UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SPACE MANAGEMENT GROUP MEETING

NOTE OF MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2023

Present: K Leydecker (Convener), M Beers, C Collins, M Cowie (vice G Paton), S Duncan, B Henderson, K Kiezebrink, D McCausland, R Moore, G Nixon, J Pearson, L Philip, K Smith, J Timms, G Wilkins and H Crabb (Clerk)

Apologies: D Dyker, G Gordon, B V Mabonso Nzolo, C MacDonald, M Mills, G Paton, E Pavlovskaia, T Slaven, and H Sveinsdottir

1. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 October 2022 were approved.

2. **TABLE OF ACTIONS**

2.1 Table of Actions

The Committee received the Table of Actions arising from the previous meeting and noted the following:

Teaching Facility Data

The Group was advised that an online teaching facilities directory was being developed which would include photographs and a list of equipment available in all teaching rooms. The Group was also advised that work would also commence shortly to develop a room utilisation dashboard in Power BI and noted that more detailed information would be presented to a future meeting.

**Action: GW/JP**

The Group also noted that a presentation on the Resource Allocation Model and space charging had been well received at a recent Heads of School meeting.

1. **INTRODUCTION TO DIRECTOR OF ESTATES & FACILITIES**

The Group welcomed Morag Beers, Director of Estates & Facilities, to her first meeting.

The Group received and noted the proposed framework within which a fundamental re-imagining of the future of the University’s campuses in Aberdeen will be carried out to ensure that their future development underpins and supports the delivery of the Aberdeen 2040 vision. The Group noted that a wide-ranging consultation and engagement process involving internal and external stakeholders would be central to the activity. The Group was advised that the results of the review would inform the development of an Estates Masterplan and contribute to the development of the Directorate’s Strategy.

In discussion, the following key points were raised:

* School meetings could be arranged, or existing meeting arrangements used, to engage staff and students in the consultation process;
* It will be important to ensure that education priorities and the student experience are considered in developing the Masterplan;
* Meaningful consultation and engagement with external stakeholders – including neighbours in the local community within which the University is based and more broadly with organisations and partners across the region – was highlighted as being central to the consultation process and the development of the Masterplan;
* The resource requirements underpinning a project of this nature were recognised, particularly in relation to data production and analysis;
* A collaborative approach to the project between the Estates, IT and Timetabling teams will be important;
* The consultation process would benefit from collaboration with existing working groups across the University which have space/facilities/specialist equipment implications e.g. Research Facilities Working Group;

In considering the proposed Terms of Reference for the Project Board, the Group agreed to recommend that Richard Lynch, Assistant Director (Service Management) be included on the membership as being ‘in attendance’.

**Action: Clerk**

1. **TIMETABLING UPDATE**

The Group received and noted the draft Teaching Timetable & Room Booking Policy.  The Group was advised that the Policy would be subject to a consultation process ahead of being finalised.

The Group was advised that the policy aimed to (i) establish a framework for the creation of the annual Teaching Timetable, (ii) provide guidance on the booking and use of the Central Teaching Pool rooms, and (iii) provide information about the respective roles and responsibilities of the Central Timetabling Team, Schools, staff and students in relation to timetabling and room booking.

The following key points were raised in the discussion:

* Guiding Principles (Section 1.2) – rephrase “optimising/making the best use of space” in lines 4 and 7 to “space efficiency” and/or “cost efficiency”. It was also suggested that the draft would benefit from a review of these sections to highlight that efficiency was required in staff time, as well as financial, resources;
* It would be helpful to include references to collating and analysing data as part of the policy;
* Timetabling being taken forward as part of the annual School planning cycle would support the timely development of a robust timetable ahead of the start of each academic year, inform the design of teaching spaces to optimise their use and efficacy and ensure the accessibility of teaching spaces;
* The Policy could be helpful in encouraging the allocation of dedicated research time for staff to enhance institutional research performance and reduce ‘ad hoc’ arrangements which complicate timetabling processes;
* Remove references to the names of specific software products/providers;
* Review wording in Section 1.5.6 to introduce more flexibility to booking arrangements for large classes;
* Amend wording in Section 1.6.4 to reflect that water bottles are normally acceptable within teaching spaces;
* Section 1.6.6 would benefit from further consideration (“where furniture has been rearranged for teaching, the room must be returned to the official layout before teaching ends”) – it would be helpful to identify some teaching spaces which do not have a fixed layout to encourage Academic staff to adopt an ‘active learning’ approach to teaching delivery;
* Review Section 1.10 (Academic Year) to ensure that it reflects current teaching patterns and structures e.g. inclusion of summer teaching in some areas, reduction (but not removal) of block teaching arrangements, impact of ‘team teaching’ approaches on staff availability for timetabling purposes;
* Review Section 1.11.3 to reflect that some students/staff need to move between campuses (Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill) not just “around campus”;
* Enhance clarity around the definition of “extenuating circumstances” (Sections 1.13.6 and 1.13.9);
* The next version of the Policy would benefit from a change in tone/emphasis from a regulatory approach to more of a policy-driven approach (including drivers to encourage cultural changes);
* The key objective in establishing a timetabling policy is to support the delivery of high-quality education and research activities – therefore, it has to reflect reality and ensure that individuals do not seek ‘workarounds’ in its implementation;
* A key challenge in timetabling processes is last-minute notifications from teaching staff who are unable to attend – it was recognised that sometimes this can be unavoidable, but in some areas there are regularly reported instances of individuals who have not checked the draft timetable and so have missed the opportunity to advise that they are not available for some/all classes once timetable slots have been allocated;
* The opportunity to allow staff involved in research to specify a research day free from teaching should be explored;
* The current timetabling software system can check room availability, but it cannot automatically check staff availability – this can cause issues at an individual level but also in disciplines where a ‘team teaching’ approach is adopted; the capability to capture staff availability, which would be essential to the implementation of academic workload allocation software, should be explored;
* Introducing norms/expectations that staff are available for teaching between agreed hours/on agreed days would simplify the timetabling process and enhance the student experience;
* The Policy would benefit from the inclusion of a preamble which sets out the broad institutional approach to timetabling, including (i) ensuring that staff time and the use of facilities is optimised, (ii) setting out norms/cultural expectations in relation to ways of working, and (iii) creating opportunities to enhance research alongside the delivery of innovative and high-quality teaching.

