

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 November 2020

Present: Mrs D Dyker (Convener), Dr A Arnason, Mrs L Benvie, Ms S Blaney, Ms E Cassidy, Mr S Carle, Dr N Curtis, Mr A Donaldson, Mr R Ebel, Mr G Fisher, Mr D Malcolm, Professor I McEwan, Mrs C Lawie, Dr A Petrie, Mr R Philp, Dr A Price, Dr S Pugh, Mr K Smith, Mrs K Smith, Mrs J Walker and Mrs D Wilson

Apologies: Mrs V Amakiri, Ms S Cooper, Professor P Fowler, Mr E Stephen, Mrs T White.

1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING

1.1 The Committee was invited to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25th August 2020. There were no comments and the minutes were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

2.1 UNIVERSITY HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE COMPOSITION (Minute 3.3. refers)

Mr Fisher informed that the minutes from the Committee meetings for this year were now on the StaffNet.

2.2 FIRE SAFETY REPORT (Minute 5.2 refers)

Mr Fisher informed the Committee that this was progressing and was expected to be closed prior to the next Committee meeting.

2.3 DRAFT HEALTH, SAFETY & WELLBEING PLAN (2020-21) (Minute 6 refers)

Mr Fisher referred to the agreed action plan which has been updated with progress and circulated for item 7 on the agenda.

2.4 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS (Minute 15.1 refers)

Next Covid Committee meeting had been moved as requested

3 WORKLOAD REVIEW GROUP

3.1 Dr Adam Price outlined the report of the Workload Review Group which had the remit to collect and analyse information to investigate whether and where the problem of overwork exists among University employees; investigate any evidence of a link between overwork and employee's health and wellbeing, and; to devise strategies to monitor and minimise overwork.

3.2 In summary, Dr Price highlighted that there was ample evidence that staff were working over their contracted and this was dependent on their role & gender. Dr Price highlighted that this is indicative of the Higher Education sector and that there is evidence that this has a negative impact on wellbeing. Dr Price further highlighted several important points in the report.

3.3 The Convener thanked Dr Price for the overview and the report and recognised the challenges of workload on staff, both academic and professional services, and that this is being looked at by the University. This includes the new staff survey which has had a good response rate and the deadline has been extended. The Convener invited comments from the Committee members.

3.4 Mr Fisher informed the Committee that workload (described as "demands" was one of the HSE stress standards and that stress is an integral part of the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Plan and also the Mental Health & Wellbeing Plan. It is recognised that addressing this will be a culture change and will take time to resolve, is a sector recognised problem and that University is taking the matter seriously and is formulating long terms plans to address these issues.

- 3.5 Mrs Smith was glad to see that professional services staff were being considered, but also that any measures to monitor workload does not generate additional workload. Professor McEwan welcomed the detail in the report, but cautioned against drawing correlations within the data and indicated that stress can also be caused by non-work issues.
- 3.6 Dr Pugh identified that recent surveys have illustrated that, at the University, the student to staff ratio has increased from 2013 and is above that for other Scottish Universities. The Convener highlighted that since the recent recruitment campaign, this should have decreased.
- 3.7 The Convener further stated that if Committee members have suggestions to address the issues, then they should address these to the Committee. A brief discussion on whether the University could undertake research to fill in any gaps in the data and to identify solutions. The Convener agreed to take the suggestion to the next UMG meeting.

Action: Mrs Dyker

- 3.8 Dr Price finished by asking for reassurance that this Committee monitors and addresses workload issues. Mr Fisher and the Convener assured that workload was addressed at this and other appropriate Committees, and the Workload Planning Review Group. Mr Fisher requested that if members have any suggestions for addressing workload and stress to email the healthandsafety@abdn.ac.uk mailbox.

Action: All

4 COMPOSITION OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

- 4.1 Dr Petrie gave a brief summary of his paper which outlined the current position with regards to the Terms of Reference, Composition and representation of the Committee Members. Dr Petrie indicated that it was still uncertain how information is collated from the Schools and Departments for discussion at the Committee and how information from the Committee is disseminated to staff within Schools and Departments.
- 4.2 Mr Fisher highlighted that Sub-Committees of this Committee should produce, as a minimum, annual reports. These were requested by the next meeting of this committee. The Convener requested Committee members to provide feedback on the areas that they represent and the Committees that they attend in their areas where HS&W matters are discussed to the Clerk via healthandsafety@abdn.ac.uk by the 11th December.

Action: All

- 4.3 Once finalised the Committee Constitution and Composition would go to SMT, before PaRC in January.

