

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)

Minute of the Meeting held on 22 April 2025

Present: Jo-Anne Murray (Chair), Waheed Afzal, Euan Bain, Lyn Batchelor, John Barrow, Nigel Beacham, Leigh Bjorkvoll, Jason Bohan, Stuart Durkin, Karim Hurtig, Jacqui Hutchison (in place of Helen Knight), Ken Jeffrey, Colin Lumsden, John Mynott, Stuart Piertney, Michelle Pinard, Amudha Poobalan, Shona Potts, Miles Roetherl, Andrew Simpson (in place of Anne-Michelle Slater), Steve Tucker, Asha Venkatesh, Eddy Wifa (in place of Anne-Michelle Slater) and Joshua Wright, with Scott Carle, Robin Cummins, Nick Edwards, Tracey Innes, James McIntosh, Heather Morgan, Sara Preston, Ian Robotham, Patricia Spence, Louisa Stratton, Emma Tough, and Isabella Fausti (Clerk) in attendance.

Apologies: Simon Bains, Harmander Battu, Debbie Dyker, Graeme Kirkpatrick, Helen Knight, David McCausland, and Anne-Michelle Slater.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 FEBRUARY 2025

(copy filed as UEC/220425/001)

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting.
- 1.2 Members of the Committee considered the minute of the meeting held on 26 February 2025. The Committee noted some inaccuracies in points 3.1 – 3.3 and agreed that an amended version would be approved by circulation. The rest of the minutes were approved as an accurate representation of discussions held.

MATTERS ARISING/ACTIONS

(copies filed as UEC/220425/002)

- 2.1 Members of the Committee noted the actions arising following the meeting of the UEC held on 26 February 2025 were complete.
- 2.2 In addition, an outstanding action arising from the meeting held on 20 November 2024 was noted as still in progress.

REVIEW OF THE UEC REMIT & COMPOSITION

(copy filed as UEC/220425/003)

- 3.1 Members of the UEC approved the proposed changes to the Remit & Composition.

UNIVERSITY RISK REGISTER

(copy filed as UEC/220425/004)

- 4.1 Members of the UEC noted that the University Risk Register (URR) is now a dynamic document that can be updated by risk owners and managers as required, whenever a risk changes, rather than as quarterly exercise.

- 4.2 As the UEC is responsible for the oversight of the risks impacting Education and Students, it was proposed that the URR will be provided for information at every meeting going forward. In addition, in conjunction with the annual institutional review of the Strategic Risk Register and University Risk Register, the URR will be included as an item for discussion once per year.

**SCOTTISH TERTIARY EDUCATION STATEMENT ON GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
AND USE OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES IN EDUCATION**

(copy filed as UEC/220425/006)

- 5.1 The Chair informed the Committee that items 5 and 6 of the agenda had been merged for discussion and approval.
- 5.2 Members of the UEC considered three proposed actions related to the need for the university to adopt a strategic, evidence-based approach to GenAI, aligned with its educational values.
- 5.3 The first action discussed by the Committee was to endorse the University of Aberdeen becoming a signatory to the *Scottish Tertiary Education Statement on the use of GenAI*. The general principles underpinning the Statement were very well received and the Committee approved this action, noting the value of a sector-wide approach. Key points raised included:
- a. Some current inconsistencies in student experience regarding guidance on authorised use of GenAI across the University, and the need for a clear, institution-wide Policy informed by the above Statement.
 - b. Concerns regarding the potential for different guidance, and therefore different expectations, around GenAI across the research, education and administrative domains at the University.
 - c. The potential for the principles mentioned in the Statement to inform and be a foundation for other policies at the University.
- 5.4 The second action involved establishing an Advisory Group on emerging technologies such as GenAI, reporting to UEC and liaising with the University's AI@ABDN Working Group. This was approved, with the following considerations:
- a. The importance of ensuring that the Advisory Group is linked with the wider Digital Strategy Committee, to avoid duplication of efforts across different committee spaces.
 - b. The need to improving the visibility and transparency of the AI@ABDN Working Group, noting current limitations due to resourcing, with plans underway to address this.
- 5.5 The third action concerned the submission of a proposal to the Digital Strategy Committee to secure approval and funding for piloting applications that use AI technologies to support assessment and feedback workflows. The Committee supported this action in principle, noting:
- a. Some Schools may not be in a position to participate in these trials.
 - b. Concerns in relation to AI performance in specific disciplines.
 - c. The need to evaluate the impact of these tools on staff workload, as well as on the timeliness, detail, and consistency of feedback.
 - d. Consideration of AI biases that might negatively affect individuals whose first language is not English.

- e. Acknowledgement that AI tools are not a replacement for human judgement and require continued human oversight.
- 5.6 Finally, the Chair noted that small-scale piloting of emerging technologies positions the University as a proactive contributor to sector-wide learning and innovation, even if the pilot demonstrates that a tool is not suitable for certain disciplines or contexts. The importance of transparency and clear communication with colleagues was highlighted, particularly to ensure the initiative is perceived as exploratory, rather than as a prelude to mandatory implementation. The University aims to be recognised as an institution that explores emerging technologies responsibly, evaluates their impact rigorously, and shares insights to inform broader sector developments.

BLACKBOARD TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER (CATALOG)

(copy filed as UEC/220425/007)

- 6.1 Members of the UEC heard an update regarding the pilot of the Blackboard Training and Development Manager (now renamed Course Catalog) that was undertaken over the course of this past Academic Year. The Committee approved the request to progress a business case to the Digital Strategy Committee to seek funding in order to move from pilot phase to full business implementation.

