University of Aberdeen
Internal Teaching Review (ITR)

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, MEDICAL SCIENCES AND NUTRITION
with a focus on **MEDICAL SCIENCES**
Virtual Panel Visit: 16-20 November 2020

INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Internal Teaching Review (ITR) of the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, with a specific focus on Medical Sciences, was initially scheduled to take place during March 2020 under the University's existing process and procedures, which are available here: https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/internal-teaching-review-6112.php. However, as a response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergency move to homeworking, the ITR was postponed to be undertaken at a later date. In order to comply with the Quality Assurance Agency's guidelines for completing periodic review, the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL) made the decision to schedule this review in an amended online format, and as such the virtual panel visit was rescheduled for the week commencing 16 November 2020.

1.2   The ITR Panel was comprised of:

Dr Jason Bohan	Chair
	School of Psychology
	Quality Assurance Committee
Dr Gerry Hough	School of Divinity, History and Philosophy
Dr Arnar Arnason	School of Social Science
Mr George Bostick	School Convener, School of Engineering
Prof Sarah Herrick	External Subject Specialist, University of Manchester
Dr Stephen Land	External Subject Specialist, University of Dundee
Prof Cheryl Woolhead	External Subject Specialist, University of Glasgow
Mrs Morag MacRae	Clerk, Academic Services

1.3   The Panel considered the documentation provided by the School, by way of an evidence-based Critical Analysis (CA). In addition, prior to the virtual visit to the School, members of the Panel were provided with access to the School's Quality Assurance (QA) repository, containing the School's annual monitoring materials (Annual Course and Annual Programme Reviews (ACR and APR respectively)), Course Feedback Forms, minutes from meetings of Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), and External Examiner Reports (EER), as well as the minutes from various School Committees. Consideration of this documentation, along with the School's submitted CA, enabled the Panel to identify key themes for further exploration.

1.4   The Panel conducted a virtual visit to the School via Microsoft Teams, where they met with a range of staff, as well as undergraduate (UG), postgraduate taught (PGT) and postgraduate research (PGR) students.

1.5   This report is split into four sections:

(i) Part A gives the overall impressions of the teaching provision within the School formed from the whole ITR process;

(ii) Part B covers the quality assurance aspects arising from scrutiny of the material provided prior to the virtual visit and the initial discussion with the Deputy Head of School and several key members of senior staff;

(iii) Part C covers the outcome of various meetings with staff and students, focusing on a small number of themes identified during Part B. It also details the Pedagogic Partnership Session, which involved more free-form discussion; and

(iv) Part D details the School action plan which will form the basis of the one-year follow-up report.

PART A: OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

2.1 The Panel were very impressed with the quality and frequency of communication between staff and students and believed that the collegiate and supportive culture of the School was evident in the overall ethos referred to by staff. Academic and professional services staff were obviously committed to their students and often went the extra mile to ensure the student experience was of the highest quality.

2.2 The Panel agreed that the School were pioneers in terms of the use of the scholarship track and pedagogical research. The various examples of teaching innovation given prior to and throughout the review were very impressive.

2.3 The School has a complex structure which seemed unnecessary at first glance, but it was noted that the various committees and working groups allow for in-depth and effective monitoring of retention, disability provision and so on. Efforts to improve retention on the Biomedical Sciences programme were particularly noteworthy.

2.4 The leadership of the MSci programme was to be commended, and the Panel were particularly impressed with the work that was done surrounding the provision of placements. However, they also highlighted that the ongoing success of this process requires the support of key staff and recommended that the School focus on this as a key area of development.

2.5 The recent move to blended learning, and the resulting reconsideration of teaching and assessment format, has been applauded by students who were vocal about their enjoyment of the online learning experience. The School was to be commended for the quick adaptations made, and subject to a small number of enhancements, students were comfortable to continue with the blended model.

