

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**STUDENT SUPPORT & EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE (SSEC)**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2025

*Present:* Jason Bohan, Jemma Murdoch (**Co-Chairs**); Duncan Stuart; Sally Middleton; Lyn Batchelor; Susan Halfpenny; Ewan Grant; Martin Barker; Ken Jeffrey; Josh Wright; William Barras; Erin Ferguson; Wendy Lowe; Peter Henderson; Heather Branigan; Ingrid Stanyer; Malcolm Harvey; Lorna Cruickshank; Hannah Cowie; Samuel Seymour; Jenna Stuart; Mary Pryor; Rhiannon Thompson; Despoina Kaloriti; Lesley Muirhead; Melanie Viney; Natalie Kinchin-Williams; Petra Barber; Chris Souter; Kaye Taylor; Saiqa Andleeb; Fiona Heinonen (**Guest**); Sara Preston (**Guest**); Sara Misuri (**Clerk**)

*Apologies:* Steve Tucker; Fiona Stoddard; Glenda Hale; John Cavanagh.

**Welcome and Chairs' Update**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members and guests to the meeting. The two new members of the committee were welcomed and introduced.

**Approval of Minutes of the SSEC meeting held on 04/11/2025**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-002)*

- 2.1 The minutes of the SSEC meeting held on 04/11/2025 were approved with no further comments.

**Actions from 04/11/2025**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-003)*

- 3.1 The committee reviewed the actions from the previous meeting, which have been actioned and completed. The relevant information was shared ahead of the meeting via the SSEC Teams channel.

**Piloting an Academic Preparedness Course via MyAberdeen Open Learning for international PGT students**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-004)*

- 4.1 The paper was presented for information/discussion. This paper outlined plans for piloting a pre-registration course focused on studying at the university and academic preparedness. The course would be via MyAberdeen Open Learning and focused on postgraduate taught (PGT) students.

The pilot will be targeting the September 2026 intake of students. Currently, it has been targeting PGT students in the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (SMMSN), though it could be extended to include PGT offer holders in other Schools.

The course would be in the MyAberdeen platform (thus maintaining the same learning environment as courses for enrolled students), but accessible to prospective students without an IT account.

The aim of the course is to support PGT students, especially International students, to prepare for the transition to postgraduate studies in Aberdeen (accounting for both academic and cultural changes). This course would be offered at the stage of pre-registration, thus also functioning as an engagement tool with offer holders. The course would be complementary to the 'Getting Started at the University of Aberdeen' module, and most of the information would not be repeated across the two modules.

The piloting is focused on trying to enhance engagement and determine the importance of supporting students in their transition. The provisional title is "Preparing for Your Postgraduate Studies" and would include three sections: 'Welcome to Preparing for Your Postgraduate Studies'; 'Preparing for Your Studies'; 'When you are a Registered Student'. The content is aligned with communication and media shared with offer holder students. The team is continuing to work with existing feedback.

4.2 The committee was invited to share comments and/or feedback. The committee reflected how it would be beneficial to include signposting to the Student Support Services to highlight the University's inclusive learning environment. This is recognised as especially useful and relevant for potential students with disabilities.

The committee highlighted how the Qatar campus is currently working on a similar project for students looking to start PhDs and wonders if some of the pre-registration work may be used across both campuses.

The committee acknowledged how recent years have resulted in various cases of Academic Misconduct, which seem to be mostly prevalent with international students. If possible, the committee believes that it would be beneficial to highlight the importance of using the correct tools to avoid academic misconduct from early stages, including the proposed pre-registration course. Further, the committee wondered if some attention may be focused on Academic Integrity and the use of AI tools.

The committee wondered if it may be possible to include a section focused on Digital & Information services, as the digital experience tools offer a lot of information regarding the international transitions.

The committee acknowledged that the tool may also offer a very beneficial marketing & recruitment tool for the University.

