

University of Aberdeen  
Internal Teaching Review (ITR)

**BUSINESS SCHOOL**

Panel Visit: 15 and 16 November 2022

**INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Internal Teaching Review (ITR) of the Business School was carried out under the University's published process and procedures for ITR which are available here: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/internal-teaching-review-6112.php>. To note, this was the first ITR to return to in-person delivery post-Covid. A typical ITR is scheduled to take place over two working days.
- 1.2 The School was asked to submit a streamlined Critical Analysis document which addressed the following key areas:
- (i) School context: to include student numbers, demographics and outcomes; highlight any areas of teaching and learning practices that are specific to the School and a summary of the School's response to the previous ITR
  - (ii) Positive aspects of the School's teaching and learning: to include examples of positive practice and particular strengths of the School as well as how this good practice is shared both within the School and beyond
  - (iii) Challenges that have been encountered in the School's teaching and learning provision: to include potential areas identified for improvement and an action plan for how they might be addressed – or whether these were issues for discussion at the ITR. It was advised that this section was not only focused on response to the COVID-19 pandemic
  - (iv) Future plans: to include areas for development in the next few years, e.g. new course/programme developments, partnerships proposed
- 1.3 The ITR Panel was comprised of:
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| Professor Bill Harrison | Chair<br>School of Natural and Computing Science<br>Quality Assurance Committee |
| Dr Martin Barker        | School of Biological Sciences<br>Student Support and Experience Committee       |
| Leigh Bjorkvoll         | School of Education<br>University Education Committee                           |
| Akua Serwaa Agyeman     | Vice-President for Education, Aberdeen University Students' Association         |
| Dr Mihaela Bishop       | External Subject Specialist, University of Exeter                               |
| Professor Barbara Flood | External Subject Specialist, Dublin City University                             |
| Professor Tim Worrall   | External Subject Specialist, University of Edinburgh                            |
| Liam Dyker              | Clerk, Academic Services  |

- 1.4 The Panel considered the documentation provided by the School, by way of an evidence-based Critical Analysis (CA) as detailed in 1.2 above. In addition, prior to the virtual visit to the School, members of the Panel were provided with access to the School's Quality Assurance (QA) repository, containing the School's annual monitoring materials (Annual Course and Annual Programme Reviews (ACR and APR)), Course Feedback Forms, minutes from meetings of Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), and External Examiner Reports (EERs), as well as the minutes from various School Committees. Consideration of this documentation, along with the School's submitted CA, enabled the Panel to identify key themes for further exploration.
- 1.4 The Panel conducted an in-person visit to the School, where they met with a range of staff and students from different levels, modes of study and campuses.
- 1.5 The themes for focused discussion agreed with the School prior to and during the visit were:
- (i) **School Strategy**, particularly in terms of portfolio development, communication, and infrastructure;
  - (ii) **Student Experience**, including assessment and feedback;
  - (iii) **Transnational Education (TNE)**, relating to the challenges and opportunities contained therein;
  - (iv) **Staffing and Staff Development**, specifically related to workload planning and career development for staff;
  - (v) **Administration, Processes, Training and Supporting Students**;
  - (vi) **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**, in respect of the diverse student and staff population within the School.
- 1.6 This report is split into three sections:
- (i) Part A gives the overall impressions of the teaching provision within the School, formed from the whole ITR process;
  - (ii) Part B covers the outcome of various meetings with staff and students, focusing on a small number of themes as outlined above. It also details the Pedagogic Partnership Session, which involved more free-form discussion; and
  - (iii) Part C details the School action plan which will form the basis of the one-year follow-up report.

## **PART A: OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**

- 2.1 Overall, the panel was very impressed by the School's approach to teaching and learning, particularly in relation to the high-quality student experience that is offered. The panel commended the School in respect of some aspects of assessment and feedback processes, research-led teaching and focus on employability. In particular, the work related to rubrics for assessment and feedback purposes was identified as positive, as were the example of high-level programme objectives embedded at course-level. While employability is high on the School's agenda, the panel sought that internships and related experiences be developed. The panel was particularly pleased to see the creation of a Director of Student Experience role and the professional services support from the Student Progression Coordinator.