PART B: QUALITY ASSURANCE

3.1 Themes for Discussion

3.1.1 The themes for focused discussion agreed with the School prior to and during the visit were:

(i) **Staffing and Sustainability,** particularly in terms of ensuring the future success of the Medical Sciences programmes with adequate staffing and appropriate structure

(ii) **Assessment and Feedback,** specifically the types of assessment set for students at various levels of study and the feedback given on performance

(iii) **Teaching Innovation,** which was universally commended by the Panel, leading to requests for further insight and information on existing practices

(iv) **Student Experience and Employability,** with regards to split-site teaching, placement opportunities and student support

3.2 Discussion Points from Initial QA Session with the Director of the Institute for Education in Medical and Dental Sciences (IEMDS) and Senior Members of Staff

3.2.1 It was agreed that staffing is an increasing concern and has been exacerbated by the recent recruitment pause as well as an increase in student recruitment. Succession planning is also of concern, as a significant proportion of the teaching staff population is aged over fifty. The School's supportive attitude regarding development into Deanship has influenced staffing which, combined with the restructuring of the School approximately five years ago, has led to current and future issues. The Postgraduate team are aware that their programme offering may require amendment due to staffing requirements.

3.2.2 The School has no singular recruitment strategy, but it was noted that most academic staff are employed on teaching and research contracts. The overall impression was that the Head of School appreciates the value of teaching and the financial importance of it in ensuring the School's future success, but it was highlighted that one singular strategy for recruitment would be advisable going forward. There was recognition that many research staff were course or programme coordinators who taught primarily in Honours or Postgraduate study, and that teaching-only staff were more often involved in Level One and Two education.

3.2.3 The group discussed staff objective setting and the annual review process and heard that it has been remodelled in recent years with specific questions relating to academic staff contracts and teaching. Teaching is also discussed at School open meetings and strategic days and is a key issue at executive group meetings. The School recognised the importance of a focus on reflection and the development of teaching staff, which is demonstrated in the institution's essential criteria for promotion. Teaching and research staff are also encouraged to apply for Advance HE fellowships to further their personal development.

3.2.4 Staff retention was discussed, and it was noted that retention issues were largely due to a period of restructuring and financial scrutiny, rather than to insecurity within the School. It was suggested that the institution should do more to clarify what is required in a research-intensive university for promotion, and it is hoped that the ongoing promotions review exercise will help to address this. Management staff within the School encourage teaching staff to provide opportunities for research and to investigate options provided by pedagogically focused grants. The School has also been successful in obtaining teaching and learning awards from the institution for scholarship projects.

3.2.5 It was highlighted that one of the pinch points for staffing was the volume of programmes offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. This was perceived by the Panel to be potentially confusing for current and prospective students and difficult to manage in terms of teaching load. However, the School believes that offering a wide breadth of programmes translates into much-appreciated flexibility for students. It was highlighted that this scope protects against trends of popularity, with the Neuroscience programme being taught to very small numbers of students for many years before eventually becoming the School's most popular programme. Nevertheless, the multitude of programmes offered,

many of which have a very similar structure in the pre-Honours years, may merit further discussion.

3.2.6   In terms of postgraduate study, it was noted that several stand-alone programmes may be more effective in terms of staffing if they were restructured to share courses with other similar offerings. The School constantly looks to keep their programme suite fresh and has made changes within recent years to enhance their appeal to prospective students. A Pedagogic Inquiry Network exists within the Institute of Applied Health Sciences to ensure they provide the best possible educational experience while being mindful of the staff required to do so. The School also recognises the importance of picking up emerging topics within a discipline, such as incorporating climate change or health informatics into existing programmes and courses.

3.2.7   The School is proud to have been the first to employ a teaching fellow who has worked his way up to a Chair position, which encouraged the Panel. They hoped this success might continue with other staff in future and were quick to comment that this positivity and support is reflected in both the Critical Analysis document and in the number of staff who are in line for Deanship. Pedagogical research is encouraged within the School, and examples of topics covered included student support, postgraduate transitions, employability and feedback. However, it is perceived that a stronger emphasis on pedagogic research would help to bridge the gap between Senior Lecturer and Chair.

3.2.8   A strong track record of using inventive technology, such as VLEs and the FutureLearn platform, as well as an attractive online programme suite, made the move to blended learning less problematic than it may have been for other Schools. The School believes that keeping students abreast of changes helps them to stay invested in their education, and that using new technology often provides opportunity for educational research. It was noted that students appreciate the use of Blackboard Collaborate and all opportunities for face-to-face interaction with staff and are grateful for the efforts made by staff to use new technologies and be adaptable to the current situation.

