UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)

Minute of the Meeting held on 25 May 2021

Present: Ruth Taylor (Chair), Alfred Akisanya, John Barrow, Leigh Bjorkvoll, Jason Bohan, Abbe Brown, Stuart Durkin, Javier Gonzalez Cuervos, Bill Harrison, Richard Hepworth, Gerry Hough, Alison Jenkinson, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Ondrej Kucerak, David McCausland, Tim Mighall, Graeme Nixon, Rona Patey, Michelle Pinard, Shona Potts, Kath Shennan, Susan Stokeld, Lindsay Tibbetts, Steve Tucker and Russell Williams with Simon Bains, Rachael Bernard, Nick Edwards, Brian Henderson, Tracey Innes, Gillian Mackintosh, Fiona Ritchie, Patricia Spence and Emma Hay (Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Harminder Battu, Hazel Hutchison and Julie Bray

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF THE UCTL HELD ON 16 APRIL 2021
(copied filed as UEC/250521/001)

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed members to the first meeting of the University Education Committee (UEC). In particular, the Chair extended the welcome to the Chairs of the School Education Committees and representatives of the Senate.

1.2 Members of the Committee approved the minute of the meeting of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning held on 9 March 2021 (at which the majority of the UEC had been in attendance) as an accurate representation of discussions held. The Committee agreed to the amendment of point 9.2, to reflect the approval of the revised policy on the Accreditation of Prior Learning.

Action: Clerk

MATTERS ARISING
(copied filed as UEC/250521/002)

2.1 Members of the Committee noted the actions arising following the meeting of UCTL held on 16 April 2021. The actions were recorded as complete or in progress. In particular, members of the Committee noted that an update on the proposed fee to be associated with the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) would follow to a future meeting of the UEC.

Action: Rachael Bernard

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

3.1 Members of the Committee noted the Campus Planning Group (CPG) papers and minutes of meetings, available here. In addition, members received an update on the work of the CPG to identify the capacity of rooms, when allowing for physical distancing, to allow timetabling for the 2021/22 academic year to begin. Members of the Committee noted that work on timetabling was set to begin by the end of the month. No further issues regarding Health, Safety and Wellbeing were raised.
EDUCATION RISK REGISTER
(copied filed as UEC/250521/003)

4.1 The Committee received the updated Risk Register for Learning and Teaching. Members of the Committee were invited to return any comments on the register to the Chair.

*Action: Committee*

4.2 The Chair provided members with an update on work ongoing at Institution level to revise the way the University records risks. The Chair noted that further updates would follow in due course. The Chair also noted that, going forward, Education risks would be assigned to the UEC or one of its sub-committees to ensure their discussion and action at the appropriate level with UEC having overall responsibility for the entire Risk Register.

*Action: Chair/Clerk*

EDUCATION COMMITTEE STRUCTURE
(copied filed as UEC/250521/004)

5.1 Members of the Committee received the update on the Education Committee Structure. Members noted the revised Remits and Compositions for the UEC and its associated sub-committees. The Committee noted that some Schools had yet to nominate representatives for the Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee (EEC) and the Student Support Committee (SSC). It was agreed that the Chairs for the School Education Committees would undertake to secure members.

*Action: Clerk*

5.2 Members of the Committee noted concern that the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), as a sub-committee of the UEC, could be overruled in instances where the UEC did not agree with issues raised by the QAC in relation to quality. Members of the Committee acknowledged this concern, however, noted that such an instance had not occurred before and that should it, the views of both the QAC and the UEC would be progressed to the Senate for discussion. Members agreed to the amendment of the remit of the QAC to reflect this agreement.

*Action: Kath Shennan/Rachael Bernard*

5.3 Members of the Committee requested the amendment of the paper to reflect the Remits and Compositions of the Steering Groups associated with the UEC.