The tool is meant to be introductory and overall aims at being mostly lightweight in content – wanting to avoid the risk of overloading with information at the pre-registration phase. However, the prospectives discussed during the meeting will be considered for further consultation and before launching the course for the September cohorts.

### **Academic Students Surveys**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-005)*

5.1 The paper was presented for information/discussion. The University gathers feedback year-round to capture students' perspectives on academic and non-academic experiences. These insights are essential for informing decisions that enhance teaching, learning, and student support. The surveys include: National Student Survey (NSS); Undergraduate Experience Survey (EUS); Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES); Postgraduate Research Survey (PRES). The paper summarises the dates of the forms in a table. The appendix offers a list of artwork which will be shared with Schools as well.

Despite a centralised marketing plan, response rates for most surveys remain low, with NSS being one of the few high-performing surveys in terms of engagement – likely due to the active involvement by Schools. To strengthen engagement, the 2026 strategy will move away from a single “Survey Season” campaign. Each of the academic surveys will instead have distinct artwork and tailored messaging to improve clarity and recognition regarding the specific survey. Schools engagement and promotional work are necessary in the marketing strategy for all the individual surveys.

Schools will get updated response rates for each survey every month, and the same information will be shared online. Schools are expected to use summary reports from surveys to inform their School Education Action Plans. School Leads (Directors of Education and SAMs) will receive an introductory email that will include guidance and a briefing on the surveys in advance of launch.

5.2 The committee was invited to share comments and/or feedback. The committee reflected on the role of the various courses' evaluation forms in relation to the policy whereby no other survey should be distributed during the dedicated season. The committee reflected that students may not be aware of the importance of the various surveys and levels of prioritisation. The committee agreed that further consideration may be given to the role of Student Voice, and how/when information is communicated to the students.

The committee reflected that there are seemingly some instances where feedback is not always fully available to share with the relevant students – for example, with the results from PRES.

To avoid survey fatigue, the committee reflected that it would be beneficial to map surveys across the academic year. The information could help inform individual teams in deciding when to circulate their own surveys. The Library team, for example, is looking to eventually distribute some short surveys to revisit the library spaces.

5.3 The paper included a section focused on Question Sets by survey. The committee was invited to review the questions and contact Jason Bohan if wanting to report feedback/recommendations by 09/01/2026.

### **Exam Arrangements 2025**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-006)*

6.1 The paper was presented for information and discussion. The University of Aberdeen academic year structure provides 3 formal exam diets across the academic year in December, May, and July, each with a 2-week assessment period. The University has approximately 15,000 students split across 12 Schools, 10 of which currently require their students to sit invigilated exams. Whilst during Covid Schools pivoted to online assessments, invigilated assessments have been increasing in trend – and are likely to continue doing so following cases of academic integrity & Gen AI. Most invigilated exams are in-person written exams, with increasing numbers of invigilated computer-based exams & invigilated assessments out with the formal exam diet.

Organising the delivery of invigilated assessments has been placing a significant strain on central and school resources, also recognising the increasingly complex assessment diet which requires scheduling to avoid clashes between assessments. The return to on-campus assessments and the combination of higher demand for single exam rooms, alongside the request for invigilated tests, and request for PC-based exams, has also contributed to the levels of organisation and workload required by professional staff members.

Since the release of the paper, there has been some updates. PC-based exams can now be delivered in the Science Teaching Hub, which can accommodate for large classes as well – with a mostly successful piloting example with the Psychology School during the Winter exam diet. More evaluation will be needed, but the Science Teaching Hub (central spaces and labs) will likely be approved for general use from the May exam diet. Further, there was an initial concern related to the Central Invigilators Pool available to help, among other things, to deliver assessments in separate rooms organised by the timetabling team. The University has now been able to confirm further funding to support this central pool, and more invigilators should be available during the May exams diet.

6.2 The committee was invited to share comments and/or feedback. The committee wondered if there would be value in reviewing the practice of assigning individual rooms for assessments and/or assessing how different Schools address setting up the practical support during the various exams diet. It has been reported that, in the past, some students have entered a private exam room seemingly unaware of the reason why that had been set up for them.