3.2.9   The group discussed the potential effect of the number of staff on scholarship contracts with regards to the projects provided to students. It was confirmed that the Head of School fully supports the expectation that all staff will offer undergraduate and postgraduate projects. Staff often work in partnerships or teams to ensure continuity of supervision when covering annual leave, as project supervision is required year-round. Sometimes multiple students work on the same project with different objectives, which eases the staffing challenges involved but ensures that the choice of projects remains student led. The project aspect of the programmes remains very popular with students and is regarded as a good selling point. Additionally, staff regard projects as a positive teaching experience and an opportunity for research staff to be involved in teaching. The Panel commended this positive attitude and the resulting support from staff.

PART C: QUALITY ENHANCEMENT; OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSIONS WITH STAFF, STUDENTS AND THE PEDAGOGIC PARTNERSHIP SESSION

4.1   Theme: Staffing and Sustainability

4.1.1   Several factors were highlighted by staff which were perceived to contribute to the ongoing issues with staffing levels. The recruitment of staff who lived outside Aberdeen was noted to be difficult, and fixed term teaching posts were unattractive to many. A move to more online

teaching may resolve this, and the School has already trialled the employment of lecturers based elsewhere in the world. The School also relies on NHS staff volunteering their time for teaching which can be problematic, as well as the abundance of postgraduate programmes which are taught year-round, and therefore are very demanding on staff. Discussion has taken place around more strategic planning, which might allow staff to condense their teaching time into two terms rather than across all three. It was also noted that many staff also teach at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, which is particularly difficult when factoring in research obligations.

4.1.2   In order to ensure an equitable allocation of responsibilities, the School provides a framework of academic expectations which is broken down by contract and research income. Staff report that the system is effective but needs to take further account of timetables and research commitments, as well as movement between campuses and increased marking loads for bigger cohorts. Staff throughout the School also requested improved provision of an element of contingency, which does not currently exist.

4.1.3   The Panel were concerned about the size of the administrative team who supported the School. Two staff formed the undergraduate administrative team and supported 850 students, which was felt to be disproportionate. The staff involved reported that much of their time was increasingly dedicated to supporting students with additional disability requirements, to the extent that technical staff often provide assistance to alleviate the workload. They also noted that the employment of a Level 1 and 2 secretary would be of great help and would ensure that staff were able to achieve the level of service they strove to provide.

4.1.4   In postgraduate study, three support staff currently manage 27 programmes, which has translated into a less personalised service than previously. This reduction in team size resulted from staff leaving and not being replaced and is also affected by an increase in student registration. Programme and course coordinators assist in providing support to students to help alleviate the pressure on administrative staff, and the move to blended learning has also provided challenges in communicating with and supporting students.

4.1.5   It was highlighted that promotion for administrative staff was more difficult to achieve than in academia, due to the role being graded rather than the person. The School attempts to continue developing administrative staff so that they have the skills to apply for promoted posts as and when they arise. Technical staff have the opportunity to learn and renew skills in research labs during the summer break, which is appreciated by staff.

4.1.6   Staff explained that those on academic contracts were at times required to undertake administrative tasks, particularly with regards to assessment results entry and student monitoring. No additional support was readily available for staff at busy periods of administration, which was concerning to the Panel, and it was highlighted that the future success of the School also relied on sufficient support staff, as well as the necessary academics for teaching provision.

4.1.7   It was recognised that mechanisms for analysing workload varied across the School, and that the coordination of the placement year was particularly onerous. The Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship, working with the University Careers Service, is identifying possible solutions that could remove some of the administrative burden of this work. Placements were recognised as enormously important to students, and as such the Panel were

encouraged to hear that discussions were ongoing to ensure the future success of the placement provision.

4.1.8   A committee has been established to examine the current portfolio offering, and the Dean for Portfolio Development and Programme Promotion is likely to progress with issues in this arena in coming years. Some amendments have been made to alleviate concerns, such as changing the academic year and a focus on team-taught courses which also supports inter-disciplinary learning. This should also enable the School to create programmes without having to create courses, while allowing flexibility and ensuring the ability to respond to changing student requirements.

4.2   Theme: Assessment and Feedback

4.2.1   The use of MCQ-based assessment was discussed, and it was confirmed to be a mechanism to manage the effective assessment of 500+ students at once. These types of assessment are predominantly used at pre-Honours level, with Honours level assessment being largely in written format. The Panel queried whether sufficient essay-writing training was provided for the jump into Honours, and the School confirmed that mock exam essay questions were used in a number of courses, as well as other informal essay writing guidance being given throughout each programme.