- 2.2 The panel was also pleased to see such a positive approach taken in respect of TNE ventures, ensuring a high-quality provision being provided across the world, and in particular, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion aspects which had been considered were very impressive. The links with the University strategy, Aberdeen 2040 themes were also highlighted as impressive.
- 2.3 The School's focus on wider EDI issues was highlighted as a strength, particularly given the significant international cohort of students and the associated, targeted support required therein. The panel commended the School in their renewal application for Athena SWAN.
- 2.4 A range of views were expressed in relation to student monitoring and administrative processes, which is highlighted as an area for enhancement, to ensure that administrative responsibilities between professional services and academic colleagues are clarified. It was recognised that the professional service teams appear to be working well, but that this further enhancement would improve their efficiency.
- 2.5 The accreditation processes currently ongoing were highlighted as important, with the panel supporting the School's aspiration in this regard. The panel noted that these accreditations will enhance the employability of students and the reputation of the School as a whole. Further considerations should be given to the mode of delivery of teaching, with block vs linear teaching noted as a point of enhancement.

## **PART B: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT; OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSIONS WITH STAFF AND THE PEDAGOGIC PARTNERSHIP SESSION**

### **3.1 SCHOOL STRATEGY**

- 3.1.1 The School highlighted themselves as a relatively young School in the wider history of the University but advised of the significant growth they had seen in recent years. School management highlighted changes in respect of the organisational structure which had allowed for more strategic growth and support in key areas. The School highlighted their culture: purposeful, professional, and respectful. In terms of strategic direction, the School Management highlighted the focus on energy transition education and research, as well as interdisciplinary programme development, collaborating with colleagues across the University. The School further highlighted the goal of reducing complexity and improving efficiency. Academic staff recognised that the School is investing in staff and that business cases are being prepared because of continued growth.
- 3.1.2 Staff highlighted the programme portfolio within the School in terms of the volume of programmes and students. In relation to undergraduates, staff reported that students greatly value the flexibility of the curriculum and the ability to switch programmes, which the students supported. The School advised that programmes are developed in respect of student demand, via the market research conducted, as well as staff expertise. School Management highlighted the desire to support the University's Aberdeen 2040 strategic vision and supporting the School accreditation processes. In the case of both undergraduate and postgraduate taught, it was recognised that several programmes had been reviewed and culled in the past. However, the current offering was successful in terms of student numbers. School Management acknowledged the complexities of programmes on offer and indeed the modes of delivery but noted that they were comfortable with the current suite. It was advised that projects are ongoing to reduce the complexities within the programmes, particularly in relation to block vs linear teaching and the issues related to January entry. It was highlighted

that complexities appear to be in delivery as opposed to development. The role of the Qatar Campus (Phase 2 Project) was highlighted in the development of new programmes for the School.

- 3.1.3 Postgraduate Research and doctoral programmes were highlighted by staff, as substantial improvements have been made, particularly in respect of research methods training and in continuous professional development. Staff advised that supervision has been aligned to the subject area of the students, ensuring regular points of contact, ensuring they are engaged, and able to assist with any training requirements. The School highlighted its plans for social events which will allow research students to foster a sense of community. The connection to the Postgraduate Research School and the induction and training sessions provided by them were highlighted as valuable.
- 3.1.4 Staff highlighted that a focus going forward will be on gaining industry experience for students. The School highlighted a new advisory board which will focus on Entrepreneurship and International Business, which will strengthen links to industry. Currently, a handful of programmes, namely the Integrated Masters of Business, offer a placement or internship, but it is hoped these can be rolled out further. The joint programmes with languages were highlighted as opportunities for students to work or study abroad and experience different cultures and industries. The School highlighted pilot courses which have been targeted at upskilling postgraduate taught students, as well as undergraduate courses which allow students to reflect on internships they may have engaged with. It is recognised that industrial engagement and placements or internships is part of the School strategy.
- 3.1.5 In respect of communication, staff highlighted that regular committee and forum meetings allow for the flow of communication between relevant Leads and the wider staff body. It was noted that the fora tend to be very structured discussions, with slides available for staff to follow up on thereafter. In terms of wider interaction, staff spoke positively of the connections with central professional services and Senior Management colleagues.

