UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)

A meeting of the University Educataion Committee will be held on **Tuesday 16 May 2023** at **1.05pm** by way of **Microsoft Teams.**

Ms Isabella Fausti, Administrative Officer
(e-mail isabella.fausti@abdn.ac.uk)

AGENDA
FOR DISCUSSION

1. **Approval of the Minute of the Meeting held on 23 March 2023** *(UEC/160523/001)*

2. **Matters Arising** *(UEC/160523/002)*

3. **Health, Safety and Wellbeing** *(Oral Item)*

4. **Risk Register** *(UEC/160523/003)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **discuss** the Risk Register with regards to the specific risks associated with Education*.*

5. **Future Academic Year Structure** *(UEC/160523/004)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **discuss** the proposals for the Future Academic Year Structure*.*

6. **Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) Findings Report**

(i) **QESR Findings Report** *(UEC/160523/005)*
(ii) **QESR Draft Action Plan** *(UEC/160523/006)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **discuss** the QESR Findings Report and Draft Action Plan.

7. **Final NSS Response Rate Update** *(UEC/160523/007)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **note** the Final NSS Response Rate Update.

8. **Decolonising the Curriculum Update** *(UEC/160523/008)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **discuss** the update in respect of Decolonising the Curriculum.

9. **Institutional Plan for Upscaling Work-Based Learning Including Placements** *(UEC/160523/009)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **discuss** the institutional plan for upscaling work-based learning.

10.   **Tools for the Delivery of Education**   *(UEC/160523/010)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **discuss** the update on the tools piloted in AY 2022-23 (Authorship, IPAC, Respondus).

11.   **Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity Update**   *(UEC/160523/011)*

Members of the UEC are invited to **discuss** the Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity Update.

12.   **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the UEC will be held on Tuesday 29 August 2023 at 14:05 pm, by way of Microsoft Teams.

13.   **Items for Information – see below/overleaf**

Any member of the Committee wishing an item for routine approval or for information to be brought forward for discussion may ask at the meeting for that to be done. Any such item will be taken after item 1.

Declaration of interests: Any member and individual in attendance (including Officers) who has a clear interest in a matter on the agenda should declare that interest at the relevant meeting, whether or not that interest is already recorded in the Registry of Member's interests.

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13.   **FOR INFORMATION**

13.1   **Update Reports from the UEC sub-committees:**

(i)   Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee (EEC)   *(UEC/160523/012a)*
(ii)   Student Support and Experience Committee (SSEC)   (*UEC/160523/012b)*

13.2   **Education Away Day, 30 May 2023**
The Education Away Day has been postponed and will instead take place in either August or September (date to be agreed).

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)

MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH 2023

Present: Ruth Taylor (Chair), Waheed Afzal, Akua Agyeman, Euan Bain, John Barrow, Lyn Batchelor, Jason Bohan, Leigh Bjorkvoll, Stuart Durkin, Nick Edwards, Bill Harrison, Ken Jeffrey, Alison Jenkinson, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Helen Knight, David McCausland, Rona Patey, Michelle Pinard, Amudha Poobalan, Shona Potts, Anne-Michelle Slater, Susan Stokeld, Steve Tucker, and Joshua Wright, with Simon Bains, Julie Bray, Scott Carle, Brian Henderson, Tracey Innes, Gillian Mackintosh, Rhona Moore, Patricia Spence, Louisa Stratton, Darren Comber, Isabella Fausti, Liam Dyker (Clerk) and Kyra Lamont (Minutes) in attendance.

Apologies: Harminder Battu, Graeme Nixon, and Graeme Kirkpatrick.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2023
(copy filed as UEC/230323/001)

1.1   The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the University Education Committee (UEC). Members of the Committee approved the minute of 16 January 2023.

MATTERS ARISING
(copy filed as UEC/230323/002)

2.1   Members of the Committee noted the actions arising following the previous meeting of UEC held on 16 January 2023. The Committee was advised that the action plans would be reviewed, and a decision taken on how they will be reported.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

3.1   Members of the Committee noted the agenda item on Health, Safety and Wellbeing and raised no matters for further discussion.

REMIT AND COMPOSITION
(copy filed as UEC/230323/003)

4.1   Members of the Committee discussed the paper addressing the remit and composition of the University Education Committee (UEC) in line with the recent Senate Effectiveness Review.

4.2   The need for clarity in terms of what the University Education Committee (UEC) approves and what the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) approves was noted. The Committee thereafter approved the remit and composition.

RISK REGISTER
(copy filed as UEC/230323/004)

5.1   The Chair addressed members of the Committee with regards to the Risk Register; highlighting the risks associated with any marking boycott should that occur, and the steps taken to mitigate the risks associated with Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR). There were no matters raised for further discussion.

ABERDEEN 2040 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

(copy filed as UEC/230323/005)

6.1   The Chair advised members that progress was being made in terms of the Aberdeen 2040 implementation plan. The Chair acknowledged the involvement of the relevant Task and Finish Groups in the process and noted the workload implications which may need further consideration outside of today's meeting.

FUTURE ACADEMIC YEAR STRUCTURE

(copy filed as UEC/230323/006)

7.1   The Committee heard a summary of the paper and noted its purpose to propose a structure for Academic Year 2024/2025 and beyond. The Chair explained the four options available for consideration by the Committee and discussed the principles against which each of the options had been assessed as described in the paper.

7.2   In discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The resource implications of maintaining the library opening hours across the Winter break was noted in relation to Options 3 and 4.
- Welcome the equal three terms and transparent recognition of teaching that already takes place.
- Option 4 overlays teaching and marking which was not seen as favourable.
- The importance of avoiding a structure which may result in poor attendance and retention after the vacation periods, in relation to the Winter and Spring breaks, was noted.
- The importance of the inclusion of consideration of our TNE partnerships in the discussions was noted. Further, it was highlighted that arrangements were recently made to delay the start of term in AFG College to allow for greater time for student recruitment.
- The flexibility within the structure for adequate reading and revision weeks was noted.
- The implications for studying and childcare during vacation periods, particularly where assessments fall after the Winter break, were noted (options 3 and 4).
- The impact of field courses for students on joint degree programmes was noted, particularly in relation to the reduced Spring vacation. Further, it was suggested that some Schools may need to adapt as the schedule for fieldwork differs significantly between departments and that adaptations should be possible.
- The importance of ensuring adequate time for research, particularly in the summer period, was noted, with options 3 and 4 pushing content into later in the academic year being problematic.
- Consideration should be given to Study Abroad opportunities and the impacts therein, as well as the work placement opportunities for students.
- The importance of clarity for January start students was noted, particularly in relation to the nomenclature of the Term structure.

7.3   Generally, members were supportive of Options 1 and 2. Some members favoured Option 3, with no preference for Option 4. Option 1 was highlighted as more favourable in relation to recruitment and alignment with University competitors. Options 3 and 4 may negatively impact research activities and create a disjointed first term.