4.2.2   Students felt that formative essay questions were helpful in foreshadowing the format of the related summative assessment, but some were unaware of the differences in potential assessment structures and found the variations between courses difficult to navigate. While some students remarked that their Honours level assessments had felt like natural progression in terms of their studies, others found their first full lab report to be very challenging and were concerned that the abundance of MCQs left them underprepared for longer writing exercises at Honours level. With current uncertainties regarding the future of on-campus learning, students were vocal about their desire for practice in all types of assessment to give them as much experience as possible, regardless of whether they made a return to campus prior to finishing their studies.

4.2.3   With regards to the blended learning environment, students highlighted that there was often insufficient time between lectures and assessment deadlines to fully digest and engage with the material provided. They also found practicals undertaken online to be difficult but recognised the skills they were gaining by using an online approach. Students from all levels expressed disappointment in the lack of lab-based assessment at present but recognised that little could be done to improve this due to current restrictions.

4.2.4   Students praised the feedback they received, especially when preparing for assessments for the first time. It was recognised that feedback was, at times, variable in quality and some students highlighted that they preferred when feedback was addressed in class. Feedback on continuous assessment was perceived to be a little slow at times but improved at Honours level with smaller class sizes.

4.3   Theme: Teaching Innovation

4.3.1   The Panel enquired as to the drivers behind the good practice demonstrated in relation to teaching innovation and pedagogical work. New members of staff had always been encouraged to engage in pedagogical research, and the Head of School is also vocal about the requirement to develop teaching practice to support large numbers of students. This

ethos of supporting quality teaching is evident in the number of staff on the teaching and scholarship track and the visible career progression demonstrated within the School. Staff are encouraged to develop their own pedagogical research and put it into practice. Challenges do still exist, in that most School staff are science trained and have limited pedagogical research experience.

4.3.2   The Panel highlighted the fact that 50% of teaching is delivered by very few people, which was believed to be a potential cause for concern. However, it was noted that these staff are largely from the Institute of Education, and due to their comparatively lower research focus, it would make sense for them to take on proportionately more teaching.

4.4   Theme: Student Experience and Employability

4.4.1   The liaison structures between services which work to support students was commended, and the Panel were impressed at the commitment of staff in providing guidance to students despite being overstretched. The Foresterhill support group was also highlighted as an effective way of highlighting issues specific to the Foresterhill campus, and the creation of the Good Cause committee had been very successful in terms of dealing with volumes of extensions and ensuring consistency and transparency.

4.4.2   The work of the technical team was commended universally by the Panel and by staff. Of particular importance was the flexibility of the team regarding movement of classes, late timetabling changes and repetition of classes to enable all students to have equity of experience. The intense cleaning undertaken between lab sessions had not gone unnoticed, and the technicians reported receiving very positive feedback from academics and students.

4.4.3   Communication to students from the School was commended, particularly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Informal communication via the use of breakout sessions is also valued and often promotes useful discussion afterwards. It was suggested that discussion forums might be used to avoid duplication of communication, but there were some concerns that the lack of anonymity might dissuade students from posting on a discussion forum. A recommended middle ground was for course coordinators to anonymise questions sent to them by email for posting on the relevant discussion board. Weekly tutorials could also help to clear up queries, as well as the use of Collaborate session office hours.

4.4.4   Students highlighted that the project-based course was of great importance to them, and that the allocation of projects was done fairly and transparently. There was some disappointment that the industrial placement grade is not considered when allocating projects. Additionally, this year several students had selected non lab-based placements in the hope they would be allocated a lab-based project, before learning that lab-based projects would not go ahead due to COVID-19 restrictions. These students recognised that there were still skills to be gained by undertaking a dry project but were disappointed not to have a full breadth of experience to demonstrate to future employers.

4.4.5   Placement opportunities were regarded as very important by all members of the group. Commendation was given to Ian Fleming and his rejuvenation of the BT3006 placement and career skills course, which provides external speaker opportunities, practice interviews and examples of previous student experience. Only one third of students who apply for placements will be successful in achieving one, but those who undertake BT3006 will be better prepared than many students in terms of looking for graduate opportunities and hence there are still advantages to undertaking the course. Students were quick to emphasise how much

impact the placement year has on them, and also noted that external postgraduate funding was often secured following positive placement experiences.