The Group welcomed the work which had been undertaken in developing the document, provided initial feedback on the draft policy and agreed to recommend that Heads of School and School Administration Managers be invited to provide comments ahead of a revised version being brought forward for discussion at the next meeting.

**Action: KL(HoS)/**

**RM(SAMs)/**

**JP(policy revision)**

1. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Group received the proposed Terms of Reference for a Learning & Teaching Spaces Sub-Group and the resulting changes to the Space Management Group’s Terms of Reference.

The Group was advised that the Sub-Group will establish an ethos of placing academic staff and the student experience at the heart of the process of enhancing (i) the in-classroom experience, and (ii) across-campus standards for digitally enabled learning and teaching spaces. In particular, the Sub-Group will seek to ensure that there are no technological or skills barriers to the optimal use of spaces and will provide a route to consultation, advice and input to the design of spaces used for teaching and learning activities.

The Group noted that prior to the pause on its activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Space Management Group had 3 sub-groups (teaching, research and social interactions spaces). The Group also noted that the Research Facilities Group was considering research space matters. It was agreed that further work would be undertaken to identify the most appropriate forum for the consideration of research spaces to take place and the Group anticipated receiving updates at a future meeting.

**Action: KL/MC/GN**

The Group considered the most appropriate reporting route for the new Sub-Group and, following discussion, agreed to endorse the proposal in the draft Terms of Reference that it report to Estates Committee via Space Management Group.

The Group endorsed the proposed Terms of Reference and noted that the University Education Committee would be invited to comment on them at its next meeting ahead of formal approval being sought from Estates Committee.

**Action: KK/Clerk**

The Group also agreed that Estates Committee be invited to approve the proposed changes to the Space Management Group Terms of Reference to take account of (i) the inclusion of the Learning & Teaching Spaces Sub-Group within the structure, and (ii) the development of the Estates Masterplan.

**Action: Clerk**

1. **SPACE MANAGER UPDATE**

6.1 Space Occupancy Records Update

The Group was advised that pictorial floor plans for each campus building had been developed and that they would be enhanced with details of current occupancy during the next phase of the project. The Group anticipated that the collation of this data would encourage the efficient use of space, particularly in relation to seeking reductions in space occupancy, which would have a corresponding impact on sustainability considerations. The Group also noted the important role this resource would play in encouraging Academic colleagues to think creatively about ways of delivering teaching and how space could be used innovatively to support these activities.

6.2 Space Website Demonstration

The Group received a demonstration of the new space management website which was currently under development. The Group endorsed the content and layout of the webpages and was advised that the formal launch would be underpinned by a communications plan to raise awareness of the new online resource.

**Action: GW**

1. **SCIENCE TEACHING HUB – POST-OCCUPANCY UPDATE**

The Group received an update on the use of space in the Meston and Zoology Buildings which had been vacated following the relocation of teaching activities to the Science Teaching Hub. The Group was advised that the Space Panel had approved the request for Meston Laboratory M155 to be utilised by the School of Engineering for research purposes. The Group also noted that scoping works were underway to relocate School of Geosciences teaching (currently being delivered in Marischal College) to Lab M156.

The Group was advised that consideration was being given to the remaining vacant space which could be used to develop a large-capacity computing/pc laboratory. Current options include Meston Lab M165, and the computing labs (G9 and G11) in the Zoology Building. A formal costed proposal on large-capacity computing facilities will be submitted to the Space Panel for consideration in due course.

The Group was advised that the application from the Scottish Government/Marine Sciences Scotland to utilise laboratories in the Zoology Building (ZB:05 to ZB:12) had been approved in principle by the Space Panel and that negotiations on the licence agreement were at an advanced stage.

The Group noted that a need for flat-floor teaching space for centrally timetabled activities in Session 2023/24 had been identified. The Group was advised that 3 laboratories in the Zoology Building (ZB:03, ZB:13 and ZB:14) could potentially be used and that further space may become available for this purpose upon the conclusion of discussions around the provision of large-scale computing facilities.

1. **SPACE PANEL UPDATE**

The Group noted the decisions taken by the Space Panel since its report to the previous meeting.

1. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Space Management Group will be held on Thursday 1 June 2023 at 1.35pm – 2.55pm via Microsoft Teams.