7.4   It was noted that these options had been developed in line with the Aberdeen 2040 strategy and that several Committees had been given the opportunity to comment on the options outlined in the paper. It was noted that any feedback obtained would be included in the paper that will be presented to Senate. In summarising, the Committee noted that option one

appeared to be the most favourable. The Committee was advised on the approval route and noted a revised proposal will return for approval following Senate consideration.

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM: PRINCIPLES AND TIMELINES

(copy filed as UEC/230323/007)

8.1   The Committee noted the principles and timelines outlined in the Paper had been considered and approved by Senate. The Committee noted the action plan and associated actions.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS): INSTITUTIONAL ACTION PLAN UPDATE

(copy filed as UEC/230323/008)

9.1   The Committee heard an update on the progress of the Institutional action plan which had been developed in response to the results of the recent NSS survey; namely, the development of further training and the TESTA pilot.

9.2   The Committee noted the work being undertaken in response to the NSS survey.

[Clerk's Note: Morag Beedie joined the meeting at this point.]

ABERDEEN STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

(copy filed as UEC/230323/009)

10.1   The Committee heard a summary of the paper, which had been developed in response to the results of the 2022 Aberdeen Student Experience Survey (ASES). It was noted that there was a summary of the results which were particularly positive with regards to teaching and learning. It was further noted, however, that there was a low response rate. Members were advised that the intention is to close the feedback loop by April this year and this will change to January as of next year. It was noted that Directorates had been asked to produce an action plan to address relevant areas. Schools will use the existing NSS action template to update actions as appropriate.   **Action: Directors of Education**

10.2   Clarity was sought whether the raw data would be made available to Schools, so that Schools could undertake further analysis if they wish. After discussion, it was advised that the raw data can be issued to Schools.   **Action: Morag Beedie**

10.3   It was suggested that specific course codes should be removed from the ASES. The committee was advised that it will be possible to redact this information in future. It was suggested that it may be more appropriate to raise any concerns with respect to particular courses with the relevant Directors of Education and requested that this was taken away for further consideration.   **Action: Jason Bohan/Morag Beedie**

10.4   It was noted that there were some areas that may benefit from further reflection, particularly with regards to the provision of mental health support.

[Clerk's Note: Morag Beedie left the meeting at this point.]

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

11.1   The Committee discussed matters of academic integrity in respect of:

(i)   CONTRACT CHEATING UPDATE   *(copy filed as UEC/230323/010)*

11.2　The Committee heard a summary of the paper. Members were advised that a new communication had been issued to students advising of the additional training and support available with regards to Contract Cheating. Members were advised that research is underway into the barriers and facilitators of academic misconduct and explained that these findings will be presented at HETL; it was noted that some students initially engage with these external services seeking a check for plagiarism as some Schools do not currently allow their students to perform a plagiarism check prior to submission of assessment. It was further suggested that the original TESTA protocol be amended to include academic integrity, particularly in relation to redesigning assessments, where possible, to minimise opportunities for academic misconduct.

(ii)　ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (CHATGPT) UPDATE　　*(copy filed as UEC/230323/011)*

11.3　The Committee heard a summary of the paper, which provides an update on the University's approach to the use of Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT). Members were advised that the proposed approach is in line with the sector and focuses on the acknowledgement of these sources, as detection is difficult. It was clarified that the unacknowledged and unattributed use of AI technology will be dealt with under the plagiarism definition. Members were advised that the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) will be amended accordingly. Members were advised that further guidance will be provided to staff, and communication will be provided to students at the level of the course.

11.4　Members expressed support for the approach, noting that some colleagues viewed this as an opportunity to modify assessments to minimise any negative impact of ChatGPT. It was advised that this may be an opportunity to share examples of good practice with the Directors of Education. Further, it was noted that the sharing of good practice would allow for consistency in approach. It was agreed that this information would be disseminated in due course.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Action: Kirsty Kiezebrink**

11.5　It was noted that disciplinary procedures should be as streamlined a possible from both the staff and student perspective, ensuring that the information presented is standardised. The importance of ensuring that lessons learned as part of discipline and appeal processes are effectively put into practice was noted.

UPDATE ON TESTA

(copy filed as UEC/230323/012)

12.1　The Committee heard an update on the progress of the TESTA pilot. It was explained that the pilot had received positive feedback, particularly with regards to the adaption made in terms of data collection. The Committee was advised that the findings of this pilot should become available in the next six weeks, though there were some delays in some areas due to unforeseen circumstances, and explained that these findings will be used to inform the subsequent TESTA protocol that could be used more widely in the University.

12.2　The Committee noted that during the recent Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) visit, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland were impressed that the University had undertaken an evaluation of Blended Learning, and that the TESTA pilot's use of evaluation continues to demonstrate a positive approach to evaluation of our Education.

REVISIONS TO THE ADVANCEHE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

(copy filed as UEC/230323/013)

13.1   The Committee heard a summary of the paper detailing the revisions to the AdvanceHE Professional Standards Framework for Learning and Teaching. It was advised that AdvanceHE oversee the UK professional standards framework for the Sector. It was noted that the framework is updated roughly every 5 years.

ADVANCED TEACHING DEVELOPMENT SCHEME PROPOSAL

(copy filed as UEC/230323/014)

14.1   The Committee heard a summary of the proposals, noting that whilst the University places emphasis on the professional development of new staff, the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) has been looking at the development of resources for more experienced Academic Staff. Members were reminded of the importance of considering Scholarship opportunities and utilising the revised promotion criteria, in addition to examples of effective teaching. Members were advised that the current proposal may also provide a method of succession planning and incorporate mentoring.

14.2   Some concerns were raised regarding the exclusivity of the Scheme, noting that there may be equally deserving people that could miss out. Members were advised that a two-tier approach has been incorporated in an attempt to mitigate these concerns. Members attention was drawn to the bespoke nature of the scheme and highlighted the benefit for both the School and the individual.

14.3   The bespoke nature of the scheme was highlighted as a strength, but clarity was sought regarding whether the scheme was designed to be bespoke for the individual or the School. In response, it was advised that it has been written primarily for the professional development of individuals at this level.

14.4   The broader approach in terms of enhancing Education leadership was highlighted; however, concerns were expressed regarding the link to promotion. It was noted that there may be a suggestion that participation in the scheme may be seen as a requirement for promotion. The Committee was informed that participation in the scheme would not be a requirement for promotion. The importance of maintaining equity of opportunity by ensuring diversity within the scheme was noted.

14.5   Members of Committee were content to approve the paper.

TEACHING AND LEARNING SPACES GROUP (TERMS OF REFERENCE)

(copy filed as UEC/230323/015)

15.1   The Committee heard a summary of the paper, noting that this group was being formalised to provide a formal means of reporting to the Space Management Committee. It was advised that the Group enables the University to ensure the issues of pedagogy, space and digital requirements are considered as a whole. It was noted that the Group provides an opportunity for the staff who are using these spaces to feedback their needs and concerns.

15.2   It was suggested that the issue of accessibility was more explicitly detailed in the Terms of Reference, especially with a view to booking arrangements. Members were reminded of the importance of ensuring accessibility for students and staff entering and exiting the University's teaching facilities, including the consideration of EVAC requirements.