*Action: Clerk*

5.4 Members of the Committee sought clarity on the UEC’s remit with regards Postgraduate Research Students (PGRs). Members of the Committee noted QAC responsibilities with regards PGR students and representation of the PGR School across the Education Committee Structure. The Committee agreed, however, to the refinement of the UEC’s remit to better reflect its engagement in this regard.

*Action: Chair/Clerk/Graeme Nixon*

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2021/22 ACADEMIC YEAR

(i) Covid-19 Roadmap Action Plan

(ii) Blended Learning and Timetabling Principles

6.1 Members of the Committee noted the papers on preparations for the 2021/22 academic year. With regard the Covid-19 Roadmap Action Plan, members of the Committee noted that the
plan had been prepared following the consideration of the Principles and Planning Assumptions (minute point 14.1 below further refers) at the Senate. The Committee noted the actions listed, by category, and the notional timelines associated with each. In discussing the action plan, members of the Committee noted the following:

- That Government level guidance would vary between the Aberdeen and Qatar campuses and that this should be reflected in the plan;
- The importance of appropriate planning for study space and access to wider Library resources. Members acknowledged that this may be covered by the Institutional Campus Return Roadmap but that this would be confirmed. The Committee agreed that the consideration of both roadmaps at the UEC may be appropriate;
- That the action plan should be amended to reflect work to be undertaken in advance of the January 2022 student cohort undertaking their studies;
- The importance of including reference to the provision offered by the Careers and Employability Service under ‘Student Experience’;
- The importance of students being able to access social as well as study space;
- A proposed amendment to the section on Assessment to reflect ‘if’ students return to undertaking exams, rather than when;
- The need to recognise traditional online learning students, who won’t return to a campus setting;
- That the section on ‘Schools’ may benefit from expansion or the inclusion of a caveat to reflect the other activity (e.g. in regard to transition) being undertaken.

**Action:** Chair/Gillian Mackintosh

6.2 With regard to the Blended Learning and Timetabling Principles, members of the Committee noted that these had been revised following their publication in advance of the 2020/21 academic year. The Committee noted that, once agreed, these would be publicised online and used to inform the preparation of the timetable for 2021/22.

6.3 Members of the Committee noted references to ‘Course Handbooks’ contained within the document. While agreeing the importance of course level information being provided to students, members noted that this was no longer consistently provided by way of a ‘Course Handbook’ and that approaches, and terminology used across Schools varied. The School Education Committee Chairs agreed to discuss this issue with the Chair, in further detail.

**Action:** Chair/School Committee Chairs

6.4 The Committee noted that traditional exams would not be undertaken in 2021/22. The possibility of a small group of students being permitted to undertake an assessment in a room on campus (i.e. Languages students) was, however, discussed. Members of the Committee noted that further guidance on the feasibility of approaches such as this would follow.

6.5 Overall, the Committee was content to approve the Principles, subject to the discussion to be undertaken, as outlined in section 6.2 above.

**BLENDED LEARNING EVALUATION UPDATE**

*(copy filed as UEC/250521/006)*

7.1 Members of the Committee received an update on the ongoing evaluation of the University’s approach to blended learning. Members noted that evaluation was critical to enabling the University to think critically about the move to blended learning while also contributing to the planning of teaching, learning and assessment for 2021/22 and beyond.
7.2 Members of the Committee noted that several strands of survey had been undertaken to date, including staff and student focus groups and a staff survey. It was noted that a student survey would follow in the autumn, however, PGT students due to complete would be surveyed in advance of this.

7.3 Members of the Committee noted the findings of the evaluation activities to date and, in particular, acknowledged student feedback which, while generally positive about their experiences of blended learning and particularly around the effort staff put into supporting them, reported a strong sense of isolation and loneliness and a feeling of lack of social interaction particularly with other students.

7.4 Members of the Committee noted that a further update on evaluation activity would follow to a future meeting of the UEC.

