as their students. However, it was explained that due to the sizes of certain student cohorts, it would not be possible to assign everyone within the same discipline while maintaining manageable tutee numbers for each tutor.

- 3.4.4 At PGT level, there is no formal Personal Tutor System and Programme Leads currently assume this role. With the increase in recent years of international students among the PGT population, this could put them at a disadvantage as they are less familiar with the Scottish education system. Having a pastoral support contact to provide advice and support and who is able to dedicate some more time to this would likely benefit these students. However, depending on cohort size, Programme Leads might not always have the capacity to provide effective pastoral support to all students in their programme.
- 3.4.5 The Panel also heard that technical staff provide pastoral support and act as first points of contact within the Science Teaching Hub (as no academic staff members are based at the STH), referring students to other services when needed.
- 3.4.6 The Panel was told that the Qatar campus benefits from a small course team and cohort, meaning students know they can approach their Programme Lead and generally feel comfortable doing so. In addition, students can access in-country support services, and the Aberdeen-based team provides assistance where needed. Students can also contact Aberdeen-based services directly, although they may then be referred to the local team depending on the nature of the query.
- 3.4.7 The Student Support Service are based at the Old Aberdeen campus. Students in years 1–3 are primarily based there, so travel is only required in fourth year. The free 9U bus service helps mitigate this, and support is offered through multiple modes (in-person, Teams, telephone) to bridge the physical gap between campuses. The Counselling Service also runs weekly sessions at Foresterhill.
- 3.4.8 Student Support offer drop-in sessions and appointments to all students. The School Inclusion Coordinators collaborate well with Support Services, ensuring effective signposting and promoting of the service to students. The SMMSN Student Support meetings provide a valuable platform for discussing any concern related to student support and wellbeing, and for maintaining visibility within the teaching team. The main challenge noted was appointment availability, which is a University-wide issue due to the Student Support team being particularly stretched.
- 3.4.9 The Panel heard that the RAAC issue on the library's top floor resulted in the loss of silent study areas and textbook space. Just before this happened, the ground floor of the library had been redeveloped for additional study space. However, with RAAC being identified, this resulted in no net gain in study space.
- 3.4.10 Student engagement is facilitated through SSLCs, surveys, and end-of-course feedback. While some confusion exists among students regarding SSLC meeting frequency, students reported the meetings themselves as being productive.
- 3.4.11 Low participation in end-of-course feedback was noted. Students expressed concerns that feedback does not always lead to visible changes, creating reluctance to raise issues. Opportunities for early feedback and implementing changes within the current

cohort were suggested to demonstrate impact. Some course coordinators reported having already introduced mid-course feedback to allow adjustments for the current cohort. In addition, dedicating class time for feedback may improve participation.

- 3.4.12 Staff agreed that creating a structure and fostering a culture where students feel safe to speak up is essential, particularly for those from backgrounds where voicing concerns is discouraged. Some students confirmed feeling anxious about giving feedback, worrying that it could negatively affect grades or be perceived as offensive if they are not confident in providing constructive feedback.
- 3.4.13 Class representatives attend induction sessions. However, some course coordinators admitted they are not always proactive in engaging with class reps and suggested that guidance for staff would be beneficial.
- 3.4.14 The institutional course template on MyAberdeen includes a “You Said, We Did” section, which helps communicate actions taken in response to feedback. While there are pockets of good practice in using this feature, both staff and students agreed that it needs wider adoption across the School. Plans are in place to introduce a similar section for PGR students.
- 3.4.15 The Panel heard that engaging online students can be challenging, as many are at different stages of their careers and often work full-time. These students are less likely to engage with class reps but more inclined to interact with programme leads in a pastoral capacity.