Action Mr Fisher / Dr Petrie

5 MANAGEMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL ROAD RISK POLICY

- 5.1 Dr Petrie presented the Policy on the Management of Occupation Road Risk (MORR) prepared by Mrs Amakiri. As part of the review undertaken by the Head of HS&W, several policies were identified as requiring developing, including managing occupational road risk. The MORR Policy
- 5.2 The Policy outlines the roles, responsibilities, actions and processes necessary to ensure that those members of staff who undertake driving as part of their work activities do so in a safe manner. Committee members were invited to provide comments, although it was noted that the papers were issued quite late and member may have not had the opportunity to review the policy.

- 5.3 Mr Fisher requested Committee members to review the Policy to ensure that it proper consultation and that it is fit for the University purposes and that the policy should not be approved 'on the nod' to be identified as wanting in the future. Committee members were invited to provide feedback to healthandsafety@abdn.ac.uk by 18th December.

Action: All

- 5.4 If there were only minor comments this would be taken as agreed. However, if there were significant issues or disagreement over the content the policy would be brought back to the next meeting.

6 COVID UPDATE

- 6.1 Mr Fisher presented an oral update on the current situation with regards to the University's arrangement for the coronavirus situation. Dr Ebel asked whether there was a possibility of relaxing the 20m² rule, as this was having a significant impact on the teaching and research capability of Chemistry. Mr Fisher stated that increases in capacity have been agreed for other areas and he, and Estates and Facilities, would be happy to assist where possible, on a case by case basis.

- 6.2 The Convener informed the Committee that the University was gearing up to support those students remaining in University accommodation over the Christmas break including the development of a range of programmes and support, especially mental health support. The Committee was informed of the asymptomatic testing centre being set up in the Butchart Centre and there had been a overwhelming response for volunteers to help man the centre which opens from the 30th November until the 9th December. The University hopes to retain the test centre for students returning in January.

7.0 HEALTH, SAFETY & WELLBEING PLAN

- 7.1 Mr Fisher outlined the HS&W Plan highlighting that most items were on target and the items in blue font relate to stress, workload and mental health. A new process for general emergency evacuation plans (GEEPS) was under development and Committee members were encouraged to be involved in this if desired. School / Department audits are currently on hold, but there are Business Continuity Plans and Incident Management audits scheduled.

8.0 MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING PLAN

- 8.1 Mr Fisher highlighted that the MH&W Plan is overseen by the working group which meets 4 times per annum and that there is currently significant work ongoing on the associated policy and strategy.

9.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY REVIEW

- 9.1 Mr Fisher informed the Committee that there had been limited progress on this as a result of work relating to coronavirus taking priority. The policy on Management on Occupational Road Risk had been brought to this Committee meeting, the Homeworking Policy was being finalised and an Electrical Safety Policy was currently being produced.

10 FIRE SAFETY REPORT

- 10.1 Ms Cassidy informed the Committee that a significant number of fire risk assessments had been completed including either a full assessment, including physical inspection for higher risk buildings, or a tabletop assessment for medium and lower risk buildings. Significant findings included issues with compartmentation, provisions for disabled persons, contractor housekeeping and signage. Work is being progressed regarding GEEPs for major teaching and

support buildings and these are available on Teams. Ms Blaney queried as to who Ms Cassidy was liaising with regarding the risk assessment for the Phytotron building and requested that either she or Mr Cowie be the contact for this.

Action Ms Cassidy

11 ACCIDENT REPORTS

- 11.1 Dr Petrie gave a brief summary of the near miss and accidents reported to the Committee since the previous meeting, including 2 reportable accidents to the HSE. The Convener enquired as to whether there were enough near misses being reported. Dr Petrie considered that the reporting of these had increased in the recent years, but it was always a challenge to ensure that all of these were reported. The Convener indicated that it would be good to have a promotion of the reporting of near misses.

Action Dr Petrie

12 HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING REPORT

- 12.1 Mr Fisher informed the Committee that most face to face training had been halted as a result of the coronavirus restrictions. However first aid refresher training was continuing for those individuals who were comfortable to undertake this. Both the Return to Campus and the MIND e-learning had low completion rates and the reason for this was currently not understood. The Convener requested that the low completion rates be investigated to determine what can be achieved to increase this. Mr Fisher agreed to feed this back to the Student Experience wellbeing team to action.

Action: Mr Fisher

- 12.2 Mrs Lawie enquired as to whether there was any benefit on the development of, for example, an e-zine from the Committee for highlighting the matters discussed during Committee meetings for disseminating information to those areas that the Committee members represent. The Convener considered that this was a good idea as this would increase the opportunity for disseminating information on health and safety matters discussed, but the e-zine should be distributed at the local level and not from HS&W.

Action: Mr Fisher

13 A.O.B

The Convener informed the Committee that the incoming University Secretary was anticipated to take over her role for the next meeting. She thanked everyone for their contributions and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

14. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

- 14.1 The Schedule of the Committee meetings for this session have been identified as 2nd February, 6th May, 3rd August and 2nd November 2021.