

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

STUDENT SUPPORT & EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE (SSEC)

Minutes of the meeting held on 17/03/2025

Present: Nick Edwards, Jason Bohan, Sara Misuri, Lesley Muirhead, Despoina Kaloriti, Erin Ferguson, Miles Rothoerl, Karim Hurtig, Tönis Tilk, Susan Halfpenny, Graeme Kirkpatrick, Megan McFarlane (in lieu of Sally Middleton), Liam Dyker (guest speaker)

Online: Karen Forrest and Zeshu Shao (in lieu of Madge Jackson), Natalie Kinchin-Williams, Lyn Batchelor, Wendy Lowe, Heidi Mehrkens, Jenna Stuart, Rhiannon Thompson, Mary Pryor, Tim Baker, Jemma Murdoch, Duncan Stuart

Apologies: John Cavanagh, Melanie Viney, Fiona Stoddard, Madge Jackson, Steve Tucker, Bekah Walker, Martin Barker, Ingrid Stanyer, John Cavanagh, Charlotta Hillerdal, Peter Henderson, Martin Mills, Melanie Viney, Kirstin Annand, Iain Grant

1. Welcome and Chairs' Update

Jason Bohan (JB) welcomes the committee and advises that the agenda points will be discussed in a different order, due to unforeseen circumstances.

2. Approval of Minutes of the SSEC meeting held on 06/02/2025

- **Despoina Kaloriti (DK) to share some comments about the previous minutes with Sara Misuri (SM). SM to update the minutes accordingly.** DK shares that the Registry currently does use some email/letter templates with withdrawing students to outline the process surrounding withdrawals and associated support.
- Minutes are approved.

3. Actions from the previous meeting

- JB has been discussing the possibility of reintroducing engagement roles within Schools with the *School Engagement Leads* group. The Schools have agreed to review the role and streamline the process for monitoring engagement and risk-assess.
- Following the Withdrawal Report, many commented on the student withdrawal process and reported that it may need adjusting and clarifications. The process also does not seem to capture all the preferred data. Nick Edwards (NE) and JB met with the Academic Services team and Emma Tough. It has been reported that the University is already looking to review the Re-Admission Policy. Language around 'withdrawal' and 're-admission' will be reviewed to include renewed terminology. While the process will not change particularly, there will be more clarity surrounding concepts such as breaks from studies. The process for requesting to withdraw will move to be fully digital (online form), thus substituting the more outdated process of using a Word document. The University hopes to implement the changes by AY 2025-26, and will seek collaboration with Alison White, Registry Team, and other relevant teams. The Re-Admission Policy will also be reviewed, and any changes will be implemented accordingly.

- The introduction of the Report & Request Tool highlighted that there may be some confusion around escalating student reports to other teams. The *School Engagement Leads* group and Student Support have been collaborating on creating a solution. The teams agreed to create a *Student in Distress* guide over the summer – which will include a section focused on how/when to escalate cases to Student Support. Jemma Murdoch and Anna Goldhawk will lead on the guide.
- Duncan Stuart (DS) to review the Induction Process and the accessibility of the digital items. DS and his team have already passed some of their work to the School Admin Managers (SAMS).
- Stats around the Feedback of Safety on Campus suggest that PGT/PGR students mostly feel safe on campus (around 90% feel either very safe or safe; and they feel enough support from the University. No live data is currently available for UG students; but the PG data can be shared with SSEC in due time.

4. (7) Student Discipline Paper

Liam Dyker (LD) presenting: The paper presented relates to Academic Discipline Update (to note, Non-Academic Discipline falls under the remit of Student Support). The data is presented as the annual review of the AY 2023-24.

The overall report highlights that the total number of academic misconduct cases has decreased in AY 2023/24 from those received in 2021/22 and 2022/23.

The percentage of the student population with academic misconduct cases is low (0.73%), and the majority relate to plagiarism.

For the first time, the University started to include cases related to the use of Artificial Intelligence. Plagiarism (AI) represents the second highest type of Academic misconduct cases. Across all the Academic misconduct cases, only one resulted in expulsion – which is a significant decrease from previous years.