3.5 Employability and Skills Development

- 3.5.1 The Careers and Employability Service maintains a strong relationship with the School. The careers adviser regularly attends the SMMSN Student Support Group, which includes academic and support staff, ensuring close collaboration between services. In academic year 2024/25, MMSN students booked 534 careers appointments, with 420 attended by 237 unique students. Additionally, there were 128 submissions to the “Ask a Question” online asynchronous service, demonstrating good engagement with careers support.
- 3.5.2 Over the period from September 2024 to November 2025, MMSN students submitted 181 distinct applications for ABDN Internships, with 15 being successfully placed (2 PGR, 8 PGT, 5 UG). Host organisations where MMSN students were placed included: Alzheimer Scotland, University of Aberdeen, AUSA, Culture Aberdeen, Love The Oceans, NHS Scotland, Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, FitIQ, Instant Neighbour, Period Place, The Haven.
- 3.5.3 Students highlighted the value of industrial placements, though noted that improvements could be made to enhance their experience. Qatar students specifically requested opportunities for placements or work experience at the end of their programme to support transition into employment.
- 3.5.4 Several students raised concerns about certain assessments in later years (e.g., the data analysis paper), feeling underprepared and perceiving that assignments do not build progressively on skills developed earlier. It was suggested that course and programme leads could better articulate the skills developed through specific assessments and how these connect across the programme. Students also noted that they often lack awareness of their own skills development. Some courses have introduced activities for students to self-evaluate their skills before and after tasks, which was seen as helpful. Expanding this practice could improve students’ understanding of their own skills.

- 3.3.14 The MySkills framework was identified as a useful tool to support skills mapping and reflection. Additionally, students suggested introducing a mentoring or buddy scheme between PGT students from January and September intakes to share insights and support skills development across cohorts.

3.6 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 3.6.1 The Leadership team explained that EDI content is embedded into courses and programmes, to ensure relevance and to make learning more inclusive and responsive to diverse needs. The Panel was informed that a new School EDI Lead has recently been appointed, reflecting a strong commitment to ensuring EDI is not tokenistic but meaningfully embedded within courses and teaching. In addition, EDI is a standing item on most School committee agendas to ensure it remains a priority and is consistently developed and considered in decision-making.
- 3.6.2 The School benefits from a diverse staff and student population, bringing international perspectives that enrich teaching and learning. Efforts continue to be made to decolonise the curriculum and provide staff with training and support to effectively engage with and meet the needs of a diverse student body.
- 3.6.3 The Panel heard that practical sessions, particularly those held in the Science Teaching Hub (a highly visible, glass-fronted building), are designed with cultural sensitivity in mind to ensure all students feel comfortable and included.
- 3.6.4 Staff indicated that delivering programmes in Qatar presents some challenges regarding content due to local regulations. While the degree must align with University of Aberdeen standards – including its EDI principles – adaptations are made through disclaimers and negotiations with the partner institution are ongoing to balance cultural considerations with programme requirements.

3.7 Pedagogic Partnership Discussion

- 3.7.1 During the pedagogic partnership session, staff and students were invited to reflect on what the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition is doing well, what it should stop doing and areas for improvement. Key discussion points have been summarised below, with full details provided in Appendix A, where student comments are shown on pink/purple sticky notes and staff comments on orange/yellow ones. The School is therefore invited to consider both the summary and Appendix A to help inform future practice.
- 3.7.2 There was broad agreement between staff and students on many of the matters discussed. Both groups described staff as approachable and collegiate. Staff highlighted the helpfulness of colleagues, particularly during times of crisis, despite challenges such as the School's size, its division into multiple Institutes, and recent job losses. Students noted that academic and support staff are generally attentive, including in relation to inclusion and mental health concerns, and provide appropriate signposting to further support, while recognising that there is scope for further enhancement.
- 3.7.3 Both groups agreed that timetabling could be improved. Students reported clashes between classes and insufficient time to travel between campuses. Staff acknowledged that this mainly affected 3rd year BSc students and suggested that relocating all classes to Old Aberdeen could resolve the issue. Both staff and students proposed greater use of blended and hybrid teaching to optimise time and space. Some students raised concerns about long gaps between classes, although staff suggested these could be used for study or completing assignments in the available library and

study spaces on campus. Students also expressed dislike for 9am lectures, but staff noted these reflect workplace expectations.