## **3.2 STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

- 3.2.1 The School were commended for their approach to student experience, and in particular, the creation of the Director of Student Experience role, which is responsible for all aspects of the student experience, including student appeals, NSS, employability, support, and engagement. In addition, Department Leads for Student Experience are in the process of recruitment to support the Director role, given the associated heavy workload. The Director has made significant enhancement to induction within the School, with support from the Student Progression Coordinator. This helps to ensure all students are clearly signposted to avenues of support and that lines of communication are clear.
- 3.2.2 In respect of employability, staff noted that the Director of Student Experience will have a role in external engagement for internships or placements, but also that further professional service support will be required to support these activities. Students further supported this by noting that opportunities for placement or internship would be greatly valuable and enhance their employability. Staff advised of the links to energy and sustainability in Aberdeen and noted this in respect of ensuring students are employable, highlighting the energy programmes, particularly. The workshops and peer-to-peer learning were highlighted as valuable in creating opportunities to engage with industry and giving students the opportunity to engage in real-life scenarios. The links with the careers service were commended by both

staff and students, noting the helpful and insightful experience of colleagues in careers. It was highlighted that there is an Employer Liaison Adviser dedicated to Business School activities within the Careers Service.

- 3.2.3 In relation to assessment and feedback, staff noted the diversity of assessments and the opportunity to allow originality across courses, acknowledging that some courses will continue to assess by way of examination. The role of the External Examiners was also highlighted by staff in the setting of assessments. Challenges were highlighted in respect of setting assessment for multi-disciplinary courses with students from varying backgrounds and abilities, with staff suggesting that specific cohorts be treated separately to ensure feasibility, for example. Staff reported that changes are made to assessments based on student feedback; for example, a debating assessment was revised because of the feedback received in terms of the word count and what was expected to ensure it was effective and relevant. Further, staff appreciated the flexibility shown and light-touch approach to quality assurance processes to make changes during the Covid period and hoped that this would continue. Students reported that feedback was usually very detailed with a marking rubric and additional comments. Students were not clear on whether the feedback they received also fed forward into future assessments, however, some students noted that feedback is usually very constructive. Some students highlighted the mapping of percentage points to the alpha-numeric grading scale. Moderation and assessment processes were highlighted particularly in respect of TNE campuses whereby colleagues must set and moderate assessments collaboratively. Staff highlighted the embedding of programme-level objectives at course-level to allow students to see how the overall objectives of the programme relate to each course studied.
- 3.2.4 In respect of grade inflation, School Management advised that some External Examiners had remarked about the increase in First-Class degrees, however, it was noted this was likely due to alternative assessments and the additional measures in place as a result of Covid-19. It was suggested the return to a single degree classification system should alleviate these concerns. In relation to the compulsory dissertation courses, it was advised that all types of dissertations are valued, and preparation starts early to allow students to make the most out of the short time they have to complete their dissertations. Staff advised of the enhanced Examiners' Meetings format within the School, and noted the positive engagement with it, the reduction in complexity and the ability to work interdisciplinary across the School, particularly important given the volume of joint programmes. Some staff, however, suggested that programmes be given as well as Student ID numbers to allow for greater transparency and reflection, and that discussions could be held at discipline level with External Examiners to gather feedback on the previous academic year. Further guidance was sought on how to handle borderline candidates.
- 3.2.5 Staff reported the value of their research-led teaching, which means that all courses were informed by current research and their research interests, taking the applied research and making it relevant within the context of education. Staff further advised that, as far as possible, courses are allocated based on research areas. This also includes the various research centres within the School.
- 3.2.6 Students advised that the course choice within the School was valuable, with a variety of courses available for selection. The students appreciated the range of courses from all disciplines in the first year to allow students the opportunity to consider which pathway might be best for them. In respect of knowledge of course choice, some students reported that they

were aware that they would have a degree of course choice, but that they were not aware of the scale of the range of options within the School and within the wider University.