15.3   Due to time constraints, the Committee was asked to approve by circulation, and feed any comments to the Dean for Educational Innovation.   **Action: Clerk**

UPDATE REPORTS FROM THE UEC SUB-COMMITTEES

16.1   The Committee noted the update reports from the UEC Sub-Committees in respect of:
(i)   Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee (EEC)
(copy filed as UEC/230323/016a)
(ii)   Student Support and Experience Committee (SSEC)
(copy filed as UEC/230323/016b)

APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS UPDATE 2021/22
(copy filed as UEC/230323/017)

17.1   Members of the UEC noted the paper on Appeals and Complaints data, noting a previous error which provided the incorrect total student population. This has now been rectified and is presented to the Committee for information.

PROMOTIONS REVIEW: FRAMEWORK FOR CRITERIA AND ASSOCIATED GUIDANCE

18.1   Members of the Committee noted the communication from the Senior Vice-Principal on the launch of the new Academic Promotion Policy/Procedure and Framework of Criteria. These are available as part of the [Academic Promotion Toolkit](#).

DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE MODEL AND ACCOMPANYING PRINCIPLES
(copy filed as UEC/230323/018)

19.1   Members of the Committee noted the paper on Development of Student Learning Experience Model and Accompanying Principles.

ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL ANNUAL STATEMENTS ON INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW FROM THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR (2021/22)
(copy filed as UEC/230323/019)

20.1   Members of the Committee noted the paper from the Scottish Funding Council and Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland) on Analysis of Institutional Annual Statements for Institution-Led Review for the HE sector for 2021/22.

POLICY REVIEW UPDATE
(copy filed as UEC/230323/020)

21.1   Members of the Committee noted the paper providing an update on policy review, which details the approving committee for each policy review.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND STANDARDS REVIEW: FINDINGS
(copy filed as UEC/230323/021)

22.1   Members of the Committee noted the findings from the recent Quality Enhancement and Standards Review.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

23.1   Members of the Committee noted that the next meeting of the UEC would take place on **Tuesday 16 May 2023 at 1.05pm**.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

ACTION LOG

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2023

Minute Point	Identified Action	Individual(s) Responsible	Action Status/Update
10.2	Confirmation to be sought regarding the breakdown of results from the Race Equality Charter Student Survey by School.	Chair	**Complete:** Distributed to the Committee via circulation.
11.3	All actions plans to be consolidated and reviewed ensuring actions are assigned appropriately.	Clerk / Chair	*Pending* *Action Plans have been collated and are currently being reviewed.*
15.1	LEO data to be included as part of graduate outcomes data.	J Barrow	*Pending*
16.2	The implementation of the PTES student survey to be actioned via SSEC.	J Bohan	*Pending*

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH 2023

Minute Point	Identified Action	Individual(s) Responsible	Action Status/Update
10.1	Schools to utilise the existing NSS action template to address actions as appropriate.	Directors of Education	*Pending*
10.2	Distribution of raw data to Schools to allow further analysis.	J Bohan (via Morag Beedie)	*Pending*
10.3	Review the data and commentary to ensure that no specific courses are identified, and raise as appropriate with the relevant Director of Education.	J Bohan/M Beedie	*Pending*
11.4	Dissemination of examples of good practice in relation to ChatGPT.	K Kiezebrink	*Pending*
15.3	Circulation of the Teaching and Learning Spaces Group Terms of Reference to the Committee, for approval by circulation.	Clerk	*Pending*

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FUTURE ACADEMIC YEAR STRUCTURE

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

> The purpose of this paper is to provide a revised proposal on the structure of the academic year from 2024/25 onwards following comments from relevant committees including Senate.
>
> The paper provides an overview of the academic view provided by Senate on 19 April for the initial proposal (SEN22:50), and an adjusted proposal for a further academic view in light of that feedback. The paper provides the following information:
> - A set of principles for the development of the academic year structure with comments on each in relation to feedback received throughout the process of consultation, and comments on implications for workload
> - A proposed structure, based on the original Option 1 (see Senate paper SEN22:50)
> - A review of the proposed structure against the principles
> - Recommendations for next steps

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	**Date**
Previously considered/approved by	SMT Academic view Joint Meeting of EEC and SSEC Qatar Academic Planning Group UEC QAC Heads of School SRC Senate URC	23 March 2023 27 March 2023 By circulation 23 March 2023 29 March 2023 29 March 2023 *Via Teams* 19 April 2023 3 May 2023
Further consideration/ approval required by	Further academic view UEC SRC QAC Senate Approval QAC UEC Senate	 16 May 2023 17 May 2023 18 May 2023 7 June 2023 August (tbc) August (tbc) 20 September 2023

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

UEC is asked to provide an academic view on the proposals to:

(i) Commence teaching w/c 23 September 2024 (week 9 of AY) with Welcome Week w/c 16 September 2024 (week 8 of AY) to optimise student recruitment activity.
(ii) Put in place a three-term structure for the academic year (AY).
(iii) Utilise 'term' as the terminology for the teaching periods
(iv) Implement 13-week terms for terms 1 and 2, including one floating week; and a 12-week term 3 with no floating week (PGT teaching in term 3). (See Principle (ii) for explanation of reason for 12-week term 3).
(v) Align University holidays, as far as possible, with school holidays in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire for the Winter break and the Spring break.
(vi) Implement an 'Induction/Transition and Employability Week' (ITEW) at the beginning of terms 1 and 2 for continuing UG students with this time being used for a Welcome Week for new UG and PGT entrants.

Feedback from the Committees noted in section 2 will be considered as part of the next phase of the work which will aim to propose an academic year structure for approval through our Committees in August / September 2024.

INTRODUCTION

4.1 Following consultation with our Committees as detailed in section 2, a revised proposal for the structure of the academic year from 2024/25 onwards is provided for an academic view through our Committees, including Senate. The proposal that was brought forward to our Committees, culminating with Senate on 19 April 2023, has been further developed in light of the feedback through that process of consultation. It should be noted that, whilst there was an opportunity for Senate to provide an academic view at the 19 April meeting, a number of Senators had further questions and comments that could not be taken due to time constraints. With the agreement of Senate, further views were provided by Senators, by email, following the meeting of Senate. For each Principle, a summary of the feedback is provided, with a response to the feedback including implications for the Principle. A revised Principle (where revision is needed in light of feedback) is then provided.

4.2 This paper retains, from the first paper, the background information and the Principles. As stated above, adjustments have been made where appropriate to account for the feedback. It should be noted that concern was raised by a number of Senators about the suggested change to the original proposal on the three terms (to Terms 1 and 2, and a Summer Teaching Period) which had been included in the presentation to Senate, rather than in the paper. These concerns are outlined in Principle (ii) along with different views provided by other Senators after the meeting.

4.3 The feedback provided through the consultation process prior to Senate is provided in Appendix 7 and feedback from Senate is included below. The overall feedback is considered within each Principle and responses to the feedback are provided.