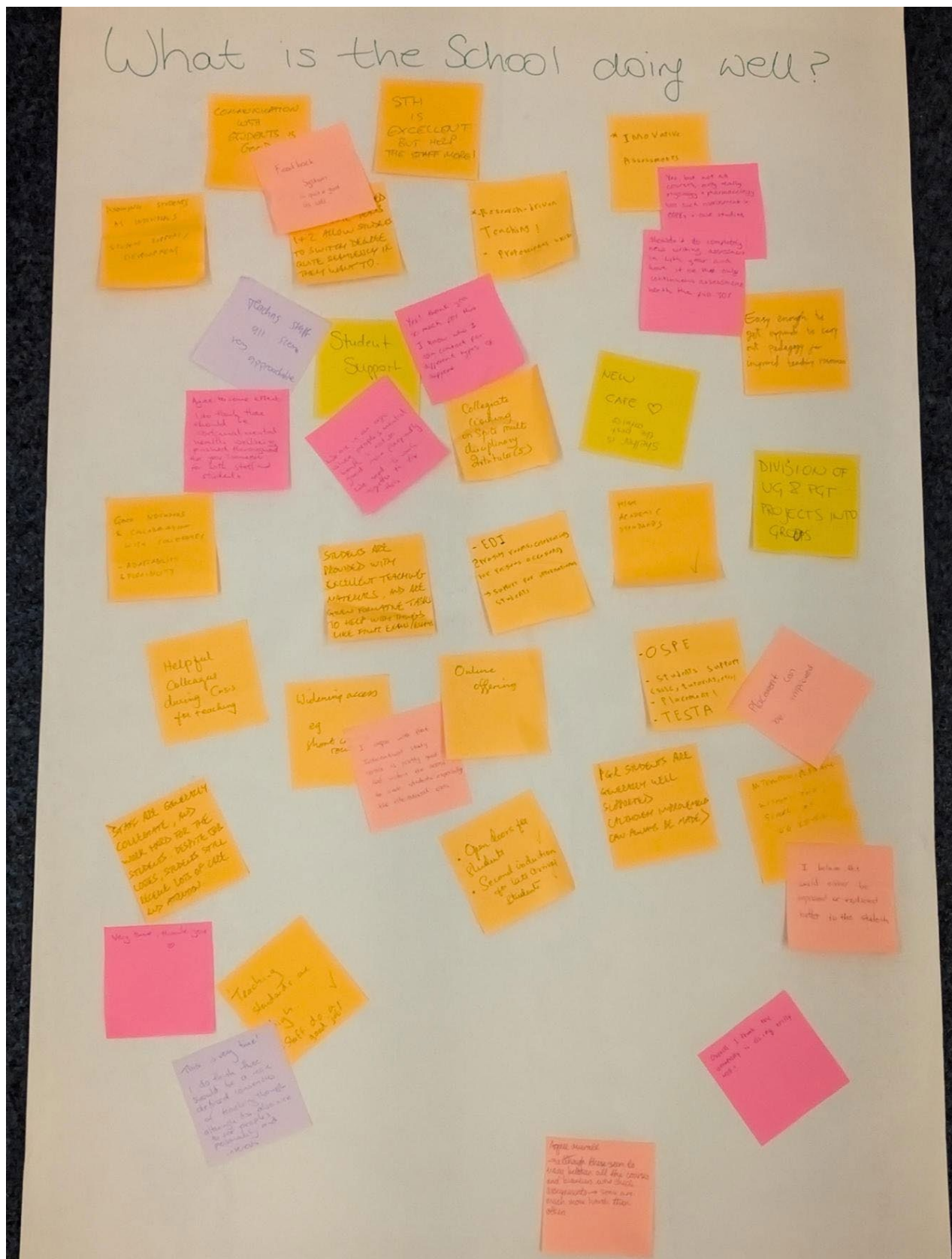
- 3.7.4 Both groups agreed that academic standards are high and teaching is research-driven. Students expressed a preference for more practical and interactive teaching sessions, such as labs and workshops, over traditional lectures, which can lead to information overload. The Science Teaching Hub can offer opportunities to add more practical elements to classes.
- 3.7.5 Some areas of the School were praised for their innovative and authentic assessment approaches, as well as for their use of grading rubrics. However, this is not consistent across all courses, and there is a need to share good practice more widely. Some students also noted that some assignment deadlines fall after courses have ended, making it difficult to contact the course coordinator. It was agreed that assignments should be completed before the course ends, or that course coordinators should ensure they can be contacted by students.
- 3.7.6 Staff generally believe that they are good at communicating with students and responding to feedback. However, students reported that while this is true for a number of courses, there are inconsistencies across the School. Setting clear expectations for response times and preferred contact methods was suggested as a way to improve communication.
- 3.7.7 Closing the feedback loop was identified as an area for enhancement. Some courses seek student feedback early on, rather than waiting until the end of the course, but this practice could be expanded to other courses too.
- 3.7.8 Undergraduate students highlighted a significant jump in assessment difficulty between 2nd and 3rd year and suggested bridging this gap by ensuring assignments build progressively. At PGT level, students noted that some courses assume prior knowledge without considering diverse range of backgrounds and recommended more scaffolded teaching and learning opportunities to allow students to fill that knowledge gap.
- 3.7.9 Students expressed a desire for more employability opportunities, including industrial placements (with a suggestion that the University explore running its own), additional research experience for PGT students, and opportunities for engagement with the scientific community through conferences, seminars, and industry events. PGR students requested more opportunities for scholarship development, teaching experience, and training.
- 3.7.10 Staff emphasised the need for additional budget to support Teaching & Scholarship staff in attending conferences and professional development activities.
- 3.7.11 Students praised the School's facilities, particularly laboratories and the library. Staff, however, noted that classrooms could be improved to better support hybrid delivery and flexible teaching styles.
- 3.7.12 Staff highlighted that requiring PGT programme leads to also act as UG personal tutors creates a barrier to providing adequate support for both groups.