- 3.2.7 Regarding student feedback, staff and students reported that there are many opportunities to provide feedback both formally and informally: via class representatives, Student-Staff Liaison Committees, course feedback forms, and the open-door policy with staff, including office hours. Students further noted that, where feedback has been provided, often they see improvements that are made as a result. Announcements are often made on MyAberdeen to alert students to any changes made or enhancements to provision because of feedback received, which is highlighted as good practice. Staff further acknowledged the value in student feedback in enhancing the student experience and the curriculum, though noted response rates were not always truly representative. Some staff noted the Examiners' Meetings as a means of gathering feedback from staff and Externals on the pedagogic provision within each Discipline. It was noted that some cohorts of students have an active class representative, while others do not. Staff suggested that course coordinators should be reminded to publish information regarding class representatives.
- 3.2.8 Students reported that staff are extremely supportive on both Aberdeen and TNE campuses, with TNE students highlighting their appreciation for the 'flying faculty' from Aberdeen. TNE students reported that they feel connected to the Aberdeen campus, though they noted the separation between Qatar and Aberdeen. In particular, some students highlighted the good relationship with the Students' Association (AUSA), while others noted that engagement seems primarily based on the Aberdeen campus and TNE campuses do not get the same attention.
- 3.2.9 In relation to PGR provision, students reported that they have benefitted from the skills-based courses and have been afforded many opportunities, such as presenting at conferences. Appreciation for the support for research students across the Covid-19 pandemic was noted, particularly in challenging circumstances of homeworking. Some students suggested more opportunities to engage as a cohort of researchers would be appreciated. The notion of completing supervision meetings in person was challenged. It was suggested that this was likely due to UKVI regulations.
- 3.2.10 In terms of enhancements to current provision, some students suggested that additional support workshops related to course materials might be beneficial to allow for contextualisation of course content, to give real-life examples and to further students' understanding of what is being taught. Staff noted that this is the case for specific cohorts of students who do require additional support. Further, students commented on the requirement for additional support for international students for whom English is not a first language, and therefore whom struggle with some of the interactions in class. These concerns were shared by staff colleagues also. Additional support for these students can be identified through the Personal Tutoring system, and more tailored support provided at the start of the Academic Year. Additionally, students commented that some tutorials for courses are occurring prior to the lecture, which hinders learning, particularly when other options are available following the lecture in the same week. Some students sought clarity on the recording of lectures, which appeared to be the case during Covid-19, and whether this would be continued.

### **3.3 TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE)**

- 3.3.1 The Business School highlighted three TNE ventures specifically: Qatar campus partnership with Al Faleh Group for Education (AFG College); Joint Institute and Articulation with South China Normal University (SCNU); and programme delivery of Executive MBA with TML Education Shanghai. Staff highlighted that there has been significant growth in TNE within the School, and the partnerships have allowed for further growth and expansion. It was highlighted that TNE allows the School to expand their influence globally and enhance their reputation by providing excellent education and research.
- 3.3.2 Staff acknowledged the challenges in respect of Covid-19 and the ability of staff to travel to overseas campuses and partners due to localised lockdowns. It was recognised that this will return in the coming academic year. The concerns of staff and students that this was not possible was highlighted. Further, it was stressed that the data related to the Covid-19 period, including student intakes, should be considered cautiously, given the challenges on recruitment. It was noted that all undergraduate programmes in Qatar have link tutors with Aberdeen, while all postgraduate taught programmes are taught by Aberdeen staff. There was recognition of relationship building on both sides of the partnership with Aberdeen and Qatar, but that collaboration between academics on Qatar and Aberdeen campuses was strong. Staff highlighted that the relevant governance processes result in regular communication. It was advised that the direction of travel will be to have in-country delivery, however, there are complexities with respect to disciplinary competencies and who is able to teach on each programme. Staff advised of their aspiration to increase the research profile of the Qatar campus. Likewise, it was noted that Aberdeen staff will begin travel to SCNU for delivery, though the ongoing Covid-19 regulations were noted. Staff advised that one of the strengths of the Qatar campus was the close relationships staff were able to develop with students which is more challenging at the home campus due to the volume of students. It was recognised that the culture at the Qatar campus is different and as such, so is the education context.
- 3.3.3 In terms of international student experience, staff advised that it feels as though you are part of Aberdeen on the overseas campuses, so much so that there are examples of many students travelling to Aberdeen for graduation in-person. Students confirmed this and noted their appreciation for campus life on the TNE campuses. Staff further advised that courses are matched to that delivered in Aberdeen, with staff visiting where possible. On the Qatar campus, it was advised that there is good engagement from students, while in Shanghai, the student experience has been challenging because of local lockdowns. Staff advised that TNE students can complete a semester at the home campus, which appears to be a unique selling point of the University of Aberdeen and should be capitalised on further in future marketing and student recruitment activities.
- 3.3.4 In respect of quality assurance, the Director of Studies role was highlighted as a cross-School role with focus on ensuring and maintaining academic standards and consistency in the student experience across the provision on the Qatar campus. The role the programme leads play in working collaboratively with the Director were noted. Staff advised that Covid had been a positive in terms of wider engagement with colleagues at both campuses, as all staff were meeting via Teams, so felt as though everyone was equal.
- 3.3.5 Regarding the Executive MBA delivery in Shanghai, staff noted the focus on facilitating international employability, and the narratives around colonisation of the teaching curriculum. It was noted that the course content, assessment, and delivery require