4.4.6   Students emphasised the importance in striking a balance between the provision of teaching materials and the encouragement of self-directed study. They also noted that the ability to plan their work appropriately while studying in a blended learning environment was key, and therefore requested that the School standardised their lecture format and length, as well as bearing in mind that lecture material should be disseminated well in advance of any related Q&A sessions or tutorials. The overall recommendation was to upload lectures between Monday and Wednesday, with the related Q&A session being held on Friday. Guidance would also be gratefully received in terms of how much time to spend on the various tasks given, with a preference for the gradual release of information.

4.4.7   Students expressed a desire for more statistics and quantitative skill learning opportunities. They stated that they felt underprepared for analysing statistics in projects, and often found they had to teach themselves statistics. Staff advertise maths clinics and there is a statistics team available during research projects for the final year students, with drop-in sessions for those with numerical queries. However, staff believed that students were often disengaged with statistics as a topic and therefore attempted to integrate quantitative skills teaching into other courses. The Panel felt that the R software package should nevertheless be taught to all students to enhance their statistical analysis skills.

4.4.8   Students have largely found blended learning very positive in terms of managing their own time. They commended staff on being adaptable to working digitally, and many believe their whole university experience has been enhanced. One area for improvement identified by students was that often supervisor meetings or tutorials began with an informal chat regarding the negativities of COVID-19 and the current learning environment, which was detrimental to the success of the meeting.

4.4.9   It was widely accepted that the sense of community at present could be slightly diminished, with those on campus being required to socially distance and wear masks in class. Online tutorials were sometimes problematic in terms of natural interaction, but the efforts of staff to make them as successful as possible were universally recognised. Staff and researchers were disappointed at the lack of opportunities to learn from colleagues informally under blended learning, and PhD students were concerned that informal lab-based conversation was missing from their research experience. Attempts to recreate conversations in a Microsoft Teams environment were commended but many creative organic learning opportunities will be missed.

4.4.10   The research culture within the School is classed as being exceptionally positive and collaborative, with approachable, open staff who are willing to help. PhD students were also delighted to be given opportunities to teach and demonstrate and applauded the institution for its support in providing training and assistance with applying for HEA fellowship. They mentioned that it would be helpful if the School were to schedule sessions giving information about future research opportunities and career prospects.

4.4.11   The provision of reading lists was discussed, and it was mentioned that this was often problematic for library staff due to the number of required textbooks. E-textbooks are charged per student and are prohibitively expensive, but alternatives have been found in most circumstances. Reading lists were described by students as often being excessively

long, and it was suggested that staff ensured they were more prescriptive about which texts were essential and which could be read for interest.

4.4.12 The School is very engaged with the Careers Service, with 64% engagement last year compared to an institutional average of 60%. This was reflected in student comments that the Careers Service was effective and gave excellent advice. Careers staff also reported excellent support from administrative staff in publicising events and a good uptake of students in the co-curricular offerings. The School reported a high proportion of research focused students whose first port of call is often further study or research, but the Careers staff believe that graduate opportunities are also still widely available in the Medical Sciences field. Students also reported engagement with course coordinators to discuss career path expectations.

4.5 Pedagogic Partnership Discussion

4.5.1 The pedagogic partnership discussion backed up many of the points mentioned during the focused meetings. This session was held via Blackboard Collaborate, and involved students and staff holding discussions in separate breakout rooms on the three questions detailed in Appendix A. Each group noted their thoughts on a collaborative document, which was then presented to the opposite group for their input (i.e. staff commented on points raised by students and vice versa). The School are invited to consider this appendix to help inform future practice. Student comments are highlighted in blue and staff comments in green, with related responses given in corresponding boxes on each side of the table.

PART D: SCHOOL ACTION PLAN

5.1 Address the ongoing staffing and sustainability issues by:

(i) undertaking a workload modelling exercise and curriculum review to assess where redistribution of responsibility might be appropriate. The Panel would encourage the School to explore a variety of processes to do this effectively, such as using TESTA;

(ii) revisiting the role descriptors of professional services staff to establish and check responsibilities have not changed. There was a specific concern that technical staff seemed to be more akin to teaching staff than support staff, and the Panel believed the pressure on notably understaffed administrative teams led to increased academic staff workload;

(iii) considering an increase in resource to enable the School to continue offering the breadth of programmes they intended, while bearing in mind that this diversity of curriculum may be a weakness as well as a point of attraction to students;

(iv) undertaking a financial review exercise to determine whether all programmes offered are financially viable, particularly at PGT level;

(v) providing more opportunities for PhD students to teach. They expressed a desire to do so and this may alleviate some of the existing pressure on academic staff;