The committee noted that, currently, the Student Advice & Support team is not able to review each student's individual allowance year by year. However, students can request to review their adjustments via StudentHub. Where with capacity, the team will reach out to students with the 'private/single room' adjustment (but no Reader/Scribe) each academic year to confirm if the provision is still required. Where a staff member becomes aware that a student does not need specific adjustment(s), they can contact [student.support@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:student.support@abdn.ac.uk) and copy the student in the email.

The committee discussed the potential future use of roving invigilators, which is being tested in, for example, the Psychology & Business School. Guidance may be developed for both roving and floating invigilators. The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) reports that over 100 people attended one of the two invigilating training sessions in 2025 – with participants from the academic, professional staff, and including PGR students.

The committee reflected that there are some logistical aspects to servicing the assessment spaces, both when they are used for computer-based exams or not. The portering team has been reduced by about 30%, which has impacted the current workers' duties across campus during the exam diet. The Estates Team has had to invest some money and resources in furniture to ensure that Exam spaces are set up in the correct way. The committee is reminded that, where possible, the Estates team should be informed of exam spaces with plenty lead time to facilitate the set up of the spaces.

The committee noted that, in relation to point 7.4 in the paper, it would be useful to note that certain spaces do not have computers with recent devices. Older computers may not be able to support certain software (inc accessible assistive technology). It is advised that the spaces be checked beforehand, and IT be contacted with plenty notice to address potential concerns.

Some members of the committee reported feedback in relation to the use of the Science Teaching Hub for assessments. Some course coordinators reported struggling with some noise concerns within the STH space, while other account that noise was controlled. The committee also discussed the use of stools for timed assessments. The use of the space for exams will be discussed in more detail with the Exam Planning Group. The committee also suggested looking into online proctoring services for exams, which can be discussed further with the Exams Planning Group.

The committee acknowledged the fact that reviewing exams is an ongoing process which is likely to be repeated year by year.

### **Withdrawals 2024/25**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-007)*

7.1 The paper was presented for information and discussion. This report provides an overview of UG and PGT student withdrawals between September 2024 and the end of July 2025 for on campus degree students only, compared to the same period in 2023/24, 2022/23, 2021/22 and 2020/21. There are relatively consistent patterns across both UG and PGT, with rather little variation between months and years.

The main results reflect that both UG and PG students have seen a reduction in number of withdrawn students – for UG there is a reduction of 3.5%, for PGT a reduction of 2.4%, with variations across Schools. There is still no extensive data focused on determining the reason for withdrawals – with the main reasons being ‘personal’ or ‘health-related’. Students with registered disability continue to make up a large proportion of withdrawn students.

7.2 The committee was invited to share comments and/or feedback. The committee wondered if the report should only be focused on on-campus students, and whether it would be useful to consider online students doing programmes and TNE students. Initially, the report focused on on-campus students as they represented a stable student population. Further demographics and groups can be considered for future reports. The committee also wondered if a similar report could be produced for PGR students.

The committee was advised that the report mentions of full person equivalence. This accounts for students doing joint degrees, but does not account for part-time students (who are considered as the equivalent of a full-time student in the report).

The committee reflected that, in the recent years, it would appear that students are more confident with their degree choice, as observed with the reduced requests to change degree titles mid-studies. The Committee was advised that the University only formally withdraws students if a student has multiple C7s and does not engage in each term. The Registry team is currently looking at reviewing the Withdrawal from by digitalising the process and reviewing the forms. More information and discussions regarding the process will be brought to SSEC in due course.

### **PGR Policies Paper**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-008)*

8.1 The paper was presented for information. The paper highlights: key updates and revisions to the Policy and Procedures on Student Leave of Absence for PGR; key information in the new PGR Family Leave Policy. UKRI has updated the standard terms and conditions for doctoral training grants, with changes to take effect from 1 October 2025. Institutions are expected to review and update local policies and processes to ensure compliance and to support PGRs funded by UKRI studentships.