consideration for international students for both the Executive MBA and the SCNU Joint Institute programmes to ensure that they are compatible with the Chinese Education systems.

- 3.3.6 Staff noted that international students on overseas ventures have different academic and support needs. For example, extra consideration is given to religious holidays. It was recognised that an induction programme has been developed to welcome and onboard every student, and that colleagues on all campuses are sharing good practice with respect of ensuring all students are supported upon their arrival at University.
- 3.3.7 Several challenges were highlighted by staff, including the difference in educational systems within the TNE countries. Further, staff advised that there are challenges with language of students and their abilities in English. It was noted that there was close collaboration with the Language Centre to support these activities. Accreditation was also highlighted by staff as an area for further enhancement, as accreditations improve reputation; helping to attract and recruit students. It was further suggested that accreditations are useful in ensuring parity across all campuses in respect of quality assurance. Staff noted the ongoing discussions regarding block taught vs linear taught programmes and hoped that Qatar programmes could be given further consideration, as the circumstances are different to that in Aberdeen. The development of critical thinking amongst TNE students was highlighted by staff as an area for enhancement in future.

#### **3.4 STAFFING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

- 3.4.1 The role of training and induction was highlighted by professional services and academic staff as positive. Though, it was recognised that this had been greatly improved in recent years and opportunities for professional development were created by individual team leaders as opposed to a consistent approach across the School. The mentoring opportunities for staff were highlighted, allowing more experienced members of staff to mentor and train the new members of staff and have this reflected in their workload, particularly in professional services. Staff reported that this had a positive impact as they felt valued and that their skills and expertise were being recognised.
- 3.4.2 The research mentoring scheme was highlighted as good practice, noting that all academic staff are eligible to take part. Senior academic staff can mentor staff of any level, with the allocation linked to research area. The School highlighted some challenges in uptake, but that it would be continued as staff who had engaged had found it useful. It was further noted that mentors do not have to be from the same research area, and in fact, this can provide additional perspectives to the mentee that they may not have considered. This is in addition and complimentary to the existing processes, such as probation mentoring and line management.
- 3.4.3 In respect of academic workload allocation, staff reported that there is mixed success with the workload model, as it will never capture every activity an academic member of staff will undertake. The workload allocation is typically completed in May and staff are given access to their allocation for the year in June. These allocations impact upon staff being able to change courses/programmes should they be assigned late or if certain developments in their respective field arose mid-course. It was noted that the aspiration is to have Teaching and Research staff with one semester teaching-free or light to allow for research activities. It was recognised that there is a 10% buffer, with aspirations that all staff will be at 90% workload capacity. Staff advised that some colleagues' workload is more severe than others, but this



can be reflective of particular times in the academic year. The consultation with staff and transparency of approach was appreciated by staff, as was the flexibility shown to staff, particularly in relation to teaching activities at TNE ventures.