(vi) adopting a collaborative approach to the organisation of the placement year, rather than relying on it being singularly staff-led

5.2 Modify course content in response to student feedback, specifically:

(i) ensuring that increased quantitative skills and analysis, especially statistics, is embedded within programmes at Level Three for project preparation. A specific recommendation was

given to provide further opportunities to engage with this type of analysis in a lab setting, which may be possible via the Science Teaching Hub;

(ii) improving induction/welcome week structure to ensure that it is provided as standard across all courses within the School

5.3   A review of the assessment structures within the School by:

(i) addressing the abundance of MCQ assessment in Levels One and Two. The provision of more essay writing is key for students' preparation for Honours;

(ii) ensuring that appropriate instruction for academic writing is integrated within programme structures. Opportunities should be provided early on for essay writing feedback to be given, in order to ensure that students have the skills they need to progress. Additional optional resources are not widely used by students.

5.4   The provision of guidance for effective employment of online learning materials, specifically:

(i) addressing the issues experienced by many students in terms of a lack of guidance surrounding what material to access, when and for how long, for example by providing weekly to-do lists for each course. A School-wide consistency in the length of lectures would aid study planning;

(ii) attending to the perceived miscommunication regarding what is expected of students, compared to what they believe they should be doing. Students often reported working very long hours to cover the basic material and were concerned that they had no time for furthering their understanding.

5.5   A reassessment of the process used to hire student representatives. Students reported this to be done on a first-come, first-served basis which they believed to be unfair.

Appendix A – Pedagogic Partnership Session feedback

Staff led - What are we doing well?

Student Comments			Staff Comments		
Agreed		Agree with the innovative teaching methods	Student support & pastoral care	Provision of learning materials through the VLE	Innovative teaching methods
Agreed	Online rubrics in my experience are often left blank if not there is limited feedback besides grade		Multi-tiered support for students	Online marking rubrics provide clear feedback	Varied and effective assessments. Agreed that allows students with different talents to excel.
	Yes - so important for student motivation	Yes, the students' grades are improving	Student grades improving	Staff enthusiasm for teaching	Strong and varied research project provision
Yes – transcripts are immensely helpful	Yes - best part of the program so far, would encourage this to anyone in med sci courses	Not all students have/had induction sessions	More slides/ transcripts etc available on MyAberdeen makes material more accessible	Ability to do industrial placement	Induction sessions that support effective transition into and throughout programmes
	How do we know how that will work with potential covid restrictions though? Haven't done project yet.	Agree- students affected by recent terror attacks in Vienna were asked how they are doing	Development of graduate attributes alongside academic achievement	Excellent honours projects/ MSc project experience	Culture of care across the school

Yes This is not as clear for part-time PGR students	Agree		Clear progression guidelines for PGR	Variety of course options	Robust and realistic marking and moderation procedures
Not always clear; depends on the course. But when asked for clarification/ rubric it has been provided if there wasn't one.			Clear expectation on marking		
	Not enough qualitative wet-lab practicals at UG (at least 3 and 4 levels) and PGT. Lab work does not go deep into the subject, few manipulation of the materials (pipette, etc…) students are uncomfortable when coming to a real lab	Agree	Good provision of provision material	Large variety of UG and PGT projects covering wet-lab and literature projects	Using our research expertise to teach within disciplines (taught by specialists)
Agreed	Important that this does not come at the expense of teaching quality for students	Agree the blending learning should continue	That teaching staff on Level 3 & 4 are mostly active researchers, thus supporting research-led teaching	Hopefully we will retain some of the blended learning/ teaching techniques, without becoming	

				Open University	

Staff led - What are we not doing well?

Student Comments			Staff Comments		
Agree, some courses don't do video recordings or live teachings sessions as much as other courses	Agree, can be great to have access to PGT, but also UG online material content for PGR. We can ask course coordinators, but a systematic approach would be beneficial		Consistency in approach of online class tests	Training for PhD students - there is a lot of material in PGT that could be useful for a PhD student with knowledge or skills gaps	Equity in support between on-campus and online
Confidence has been a primary problem during my time as an UG - support has been great, however application of learned material feels very much left up to potential PG study		Agree that should have more interaction of teaching content	Building confidence, especially regarding application of knowledge	Close integration of teaching content across courses within disciplines	Too much variation in feedback quality between markers
Disagree. Choice is one of the selling points for UoA	The amount of material offered this semester is nice to see but also puts a lot of stress on students who feel need to keep up with timetable leading to little/no	At MSc level, we've studied before and know what works for us	Too much choice – can be overwhelming and results in a lot of time with 1-2-1 meetings for choices	Are we stifling student independence by providing so much material?	Lack of integration of study skills training into core teaching

