

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

STUDENT SUPPORT COMMITTEE

Minute of the Meeting held on 02 June 2021

Present: Abbe Brown (Chair), Nick Edwards (Chair), Tim Baker, Martin Barker, Lyn Batchelor, Heather Branigan, Jaye Carr, Grainne Ferrigan, Garry Fisher, Katrina Foy, Iain Grant, Kerry Harrison, Ken Jeffrey, Alison Jenkinson, Graeme Kirkpatrick, Ondrej Kucerak, Russell Moffatt, Lorna Muir, Mary Pryor, Duncan Stuart, Steve Tucker, Jacqui Tuckwell, Burcu Yuksel, and Lesley Muirhead (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: John Cavanagh, Louise Henrard, Wendy Low, Martin Mills, Jemma Murdoch

Welcome

1.1 The Chairs opened the meeting and welcomed members to the first meeting of the Student Support Committee (SSC).

Remit and composition

(copy filed as SSC/020621/001)

2.1 Members of the Committee introduced themselves.

2.2 Members of the Committee noted the remit and composition of the SSC. Abbe Brown (AB) noted that the remit of the SSC will include student mobility. The Chairs advised that all issues in relation to student experience and support are welcome to be raised in this forum. There are some vacancies still to be confirmed with Schools and the Chair, AB, outlined the details of the student and AUSA representative positions still to be recruited and how these will be appointed.

Action: Clerk

Aberdeen 2040 Operational Plan: Education

(copy filed as SSC/020621/002)

3.1 Members of the Committee noted the Aberdeen 2040 Operational Plan: Education. The Committee noted that this was a positive and welcome paper.

3.2 After discussion, members noted that PGR students are not included in the plan but that this is picked up in the Research plan.

3.3 Members of the Committee noted that plans need to be intertwined with the Qatar campus and London and Shanghai projects of the Business School. The Committee noted that in addition to Education groups, all professional services have commitments and plans in place covering all students, including PGR students, and

the Qatar, London and Shanghai points will be picked up by the Qatar operations board and the Projects groups.

3.4 Members of the Committee noted that a Venn diagram to accompany the plan, showing the relationships of the different University Education committees, would be helpful.

3.5 Members noted that the commitments of the plan reflect the priorities of students such as environmental sustainability, accessibility, inclusivity, and ensuring students have access to international experience.

National Student Survey (NSS) Response Rate

(copy filed as SSC/020621/003)

4.1 Members of the Committee noted the paper on the National Student Survey (NSS) Response Rate. Members noted that the University's response rate is reasonably consistent but this has decreased slightly; this may be impacted by the pandemic but other institutions have increased their participation rate. Members of the Committee noted that the NSS results are important for benchmarking; we need to see ourselves in relation to comparable institutions.

Action: Iain Grant will provide further information on response rates

Aberdeen Student Experience Survey

(copy filed as SSC/020621/004)

5.1 Members of the Committee noted the paper on the Aberdeen Student Experience Survey. Members noted that we need to consider what we would do with the information gathered, when thinking about what to ask in the survey.

5.2 Members of the Committee noted that it would be helpful for questions related to Aberdeen 2040 to be included, as they were in the previous survey, for KPI purposes and measuring progress. Members noted that attempts have been made to reduce the survey questions in order to encourage participation and to focus on those which proved useful to colleagues going forward. Members of the Committee noted that the 2040 questions were used in Planning.

5.3 Members of the Committee were asked to provide comments on the draft survey to the Student Experience Team/Duncan Stuart by the end of June 2021.

Action: All; Duncan Stuart

Engaging Students in Teaching Design

(copy filed as SSC/020621/005)

6.1 Members of the Committee noted the paper on Engaging Students in Teaching Design. Members noted the positive aspects of online learning and the areas for improvement.

6.2 Members of the Committee noted that 62% of respondents to the Jisc survey experienced Internet connection issues.

6.3 Members noted suggested improvements such as providing clarity on the navigation of University systems via training for students on how to use these systems, increased scheduling of small, interactive sessions, lecture recordings being posted as soon as possible, and the provision of support to staff to utilise available tools to enable more accessible, and inclusive delivery of courses. Members of the Committee highlighted the challenge of communication, there is a lot of information available on the Toolkit and provided in induction, but this does not mean that this information is always being communicated in an effective and timely manner.

6.4 Members noted that the Survey was completed between October and December 2020 which was during the period of blended learning, this may have impacted the provision of feedback and Kirsty Kiezebrink will be looking into this further.

6.5 Members of the Committee noted that the feedback provided echoes the anecdotal feedback provided by students. Members noted that there have been issues with students unable to submit their work due Internet connection issues. Staff have taken different approaches on how to manage this with some staff requesting evidence of the issues in the form of a screenshot, and also to the periods of extension which are granted. Members of the Committee noted that it would be helpful to have a central policy/framework as to how this should be managed.

6.6 Members of the Committee noted concerns about the community environment online and that it can be difficult for staff to assist with this. Members noted that the majority of students still seem to look to their peers first for support, so there appears to still be a sense of community but it is more challenging to create a community if this was not established prior to the pandemic. Members of the Committee noted that fully online students are encouraged to access peer to peer support through online social media communities:

<https://on.abdn.ac.uk/discover/facebook-groups/>

6.7 Members of the Committee noted that the data for the University's Digital Experience Insights is 5-10% above UK average in all of the key categories. Members noted that it is helpful to have Aberdeen data for benchmarking. Russell Moffatt provided information on the Insights Survey to the Clerk for sharing with the Committee.