- 3.4.4 In respect of career development, academic staff advised that they felt their career development had been supported by the School, and in particular, with the encouragement of School Management. Administrative staff, however, felt that their current workloads were challenging and could not allow time for personal or professional development. The challenges associated with the ability to carry out research and the links to promotion were highlighted by academic staff.

### **3.5 ADMINISTRATION, PROCESSES, TRAINING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS**

- 3.5.1 The School highlighted that a period of review had been ongoing in the professional services team; but that it was currently divided into four key teams: Teaching Support, Operations, Accreditations and QA, and Admissions and Partnerships. Communication was highlighted by support staff as generally effective, noting the use of Microsoft Teams and regular professional service team catch ups to keep everyone updated on current and future activities. However, it was highlighted that there are instances where key staff are not informed of decisions taken that have an impact on their role. Further, it was suggested that relationships with academic colleagues were better in previous years due to reduced workloads and the ability to meet colleagues. This has had an impact on relationship building and communication across the School. It was further noted that individual teams also hold their own team meetings to discuss team-specific matters.
- 3.5.2 The support offered to students has been highlighted as particularly positive, and the new Student Progression Coordinator role has made a positive impact on the student experience and in student pastoral care and wellbeing. It was noted that signposting to students is not always effective, particularly on the University website, due to changes in roles and who to contact not always being reflected. Staff reported that supporting late arrivals was challenging in both a pedagogic but also pastoral context. Some students remarked that the flexibility that was shown during Covid to hybrid learning students was positive, though it was suggested that this would have been useful to retain. It is acknowledged that this not a School-based decision. Some students further highlighted that enhancements could be made to specialist learning support within the School, and the application of digital poverty funding. It is recognised that central professional services handle these currently.
- 3.5.3 The administrative team highlighted the lack of ability for various systems to interface with one another and the requirement for manual intervention at many points in the relevant processes. This was raised in respect of absence reporting, and inputting of marks. It was further noted that data is difficult to obtain, and the limitations of the Student Records and Admissions Systems were highlighted.
- 3.5.4 Staff advised that there can be significant differences in the engagement of course coordinators and the clarity on what their role entails. Staff further highlighted the requirement for proper mentoring and training for academic staff on their roles and how they interact with the administrative teams. The Teaching Support colleagues noted their level of involvement in course administration, including handling and tracking assessments, monitoring academic misconduct, and pulling class lists and marks, for example. It was highlighted that it appeared that the Teaching Support team are currently carrying out some

of the roles of the course coordinators or personal tutors. The role of the professional services team, and in particular the quality assurance officer, in programme and curriculum development was noted by staff. The coordination of assessment changes for QAC approval and accreditations was further highlighted.

- 3.5.5 A mix of views of academic and administrative staff were expressed in relation to student monitoring. The administrative team reported good communication with colleagues in Registry who handle correspondence to the students. Significant concern was expressed across all groups of staff regarding the automated emails that are issued to students for monitoring, noting they can be particularly unhelpful. If personal issues are identified, colleagues in the administrative team advised students will be flagged for student support. Across academic and professional service staff, there appeared to be some confusion and overlap regarding the activities that were expected of each for student monitoring. The complications regarding visa students were noted.
- 3.5.6 In respect of academic misconduct, the administrative staff advised they were responsible for all administrative duties for academic integrity cases, including checking the plagiarism detection software scores for assessments, with experienced academics within the School responsible for investigating instances of misconduct. The staff advised of the Academic Integrity Committee panel which oversees these cases. It was noted that additional sessions at induction and orientation are provided to students, but these are not mandatory. Staff advised that the administrative team have responsibility for this as a legacy from before Covid-19, whereby the administrative staff would collate exam papers and academics had little interaction with MyAberdeen.

