

University of Aberdeen

Workload Planning Review Group

**Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 21 September 2020 (Teams Meeting)**

*Present:* Karl Leydecker, Debbie Dyker, Amanda Lee, David Muirhead, Chris Collins, Tracey White, Ruth Taylor, Syrithe Pugh, Laura McCann, Neil Vargesson, Brian Paterson, Adam Price, Laura Benvie, Sarah Duncan, Garry Fisher, Lindsey Hamilton (clerk)

*Apologies:* Hulda Sveinsdottir, Marion Campbell, Brian Henderson

**1. Minute of Meeting 12 August 2020**

The group approved the minutes of the meeting 12 August 2020.

**2. Update on Actions / Matters Arising**

Updates on Actions from 12 August minutes (all complete):

Reference:

2.0 Digital Proposals have been reviewed by Digital Strategy Group

3.3 Heads of Schools and Directorates were encouraged to ensure uptake of annual leave and it was also noted that it had been agreed that 10 days of leave could be carried over.

4.3 & 6.1 Debbie Dyker organised communication to be issued on Email Etiquette

4.4 – Marion Campbell and Karl Leydecker updated Heads of School on the Research Leave Policy for 2020/21.

**3. Discussion on Workload actions in Response to the Covid-19 (Pulse) Survey**

3.1 An overview on the recent survey was given that had been published.

[https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/documents/Covid%20Survey%20Action%20Plan%20August%202020.pdf?dm\\_i=5EH4,8Z26,323LRP,ZTFW,1](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/documents/Covid%20Survey%20Action%20Plan%20August%202020.pdf?dm_i=5EH4,8Z26,323LRP,ZTFW,1)

The following comments were received:

3.2 An issue was raised that support and technical staff were starting to get concerned about workload demands as they felt more pressure to ensure staff and students were adhering to return to campus guidelines compared to academic colleagues.

In response it was noted that this issue would be raised with the campus planning groups and that there was a responsibility on all staff to ensure that they are following guidelines and that students were too. It was confirmed that there would be student updates over the next few weeks to highlight the guidelines to follow on campus.

3.3 In addition, it was confirmed that a Covid Ezine would be in place so that the information was more accessible. The Ezine would also mean that there could be a track of the number of people reading the communications.

3.4 It was highlighted that when captioning lectures for technical subjects it could take much longer than anticipated to correct the terminology. It was queried if it was possible for students to be advised that whilst every effort would be made to caption lectures it might not be possible in all cases.

It was agreed that students would be advised accordingly and that it should be the Programme Leads' responsibility to email students rather than the Lecturer; this would be raised with Heads of Schools:

#### **Action KL to discuss with Heads of Schools**

3.4 It was also suggested that where it wasn't possible to caption lectures, could the Lecturer's slides or notes be an acceptable alternative.

It was agreed that if it wasn't possible to add captioning that the Lecturer's notes could be used.

3.5 It was discussed that the semester timetable has been out for considerable time; Schools were aware of the sessions and repeat sessions that Lecturers had to undertake, the timetable would be subject to amendments as the final number of students became clearer.

3.6. It was confirmed that some funding had been allocated to employ additional resources to help staff with captioning and a communication would follow in the near future regarding this.

#### **4. Staff Survey 2020**

4.1 It was confirmed that a paper would go to SMT in the near future to finalise arrangements for the Staff Survey 2020. The plan was to launch this in November with the results published in January. The survey is being run through Capita which will allow the University to benchmark the results with other universities. There will be questions about workload both pre-Covid and now.

4.2 The Group agreed that the questions on the survey looked relevant to the work of the group.

4.2 It was queried whether it was possible to cross tabulate the questions by having pseudo-identifiers for each respondent. It was agreed this should be discussed with Sam Waldram, HR Partner, who is coordinating the survey.

#### **Action LH to discuss with Sam Waldram**

#### **5. Feedback from Mental Health First Aiders**

5.1. The group discussed the feedback received from the Mental Health First Aiders. It was highlighted that it was important for managers to be aware of all the sources of support in place for employees, including the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health and Counselling:

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/support-services-1168.php>

5.2 It was noted that the Unions had received feedback that the 9-day fortnight had been withdrawn. It was discussed that this was not the case and that Tracey White would make sure this was communicated.

## **Action: TW to update Directorates and Schools**

5.3 It was highlighted that Health, Safety and Wellbeing were working on training/guidance to help managers recognise the signs of overworking and that this was a long-term project.

### **6. Update from Campus Planning Groups:**

Brief updates were given from the Chairs of the Working Groups:

#### **Blended Learning Task and Finish Group**

6.1 As well as the points covered earlier, it was noted that a considerable effort was being made to ensure that there was a record of students and staff who were on campus at any time.

#### **Campus Planning**

6.2 It was discussed that building coordinators were being appointed and supporting the return to campus process. It was highlighted that it was the responsibility of all staff to ensure a safe environment on campus.

### **7. Planning for Workload in the Longer Term**

7.1 A discussion took place about the information that the group would need to review and start the process for long term workload allocation planning. It was agreed that it would be useful to draw on information already available such as copies of existing UoA school workload models, standard role descriptors as well as benchmarking sector data/models.

### **8. Next Steps**

The group discussed ideas to help support current workload issues:

8.1 There was discussion on the Digital Strategy Paper that was circulated prior to the meeting. Sarah Duncan will continue to update the group with developments.

8.2 It was discussed that SMT were considering how to support workload matters and the following actions were being considered; moving the planning cycle to the second semester and ensuring that processes like annual review could be light touch for the next year.

8.3 It was noted that planning for the second half session was taking place, including January contingency plans, Schools should start to think and review this now and a communication through Campus Planning Group would soon be circulated regarding this.

8.4 It was highlighted that staff valued the ex gratia annual leave days at the start of lockdown and it was queried whether these would be considered again in the future. It was highlighted that this matter was currently being discussed with the SMT, including if there should be a longer Christmas closure period.

### **9. Date of Next Meeting**

The Group will next meet by Teams on 29 October at 1.30pm

**TABLE OF ACTIONS**

Reference	Description	Action by	Action Date
3.3	HoS to be updated with Captioning advice for students	Karl Leydecker	Complete
4.2	Cross Tabulation to be queried with Sam Waldram	Lindsey Hamilton	Complete. Amanda Lee commenting on survey questions that could be linked
5.2	Ensure Schools / Directorates are aware that 9DF can be agreed/continued with manager approval	Tracey White	Complete