Comment at Senate	Response to comment
Concerns about the formalisation of a three-term academic year structure and that the proposal should be taken to the University Research Committee.	Proposal taken to URC. Section 7(ii) provides the detailed feedback from URC as this was an action agreed at Senate Also see paragraph 8.2
That a three-term structure had previously been considered by QAC on 24 February 2022 and that it had not been approved.	The minute of the QAC on 24/02/22 notes that a three-term structure was not approved. It goes on to state that it was agreed at that

	meeting that the proposal 'would be taken away and further work carried out on it'.
Concerns were raised following Senate, by Senators, that the three-term proposal appeared to have been removed from the proposal with a 'summer teaching period for those who undertake teaching' being proposed instead. Support for the three-term proposal was received by email from Senators in Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition and School of Biological Sciences.	A three-term period is retained in this proposal (Term 1, Term 2, and Term 3 (PGT)) with Term 3 being designated as being for PGT specifically.
A query about the need for a marking period given that there is increasing use of continuous assessment.	A marking period of 3 weeks remains necessary as while there is increased use of continuous assessment, many Schools continue to use the end of course assessment period for exams or end of course assessments and as such require the marking period to complete marking and the associated confirmation of results through Examiners' meetings.
A query about whether formalising term 3 would impact on the opportunity for international students to undertake paid work	Students on the Student Visa route are allowed to work part-time during teaching periods and full-time (up to 40 hours) during the formal vacation periods for their personal course of study. The identification of a summer teaching period has no impact on a students' ability to work. For those on degree programmes, the maximum amount of part-time work during official teaching periods is 20 hours.
Student wanted more elaboration on extensions.	Schools take different approaches to the management of extensions and should make the information clear to students. The point is noted for future discussion with Schools.
Concern about the evidence-base for aspects of the proposal (e.g., use of three terms across other universities).	Evidence provided in section 9 and table 2
A recognition of the value and potential of each of the Principles as outlined in the proposal.	N/A
Comments on the start date for the academic year which seemed to demonstrate overall consensus for the Option 1 start date (16 September 2024 Welcome Week and 23 September Teaching).	Start date proposed: Option 1 with the proposed structure set out in Appendix 1
Request for consideration of a short break between cohorts.	It is not possible to provide a break between cohorts due to the number of weeks available for teaching and assessment, and holiday. It is anticipated that Schools will work with staff to manage workload appropriately as currently.
Request for a guarantee that people with childcare responsibilities can be free from scheduled teaching during the Winter, Spring and Summer breaks.	The Winter and Spring breaks align with the local school holidays (as are currently known). It is not possible to provide a guarantee that the Summer period can be kept free of

	teaching for those with childcare responsibilities. Further information provided in section 7(v)
Comment that the 13-week term with 2 weeks for assessment means there is only 10 weeks for teaching, where there was 11 (10 weeks teaching, 1 week revision, 2 weeks exams). Can we address the 'vanished' week?	Structure enables 10 + 1 + 2 assessment. While it would be possible to remove the flexible week this would limit flexibility and remove revision week where that is needed.
Concern about the reduction from 3 weeks to 2 weeks for the Spring break, impacting on both staff and students who have field trips to undertake.	The proposal now includes a 3-week Spring break. See section 7(ii)

5. BACKGROUND

5.1   Our Aberdeen 2040 Strategy articulates the ambitions for Education. In summary, the Strategy states our ambitions for Education as: Aberdeen 2040 aims to prepare our graduates to thrive in the diverse workplaces of the future with commitments that need to be embedded in the experience of all our students. Our Education aims to be among the very best in the world, enabling our students to grow as independent learners, to achieve their full potential and succeed whatever their personal and social background, their mode of study and location, and to be equipped for global employment. Our Curriculum is challenge-led, distinctive, has breadth and flexibility with the interdisciplinary challenges embedded. Our Curriculum is inclusive, international and enables our students to be leaders in protecting the environment. Our Environment aims to be diverse, caring, supportive, challenging, innovative, and developmental. The overarching ambitions are supported by a number of Commitments [1].

5.2   Whilst an academic year structure cannot deliver all aspects of an Education Strategy, the aim is to develop a structure that acts as an enabler for its achievement. The Principles (see section 6 below) aim to articulate how the academic year structure can support the delivery of Aberdeen 2040 Education. Of particular relevance to the development of these proposals are the actions to increase the opportunities for student mobility, international learning, work-based learning, and placements, all of which are being taken forward through Aberdeen 2040 workstreams.

5.3   The academic year structure that was in place for seven years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic is provided in Appendix 3 (approved at Senate on 14 November 2012). In 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23, and 2023/24 revisions to the academic year structure were approved by Senate [2] on a temporary basis to address the challenges of the pandemic. These are also provided in Appendix 3. It is not appropriate to continue to make changes year on year, and it is therefore important that an agreed academic year structure is in place for academic year 2024/25 onwards.

5.4   Consideration has been given to the future possible structures of the academic year to take forward from academic year 2024/25 with four options presented to Senate on 19 April 2023. The proposals aimed to support the developments in Education in line with the Aberdeen 2040 Commitments (see section 5.1 above) and are in line with changes to the external context that are impacting on recruitment and admissions of students. Once agreed, the new structure would take effect from academic year 2024/25. It had previously been planned that a decision about

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[1] Commitments 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17

[2] Changes to second half-session 2020/21 and first half-session 2021/22 approved by Senate on 21 October 2020; 2021/22 term dates approved by Senate on 3 Feb 2020; Changes to second half-session 2021/22 approved by Senate on 12 May 2021; 2022/23 term dates approved by Senate on 1 December 2021 with adjustments approved 11 May 2022; 2023/24 term dates approved by Senate on 2 November 2022.

the structure be agreed by late summer 2023[3] and would therefore need to be approved no later than the final Senate of this academic year on 7 June 2023 to optimise information to support the recruitment cycle for 2024/25. However, given the differences in view expressed by Senators, a further academic view is sought in June, with final approval being sought at the Senate on 20 September 2023. The new structure will apply to the majority of UG and PGT programmes with the exception of certain programmes.[4] where professional requirements necessitate a different academic year structure.

5.5 In developing a proposal for the structure of the academic year, we have also been mindful of the increasingly competitive and complex global student recruitment marketplace within which we are operating. We need to take an approach that places us in a strong position with our external audiences, specifically prospective students and their influencers including recruitment agents and scholarship providers.

5.6 An extensive process of consultation for the development of the initial options took place with colleagues and students as follows:

- Recruitment and Admissions Teams (UK and international)
- Dean for Student Support and Experience
- Dean for Portfolio Development and Programme Promotion
- Team Leaders in the Directorate of Academic Services and Online Education
- School Directors of Education
- PGT Leads from Schools
- AUSA Education Committee
- Vice-Principal (Global Engagement)

5.7 Further consultation then took place through the formal committees and through Schools via the School representatives of the Education Committees, through the School Education Committees and other School-led discussions. The student membership of committees both institutional and School level will continue to ensure that student views inform the final outcome. The feedback from this process is provided in Appendix 7 and, along with the Senate feedback, was considered in the development of this proposal.

