UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STUDENT MONITORING ABSENCE AND ENGAGEMENT TFG UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper provides an update on progress made by the Student Monitoring, Absence and Engagement TFG.

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY/FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considered by</th>
<th>Board/Committee</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSEC</td>
<td></td>
<td>21st August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further</td>
<td>UEC</td>
<td>29th August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consideration by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

SSEC is invited to note the establishment of the digital project group and progress of the monitoring group activities.

4. BACKGROUND

The Monitoring, Absence and Engagement Task and Finish Group (the TFG) was established in Autumn 2021 with a remit to 1) propose the enhanced new approach to student monitoring and engagement process; and 2) review existing processes and systems and identify areas for present improvement. The TFG has representatives from academics, school professional services leads and school staff who carry out the monitoring process, Registry, eLearning, Directorate of Digital and Information Services, student support (including visas, disability and careers), Qatar Director of Studies, other AFG colleagues, students and Business Improvement. The wide composition was to ensure that all relevant voices were heard in identifying challenges in the current processes and systems and university wide needs for the future. The TFG identified that there was need to enhance IT systems supporting monitoring, absence and engagement processes and to establish a community of practice to share good practice and develop streamlined and consistent practices across the institution.

The student monitoring system runs throughout the academic year to identify students who may be experiencing difficulties with their studies and to ensure that students remain on track for their degree. This is often referred to as the C6/C7 process (codes that are applied to individual student records in the Student Records System). The monitoring process is key to supporting students. It does involve, however, a significant amount of manual processing by staff to identify these students before we can try and support them to get back on track. This is largely due to the number of separate systems that are used to monitor students which requires duplication of work, cross-checking etc. In addition students can be confused by the process or the language used (i.e. what is a C6?) and they may have to advise of their absence, for example, via more than one system or to separate areas of the university, and separately respond to multiple C6 notices relating to the same events.
Supporting students through their learning journey is a key component of the Aberdeen 2040 Education Strategy “Our education is open to all. We will provide an environment in which all students can achieve success, whatever their background or personal characteristics” (https://www.abdn.ac.uk/2040/education-research/index.php). It is also integral to the Inclusive strand of the Aberdeen 2040 strategy ie the university will “Care for the wellbeing, health and safety for our diverse community, supporting and developing our people to achieve their full potential” https://www.abdn.ac.uk/2040/inclusive/index.php

5. Update on Monitoring, Absence, and Engagement TFG activities

5.1 IT enhancements to My Timetable and Student Records Systems

An initial business case was presented to the Digital Strategy Committee (DSC) in January 2023 detailing a list of IT enhancements recommended by the TFG. This list was revised based on feedback provided by members of DSC and informed by subsequent conversations with key stakeholders (DDIS, Student Support, Registry, SAM’s, TFG). Key changes made have been to revise the list of recommended IT improvements to focus on activities that are considered deliverable in the 23/24 academic year as judged by stakeholders (DDIS and Registry), and re-prioritised by TFG, school staff (who took part in the original process reviews in Spring 2022) and SAMs.

A business case was approved at the May 2023 meeting of the Digital Strategy Committee for the establishment of a Project to deliver ten enhancements to My Timetable and the Student Records System. The project will alleviate staff workload in a number of areas and ensure a more joined up view of individual students’ engagement on courses and programmes by improvements to My Timetable and Student Records Systems. This will enable more effective student support to be provided, more effective monitoring and subsequently a positive impact on continuation rates whilst also addressing staff workload concerns.

The Digital Strategy Committee approved the business case with the scope of the project being to deliver the desired enhancements defined in Table 1 of the Business Case.

Table 1: List of IT improvements to be made to My Timetable and SRS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MyTimetable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Download “students on course” list indicating attendance, in excel format so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that the file can reformatted/analysed for various purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report on who hasn’t attended a teaching session; eg easier to see which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching session a student has attended if different from the one they were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allocated to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QR codes being available via a report from MyTimetable, rather than having</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to copy the code to a word file to obtain them and also automated naming of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>codes (have to manually name them at present)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlight those with a student visa so that is easier to monitor them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other improvements to MyTimetable, eg, a “hover” over the authorised absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symbol that gives the reason for the absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to email students directly from MyTimetable to flag their absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(and cc Personal Tutors into the email) so that warning emails can be sent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Records System (SRS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The auto-trigger for a C7 should trigger 2 days after the C6 deadline to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensure that students receive the letter on the 3rd working day as it is an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overnight run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System to pull through the name of the school (cost centre associated with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the course code) so that students do not have to work out which School to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ensure that a student does not receive a C7 if they have withdrawn after receiving a C6

Correct interface quirk between MyCurriculum and SRS to ensure a student is not reinstated in error (previous Registry suggestion)

- A project has been established with Jason Bohan as Project Sponsor and Russell Moffatt as Project Manager. The Senior User is Carol Lawie (School of Law) with James McIntosh (DDIS) as Senior Supplier.
- The project is scheduled to deliver the desired enhancements throughout the 23/24 academic year.
- The cost for delivery is substantive within a Digital context: over £226K.
- There are a number of risks associated with the project, more so arising if it is not taken forward. These relate to rates of non-continuation, but also the University's ability to monitor continuation rates as the student population grows, and to intervene where needed; meaning real impacts on the student population.
- The project will require input from multiple stakeholder groups across the University, but more importantly, the benefits delivered will positively impact students, and staff involved in delivering and supporting education.
- Project Board membership is being finalised and board meetings scheduled.
- A User Group is being formed using established TFG, school and directorate contacts, who will be consulted regularly throughout the enhancement development and delivery and will provide greater detail on the desired enhancements so that precise requirements can be coordinated by the Senior Supplier.

5.2 Community of Practice

A community of practice session is to be held on August 24th and will be attended by academic and professional services staff who are directly involved in student monitoring, absence and engagement. The purpose of the meeting is to share good practice, promote consistency across Schools to ensure equity of experience for students studying across Schools; identify continuing challenges and potential solutions; revise the content of C6/7 emails to ensure clarity of communication; consider PGR monitoring issues. The community of practice will meet 1-2 times a year as required.

6. Academic Workload Engagement Exercise

The Academic Workload Engagement Exercise (May 2023) identified a number of factors whereby the Class Certificates (C6/C7) system was routinely described by respondents as being a significant contributory factor to staff workload pressure. These issues were also identified by the TFG consultation with Schools which identified the IT enhancements which are required to alleviate staff workload pressures. The consultation also revealed that pressures were not felt equally across all Schools where different practices operation. The community of practice workshop aim to share good practice which will in addition help to reduce staff workload pressures.

7. Next Steps

- The committee is asked to note the current direction of travel on the actions outlined in this paper.
- It is recommended that the TFG continues for the duration of the digital project to allow TFG members to input into the ongoing work and complete the activities of this strand of the TFG’s remit. Once this project is completed it is envisaged that the current TFG will be disbanded, however the status of future work (for example, revising the longer list of IT of proposed enhancements) will then be revisited.
• It is recommended that the Community of Practice continues to meet 1 to 2 times a year organised by the Dean for Student Support and Experience

8. **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information is available from Professor Jason Bohan, Dean for Student Support and Experience ([jason.bohan@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:jason.bohan@abdn.ac.uk))