UPDATE ON THE REPORT & REQUEST TOOL

(Oral Item)

- 7.1 The Committee received an update on the work to develop the new Report & Request Tool, following the implementation of an institutional extensions policy at the start of this Academic Year. The name reflects its use as a centralised tool for reporting absences, requesting coursework extensions and responding to monitoring (C6/C7) emails. The project has provided a platform for sharing good practice and for collaboration across the University.
- 7.2 The Committee heard that the project consisted of two phases, with phase one involving extensive consultation with schools, professional services, and students to redesign the logical flow of the overall user interface of the student reporting form, and to introduce initial improvements to the staff administration side. Phase two, which is the work being undertaken now, will continue to capture and review feedback, and focus on improving user and role management, automating notifications to reduce manual processes, and enhancing functionality to support administrative work.

FULL-TIME UNDERGRADUATE NON-CONTINUATION INTERNAL DATA

(Copy filed as UEC/220425/008)

- 8.1 Members of the UEC discussed the 2023/24 full-time undergraduate non-continuation data.
- 8.2 It was noted that, while there was some variation across Schools, as well as a need to monitor the non-continuation rate for certain demographics, there had been an overall reduction of non-continuation rate from 5% in 2022/23 to 4% in 2023/24, representing an overall improvement of 1%.

- 8.3 The Committee also noted that Schools would benefit from having access to more granular data on non-continuation. For example, non-continuation rates for direct entry and low SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) students would be helpful.

WORK BASED LEARNING (WBL) POLICY WORKING GROUP UPDATE

(Copy filed as UEC/220425/009)

- 9.1 Members of the UEC received an update on the development of a Policy on Upscaling Work Based Learning, based on an evidence-based recommendation from a task and finish group in January 2022. It was noted that progress had been delayed due to resource constraints following the recruitment freeze implemented in November 2023. However, given the ongoing policy-gap and associated institutional risk, it had been agreed that a dedicated workstream would be established as part of the Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee to take forward the development of the Policy.
- 9.2 The Committee was informed that the workstream had convened its initial meeting, during which a previously drafted version of the Policy was reviewed, concluding that the draft was outdated and overly narrow in scope. As such, a follow-up meeting is planned to consider the wider definition of work based learning that the policy will cover. It was noted that a draft of the Policy would be presented for comment at a future UEC meeting, over the upcoming academic year.
- 9.3 Directors of Education involved in WBL were invited to express interest in joining the workstream. Members were also asked to suggest any additional committees or groups that should be consulted during the Policy's development, such as the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION UPDATE

(Oral Item)

- 10.1 The Committee received an update on the ongoing review of entrepreneurship education options available to students at the University. This work builds on the Scottish Government's *Entrepreneurial Campus* blueprint, published in 2023. It was reported that a series of recent workshops, attended by approximately 25 staff members, had been held to map and streamline the current provision across the institution.
- 10.2 It was noted that a comprehensive report including clear deliverables that can be achieved with minimal impact on workload would be circulated in the near future, following consideration by the Enterprise and Innovation Committee, under whose remit this work falls.

UPDATES ON TERTIARY QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK

(Oral Item)

- 11.1 Members of the UEC heard an update on the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) and its component elements, specifically the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) and the Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP).
- 11.2 The Committee noted that the TQER, which replaces the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR), will be conducted at the University in 2025/26, with submission of the documentation by

September 2025, and the main visit taking place in February 2026. Committee members were informed that relevant colleagues will be contacted shortly to assist in gathering documentation and evidence for the submission.

- 11.3 The Committee was also informed that the University has recently received feedback from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on the first SEAP (Self-Evaluation and Action Plan) – the annual report required by the SFC and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), except in years when the TQER is conducted, such as 2025/26. While feedback from the QAA is still pending, the SFC's response was described as positive and constructive, with several sections identified as examples of good practice. A recommendation was made to adopt a more analytical, rather than descriptive, approach in future submissions. Despite the challenges of preparing the SEAP without a prior reference point, the feedback received – alongside that from the upcoming TQER – will inform future SEAP submissions.
- 11.4 The UEC also heard of the forthcoming annual meeting with the QAA, which will focus on reviewing the University's quality-related activities to date. This includes the temporary measures implemented prior to the introduction of the TQEF. It was noted that the University is in a strong position regarding the actions taken and subsequent follow-up, and a positive outcome from the meeting is anticipated. Further feedback on the SEAP is also expected, and an update will be provided at the next meeting of the UEC.
- 11.5 Lastly, the Committee received a brief update on the Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP). It was noted that three of the four scheduled Discovery Days have now taken place. Project development is underway for years two and three of the programme, with evaluation planned for year four. The opportunity for colleagues to engage in additional STEP-related projects was also highlighted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 12.1 The Committee noted feedback from SMMSN staff regarding the timing of Term 2 for PGT programmes, and some concerns raised in relation to feedback return deadlines, workload implications and potential impact on students. However, it was acknowledged that the term dates had undergone extensive discussion and consultation in the past, and further conversations with relevant colleagues were planned to address the concerns raised.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 13.1 Members of the Committee noted that the next meeting of the UEC would take place on Wednesday 24 September at 1:05pm in the Committee Room 2, University Office or by Microsoft Teams.