The PRG focused work on reviewing and writing two policies:

- PGR Absence policy: this is a heavily revised policy compared to the same from the previous academic year.

- PGR Family Leave policy: this is a new policy for PGR students who, previously, were covered by the University-wide Student Family Leave policy.

UKRI is the largest studentship body for PGR students across the UK. The University aims at being able to offer similar entitlements/support to PGR students as outlined by the UKRI bodies. UKRI changed certain T&Cs in October 2025, and the University has been able to implement changes to follow the T&C requests. Further, where possible, the University applied the same entitlements and support across the wider PGR student body.

These policies have been developed and shaped by discussing whether PGRS, the Student Immigration Team, Student Support Team, and PGR supervisors. The policies are immediately effective.

**8.2 Absence Policy:** The Policy and Procedures on Student Leave of Absence (PGR) has been revised to provide greater clarity on student entitlements and procedures. The policy aims to ensure absences are consistently recorded, managed, and supported in line with University regulations, funder requirements, and visa conditions, while prioritising student welfare and minimising disruption to research progress. Key changes include: clarity around types of leave (authorised; parental & family; medical; additional); clarity on annual leave entitlements for MSc (Research) students (previously, 60 days – now reduced to 30 days, to support MScR students to complete their degree in time); Clarity on funding considerations for PGRs wholly funded through the University, who will now receive equivalent benefits to UKRI students (UoA Schools have approved the option to give medical leave to School-funded students).

**Family Leave Policy:** The PGR Family Leave Policy is a new policy designed to promote equity, transparency, and wellbeing for PGRs who parents are or who are becoming parents. It provides clarity on leave entitlements and processes, with reference to funding and visa requirements. Key information includes: Clear guidance on the types of family leave available, including associated processes and support for PGRs; The provision of templates for a 'Parental Leave Support Plan' and a 'PGR Risk Assessment for Parental Leave/Return/Breastfeeding', designed to be tailored by Schools; Alignment with UKRI terms and conditions, while providing guidance for other funders and visa sponsors. Funding considerations for each type of leave are clarified, PGRs wholly funded by the University will receive equivalent benefits to UKRI students.

**8.3** The committee was invited to share comments and/or feedback. The committee asked for further information related to needing to share evidence in relation to reporting an absence, in relation to the [Absence Policy](#) across the University. The committee was advised that UKRI bodies no longer require evidence in relation to absences, as the UKRI bodies would trust the University. UKRI bodies can request additional information regarding absences/suspensions to Student Support and/or Schools, where the student consented for the information to be shared to the Schools.

The committee was advised that there are no larger changes to the suspension process (application/forms).

The committee acknowledged the positive impact of the new policies and the impact on equitability across the University.

### Registry Update

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-009)*

9.1 The item and PowerPoint presentation were presented for information. The Committee was informed of updates to the Registry team/work.

**Overview of Registry Team:** Registry is currently part of the Academic Services and Online Education group, but will be part of the Directorate of People soon. Registry is currently made of various sections, including: Student Services; Academic Services; Curriculum Team; Student Records; Central Timetabling. Within the Student Services there are: Registry Officers (typically supporting two/three Schools each); Tuition Fees team; Administrative Assistants.

The Registry team is responsible for supporting students from registration until graduation.

Student Services - key responsibility include: Summer Progress (checking all individual students' credits for progression/advising on options/solutions where minimum credits are not met); Regulatory Advice to Schools; Advice on Degree & Course/Fee Changes; support Research Students Examination process; Student Monitoring (while it is the Schools to implement C6/7s, the Registry team processes weekly reports for students with multiple engagement concerns, and provides advice/signposting); delivery of in-person support at the InfoHub (Duty Registry Officer).

Fees & Loans - key responsibility include: Fees set up in SRS, publication, policy & invoicing; Discounts and Scholarships; External Agencies (eg SAAS, SLC, US Loans, etc.).

