

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)**

Minute of the Meeting held on 6 October 2021 (Draft, not yet approved)

*Present:* Ruth Taylor (Chair), Alfred Akisanya, John Barrow, Leigh Bjorkvoll, Jason Bohan, Abbe Brown, Stuart Durkin, Bill Harrison, Richard Hepworth, Gerry Hough, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Ondrej Kucerak, Lucy Leiper, David McCausland, Tim Mighall, Rona Patey, Shona Potts, Kath Shennan, Susan Stokeld, Steve Tucker, Russell Williams and Adelyn Wilson with Julie Bray, Rachael Bernard, Scott Carle, Nick Edwards, Tracey Innes, Graeme Kirkpatrick, Gillian Mackintosh, Fiona Ritchie, Patricia Spence and Emma Hay (Clerk) in attendance

*Apologies:* Harminder Battu, Alison Jenkinson, Hazel Hutchison, Graeme Nixon, Michelle Pinard, Lindsay Tibbetts, Simon Bains, and Brian Henderson

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE UEC HELD ON 23 JUNE AND 25 AUGUST**

**2021**

*(copy filed as UEC/230621/001a and 23062100b)*

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed members to a meeting of the University Education Committee (UEC). Members of the Committee approved the minutes of the meetings held on 23 June and 25 August 2021 as accurate representations of discussions held.

**MATTERS ARISING**

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/002)*

- 2.1 Members of the Committee noted the actions arising following the meeting of UCTL held on 23 June and 25 August 2021. The actions were recorded as complete or in progress. In particular, members of the Committee noted:

- With regard to *minute point 2.1* of the meeting held on 23 June 2021, that work on a revised Risk Register was underway, following the recent dissemination of a new format for their completion. Members of the Committee were assured that work was underway in this regard and that a revised Register would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee;

**Action: Chair**

- With regard to *minute point 2.1* of the meeting held on 23 June 2021, that the Dean for PGR would provide a presentation on PGR to the UEC in 2021/22. Members noted that the precise date for this presentation would be confirmed in due course;

**Action: Graeme Nixon/Clerk**

- With regard to *minute point 2.1* of the meeting held on 25 August 2021, members of the Committee were assured that should Schools identify anything of concern (including but not limited to references to suicide) within absence reports, that these should be discussed with the Student Support team, who would be able to provide advice on how best such instances should be handled. Members of the Committee noted that further information in this regard would be circulated following the meeting, for their information and for dissemination amongst colleagues. Members of the Committee expressed concern that the Student Support team were, at times, too busy to provide this level of support. The Committee were assured that the team were always willing to engage in such discussions. Members of the Committee expressed concern about the sharing of data

received by way of an absence report. The Committee was reassured that the sharing of data, for the prevention of risk, is permitted.

**Action: Nick Edwards**

### **HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING**

- 3.1 Members of the Committee noted the Campus Planning Group (CPG) papers and minutes of meetings, available [here](#).

### **UEC REMIT AND COMPOSITION**

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/003)*

- 4.1 Members of the Committee received an updated version of the UEC Remit and Composition, for use during the 2021/22 academic year. Members of the Committee noted two new members of the Committee as follows:
- David Mercieca, on behalf of the Students' Association;
  - Anne-Michelle Slater, Dean for Portfolio Development and Programme Promotion.

Overall, the Committee was content to approve the remit and composition for 2021/22.

**Action: Clerk**

### **EDUCATION IN THE FIRST HALF-SESSION 2021/22**

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/004)*

- 5.1 Members of the UEC discussed the paper, providing a brief overview of Education delivery during the first half-session of the 2021/22 academic year. Members of the Committee were invited to provide feedback on their experiences of the first half-session to date. A discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:
- Members of the Committee expressed concern that despite accessing rooms for the term having been very difficult, classrooms on campus were noticeably empty;
  - With regard to teaching, members of the Committee expressed concern that online students were struggling to participate in synchronous sessions, resulting in members of staff having to dual teach. The Committee noted that the IT equipment in rooms was compounding the problem. Members of the Committee expressed concern about the resulting workload for staff;
  - Members of the Committee noted that there appeared to be a lack of clarity amongst students as to whether or not they could study online. The Committee acknowledged that students were registering for online teaching in instances where they are not studying at a distance. The Committee expressed a desire for a more rigorous approach to ensuring students cannot do this in the second half-session;
  - The Committee received an update on library capacity, noting that it was currently much lower than in previous years. Members of the Committee noted that group study spaces would be reintroduced in the coming weeks. The Committee acknowledged, however, that the library could not accommodate students who need to attend online teaching, where they are required to contribute verbally.
  - In regard to the library, members of the Committee noted plans to reintroduce 24/7 opening during exam periods. In recognition of an alternative approach to assessment, however, members of the Committee were asked to provide feedback on the amount of exams/level of assessment that would be ongoing during the traditional 'assessment diets'. It was agreed that the University Librarian would attend

a future meeting of the School Leads, to discuss this matter in further detail. The Vice-President for Education also requested to be in attendance.