The number of cases for international students has fallen drastically, though it remains the cohort with the highest proportion of cases.

The data can be sorted by School and is available on the spreadsheet.

The decreasing amount of Academic Misconduct cases is likely related to the work carried out by Schools and CAD to promote Academic Integrity.

Karim Hurtig (KH) highlights that the report differentiates between UK, EU, and INT students. Currently, EU students are treated as International Students; so KH wonders if the International Students may be classified in different regions. Most of the plagiarism cases are seemingly happening with students from the Global South. LD agrees that the team may consider looking into updating future reports to better reflect the student population (QAC to bring forward).

Tim Baker (TB) wonders if the reduction in data may be related to the fact that Schools have stopped progressing cases as frequently as in the past – and that they will often try to resolve them on a school level in the first instance. LD can look at how data is recorded in their team to assess the information and understand the amount/types of cases that are progressed to a hearing (QAC to bring forward).

According to some students' accounts shared with TB; the waiting time for an academic hearing has significantly increased in the past years. LD agrees that, due to a variety of factors, it

sometimes may take an extended amount of time to organise a hearing. As the Code of Practice on Student Discipline will soon be reviewed; LD agrees that he can report the problem related to waiting times (QAC to bring forward).

Jemma Murdoch (JM) reports that Schools highlighted a drop in academic misconduct, but that this can be linked to the increase in adjustments during in-class assessments. As a result of more class tests, plagiarism has decreased; however, this resulted in increased challenges related to in-person tests (such as operational considerations – booking rooms, having invigilators, etc.).

Lyn Batchelor (LB) reports that there has been a drop in Academic Misconduct cases at the Qatar campus – primarily within the Business School. This also coincides with the increase of in-class tests. The Computing Programs in Qatar and NCSU had high plagiarism cases in 22/23, but these dropped to zero in 24/25. LB notes that the decrease in number is likely related to the work done by Staff members and their ability to educate on plagiarism, referencing, and academic integrity.

Graeme Kirkpatrick (GK) highlights that it would be helpful to have data around percentages and headcounts sorted by Schools. GK highlights that the Student Union has noticed that different Schools seem to approach plagiarism and collusion differently, and identifying trends and tendencies would be helpful.

5. (8) Appeals and Complaints Paper

Liam Dyker (LD) presenting: The Report contains detailed data on appeal and complaint submissions received prior to and during the 2023/24 academic year, in addition to an analysis of emerging trends. Caution should be urged in interpreting the data because, from 2024/25, a new policy has been introduced – thus decreasing the number of cases brought up to Schools.

Appeals: The number of appeals has fallen, and the total percentage of the student population remains low and consistent with previous reports. As previously, the MMSN and Business School continue to have the largest number of cases. There have been some improvements in some Schools, but there are varied reasons why an academic appeal may be submitted. The number of cases related to the removal of a class certificate (C7) has remained in line with previous years in 2023/24, though the number of cases remains high in proportion to other cases received, comprising 47.7% of all cases received. About 70% of cases related to C7s have been partially or fully upheld. This data may change in 24/25, with the renewed Monitoring and Engagement process. Informally, a difference and decrease have already been noticed, including by the *School Engagement Leads* group. Resolving engagement concerns informally at a School level would be especially beneficial for both staff and students alike. Timescales have been improving and are predicted to continue improving. The workload for Schools has decreased but has not been removed completely. Time is still focused on the competency-panel stage and on reviewing cases.

Complaints: A smaller number of complaint cases are still recorded – some of these at the frontline. Training is rolled out to Schools and Directorates to ensure that complaints are addressed the correct way. Given the wide range of potential complaints, it is more difficult to collect relevant data regarding clear trends.

LB notes that Appeals & Complaints of students in the program in Qatar are dealt with by the School; but frontline investigations are carried out by the Qatar Staff. To ensure that future reports are more accurate and reflective of the work done in the Qatar campus, LB wonders if frontline training can also be delivered to the Qatar campus. LD agrees to review the process (QAC to take forward).