### **3.6 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)**

- 3.6.1 Both staff and students highlighted EDI as important within the Business School, noting that approximately 75% of students are international and there are over 40 nationalities within the staff team. School Management highlighted the appointment of Co-Leads for EDI and a Director of Staffing which supports the monitoring and strategic direction of EDI issues. The School advised that they are preparing for the renewal of their Athena SWAN Bronze award, noting graduate teaching positions have been utilised to assist with data analysis.
- 3.6.2 Staff highlighted some of the challenges in respect of EDI, particularly in relation to the lack of funding available which may be prohibiting students from being able to apply and study at the University. Further challenges were highlighted in relation to the variety of cultures of the student and staff populations. It was advised that many international students struggle, especially when Aberdeen is far from home. It was noted by support staff that there is more focus on Chinese students and that the increasing diversification of international students meant a need to adapt inclusive strategies. The role of the Director of Student Experience and Student Progression Coordinator in supporting these students was highlighted and commended, particularly in relation to the induction processes. It was also noted that the School is trying to foster a sense of community among students and included additional support sessions for students to focus on what they might have coming up, with additional support from the Centre for Academic Development.
- 3.6.3 Where language has been highlighted as a challenge for some students, there may be staff within the School who can reach out if the students are struggling with communication, in cases where staff might be fluent in the students' mother tongue. The support developed for

the Chinese student population was highlighted, noting the support from the international team in the arrival of students, particularly where students intend on staying within the UK following their degree.

- 3.6.4 Some mature and disabled students highlighted that their experiences had been overwhelmingly positive. Thanks, in part, to the support from the Student Advice and Accessibility team within the central professional services, as well as support at School-level. Challenges arose when prior to diagnosis of a condition, whereby support could only be put in place once a diagnosis had been made. The students commended the support the University provides to students, particularly where disability is concerned.
- 3.6.5 In respect of TNE, staff reported good gender equality on the Qatar campus, with very engaged female students in mixed classes. It was noted that classes are set up in Qatar as they would be as if in Aberdeen. Staff from the Qatar campus further advised that from the initial stages of the venture, providing education to Qatari students, and, in particular female Qatari students, was important. Staff reported that conversations are had with both male and female students about leadership and diversity in some of the PGT programmes. It was noted that, where appropriate, flexibility can be given to female students, for example, whereby they may feel uncomfortable in a mixed classroom setting, and staff will openly discuss this with students. In respect of the partnership with TML Education in Shanghai, it was reported that the gender balance there is also particularly positive, with approximately 45% female students on the Executive MBA.
- 3.6.6 Diversity within the staffing was highlighted as a challenge, particularly in areas where the recruitment pool is small. This was raised in relation to the Executive MBA programme, whereby it is important that teaching faculty are exposed to the executive world, leading to challenges in recruitment. Likewise, the gender balance of staff can be easily disrupted by a small number of female staff departing. Colleagues in Qatar reported that recent recruitment of staff had been female, noting that recruitment is always based on ability. The staff gender split in respect of the Qatar Senior Management Team and Teaching Management Team is positive.

### **3.7 Pedagogic Partnership Discussion**

- 3.7.1 The pedagogic partnership discussion backed up many of the points mentioned during the focused meetings. There were challenges in student participation and therefore, the results are not as fulsome as intended. In addition, the group highlighted several additional points for consideration, which can be found in Appendix A. The School are invited to consider this appendix to help inform future practice. Student comments are on green and orange post-its and staff are on yellow post-its.
- 3.7.2 There was agreement between staff and students on the structure and student experience of the courses. In terms of positive commendations, the students appreciate the recording of lectures and the maths support which is offered to students. Meanwhile, the staff highlighted the applications of theory and working with local industry to facilitate authentic experiences and enhance employability, including applications of learning in real-life contexts. The staff highlighted innovative teaching and assessment, including the Bloomberg financial training room and the use of peer-to-peer discussions. Further, staff noted that students are benefitting from the use of online materials.

3.7.3 Staff and students highlighted several aspects for improvement or to cease. For students, support for students with specific learning differences could be enhanced, as well as further integration and inclusion among course cohorts. In some cases, some students have never met their course coordinator. Some students noted the timetabling and difficulties with rooms being across campus. Students sought industry-specific sessions as well as workshops with companies or businesses. Some students sought more social events. Attendance monitoring was noted as an issue among students and staff, with staff suggesting it should be stopped and the wording of emails be reviewed. The purpose of the email communications is generally understood by staff and students, however, adjustments should be made to ensure that attendance monitoring is a supportive and compassionate exercise, as opposed to punitive. Staff highlighted follow up information on graduate employability as an area for improvement, as well as utilisation of more digital resources. The scalability of practical classes for larger cohorts and engagement with students was noted, as was the simple, qualitative feedback on courses for students. The transition of asynchronous to synchronous classes could be improved. Some staff believe that the “School does not have a home,” which should be alleviated by the new building development.