- 5.2 The Chair thanked members for their feedback. Members of the Committee were assured that the matters they had raised had been noted and that further discussion regarding the experiences of Schools would be held at the next meeting of the School Leads, the Director of Academic Services and Online Education and the Chair.

**Action: Chair**

#### **ARRANGEMENTS FOR TEACHING DELIVERY FOR REST OF ACADEMIC YEAR 2021/22**

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/005)*

- 6.1 Members of the Committee considered the proposal for delivery of teaching for the rest of the academic year 2021/22. The Committee acknowledged the approach proposed, following the model currently in place for first half-session teaching. Members of the Committee were invited to provide feedback on the paper. A discussion ensued, the main tenets of which were as follows:

- Members of the Committee expressed concern at the proposals to retain 1-metre distancing, despite such levels of distancing were no longer a legal requirement. Members of the Committee noted staff and student frustration with this model and its severe impact on teaching and the student experience and consequently the National Student Survey (NSS);
- Members of the Committee stated that since the first half-session approach was agreed, significant changes to the external context had occurred, including the likelihood that students were now fully vaccinated;
- Members of the Committee further expressed concern that the arrangements for teaching delivery had already been agreed, prior to consultation with Schools, the UEC or the Senate;
- It was noted that the need to engage Senate in discussions on second half-session teaching delivery should be clarified;
- Members of the Committee noted that some teaching rooms, following their assessment for occupancy on the basis of a 1-metre distancing model, had been judged as having less capacity than envisaged. The Committee sought reassurances that rooms could be revaluated;
- The Committee noted the cap of 50 on larger teaching events, requesting that this be re-evaluated for teaching spaces with larger capacity;
- Members of the Committee noted concern at the timings stipulated in the paper for the timetabling process, suggesting that they put unnecessary pressure on staff. It was noted that this was not reflected in the timelines stated;
- The Committee noted feedback from colleagues based in Schools which deliver professionally accredited programmes. It was stated that professional bodies had agreed to adjust to alternative forms of assessment to address the impact of the pandemic, but that a move to normality and invigilated or proctored exams was now an expectation of some;
- Members of the Committee acknowledged that some staff and students remained anxious about returning to normality. The Committee agreed the importance of ensuring staff and students feel able to return to campus and supported in doing so.

- 6.2 The Chair thanked the Committee for their contributions. The Chair informed the Committee that the decision as to how the second half-session would be delivered had been left as long

as possible and made in line with Scottish Government guidelines and restrictions. Members of the Committee acknowledged that the pandemic remained ongoing and that some adjustments were still required to teaching delivery as a consequence.

- 6.3 In response to concerns raised regarding the occupancy of rooms, the Chair noted that there could be an opportunity to look at these again. In addition, with regard to the capacity of 50 for teaching events, it was noted that this would be revisited in due course. The Chair asked that the discussion regarding exams be taken out with the Committee – for discussion with the relevant Schools.
- 6.4 Members agreed the importance of communicating the decisions taken with regard teaching delivery to the staff and student bodies. Members of the Committee agreed the need to be transparent in communication.
- 6.5 Finally, members of the UEC agreed that planning for the second half-session would progress on the basis of the paper presented, and that Senate would be offered the opportunity to discuss the paper.

**Action: Chair**

#### **TIMING OF THE 2022/23 ACADEMIC YEAR**

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/006)*

- 7.1 Members of the Committee noted the proposals for discussion by Senate relating to the start date and structure for the 2022/23 academic year. It was noted that the paper was for initial discussion only and that a finalised proposal would follow to a future meeting of the UEC for approval. Members of the Committee acknowledged the proposal to retain current arrangements for a later start to the academic year, as a consequence of a series of factors, most notably student recruitment. Members of the Committee were informed of the benefits seen by the University in advance of the start of the 2021/22 academic year as a consequence of the later start date. The Committee noted there were agreed exceptions to this later start date, such as students undertaking degrees in teaching or medicine.
- 7.2 Acknowledging the proposed later start date, members of the Committee expressed concern as to the continued constriction of the first half-session and the impact of this on student wellbeing. The Committee noted that a shorter half-session could incur tight assessment submission deadlines and a lack of revision weeks. It was further acknowledged that a restricted half-session could be more challenging for new students, who, as a consequence, had little time to adjust. The Committee also noted concerns as to a longer winter break, which could be isolating for students unable to travel home.
- 7.3 Members of the Committee expressed concern at the apparent removal of an exam diet. Concern was expressed that the proposal removed the ability for Schools to hold exams, and therefore the continuation of alternative assessment for all courses, without further discussion. Members of the Committee were assured that the model proposed did allow for an examination diet, where Schools chose to assess in this way. Members of the Committee noted a forthcoming review of assessment methods.
- 7.4 The Committee noted the beneficial impact of the agreed delay to the start of the 2021/22 academic year, acknowledging the positive financial impact more time to recruit students (including international students and those entering via clearing) had had. The Committee noted that the paper would be revised before proceeding to the Senate for an academic view.