5.8 The paper outlines (in sections 6 and 7) the set of Principles on which the proposal for the new academic year structure is based. In the previous proposal, four options were presented. Option 1 has been identified as the most appropriate for taking forward to this next stage as it allows for the achievement of all of the Principles. Amendments to the length of the Spring break and to Term 3 (PGT) have been made based on feedback and these amendments are explained in section 7.1(ii). The other options have not been taken forward for the following reasons:
- Option 2: the earlier start date for the academic year does not allow for optimising recruitment opportunities.
- Options 3 and 4: the late start date for the academic year impacts on the timing of teaching over Summer and would impact on research activities; they do not enable suitable student mobility opportunities; assessment is not completed prior to the Winter break. In addition, Option 4 does not achieve the principle of completion of marking before the start of the next term and, in addition, an overlap of marking and teaching was not seen as favourable from a workload perspective.

5.9 Appendix 1 provides the proposal for the academic year structure with an appraisal against the Principles set out in Appendix 2.

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[3] UCAS will open in September 2023 for September 2024 entry, and we will have started to receive applications for PG study; and need to have accurate information included in offers of admission and also for returning students. A September decision has been discussed with the Student Recruitment team and agreed as being manageable.
[4] Programmes with non-standard academic year structures: MBChB, Physician's Associate, BDS, PGDE. Some programmes also include optional fieldwork over the spring and summer breaks.

6.   AIMS OF THE PROPOSAL

6.1   The overarching aims of the development of a revised academic year are to:

(i)   Ensure appropriate allocation of time for the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment so that students are provided with sufficient time to undertake all programme requirements.

(ii)   Provide opportunities to further enhance the student experience in relation to, for example, student preparedness and transition into university and subsequent study years.

(iii)   Adopt a transparent three-term structure that better reflects current practices, which will aid clarity for prospective and current students, and support Schools in their workload planning.

(iv)   Ensure that the structure facilitates the Aberdeen 2040 Education Commitments relating to student mobility, international learning, work-based learning, and placements.

(v)   Ensure academic year start dates that provide optimal student recruitment opportunities.

7.   PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR STRUCTURE 24/25 ONWARDS

7.1   In developing the proposal for the future structure of the academic year, a set of Principles have been developed which have been used to evaluate the proposal. There are eight Principles, and, whilst there are connections across them, each one is considered separately in this section. Within each of these sections, comments are made on the feedback received, any adjustments that have been made in light of the feedback, and consideration of workload for each of the Principles.

(i)   Provide a structure that supports our Aberdeen 2040 Education ambitions

> ***Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback***
>
> *Feedback*
> *Feedback indicates support for the Induction, Transition and Employability Week (ITEW), and overall structure as a means to enabling student mobility, international learning opportunities, and opportunities for placement activity such that external stakeholders have clarity about student availability.*
>
> *Response*
> *No adjustments have been made to this Principle.*

As part of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy, the University has committed to providing 'an international education to learners from all around the world' (Commitment 11), equipping 'our graduates for global employment through our curriculum and teaching methods' (Commitment 12), and to ensuring that 'all our students can have an international experience, by studying or working collaboratively with international partners' (Commitment 14). These ambitions are being addressed, in part, through our workstreams on placements and work-based learning, Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills, and international learning (through student mobility and collaborative online international learning (COIL)). The academic year structure aims to be an enabler for these ambitions by:

- Providing a consistent academic year structure, including three equal terms, to enable consistent and coherent engagement with external stakeholders (e.g., employers, student mobility placement providers).

- Providing a dedicated week for returning students at the start of terms 1 and 2 to be used as a focus on skills enhancement recognising the importance of the University supporting continuing UG students to enhance their employability (Induction, Transition and Employability Week (ITEW)). These transition weeks will not only enhance skills development but will also augment a sense of belonging. For new entrants (UG and PGT) this time will be used for Welcome

Week. Further work will be required to determine how best to use these weeks and is referred to in section 11.2 and workload implications section below.

As part of our overall approach to enhancement of the student educational experience, there will be different areas of focus dependent on outcomes of student experience feedback (e.g., NSS), external quality assurance and enhancement processes (e.g., through QAA Scotland and professional / accreditation bodies), and the national focus on enhancement (e.g., the Resilient Learning Community Enhancement Theme, 2020-2023). In addition, the work that the University has undertaken over recent years in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated need to pivot our education online, has led to enhancements across our provision (e.g., delivery of continuous, authentic assessment). The academic year structure therefore aims to continue to support the ability for flexibility for enhancements such as these by:

- Providing consistent term timelines across the academic year.
- Clear timelines for assessment and feedback on assessment.
- Creating space for community building and creating a sense of belonging (through the Induction, Transition and Employability Weeks).
- Creating some flexibility for discipline-specific approaches to structuring the delivery of Education across each term.

Workload implications
The development of the two ITE Weeks for returning students will build on existing activities through the Careers and Employability Service, and will be discussed with Schools, through the Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship (because some Schools have identified that there may be opportunities for them to use the Week for School-based activities). The aim would be to minimise academic staff workload (e.g., by providing packages of support through Toolkits and other means) whilst at the same time allowing scope for Schools to undertake high-impact and School-specific activities with their students. It is anticipated that these induction and transition activities will help with staff workload in the longer-term as we ensure that students are adequately prepared across a whole range of areas including, for example, academic integrity.

(ii)   A consistent and transparent structure of three equal terms across UG and PGT provision to provide adequate time for teaching, learning and assessment

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Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback
Feedback on this aspect of the proposal has demonstrated different viewpoints summarised as follows:
- *Concerns that three formal terms will: lead to increased teaching and associated administration across Summer where these were previously not taking place; concern that there would be an introduction of undergraduate teaching to the proposed Term 3; reduced time for research activities; impact on childcare responsibilities; impact on the ability of academic staff to take annual leave.*
- *Support that three formal terms will: recognise teaching and associated activity that is already taking place; provide clarity for students, staff and external stakeholders (e.g., employers) on the timings of delivery of teaching; enable international students particularly to plan their year and when they are able to return home; provide practical advantages (e.g., in making room bookings easier); support recruitment onto PGT programmes which represent an important part of the income stream; should not impact on staff workloads as Schools manage staff workload whilst allowing for annual leave; transparently places value on the delivery of the PGT teaching that takes place across the proposed Term 3.*
- *Summer teaching is a reality for many academics and the proposal formalises what is already in place in many areas; appropriate management of workload, including teaching, by Heads of School is key to ensuring an equitable approach that enables*

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all researchers to have time for undertaking research (e.g., one term each year free from teaching); concerns that the structure is a precursor to the introduction of more January start programmes and increased teaching loads generally leading to erosion of teaching-free period over the Summer and creating barriers to collaboration and team working for research; on balance, the structure could be neutral in terms of impact on research activities as long as teaching loads are not increased. [Feedback from URC]