PART C: SCHOOL ACTION PLAN

- 4.1 The School is asked to consider the following action plan which has been formulated by the Panel following the review. A follow-up report should be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) in one year, and annually thereafter, to outline the progress made by the School.
- 4.2 **Standardise areas of good practice across the School**, in particular:
- i. **Innovation in Teaching and Learning:** Leveraging available technology and teaching spaces, expand delivery of interactive and practical teaching session (e.g. labs, workshops, etc) in order to enhance student engagement in class.
 - ii. **Assessments:** Increase use of authentic assessment approaches (e.g. OSPEs), and encourage use of the Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment (TESTA) method to ensure assessment builds progressively across programmes. Standardise use of grading rubrics across the School.
 - iii. **Institutional Course Template on MyAberdeen:** Ensure consistent and effective use across all courses, including uploading lecture slides and notes in advance to support student preparation.
 - iv. **Feedback Culture:** Consider introduction of early feedback opportunities in all courses. Consider offering workshops for students on constructive feedback, to build reassurance and trust – especially for students who come from backgrounds that don't encourage providing feedback – that they won't be discriminated against for doing so. Explore ways to strengthen collaboration between class reps and course coordinators, and close the feedback loop through "You Said, We Did" sections on MyAberdeen.
- 4.3 **Artificial Intelligence:** Recognising the rapid and continuous advances in the development and adoption of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), continue engaging with the University frameworks and guidance on the use of GenAI to ensure institutional alignment. Explore ways to teach and promote ethical and transparent uses of GenAI in education and research, in line with the [Scottish Tertiary Education statement on the use of GenAI](#). Continue to explore authentic assessment approaches to mitigate misuse of GenAI.
- 4.4 **Continue to enhance communication across the School**, by:
- i. Facilitating student connections through buddy schemes or peer networks across levels of study to foster community and belonging.
 - ii. Improving communication between course coordinators within the same programme to ensure holistic approach to assessment planning, avoiding over assessing and supporting progressive skill development.
 - iii. Reviewing School's committee structures to reduce duplication and improve dissemination of good practice, minimising the perception of working in silos.
 - iv. Providing guidance/training for course coordinators on effective engagement with class reps.
 - v. Encouraging teaching staff to set clear expectations for response times and preferred contact methods from students.
 - vi. Continuing to signpost support services clearly to students, including online and in-person options.