GK wonders if it would be possible to analyse data by student provenance/global region. Similarly to what was reported in the School Discipline Paper, the Student Union has noticed that most Appeals & Complaints are concerning students from the Global South; therefore designated data would be especially useful.

6. (11) University Risk Register

Nick Edwards (NE) presenting: this is the start of a team review by SSEC on the Education and Student Experience Risks that are contained within the University's Risk Register (primarily managed by Debbie Dyker and Jo-Anne Murray). NE collated the risks and determined the impact they may have on Student Experience. SSEC will look at reviewing and discussing the annexe and information every six months (additionally, further quarterly updates will follow with the Planning team/Debbie Dyker). The committee will discuss how to control, update and action such risks. NE has already agreed to update the current annexe to remove risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

LB highlights that the non-Aberdeen campuses appreciate how a point has been included to reflect on the Quality Assurance Report and determine the importance of pursuing quality across the various committees. NE highlights that there used to be a dedicated tab for International Partnerships, but TNE operations should be more embedded within the main Risk Assessment. References to other campuses will begin to be more integrated with the overall risk assessment topics; rather than separated.

GK wonders if the Wider Student Experience also considers the current financial situation of the University. GK reports that the recent VS/ER scheme has had a negative impact on the student experience; for example with the repeated closure of Libraries across the year due to reduced staffing. Given the current financial situation of the University, GK is concerned about potential future trends which may continue to impact staffing and, consequently, student experience. NE explains that this issue is explored by the HR Risk Assessment; however, **NE will look at the possibility of exploring more in detail the role that reduced staffing has had/will have on the general student experience.**

Megan McFarlane (MF) refers to the point on non-continuation students from a student recruitment prospective. MF and the Recruitment Team have been working on lowering tariffs to enhance student recruitment – and have been engaging on ongoing discussions with Planning. UG entry requirements have been explored, and PG entry requirements will be explored in the upcoming month.

Feedback and thinking points are encouraged and should be shared with NE by the end of 21.03.2025 (Teams post [reminder](#)).

7. (4) Sport & Active Health (Draft) Strategy 2025-30

Duncan Stuart (DS) presenting: the document is the result of collaborative work with the Students Union, ASV, the Scottish Students Sport, and the University. The document is being shared with SSEC to gather feedback before sharing it with SMT. Ideally, this would result in the creation of a working group focused on how to deliver the objectives outlined in the strategy.

Feedback is welcome and can be shared directly with DS.

Tönis Tilk (TT) agrees that the document will have a positive impact in ensuring that Sport is valued at the University. TT believes that the document would benefit from a closer link to the 2040 strategy and a more linked-up strategy with the wider University. TT would like to see more direct mentions of the work done by the Student Union and ASV, perhaps including the review of Sports under ASV. Finally, TT trusts that there would be scope for including a focus on the impact Estates may have on the Sport strategy. Overall, the strategy is acknowledged as positive.

MM highlights that they have been reviewing the RUK Scholarship Provision for 2026 for UG and would like to remind SSEC that some sports scholarships are available. **MM and DS to discuss potential marketing strategies surrounding Sports scholarships.**

KH highlights that the University is great at promoting ASV to prospective students, but more attention should be focused on ensuring that the facilities are effectively accessible to enrolled students.

Susan Halfpenny (SH) wonders if the strategy should have a specific focus on International Students. Similarly, LB wonders if TNE should also be considered separately. DS explains that the strategy's overarching goal is to promote activity across all campuses – but it may be more difficult to develop specific strategies for the TNE campuses. DS explains that EEW Team will soon welcome a new intern. Their role will be to focus on the International Student Experience and understand where further support may be necessary. The new intern will be able to investigate the query surrounding International Students and Sports.

8. (5) AUSA Standing Point/Update

Miles Rothoerl (MR) presenting: The Student Union will provide a general update for this meeting.