Clerk to share to share Insights Survey information

Timing and assessment for disabled students

(copy filed as SSC/020621/006)

7.1 Members of the Committee noted the paper on the Timing and assessment for disabled students. Members noted that some Schools have explored offering all students the same, inclusive time, to undertake short timed assessments, and that there has been discussion about what this inclusive period should be. This is all in the context of strong recommendations from the University that there are no timed assessments, however regulatory and pedagogic reasons means that this is not always appropriate. Members of the Committee noted that in consultation with staff and students and through benchmarking with other HEIs, it has been proposed that three times the standard allocated time would be fair for short timed assessments. If for regulatory or pedagogic reasons this also is not considered appropriate, then the course organiser can choose to have the standard time (or anything less than x3) plus individual extra time for students with reasonable adjustments.

7.2 Members of the Committee noted that it is important for messaging to be clear to ensure that there is not an implicit expectation from students and staff that the full time (e.g. x3) is devoted to the completion of the assessment. Members noted that it also needs to be clear that, if this is done, triple time has been implemented for all, as an inclusive measure.

7.3 Members of the Committee noted that it would be also helpful to review the (initial) time allocated for assessments, that this could be raised with external examiners and the Dean of QW/QA. Members noted that authentic assessment should be considered.

7.4 Members of the Committee noted that the aim of the paper is to fill a gap in current guidance in relation to the time that should be allocated, for short-timed assessments, when it is appropriate for the Schools to deliver these inclusively. The specific issue is limited, although it raises wide questions.

7.5 The Committee noted general support for the paper and this and the points raised will be shared with the University Education Committee.

Action: Chair, Abbe Brown

Readmission support processes

(copy filed as SSC/020621/007)

8.1 Members of the Committee noted the paper on the Readmission support processes, to support students around the formal readmission processes. Members of the Committee expressed positive feedback in relation to the diagram created. Members noted that it is important that it is made clear that information will be sent out from Registry to the different School colleagues, from which Schools can then make their decisions as to how their School is to provide support.

8.2 Members of the Committee noted that the diagram should be refined to suggest less that there is a burden on the student to do things and more to make clear that whoever has the information and is contacted, that they share it with others.

8.3 Members of the Committee noted that the process for PGR students is not included in the paper and this will be considered separately in due course with the PGR School.

8.4 Members of the Committee noted that the Student Learning Service is often approached by students considering taking a break in their studies to discuss their decision. They are also contacted by students who have withdrawn or who are taking a break for support to prepare to return. The Student Learning Service would never decline to see a student at any stage in the process; they work in tandem with the relevant Schools. This should be noted in the process.

8.5 Members of the Committee noted that it would be helpful for the details of the staff who will lead on the process to be recorded, for this to be made clear to students who are taking a break, and that records of contact and roles should be maintained by Schools, in case colleagues leave or there is a change in role.

8.6 Members of the Committee noted support for the move away from the term 'withdrawal' as this can be distressing to students, rather than taking a break or suspended. It was also noted that care needs to be taken in language as there is an official leaving of the University, and then a readmission. This is for regulatory, visa and societal reasons such as eligibility for benefits.

8.7 Members of Committee noted the different processes for UG and PGT students and the links with Associate Student Status.

8.8 Members of the Committee noted that clarity is required when a student has withdrawn or has taken a break from their studies; what is the ongoing formal relationship, if any, during the period of the break and what are the implications of this for the levels of support which are provided and responsibilities held. The present position is to be investigated and made clear.

8.9 Members of the Committee noted concerns in relation to the flow of information; Course Coordinators are only made aware that a student has withdrawn or is taking a break when the student records system is updated, unless there is communication with the student beforehand and that it is difficult to stay in touch if a student is not using a University email address.

8.10 The Committee noted general support for the paper and this and the points raised will be shared with the University Education Committee.

Action: Chair, Abbe Brown

Pastoral review

9.1 Members of the Committee discussed the Pastoral review. A draft paper will follow from AB. A team has been identified to undertake the review, the work will be reported into SSC and to UEC. The UG and PGT systems will be considered in terms of who provides the support, what support is provided and how engagement can be increased.

Action: Chair, Abbe Brown

General discussion about possible future work

10.1 Members of the Committee noted the benefits for members of the University community to gather to discuss the work going on and the opportunity it provides to learn from each other.

10.2 Members of the Committee noted that the SSC will have voice at Senate through the UEC.

10.3 Members of the Committee noted agenda items for possible future work:

- Risk register from UEC
- Review of class representative structures
- Content warnings
- Social media (internal/external/behaviours)
- Discussion/introduction of technological solutions to support community building/feedback
- Mainstreaming of processes for all students
- Inclusive practice; sharing good practice and improving consistency in practice
- Training for staff and students on inclusive practice
- Good practice for student retention
- Student support in online teaching and learning

HEPI Report: More than half of students do not expect any more face-to-face teaching this academic year, but two-thirds of students are currently living in their usual term-time accommodation

(copy filed as SSC/020621/008)

11.1 The Committee noted the HEPI Report.

AOCB

12.1 No other points of business were raised.

Reflection on this meetings' discussion regarding equality, diversity, inclusion, health, safety, and wellbeing.

13.1 No additional reflections are needed with regard to equality, diversity, inclusion, health, safety, and wellbeing.

Date of Next Meeting

14.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Monday 18 October 2021, at 2pm, by Microsoft Teams.