Response
- *Retain the three-term structure.*
- *Confirm that there is no intention, through this proposal, to introduce undergraduate intakes at any other time of year than September (therefore no undergraduate teaching in T3), nor to require teaching and associated activity to take place in T3 where this does not already happen.*
- *Adjust the naming of the current Term 3 to Term 3 (PGT) to clearly identify it as PGT-only teaching (noting that some UG fieldwork currently takes place during that time period).*
- *Confirm that Schools will manage workload appropriately to ensure that staff are able to take allocated annual leave over the Summer and are able to undertake research activities.*
- *Encourage Schools to consider appropriate ways to utilise the three-term structure as a basis for the allocation of teaching (e.g., an approach might include the allocation of a term which is free from teaching).*

Additional Feedback
- *The previously proposed reduction (in the proposals brought to Senate on 19 April) from 2 weeks to 3 weeks for the Spring break would impact negatively on some field trip opportunities[5].*
- *Consideration be given to creating a break between cohorts, with the suggestion that marking time be reduced to two weeks to accommodate the suggestion.*
- *A single week of delivery after the Spring break is of limited value.*

Response
- *The proposal introduces a third week to the Spring break, followed by 5 weeks of teaching including a two-week assessment period. This additional week will enable the field trips to take place, and for staff and students to have at least one week of vacation. The additional week is likely to provide more flexibility for staff and students with childcare should school holiday timings shift over the lifetime of the AY structure.*
- *Reduce the proposed Term 3 to 12 weeks (from 13 weeks) with no flexible week (compared to Terms 1 and 2) to accommodate the extended Spring break.*
- *Whilst there is merit in the suggestion to create a break between cohorts, a reduction in marking time would not be feasible due to workload.*
- *The proposed structure avoids having only a single teaching week followed by a two-week assessment period after the Spring break, as previously was in place.*

Currently the academic year has two defined half-sessions currently with 11 weeks (including a floating week) teaching followed by 2 weeks assessment with the summer teaching period for PGT being set at a School / programme level. This approach leads to variability in both timing and length of the summer period and given the lack of consistency, means the transparency of information about term dates for PGT students is impacted. The rationale for Principle (ii) is:

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[5] In Geosciences, 2 weeks of field trips and 1 week of vacation typically take place across the 3-week period. The trips are scheduled to fit with learning outcomes threaded through T2 and staff availability. Most students do 2 separate field trips based on discipline, and these could not be moved to 'within' term as they would clash with other Schools' teaching at level 2. They cannot be moved later as data gathered is required for later assessment. It is important that students and staff are able to have at least one week of vacation.

- As each stage of PGT programmes carries 60 credits, it is important that each term is of equal and appropriate length to recognise the notional student effort required.
- Helpful for external messaging to prospective and new students as it will better support a dual entry model (i.e., term 1 and term 2 entry) which is important from a recruitment perspective given international markets.
- Transparently acknowledges the delivery of Education that takes place in many areas across the University, and the associated staff workload (although does *not require* delivery of education across all three terms).

As such an academic year model based on three terms of equal length is proposed with the start and end dates of each term being consistent across Schools. The nomenclature is proposed to be:
- Term 1 (T1)
- Term 2 (T2)
- Term 3 (PGT) (T3 (PGT)).

For September PGT cohorts they would work through T1, T2, and T3 (PGT) in that order. For January PGT cohorts they would work through T2, T3 (PGT), and T1 in that order. Comparison universities have similar models and naming conventions (see paragraph 9.2).

The proposal for the academic year structure consists of two 13-week (T1 and T2) and one 12-week (T3 (PGT)) periods of teaching. Term 3 (PGT) is clearly identified as a PGT-only teaching period. The structure is composed of:
- 10 weeks of teaching (including in-course assessment) in T1 and T2 and 2 weeks of assessment in weeks 12 and 13 to allow for in-person exams where these need to take place.
- 12 weeks of teaching and assessment in T3 (PGT) (for postgraduate taught delivery recognising that for many programmes, dissertations / projects / fieldwork take place over that teaching period).
- In T1 and T2, one flexible week for:
  - Revision where in-person exams are used
  - Reading week
  - Fieldwork
  - Other suitable activities
- A dedicated two-week assessment period at the end of Terms 1 and 2 for most undergraduate programmes. While in-course assessment is threaded through the term for most courses, this assessment period provides time for end-of-course assessments and, where required, formal exams. For postgraduate provision, this period can be used for teaching due to the more prescriptive nature of these programmes except if formal exams are required in which case a two-week assessment period will be used.

The proposed new structure will apply to the majority of UG and PGT programmes with the exception of certain programmes[6] where professional requirements necessitate a different academic year structure.

Workload Implications
Feedback from some Senators indicate that the three-term structure will support the management of staff workload by providing transparency and consistency of timings across the academic year. It is important to reiterate that, where teaching does not take place, there is no intention through this proposal to introduce teaching or administration during Term 3 (PGT). There will be no introduction of new undergraduate teaching across T3 (PGT). There should therefore be no negative impact on workload and the proposed approach should support the allocation of workload by providing opportunities to consider

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[6] Programmes with non-standard academic year structures: MBChB, Physician's Associate, BDS, PGDE and some Exec Education programmes. Some programmes also include optional fieldwork over the spring and summer breaks.

discipline- and School-specific approaches which might include the allocation of a no-teaching term where this is appropriate.

(iii)   **All first term assessment completed prior to the Winter break**

> ***Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback***
>
> *Feedback*
> - *Completion of assessment prior to the Winter break is favoured, with students stating that this is their preference.*
>
> *Response*
> - *No changes to the Principle have been made.*

A core principle underpinning the last substantive review of the academic year structure, approved by Senate in November 2012, was the move of first half-session assessments before the Winter break. This was agreed to be important to allow students to have a proper break and take advantage of employment opportunities over that period. It was also agreed to be important from a retention perspective to reduce the risk of those struggling in the first half-session not returning after the winter break. Additionally, this structure was also agreed to be beneficial to both incoming and outgoing international exchange students because it allowed visiting students to return home prior to the Winter break having completed all teaching and assessment and likewise allowed outgoing exchange students to be able to start their exchange early in the new year without needing to return to Aberdeen to complete assessments.

It is possible to change the timing of the completion of assessment to after the Winter break and two options were presented in the previous paper to that effect (Options 3 and 4). Not all international students choose to return to their home country over that period; some students prefer to have time over the Winter break to complete assessment (although it is important to note that students will not have access to support from academic or professional services staff who can support assessment during that period). Comparable data on student retention related to any change to the timing of assessment is not available for the University so it is not possible to make an evidence-based judgement on this matter. Where the delivery of assessment takes place after the Winter break, this timing allows for a later start date.