- 4.5 **Enhance students' employability, by:**
- i. Expanding and improving industrial placement opportunities, including exploring the feasibility of University-managed placements.
 - ii. Providing PGT students with more research experience as well as opportunities to engage with industry and the scientific community (seminars, conferences, networking events).
 - iii. Signposting PGR students to available CPD opportunities (e.g.: AdvanceHE Associate Fellowship; courses and training offered by the Centre for Academic Development) and integrating them more actively as members of a course team, including feeding into content development and getting feedback on their performance.
 - iv. Embedding the MySkills framework more widely to help students articulate skills gained through academic and co-curricular activities.
- 4.6 **Strengthen pastoral support, by:**
- i. Discussing with the Dean for Student Support and Experience about the potential of increasing the number of Senior Personal Tutors in the School to distribute workload more effectively.
 - ii. Considering organising annual School-level events, or other training opportunities, for Personal Tutors on specific topics, to help clarify what is and what is not expected from this role. Continuing signposting Personal Tutors to resources and training opportunities offered by the University.
 - iii. Considering reviewing current pastoral support for PGT students within the School, in conversation with the Dean for Student Support and Experience, recognising that the Personal Tutor system for UG students is a University-wide initiative.
- 4.7 **Strategic alignment:** Continue aligning the School Strategy with [Aberdeen 2040](#) as well as with the new Education Strategy 2025-2030: "The Future-Ready Graduate".
- 4.8 **Address staff workload and resource challenges, by:**
- i. Providing additional support to administrative staff, particularly during very busy times (e.g. invigilation during exam diets).
 - ii. Offering pastoral support training to (new) technical staff who often act as first points of contact for students.
 - iii. Mitigating single points of failure and loss of expertise when senior staff leave, by cross-training staff and succession planning.
 - iv. Reviewing the requirement for PGT programme leads to act as UG personal tutors, considering alternative models to reduce workload and improve support for students.
- 4.9 **Review the General Essay and Data Analysis exams:** these are currently listed as 0 credits, but carry an effective weighting of, respectively, 15 and 30 credits. This system should be reviewed and additional guidance provided to ensure transparency and clarity for both staff and students.

Appendix A – Pedagogic Partnership Session feedback



06
Tutorials are great
Learning opportunities

UG
Always happy
to help

[illegible]

[illegible]

What should be stopped?

BLACKBOARD
- CANVAS IS BETTER

Giving postgraduate programme coordinator
UG lectures
to recognise
they are already doing
this role at PG

Lots of lecture
lectures... we know that
are limited in opportunity
Higher still for hybrid
lectures (lectures and for the
best of online class)

Also would be
very helpful

Hybrid teaching
could absolutely
be effective
to engage
material with
the whole community
in online

MSc courses are
catering with some
lectures, new structure
will be too wide to run
also courses with some
are online, can't see the
big picture. This is an
issue in some cases
especially the 1st volume
which is more of a
general overview of the
topic

SEEF

12/30 up to
this year

Very
long to
fill out
- long too
long

What should be stopped?

Big gaps in between
classes
Yes - but give
opportunity to study
in a flipped class
model

Staff Report
Allows for study
time?

Big gap
This will depend
on electives
for a student doing
diff elective
Might not be able to
take class together
because of size of classes

Great opportunity
to complete
assignments
or
study for
next class/room
(in a warm building)

Tam chooses
in winter
Staff Report
We have moved
some courses to be
concurrent in class together
there is a time gap
to move between classes

Preparing
for
workplace!

Timetable classes
opening up room
between the main courses
and Electives
Staff Report
Agree - Also, check
elective

Not been helped
by this new
responsibility of
our admin -
difficult job!

Putting classes
on Wednesday

Postgraduate
also have this
U & VEC Web page
- becoming support
- Short 1 year of Post
- External can teach
at U & VEC with graduate