**Action: Anne-Michelle Slater/Gillian Mackintosh**

## **EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN: STRATEGY AND PLANNING**

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/007)*

- 8.1 The UEC received the paper on Education at the University of Aberdeen: Strategy and Planning, noting that the Aberdeen 2040 actions and KPIs had undergone extensive university-wide consultation, including with UEC (then the University Committee on Teaching and Learning). Members of the Committee noted the draft status of the paper and were updated on plans to amend the approach, as detailed in the paper, to the setting up of one or more of the Task and Finish Groups (TFGs) and that UEC would be a focus for discussion and consultation in one or more of the priority areas. Associated wider consultation would form part of all aspects of the work.
- 8.2 Members of the Committee noted that work was already underway in several areas, including with around decolonising the curriculum. The Committee was assured that the amount of work detailed in the paper was not underestimated and that timelines around it would be looked at. Members of the Committee noted that while a specific TFG on inclusion would not be established, inclusion was to be considered as a key part of all the work being undertaken.
- 8.3 Feedback on the paper was welcomed. The Committee were content to play a role in discussing some of the issues raised in the paper, such as the work around Graduate Attributes. It was noted that further meetings of the UEC, specifically focussed in this way, would be scheduled in due course. The Committee welcomed the suggestion that representatives of the library/digital team should be added to the TFGs.

**Action: Clerk/Chair**

## **NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) 2021 COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS**

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/008)*

- 9.1 Members of the UEC discussed the comprehensive analysis of the 2021 National Student Survey (NSS). Members of the Committee noted that each School was in the process of action planning and that support would be provided as required in that process through the Vice-Principal Education.

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 10.1 Members of the Committee noted that the next meeting of the UEC would be held on Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 2pm.

## **LATEST DATE FOR THE RETURN OF EXAMINATION RESULTS**

- 11.1 Members of the Committee approved the Latest Dates for the Return of Examination Results, for the First Half-Session of 2021/22 as follows:

Undergraduate courses, Levels 1 to 5: by Friday 28 January 2022

Postgraduate Taught courses: by Friday 4 February 2022

January Start Postgraduate Taught programmes, for candidates commencing January 2021:  
by Friday 4 February 2022

**Action: Clerk**

## 2021/22 MONITORING DEADLINES

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/009)*

- 12.1 Members of the Committee noted the 2021/22 Monitoring Deadlines, approved by way of Chair's Action.

### LATEST DATE FOR THE RETURN OF EXAMINATION RESULTS

- 12.2 Members of the Committee noted the November 2021 Graduation Ceremony allocations, approved by way of Chair's Action, as follows:

**Wednesday 24 November**

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition  
Biological Sciences

**Wednesday 24 November**

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Engineering, Geosciences, Natural & Computing  
Sciences and Psychology

**Thursday 25 November**

Higher and First Degrees in the Schools of Divinity, History, Philosophy & Art History,  
Education, Social Science and Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture

**Thursday 25 November**

Higher and First Degrees in the Business School and the School of Law

### STUDENT ABSENCE POLICY

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/010)*

- 12.3 Members of the Committee noted the revised Student Absence Policy, approved by way of Chair's Action. Members noted that the revised version provided clarification of the actions students isolating as a consequence of Covid-19 (where they remain able to engage with their studies online) are required to take.

### DISABILITY TIMING

*(copy filed as UEC/061021/011)*

- 12.4 Members of the Committee noted the paper on *Approaches to Time for Completion of Assessment by Disabled Students with Provisions for Extra Time in Academic Year 2021/22*, approved by the Committee by way of circulation.

## QUALITY EVALUATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF UK TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PROVISION 2021-22 TO 2025-26

- 12.5 Members of the UEC noted that the University had signed up to the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA's) new TNE quality evaluation and enhancement scheme, 'QE-TNE'. By registering for the QAA QE-TNE Scheme, the University is investing in the quality of our students' academic experience and demonstrating our commitment to the advancement of UK higher education delivered overseas. Further information is available on the [QAA's webpages](#).