- Annual General Meeting: Ran every 1.5 years. Met quorum with 350 students. The AGM was rather successful.
- Class Rep Conference: around 80 Class Reps from across various Schools attended. Training, funded by the Development Trust, was provided. The event was positive in terms of networking and engagement.
- AUSA Student Officers Elections: Over 2000 students voted, with about 12.2% turnout. The percentage of voter is especially strong for the SU, especially compared to previous years – and in line with the general national trend.
The new officers are as follows: Student President - Christina Schmid (re-elected); Vice President for Activities - Hannah Cowie; Vice President for Communities - Jonathan

Dorrat; Vice President for Education - Samuel Seymour; Vice President for Welfare - Karim Hurtig (re-elected)

MR shares that the Student Union has been receiving feedback regarding the release of Graduation Ceremony dates. International Students would especially appreciate it if information/dates could be released earlier, to allow for travel arrangements (for instance, with visiting families). Further, some students have complained about the tickets being released in May – which may impact attendance and travel arrangements.

DS confirms that their team is looking at reviewing the process for releasing graduation dates. The process is a bit convoluted, but there can be scope for bringing this forward. The ticket sale process is more complicated, as it currently occurs once the applications to graduate are closed, as to ensure equal access to the tickets. **DS and AUSA to speak about possible alternative solutions** (for example, allowing students to purchase their two guaranteed tickets ahead of the general ticket sale).

Zeshu Shao recounts that many International PG students (Jan starts) have also complained about the Graduation scheduling – especially those who are impacted by their VISA (and whose graduation ceremonies are often scheduled past the VISA expiration date). DS explains that this challenge is a bit more difficult to address, as the graduation cycle is set various years ahead; but DS can report the feedback. Further challenges to the set cycle of graduations are also in relation to RGU's graduation dates and the risk of overlaps.

9. (6) Full-Time Undergraduate Non-Continuation Internal Data

Jason Bohan (JB) presenting: The purpose of the paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the 2023/24 full-time undergraduate non-continuation data as produced internally by the University. This differs from the HESA non-continuation performance indicator, which is restricted to first year undergraduate entrants only. The internal non-continuation data focuses on various non-continuation students, including those who are not registered for the following academic year, not completing their studies, and who are seemingly not continuing their studies in other institutions.

The results are overall positive, the non-continuation rate for 2023/24 is 4.0%, which represents a decrease of one percentage point from 2022/23's position of 5.0%. However, for the first time, data highlights that International Students are more likely to not continue than their UK counterpart. Further, the data considers the following categories and non-continuation trends: Male > Female Students; BAME > White Students; Students with declared disability > non-disabled students. It is noted that 'Health Reasons', 'Other Reasons', and 'Other Personal' covers numerous individual circumstances for non-continuation, and it isn't possible to identify systematic reasons for non-continuation across the institution.

Despoina Kaloriti observes how various students seem to be under the non-continuation data due to their non-attendance; however, the report does not explain the reason why some students may have chosen to stop attending classes.

JB highlights that, while the data has improved, some issues are unchanged – for example, the high levels of non-continuing students in Y1, or of disabled students. The University has been looking at strategies to counteract this, for example by organising BeWell week (to foster a

positive environment), reviewing the monitoring processes, etc. Further work can be developed and strategies reconsidered.

MR highlights that it would be helpful again to categorise data by regions (International, European, etc.). MR also highlights that Chart 15 'University of Aberdeen undergraduate non-continuation rates by reason for non-continuation (%)' demonstrates a spike in students reporting feeling 'Excluded'. **JB to review the data on Chart 15 for accuracy, with particular focus on the 'Excluded' data.**

10. (9) Digital Exams Guidance Paper

Jason Bohan (JB) presenting: The purpose of this paper is to develop clear School guidance on the delivery of digital-based assessments. Schools regularly employ a range of digital assessments both in person and remotely. The use of these types of assessments has grown substantially post-COVID however, we have also witnessed inconsistency in practice, which calls for greater school guidance, and support/advice for students on a range of issues. Students have experienced difficulties in understanding the difference between assessment types (for example, invigilated exams vs. class tests), and the expected regulations.