Graduations – the team supports the delivery of graduation from the student side. Some key responsibilities include: Predictions for Ceremonies (currently predicting number for summer gradations); Process Applications; Qualifying Students to Graduate (inc. advising students who do not qualify for graduation with further steps); Preparing the Graduation Brochure; Latin for the Ceremonies; Produce and Despatch Certificates; Manage Students at the Ceremonies.

**Updates & Current Tasks:** In collaboration with the Student Experience Team and Schools, Registry has been working on making various UG and PGT form available for online use. These include form for: suspension of studies; extending studies; moving degrees; withdrawals. The UG withdrawal forms have been online and working well – with options for the students to note their plan to return to studies, if relevant. Registry has been able to follow up on the forms by communicating with the students/relevant staff members, where relevant. The new process has removed the need to go through a separate re-admission process. PGR forms have been designed, but further work is required by IUT and Schools to address workflow and automation task force (inc. deciding on where approval by specific staff members may be required). While the initial plan was to have all forms available online by February 2026, work will be completed as soon as possible.

The Registry team is also supporting a process whereby PGR students can submit their APE and thesis to Turnitin directly with the support of the eLearning team – moving away from needing to rely on Registry to do the submissions on behalf of the individual teams.

The Registry team is working on updating the PGR submission and examination policy and guidance in collaboration with the PGR College and Library.

Following feedback from students in previous years, the Registry team is able to release summer graduations by the end of January 2026 ([When is My Ceremony?](#)).

The team has been working on the non-returners exercise, to inform students if they are eligible for any award.

Registry has support the C7s notification process, addressing students that are deemed withdrawn in fully disengaged. The team has also been working on the January registration and readmission process.

Finally, the team has been supporting Academic Services with the annual degree regulations update exercise.

9.2 The committee was invited to share comments and/or feedback. The committee acknowledged the positive work by the team, with special focus on the introductions of the new online forms. The new forms are recognised as a positive tool across the University, which will help streamlining & standardising process across Schools. The forms are acknowledged as a positive addition for students due to the user-friendly interface.

### **AUSA Standing Item**

10.1 The item was presented for information and discussion. The Student Union (SU) discussed various topics.

10.2 **General Update:** The Student Union has progressed work, in collaboration with Jason Bohan, in relation to the Class Rep review work, having organised three meetings by the date of the SSEC meeting. Schools have been able to provide various feedback and recommendations, that are being actively explored.

The SU held their annual general meeting with about 240 attendees. Discussions were mostly focused on Library spaces. The SU expressed gratitude towards the support provided by the wider University staff members.

The committee was made aware that work has been progressed with the Student Mental Health Agreement – in collaboration with the Student Experience, Engagement and Wellbeing (EEW) Team. The VP for Welfare, Karim Hurtig, has supported the delivery of surveys. The Union was due to analyse the results are responses.

The SU attended the Winter Graduation (November) in various capacities.

10.3 **Update on the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA):** The EEW and SU team have been responsible for developing the SPA. Previous agreements have been impaired by limited buy-in from student officers, high turnover of officers and their priorities, limited time spent working on priorities due to staff workload constraints, annual renewal of agreement limiting time for delivery of outcomes. This led to the SPA being mostly a reporting mechanism on existing work. Previous agreement included work on wellbeing & mental health, inclusion, and employability. A new approach is being developed, and is focused on using SPA to initiate new areas of partnership working on one, broader theme of ‘spaces’ – as a theme informed by student feedback. This allows to stay relevant over multiple official terms, enhancing continuity and allowing new officers to put in goals aligning with their priorities without renewing the full agreement. SPA aims at a three-year agreement, focused on working on objectives and medium-to-long term goals.

The SPA defines three main areas of focus in relation to Spaces: Study, Social, and Sport. Whilst these are three separate areas, the SPA’s goal is to focus on intersectionality of spaces – aiming at enhancing belonging, community, and wellbeing. Spaces will be developed through three lenses: Accessibility (are students able to access/use spaces?), Availability (are spaces available when students want to use them?), Utility (are students getting what they need from the spaces?).