## **PART C: SCHOOL ACTION PLAN**

4.1 Continue to increase and enhance communication across the School by:

- (i) clarifying the roles and responsibilities of School professional services colleagues and academic colleagues, in particular, course coordinators and personal tutors, to ensure a parity of experience for all students;
- (ii) ensuring clear lines of communication in respect of decision making at all levels in the School structure to ensure all colleagues can fulfil their roles effectively;
- (iii) considering revisions to the University’s websites to update and clarify content, including signposting for students, and improving navigation for all users;
- (iv) ensuring that all staff, particularly new staff, are aware of the School-level and University-level policies and procedures;
- (iv) promoting open and active discussion at a department- and school-level.

4.2 Aim to enhance the student experience by:

- (i) reviewing and clarifying strategies to improve student engagement, and in particular, course feedback response rates and participation in lectures;
- (ii) developing opportunities for internships or placements across programmes to enhance the employability of Business School students;
- (iii) continuing to monitor the impacts of the proposed level of programme development, ensuring the needs of academic and administrative staff are considered, particularly in respect of workload;
- (iv) exploring how the weighting and format of assessments are balanced across courses, and that formative, authentic and alternative assessments are used when required;

- (v) reviewing the consistency and quality of both feedback and feedforward across courses;
- (vi) ensuring that the sequence and separation of lectures and tutorials are not constrained by the timetable, monitoring this as required;
- (vii) continuing to review and monitor academic misconduct cases, ensuring the School is doing all within its power to reduce the number of instances and share good and malpractice with students;
- (viii) exploring and carefully considering the modes of delivery of block taught vs linear taught courses.

4.3 Enhance the support offered to students by:

- (i) ensuring student monitoring is carried out as effectively as possible, and that all parties (both academic and administrative colleagues) have a better understanding their roles and responsibilities;
- (ii) exploring the consistency and effectiveness of the personal tutoring support delivery across the School.

4.4 Enhance the reputation of the School by:

- (i) continuing with the process of accreditation, liaising with colleagues in the Quality Assurance Committee as required.

# (STAFF) WHAT IS THE SCHOOL DOING WELL?

- Q1 Applying theory, working with local businesses
- Q1 Applying learning in real-world contexts
- Q1 innovative assessment
- Q1 Students benefitting from online materials
- Q1 Bloomberg training room
- Q1 Utilising prior experience
- Q1 peer-peer discussions

# (STAFF) WHAT COULD THE SCHOOL IMPROVE ON?

- Q2 getting follow-up information on graduate employability
- Q2 Scaling up practicals to larger classes
- Q2 asynchronous → synchronous
- Q2 more utilisation of digital resources
- Simple Qual. Feedback on courses can be improved.
- Q2 Scalability of engagement with students
- Q2 "school does not have a home"  
↓  
new building very important

(STAFF)

# WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL STOP DOING?

Q3

non-attendance at lectures → CB

Q3

wording of CB notifications

(STUDENTS)

# WHAT IS THE SCHOOL DOING WELL?

Recording Lectures

Structure within the courses

Math support for some courses

(STUDENTS)

# WHAT COULD THE SCHOOL IMPROVE ON?

Support for students with Learning Difficulties  
Ex Dyslexia, ADHD

More inclusion within students from the same course

Never met Course Coordinator

Hard to be on time because rooms are far from each other

Presence of the Business School

Not a unity when planning courses

- industry-specific sessions (e.g. consulting, manufacturing, hospitality etc...)

- Course social events

- work shops with companies (gain some sensible experience for CV)

- too random class rooms  
- QR code/attendance → maybe handing out attendance cards and collect them at the end of lectures?

- very small knowledge check questions / tests every lecture so students can gain understanding about what they are studying