> *Workload Implications*
> *Workload remains the same no matter when assessment is submitted. However, having submissions prior to the Winter break ensures that staff do not feel a sense of obligation to support students with their assessment over the break. There is the usual period of marking time within the structure, so time for this activity is not impacted negatively.*

(iv)   **Marking completed in 3-week window prior to start of next term**

> ***Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback***
>
> *Feedback*
> - *The allocation of marking time (3 weeks) does not reflect the reality of workloads at 'heavy' marking times and, in the case of the feedback provided, impacting on the opportunity to take annual leave over the Spring break.*
>
> *Response*
> - *We make a commitment to our students through our Feedback Framework that feedback should be provided within a maximum of three working weeks excluding vacation periods.*

> • *No changes to this Principle have been made.*

The University's [Feedback Framework](#) states that feedback should be timely and normally provided within a maximum of three working weeks (excluding vacation periods). In the context of the academic year structure, it is important that students can receive their overall course results before the start of the next Term to allow them, where necessary, to make changes to their curriculum (e.g., changes to curriculum breadth courses). This timing is important where students may not have passed a pre-requisite or where a student finds they have not done well in their elective courses and wish to make changes (e.g., a student who has taken a language to fulfil their Enhanced Study requirements who decides after the Term 1 that, based on performance, they would prefer to switch to a Sixth Century course in Term 2 instead of taking a further language course).

Workload Implications
Marking is currently undertaken in a 3-week time period. Therefore there are no additional workload implications.

(v) **Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 1: school, public and religious holidays**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback
• *Consideration should be given to guaranteeing that people with childcare responsibilities can be free from scheduled teaching during the Winter, Spring and Summer school holidays.*

Response
• *It is not possible to make this guarantee. The university has an annual leave allocation which should be utilised alongside other support mechanisms to put support in place for childcare or other caring responsibilities[7].*

The University has an increasingly diverse student population and, in line with the Aberdeen 2040 commitments in regard to inclusion, it is important that in developing a new academic year structure that consideration is given to equality, diversity and inclusion issues impacting both staff and students.

School holidays
In recognition of caring (childcare), work commitments, and wellbeing needs of both staff and students, where possible, the proposed structure has been aligned with school holidays. As the timing of City and Shire school holidays can vary, it cannot be guaranteed that the academic year structure will always fully align with school holidays but where possible alignment will be made. School term dates for 2022/23 to 2024/25 for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire as currently published, are given in Appendix 5.

The Spring break aligns with the City and Shire holidays, and it is proposed that it reverts to 3 weeks in length rather than the previously proposed 2 weeks (see Section 7(ii)).

The school Summer holidays, as currently in the Summer teaching period, fall within the proposed Term 3 (PGT). As currently, it is expected that staff will take annual leave during the Summer period in agreement with their line manager.

The October school holidays fall in the first term. It is not possible to include a formal break given the proximity to the start of Term 1. Importantly, Schools have the flexible week which could be used to provide a reading week at this time if the timing is appropriate in relation to the student learning experience.

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[7] Staff can request up to 18 weeks unpaid leave under the [parental leave policy](#).

Public holidays
In regard to public holidays, there are normally four public holidays which fall during teaching as outlined below for 2022/23:

Spring Public Holiday – 18 April
May Day Holiday – 2 May
Start of Trades Fortnight – 11 July
Autumn Public Holiday – 26 September

These dates may fall within teaching, assessment or non-term-time periods. Where an alternative teaching slot is requested to compensate for the public holiday, Schools can liaise with the Central Timetabling Team to review alternatives after Registration. It may not be possible to reschedule due to the flexibility of the curriculum as it can be difficult to find alternative slots which avoid clashes with other courses being taken by students and also available appropriate rooms for the type of teaching (e.g., lecture theatres). In the case of assessment, the scheduling will be managed to avoid delivery of assessments on public holidays. Where it is not possible to reschedule delivery to avoid public holidays, staff will be enabled to take a day in lieu as part of their existing annual leave entitlement.

Religious holidays
The Policy on Religion and Belief states that the University recognises that there may be circumstances where students may request absence or adjustment on the grounds of religious observance and where this is the case reasonable adjustments will be made. It is important that we do everything that we can as a University to create a sense of belonging and welcome for all. In addition, we have a partnership with Al Faleh Group for Education and Academic Services (AFG) in Qatar for whom religious days such as Eid Al-Fitr[8] and Eid Al-Adha[9] are important national holidays when the campus in Qatar is closed. The timing of these holidays varies widely. Further work will be done to determine what is possible in relation to managing the timing of assessment, and the delivery of education with respect to religious holidays.

Workload Implications
The flexible (floating) week allows for School-based management of workload around holiday periods. Where Summer teaching does take place, Schools will manage workload such that all staff are able to take their annual leave entitlement which, for some, will support childcare responsibilities.

(vi) **Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 2: optimal orientation and induction opportunities so as to enhance the preparation and readiness of students for university, their studies and wider student life**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback
- *There could be opportunities for some Schools to put in place School- or discipline-specific activities that will enhance the student experience.*
- *The proposal presents opportunities to put in place institution-wide activities.*

Response
- *No changes have been made to this Principle.*

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[8] Eid al Fitr / End of Ramadan dates for the years 2023-2033 https://www.qppstudio.net/global-holidays-observances/eid-al-fitr-end-of-ramadan.htm

[9] Eid al Adha / Feast of Sacrifice dates for the years 2023-2033 https://www.qppstudio.net/global-holidays-observances/eid-al-adha-feast-of-sacrifice.htm

It is critical that new students receive robust induction into their studies. This is important to ensure those joining the University are given an appropriate introduction to their chosen subject and informed about relevant policies and procedures (e.g., those associated with student support, academic integrity, wellbeing etc.). This approach will also allow opportunities for new students to have time to meet other students and get an insight into the wider student experience (e.g., clubs and societies). As such the proposed academic year structure as set out in Appendix 3 provides time for orientation and induction at the start of Terms 1 and 2. As detailed in (i), it is proposed that this time is also used to support skills development for returning students. As part of the ongoing work to enhance student induction, orientation and transition, consideration will be given to how such induction and orientation can be delivered more flexibly, whilst ensuring that we provide all opportunities for students to arrive during these important weeks.

> *Workload Implications*
> *See Principle (i) workload implications.*

(vii) **Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 3: Equality Impact Assessment**

In developing the new academic year structure, an equality impact assessment has been undertaken prior to the proposal being brought forward for a further academic view.

A revised Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken (see Appendix 6).

(viii) **Academic year start date late enough to optimise recruitment activity, including the Clearing period following school exam results, timing of release of school results more generally, UKVI requirements and timing of the confirmation of external scholarships**

> ***Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback***
>
> *Feedback*
> * *A later start date is seen as beneficial for recruitment and that, whilst there was some support for the previously presented option 2 (with a start date of 09 September 2024), it does not support this Principle. Whilst the start date for options 3 and 4 (30 September 2024) are noted as allowing further time for recruitment, a number of concerns were raised around the impact on the timing of teaching over the Summer (e.g., time for research).*
>
> *Response*
> * *On balance, option 1 with its start date of 16 September 2024 (Welcome Week) and 23 September 2024 (for teaching) is proposed (see Appendix 1).*

Although enhancements have been made to processing times for applications for study to allow more time for prospective students to complete required actions after receiving an offer of admission, there are different external factors which mean a later start date is competitively advantageous.

In recent years, we have recruited around 200 undergraduate students during "Clearing" that is the period following the release of Higher and A Level exam results in August. This group has been key to us achieving growth in Rest of UK undergraduates, and now, with a very competitive market for Home fees/Scotland students is even more strategically important. However, a school exam release date of 8 August (Highers) and 17 August (A Levels) is very close to a September start, which could be off-putting for an applicant who is re-considering their university options in Clearing. Some of our Clearing applicants will also be international and require time to apply for a Student Visa. It is worth noting that the

staffing within the UKVI will reflect the volume requirements for English Institutions, generally.