	work-life balance				
This can make it unclear how a course is applicable to a field of interest.	I'd say that if this is the belief, we should then be told HOW to go effectively in looking for resources outside the lectures. Outside of Google, which never really can provide the best answers, there's little incentive to go beyond because we don't know how to effectively and efficiently as such	Opportunities to arrange 1 to 1 online meetings to discuss feedback (essays, reports etc)	Too many degree programmes, or increasing course sharing to reduce staff requirement.	Coddling students by providing too much study material, little incentive to go beyond revising lecture material provided.	Timely feedback on some programmes according to NSS results
			Not sure how well level of marking is comparable between courses.	More secretarial support for course coordination would be helpful	Keeping staff informed of communications to students from central admin, etc.
Agree: Students feel less willing to ask for support/help from staff			Need more staffing to support admin (office support staff)	Could put more emphasis on transferrable skills	

given we know how much stress and pressure they are under during this period - having support dedicated staff may free up some time for teaching staff					
Agreed, staff are too stretched; potential issue with not enough student projects available if student numbers keep increasing	Agree, there are not enough teaching opportunities	Half disagree. PGR students receive an email at the beginning of each semester to take part of demonstrating roles. But no PGR students are actually responsible for tutorials, I think this can be a great teaching opportunity	Student:staff ratio	Offering out PGR enough teaching experience	

Staff led - What should we stop doing?

Student Comments	Staff Comments		
I think a point was made yesterday that distance learning students feel more involved and supported now that there is a focus on keeping the online community involved. We are trying to build an online community and it would be good if students (purely online) could be given, as much as possible, equal opportunities to be engaged and take advantage of the new platforms and resources being offered to on-campus students.	Offering different levels of support and opportunity based on delivery format and student location	Expecting staff to do tasks that could be (used to be) done centrally by dedicated office staff- prevent redundancy of effort. Eg timetables, room bookings	Allocating resources to online courses / programmes based on number of FTE equivalent rather than absolute numbers
	Don't expect excellent teachers to also be excellent administrators and experts in all digital technologies		Expecting staff to be able to manage accessibility requirements e.g. captioning
Agreed, this is not a good use of their time Can PGR students be paid to do this instead?	Using academic staff for invigilation		

Student led - What are we doing well?

Student Comments			Staff Comments
Student support is excellent	The anatomy teaching and practicals are excellent.	Communication	Thanks to the students for this positive feedback
Online content very good	Live and recorded lectures available for some courses	Staff are very committed in accommodating students in every situation	Glad to hear our efforts are appreciated
Excellent career support	More lecture video recordings noted	PGR supervisors have been very supportive, both in terms of support or project extensions and pastoral support, during the pandemic	
Blended learning is very good	virtual labs are clear	Enough time given to work around in the new learning environment before actual classes are started	
Support for students	Research-led teaching	Good timeframe for our assessments	
Well-timetabled lectures	Staff are very approachable	Examination info has been pretty clear on what needs done and when	
Decent lecture lengths for online learning		Recorded lectures with captions	
Transcripts of the podcasts are very good	Timely reminders about upcoming assessments	Welcome week was well done	
Making PGT admission accessible for students who don't have the most robust preparation (eg Human Nutrition MSc -FutureLearn course)		Library staff and resources are excellent. Impressed with the support offered (even during lockdown)	
Certain courses have it well laid out with what we're meant to be doing and what's expected of us each week	Regular lecturer support/feedback via email or announcements in myaberdeen gives students a boost in motivation to keep going.	More support for students this time in comparison to last semester	

Student led - What are we not doing well?