A working group was formed out of the Exams Planning Group, and a survey was delivered to Schools to identify where additional support may be needed. Schools highlighted that they require additional support, but they also shared concerns about the possibility of new types of assessment being delivered with a return to fully on-campus teaching.

The work by the group also resulted in the review of the disability guidance, the development of an assessment taxonomy, and overall guidance for Schools surrounding procedures and digital assessments. A summary of the main addition to the guidance can be found on section 5 of the paper. Overall, the new guidance will look to clarify practice surrounding facilities and equipment, extra time in assessments, use of browsers, Schools and Students' expectations, etc. **The Committee has been invited to share feedback during the meeting, or with JB by 20/03 – as per the Teams [post](#).**

SSEC approves the guidance, so this will move to QAC to be integrated into the AQH.

Jenna Stuart reports that there has been a trend whereby fully online students have been sometimes requested to attend in-person assessments. **JB will consider whether guidance surrounding this issue should be included in this Guidance Paper, or if should be considered elsewhere.**

MK agrees that the guidance is a positive addition to the institution, and helps in providing clarity and structure for both Schools and Students.

Heidi Mehrkens wonders if it would be possible to provide practical advice regarding how to implement the recommended changes – for example how to implement additional 'upload' time' across various types of assessments. **JB to look at the possibility of implementing changes to the guidance to account for more practical guidance.**

In reference to point 3.9, Lesley Muirhead (LM) highlights some key changes to the language. **LM to share comments and feedback with JB.**

JB and Mary Pryor have been working on guidance for schools to Inclusive Assessments. That guidance may be further integrated to the Digital Assessment Guidance.

11. (10) Update on Inclusion Adjustments

Lesley Muirhead (LM) presenting: the proposal to review Study Adjustments was first presented to SSEC last year, and the work is about to be finalised with an update to the Student Record System.

Since discussing this with SSEC, LM reports that the University has positively committed to update their language and move from using the terminology ‘provision’ to instead speak of ‘adjustments’. However, some of the online systems (like SRS, Student Hub) still use the older language. JB and LM have already requested an update to these sites.

The proposal to update Inclusion Adjustments focused largely on reviewing and expanding upon the types of codes used on SRS. Currently, SRS speaks of ‘disability provision codes’ and lists a limited amount of pre-written codes. The adjustments have thus been relying largely on the use of a ‘free text’ option to accommodate for non-coded adjustments. To promote inclusion and consistency across the Institution, a new collection of codes has been developed and was previously circulated with SSEC for review. The new database has been shared with IT and the update to SRS should be progresses. There will be some testing after the new system of codes is implemented, to ensure that the information is accessible and transferable across Student Support and Schools.

The goal is to have the change finalised and implemented on SRS by Sept 2025.

AOBC

- Susan Halfpenny (SH) highlights that reduced staffing and limited resources have affected the Library Services, especially in their opening times – with Medical and Taylor Library closing on various occasions. In terms of Student Experience, this challenge has especially affected the delivery of the service during Evening & Weekends. The Library team is prioritising the opening of facilities around assessment times. The 24-hour access to SDRL will not be affected this semester, as it will be open as usual with the support of the Security Team.

MR highlights that, while 24-hour access has been confirmed for the current AY, there hasn’t been confirmation that budgeting will be made available in the upcoming years. MR reflects that it may be necessary to reconsider 24-hour accessible spaces in the future – as the MacRobert Building does not provide facilities on par with SDRL.

JM reminds the committee that if any student reports issues in their ability to access technology (laptop, Wi-Fi), or if they speak of Digital Inclusion, Disability, and Equipment; they can be signposted to Student Advice & Support (as funds and loans may be available).

- In line with the University Guidance, SSEC will move to the DecisionTime platform ([about the platform](#)) in 2025/26. SSEC members who are not on the platform will be

invited to join it over the break. The Teams site will remain active and documents and papers will be available.