Action: Kirsty Kiezebrink/Gillian Mackintosh

ABERDEEN 2040 OPERATIONAL PLAN: EDUCATION
(copied filed as UEC/250521/007)

8.1 The Chair introduced the paper on the Aberdeen 2040 operational plan, in respect of ‘Education’ at the University. Members of the Committee noted the purpose of the paper in providing the vision for the future of education at the University as described in the Aberdeen 2040 document, the strategic aims and actions (as articulated in the University’s operational plan) and an overview of the proposed approach by which the work will be taken forward, with timeframes associated with the development of proposals to support that work.

8.2 The Committee acknowledged the appendices to the paper, including the overall high-level actions for Education during the 2021/22 academic year. Members noted that once high-level actions had been agreed, underlying associated actions would be discussed amongst the UEC and its sub-Committees. Members of the Committee noted priority areas for action in 2021/22 as follows:

- Aberdeen 2040 Pedagogy through a Task and Finish Group (TFG) building on the evaluation and experience of blended learning, and the wider sector developments;
- The development of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills through a TFG providing a foundation for the subsequent years’ work on the Aberdeen 2040 Curriculum.
- Decolonising the Curriculum through a Steering Group which met for the first time in May 2021.

8.3 The Committee noted the emphasis on an anti-racist University contained in the document, but a lack of focus on the other protected characteristics. Members of the Committee agreed the importance of ensuring the document reflected that the University cares for all. In addition, members of the Committee noted, despite the exciting nature of the proposals, some concern with regard the challenges of undertaking this work at a time when staff are so busy and that the consideration of their resilience and health and wellbeing must be at the forefront of discussion. Members of the Committee agreed that these concerns should be reflected in the operational plan. The Chair further agreed to take cognisance of the concerns raised.
8.4 Members of the Committee were thanked for their contribution to the discussion. The Chair noted that the document remained a work in progress and would return to the UEC for further discussion.  

Action: Chair

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) RESPONSE RATE  
(copy filed as UEC/250521/008)

9.1 Members of the Committee noted the paper on the National Student Survey (NSS) Response Rates.

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN TEACHING DESIGN  
(copy filed as UEC/250521/009)

10.1 Members of the Committee received the paper on Engaging Students in Teaching Design, providing an overview of a recent JISC survey of students’ experience with digital learning and suggesting ways in which the University can learn from students’ early experiences to further enhance the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment going forward.

10.2 The Committee noted the findings of the survey and the positive and negative aspects associated with online learning reported. The Committee acknowledged, however, that the survey did not distinguish between pre-recorded online sessions and live online sessions. Members noted the suggestions included in the report to enhance current practice to support students to become more effective online learners.

10.3 Members of the Committee agreed the importance of creating an evidence base around the modes of learning which suit different students.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY UPDATE  
(copy filed as UEC/250521/010)

11.1 The Committee received a paper providing an update on the guidance being developed for staff on how to promote academic integrity in their assessments. Members of the Committee acknowledged the progress being made in developing a website to provide guidance for staff on how to consider academic integrity when designing their assessment. The Committee noted the focus of the website in drawing the attention of staff to the 3 main types of misconduct – plagiarism, collusion and contract cheating.

11.2 It was noted that the preparation of case studies, to be added to the website, was underway. Members of the Committee were asked to review the site and provide any proposed amendments and/or additions and, if possible, to suggest case studies or examples of good practice for inclusion.  

Action: Committee

11.3 Members of the Committee suggested the use of a declaration at the point of the submission of assessment to ensure students are made acutely aware of cheating and its risks. The Committee noted that one of the next steps in the work on academic integrity would be around the preparation and issue of guidance to students.

Action: Kath Shennan
DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12.1 Members of the Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 23 June 2021, at 2pm, by Microsoft Teams.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE FOR PGT STUDENTS
(copy filed as UEC/250521/011)

13.1 Members of the Committee approved the proposed professional development course for PGT students.

2021/22: PRINCIPLES AND PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS
(copy filed as UEC/250521/012)

14.1 Members of the Committee noted the update version of the Principles and Planning Assumptions paper.