Student Comments			Staff Comments		
Should be more employability meetings/talks specific to our programs	Online lectures are much longer - gives more information/explanation but takes a lot longer to complete adding to stress from pace of course content delivery	Not enough hands on lab experience		Agree that this is something we could work on. I think former graduates coming back can be more effective than staff advice	
Limited preparatory material for practicals making them less beneficial for learning	Tutorials come too quickly after lectures go live, limiting student attendance and ability to ask questions	Engage more with students	Agree that pre-session materials are really important, but inevitably you have to spend time going over it for the small number who haven't done it, so how would students like to have this handled?		
Synchronous Q&A sessions for the Medical Sciences not quite as focused as other schools.	AUSA mostly focused on UG students, PG students not represented	A lack of a practical aspect to the work. Of course, covid makes it a bit hard now— but we're just basically looking at slides each day.			
Sound of some podcasts are too low, sometimes difficult to	Inductions to courses laid out more clearly, with what is expected of us, how the course is going	PGR assessments too close (6 months review vs yearly)		Useful to know re inductions.	Frequent PGR assessments are helpful for both - it prevents issues from festering.

hear	to be run throughout the term.				But maybe need to support students to understand that this is supportive process.
Would be nice to have written assessments spread apart so we have time to receive feedback to improve future assignments	Some podcasts don't have captions, sometimes difficult to understand lecturers	There are student reps that are waiting for feedback, but few students actually take the time to do it and it's hard to make everyone's voice heard		This is compulsory for staff for pre-recorded video. So you are in a strong position to insist on this.	
Not enough healthy food (or not) choice at Foresterhill campus	No easy places to find coffee at foresterhill	Introduction week was quite messy, not quite sure what and where we were meant to be going.		Try the local community garden near the Foresterhill campus. Bonnymuir. :)	
Library spaces to study are limited in Foresterhill	Election of class reps to be less biased, more structured and open to all. For example, allowing potential student reps to write about why they believe they would be the best carrier of the student voice, allowing students themselves to select the student rep rather than the course coordinators, as well as ensuring the voting mechanism itself is unbiased mathematically. (e.g. Ranking candidates by inputting numbers rather than swapping pre-ranked tiles.	Limited teaching on scientific writing during levels 1-3 UG courses. Some focus in 4th year but beforehand we are largely left to make mistakes and try and learn from limited feedback.			General agreement that it would be great to embed critical thinking/evidence based writing early on in courses. Counterbalanced by the fact that a lot of these materials are already available to students (e.g. via ACHIEVE), but student uptake/access can be poor. More structured teaching might be helpful?

Assessment feedback is generally very brief giving only a very limited view of what was done well/not. I often am unaware how I can improve my grades as feedback is limited and often mainly positive instead of constructive criticism.		Some courses have thrown us into the dark, with assessments, lectures e.g. quite unexpectedly popping up, leaving us disorganized.	Unfeasible to provide exhaustive feedback on a large class assessment and return the feedback within a reasonable time.	With limited time we could do more to focus on the key things needed to improve rather than extensive feedback on correcting small things

Student led - What should we stop doing?

Student Comments			Staff Comments		
Less rambling in Q&A sessions, more focused sessions concentrated on the topics at hand (Quizzes, discussion of material e.g.)	C6s without warning, registration for online classes can be different depending on module. An email to ask why would resolve any misunderstandings. Takes a while and Is stressful to fix	C6 based solely on attendance without consideration for how well the student is doing on assessments.	Q&A sessions rambling; yes, take the point - but these are meant to be an opportunity for free flowing discussion - reluctance to contribute to the discussion on the part of the students sometimes constrains this format.	Agree that the C6 mechanism is a little confusing, and the tone is brusque. There is not pre-warning element which would soften the message a little. C6 is a term that is confusing for students and they don't understand that it isn't a punishment. C6 does not come across as a supportive measure	Different students want different things so it is very difficult to pitch a session that suits everyone. Some want strict structure and just be given information, some want conversation and opportunities to discuss. Maybe we can be clearer on what teach format will be of each one.
Clashes on assessments due date from different courses	Split between Foresterhill and Kings Campus can be difficult and time consuming depending on where you live/transport options. 9U may leave you behind if you don't get in queue early enough and so you arrive to lectures/practicals late	Advertising peer marks or votes for class reps/best presentations to whole class - turns it into popularity contest and /or can offend those who don't receive any	Assessment clashing is inevitable if we continue to have high levels of course choices within programmes as it would be impossible to map them unless we have dedicated assessment weeks across all courses within a School		
	Too many students on discussion boards make it confusing	Too many emails about things being added, maybe a daily digest?		Some of the announcements and emails are outwith staff control as they	We never know how many students are going to comment on a

				are automated by MyAberdeen and we don't know these are being sent. There is a daily digest for announcements	forum, so if we limited to groups we may get ones with no discussion, but perhaps this could be reviewed as time goes on