Key areas represented in SPA: Sabbatical Officers; SU SMT; EEW; SMT; Deans; Estates & Facilities; DDIS; External Partners (ASV).

Work so far: Internal SU discussion about SPA/goals; initial sharing with EEW to discuss; meeting with stakeholders (estates, facilities, digital – IT & Libraries); follow-up with EEW to plan further steps.

Next steps – considering: KPIs/metrics; audit for step 1; comms planning; deliverables for year 1 & review of plan; practicality; sources of student body input; ensuring longevity & prioritisation; recurring agenda points; goals and objectives; monitoring & reporting to SSEC.

10.4 The committee was invited to share comments and/or feedback. The committee expressed excitement regarding the introduction of the SPA. The committee wonders if, especially in relation to study spaces, it may be useful to include Schools for consultation. The committee wondered if the SPA is planning to also consider additional spaces such as: quiet spaces (suitable for single individuals too), virtual spaces (focused on allowing online students to feel part of the community). The committee advised that it may be useful to note some data from the Library and note how spaces have been used, as well as noise & complaints.

### **Student Support Update**

11.1 The item was presented for information. The committee was reminded that the Winter Break closure would apply to all teams, including the Student Support Services. Messaging and information were shared via central comms, and all committee members and teams across the University were encouraged to use similar messaging (information also shared for SSEC on the Teams Channel).

The Student Advice & Support team saw an increase in volume of inquiries and workload. Additionally, the teams saw an increase in disabled students accessing support (about 37% increase in 2025-26); in student conduct cases (157% year on year); in student of concerns (58% increase – with an increased number of student cases being progressed to the management group); in email traffic (17% increase). As a result of the increase in data, the service may consider requesting additional resources to support the frontline work of the team.

11.2 The committee had no comments or queries.

### **Student Experience, Engagement and Wellbeing Update**

12.1 The item was presented for information. The EEW provided information to all staff members in relation to the Winter Closure, including signposting information.

From 19/01/2026 to 06/02/2026 the Science Teaching Hub will be open to support students in registration. The teams will be operational Monday to Friday, 10 to 5 (with the exception of the last day, where the services will close early). During this period, Student Ambassadors will help the delivery of Immigration/Visa checks in collaboration with the relevant team to streamline the process. IT has been working on addressing the Student ID photo upload issue, and will continue to support the process. The Arrival & Wellbeing Hub will be present again during the first week, with signposting to various information – including to GPs, Dentistry, etc. Late arrivals will still be able to participate to informal welcome week events. The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy will

deliver a welcome event during the regular postgrad café on 03/02/2026. Across 2026, the Library will host a series of pop-up event to provide information regarding various services (inc Student Learning Services, and Careers).

The EEW team has been working on various campaigns, including: Exams Readiness campaign; Dignity at Work and Study campaign; Stress Awareness Week; Men's Mental Health week; 16 days of Action campaign; Seasonal [Wellbeing](#) campaign (to address the challenges with winters). The team is working with the Dean for Careers & Employability to provide a foundation of mental health digital badge. The team has continued their work to promote downloading and signing up for the SafeZone app. The last event of 2025 was organised for 18/12/2025 (Christmas lunch with the University Rector).

12.2 The committee had no comments or queries.

### **Inclusive and Accessible Strategy Group**

*(copy filed as SSEC-17122025-013)*

13.1 The paper was presented to the committee for a brief update & information. Jason Bohan has begun to form an Inclusive and Accessible Strategy Group, which will largely operate from 2026. The group's aim will be to focus on addressing concerns and suggestions related to inclusivity and accessibility across physical and digital spaces. Further updates will be provided in due course.

### **AOCB**

14.1 No AOCB was discussed.

### **Date of next meeting**

15.1 The fourth SSEC meeting will be held on Thursday, 12th of February 2026, 14:05-15:55 (University Court Room or Teams Meeting).