

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

CAMPUS PLANNING GROUP

SECOND HALF-SESSION DELIVERY OF TEACHING**1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

This paper gives consideration to delivery of teaching in the second half-session 2021/22 and whether there is scope to manage the number of students who are choosing to study online even when they are in Aberdeen or able to get to Aberdeen. This is in response to concerns expressed by colleagues regarding (i) the burden of double teaching to support students choosing to study online where they are able to get to Aberdeen / are in Aberdeen and (ii) the difficulty in knowing students' intentions in regard to whether they are studying on campus or online and the impact of the lack of clarity on student location on the ability to plan.

The paper has been updated following an initial discussion with CPG, and additional discussion with Heads of Schools and Directors of Education, as well as discussions with Professional Services colleagues to identify how best to take forward some of the actions.

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	CPG	19 October 2021
Further consideration/ approval required by	N/A	

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

CPG is asked to give consideration to the proposed approach to manage the number of students choosing to study online in the second half-session despite being in Aberdeen or able to get to Aberdeen.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Communications regarding the return to on campus teaching for academic year 2021/22 informed students that there is an expectation that they should return to campus. It was noted however that there would be some situations (e.g. due to travel restrictions) which would mean that students would be unable to return and, as such, provision of online delivery was also put in place for the first half-session.
- 4.2 While the number of students formally seeking to study online via coronavirus@ has been relatively small, there are students who have not informed us of their requirement for online study, and / or who are in Aberdeen but are choosing to study online. For the latter, some of these students may require to access one or more of their courses online due to class clashes, but Schools are reporting that there are some students who are choosing the online classes even where there are no clashes. Feedback from Schools has highlighted the burden this poses in regard to the workload associated with double teaching particularly and the uncertainty in knowing numbers of those studying online making planning on campus delivery difficult. In addition, there can be an impact on the on campus student experience where there are fewer than expected student numbers in sessions.
- 4.3 The University's course registration system (MyCurriculum) is integrated closely with the timetable. This means that elective courses available to students to choose is driven by clash checking which is informed by teaching patterns. Within this process, it is not possible to differentiate between the mode of delivery meaning that if a course provides both on campus and online sessions, a student may be given the option in MyTimetable to take that course on the basis of availability of the online rather than on campus session. System developments to

change this to functionality would be complex to do and impossible in the timescales we are working to.

4.4 A small group met to discuss whether any approach could be taken, within existing system constraints, to address the concerns outlined in 4.2. In discussion, the following points were noted in regard to the delivery of teaching in the second half-session:

- That it would be important to place strong emphasis in communications on the expectation that students should be returning to campus if they have not already done so and that this message should be emphasised to January entrants too;
- That the number of countries on the red list is now very small meaning those unable to travel should be significantly reduced;
- That the University will continue to cover the cost for those requiring quarantine;
- That due to students choosing their courses for the full academic year in September, we have a better idea of class sizes for second half-session to help inform timetabling;
- That no guarantee has been given around the potential for online study in the second half-session;
- That physical distancing constraints mean that campus capacity for teaching is reduced with capacity at approx. 57% of normal **total campus capacity** compared to around 19% last year. Many courses also wish larger group sizes to reduce repeat teaching which means some smaller rooms are less popular and are not being used to capacity.
- That the forthcoming work on the King's Quarter Project will mean some central teaching rooms will not be available in the second half-session. The Science Teaching Hub will however become available although capacity will need adjusted to reflect physical distancing.
- That some staff have found dual delivery to not provide the functionality needed to enable effective delivery of their teaching and have had to resort to double delivery with associated workload implications.
- **That there may be the ability to increase the capacity of rooms beyond 50 (where appropriate) depending on size (e.g., the Science Hub labs, the arts lecture theatre) if we agree this at CPG. The sooner any decision on this can be made, the more helpful that would be for timetabling.**

5. PROPOSED APPROACH

5.1 To address the concern about students electing to study online even where they are in Aberdeen or easily able to get to Aberdeen, the following approach is proposed for the second half-session:

- In contrast to the approach taken for the first half-session, online synchronous sessions as an alternative to on campus sessions will not automatically be included for each course unless a School specifically requests. In doing so, it will be important to ensure that the amount of contact time is not reduced for each student and so there may be situations where online delivery of some small group teaching is required alongside on campus delivery (e.g. in alternative weeks) due to room capacity to provide the required level of contact time. Delivery of large group teaching sessions (e.g. lectures) will remain online **together with any other online activities already planned by Schools**. Additionally, as the removal of an online alternative should increase student numbers on campus, double delivery of on campus sessions may be needed due to the limited number of larger teaching rooms **however Heads of School will give consideration to addressing any associated workload implications. Furthermore, it is expected that all courses which would normally be on campus will have on campus delivery as part of their delivery model. Where, in extenuating circumstances, this is not possible and the Head of School has agreed, it is expected that students will have adequate on campus time as part of their overall programme in their other courses.** The removal of the automatic inclusion of an online alternative to on campus sessions will however remove the opportunity for students to simply opt for an online session out of preference in MyTimetable.
- Appropriate messaging will be used to inform students of the expectation that they will be on campus for the second half-session.

- A process for managing requests for online study will be introduced. This will be centrally managed due to the flexible curriculum meaning students can be studying across a number of schools and the need for a single decision. It is also important to stress that the operation of the system may be resource-intensive and no resource is currently identified to support this. It is proposed that student requests for online study are directed to coronavirus@ and that an online form will be created to manage the requests. This form will cover various scenarios (e.g. health issues, costs of managed quarantine) and will, where relevant direct the student to the support available to enable them to be able to return (e.g. to the guidance on the University's support for managed quarantine costs). Where an existing route to manage the identified issues does not exist, cases will then be reviewed to determine if online study is required. Taking this approach, it is hoped that the number of cases requiring consideration can be kept to a minimum. It is worth noting that based on similar discussion prior to the first half-session, such decision-making will be difficult to do and may be subject to challenge.
 - While it will be helpful to know as early as possible which courses will require online sessions to support those given approval to remain online in HS2, it is likely that some cases will only occur close to the start of the term. Where those students make an application well in advance of start of term, there is more scope to support them to make arrangements to return to campus and if that is not possible, to inform Schools that these students will require an online alternative for their learning.
 - The Student Hub form for students to indicate their study location will be made available to those formally approved as being permitted to study online and will be recorded in the SRS at the point online study is approved. It should be noted system development will be required to enable the manual recording of those studying online in SRS.
 - As the numbers of those needing to self-isolate is currently very low, it is proposed that these students are treated in the same way as other absences but that Schools will need to ensure students are supported in catching up with their studies on their return to campus. Should the numbers of those self-isolating substantially increase, this approach may need reviewed. There may be a need however to provide online alternatives for those self-isolating during a period of block teaching where the short duration of the course would mean a student might miss a significant portion.
 - A communication plan will need developed and will need to be carefully worded to emphasise the expectation that students will be on campus as a norm.
- 5.2 It is worth noting that implementation of the proposed process outlined above will reduce the ease by which teaching can be moved online should changes to Covid restrictions necessitate this. Schools will therefore need to have a plan in place to ensure that, should such a situation occur, they have a contingency in place which can be implemented quickly.
- 5.3 Subject to progress out of the pandemic continuing positively, it is proposed that the move back to greater normality in terms of on campus delivery can continue for academic year 2022/23.

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Ruth Taylor (ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk) and Gillian Mackintosh (g.mackintosh@abdn.ac.uk).

25 October 2021

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: *Open*