Specifically in relation to international students, the arrangements they require to put in place both before we an issue them a CAS.[10] and before they apply for a Visa are complex and time consuming. Evidence of funding is required for some markets; in many cases this is dependent on external sponsors confirming scholarship awards which can occur close to the start of the academic year. To obtain a Visa, self-funding applicants have to demonstrate to UKVI that adequate finances have been held consistently in their bank account for 28 days. And the external bodies driving these processes often work to an understanding of an autumn start for the UK sector that is closer to October.

A later start date would also be advantageous for recruitment in Qatar.

Table 1 below provides details of start dates for 2023/24 for a range of other UK institutions where dates for the equivalents of our "Welcome Week" and "Start of Teaching" are readily available. This shows that our 2023/24 start date is one of the earliest in the group, with the most common start date for 2023 being one or two weeks later (a Welcome Week that starts on 18 September or 25 September). A start date that is more in line with others across the UK would be more line with the expectations of prospective students, their agents, and other external agencies. It is noted that Scottish institutions in general start earlier, but we do need to be mindful of the wider UK context.

Table 1: Start Dates at other UK Universities

Wesley Group	Welcome week / Freshers' week	Start of teaching
St Andrews	04/09/2023	11/09/2023
Aberdeen	11/09/2023	18/09/2023
Dundee	11/09/2023	18/09/2023
East Anglia	18/09/2023	25/09/2023
Kent	18/09/2023	25/09/2023
Surrey	18/09/2023	25/09/2023
Bath	25/09/2023	03/10/2023
Leicester	25/09/2023	
Loughborough	26/09/2023	02/10/2023
Lancaster	02/10/2023	06/10/2023

Russell Group	Welcome week / Freshers' week	Start of teaching
Birmingham	18/09/23	25/09/23
Bristol	18/09/23	25/09/23
Cardiff	25/9/2023	2/10/2023
Durham	25/9/2023	2/10/2023
Edinburgh	12/09/23	18/09/23
Exeter	19/09/23	25/09/23
Glasgow	11/09/23	18/09/23
King's	18/09/23	25/09/23
Leeds		02/10/2023
Liverpool	18/09/23	25/09/23
Manchester	18/09/23	25/09/23
Newcastle	18/09/23	
Nottingham	25/09/23	
Oxford	09/10/2023	
Queen Mary	18/09/2023	
Sheffield	18/09/23	25/09/23
Southampton	25/09/23	2/10/23
Warwick	25/09/23	2/10/23

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[10] Certificate of Acceptance for Studies, the formal UKVI document we issue to applicants which they require to apply for a Visa.

> *Workload Implications*
> *The structure prevents the impact of teaching running later into the Summer, and the subsequent impact on research time for academic colleagues.*

8.   OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

8.1   The structure will be appropriate for our Transnational Education

The University has a number of transnational education (TNE) partnerships. Some of these necessarily require to be delivered over a different timeframe to that of our academic year, such as the SCNU Joint Institute where delivery takes place on the SCNU campus in China and as such requires delivery to align with their academic year structure and associated public holidays (e.g., Chinese New Year). Others such as the University's partnership with AFG in Qatar in contrast require the alignment of delivery between Aberdeen and Qatar to ensure equivalence of experience between both cohorts who are studying on the same programme. As such, input has been provided from the Qatar Academic Planning Group as part of the consultation and support for option 1 was provided. In this context, it is noted that the Ministry of Education in Qatar can impose changes to the academic year structure to reflect nationwide events such as the FIFA World Cup.

8.2   Staff Workload

The impact of each of the Principles, and therefore the proposal, has been addressed within each of the sections i)-vii). To highlight a response to a key concern:

- Whilst the proposal is to create three terms as a transparent approach to recognising the teaching activity that takes place across the academic year, it is recognised that Heads of School currently manage staff workload in relation to the realities of whole year teaching (including PGT summer teaching) in many areas. The management of staff workload in the context of delivery of Education across the whole academic year in some areas is of particular importance given the growing intake of January start PGT entrants and the need to ensure that staff have focused time for research or other activities. Delivery across three teaching periods is not new. However, the proposal highlights the need for Schools to appropriately manage workload in this context. For example, **it is not a requirement that academics teach across all three terms**, and it is important to ensure appropriate workload management in Schools as part of an overall approach to address workload concerns and create further time for research. It is also important to reiterate that there is no intention, as part of this proposal to introduce undergraduate teaching across the proposed Term 3 (PGT) (noting that some fieldwork takes place currently at this time).

Once the structure of the new academic year is agreed, work will be required to support the transition (e.g., updates to University IT systems (e.g., Student record) to accommodate the changed structure). Consideration will also need to be given, within Directorates and School Admin teams, to the management of any workload implications posed by the new structure. This will be done ahead of the presentation of proposals for approval in September.

One of the next phases of work for Aberdeen 2040 Education, is scoping of the flexibility of our curriculum with a view to aligning the breadth curriculum more closely with Aberdeen 2040 to benefit the student experience, as well as providing opportunities to appropriately streamline the curriculum.

8.3 _The structure enables achievement of Statutory Requirements_

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) defines full-time study as requiring at least 24 weeks of study.[11] for at least 21 hours per week. The proposed academic year structure enables the achievement of these requirements. Additionally, the University has a growing number of students who are funded by US Federal Loans who stipulate a requirement for 30 weeks of instruction, exams, or study for final exams (excluding formal breaks). As such it is important that consideration is given to these requirements in designing the new academic year structure. The proposed structure offers a 28-week undergraduate academic year structure including the induction / transition and employability week at the start of Terms 1 and 2. In this regard, it is worth noting that a comparison of other Scottish HEIs shows their academic year structure for UGs to vary between 26 and 31 weeks in length.[12].

9. NOMENCLATURE

9.1 We currently use the terminology 'half-session' and have only two half-sessions (from September to December, and from January to May). We deliver our Education across the entire academic year and the proposals for the new academic year structure transparently acknowledges this. The terminology proposed for the three teaching periods is 'term' (i.e., Term 1, Term 2, and Term 3 (PGT) for the specific teaching periods). Feedback from some areas suggest the use of Autumn, Spring, Summer as indicators of the terms. However, this could be confusing for some international students where seasons are at a different time of year. Numbering is suggested as being more inclusive. Previous discussion with QAC[13] on this matter indicated some concern that all Schools and disciplines would be required to deliver education across all three terms (and thus staff would be required to teach across all three terms). In line with section 7.1(ii) above, Heads of School already manage staff workload in relation to the realities of whole year teaching (including PGT summer teaching) in many areas particularly given the growing intake of January start PGT entrants.

9.2 Many institutions across the sector use the terminology of 'term' (see table 2 below for examples). Other institutions use the terminology of 'semester' or 'trimester' (e.g., Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle and St Andrews) and likewise denote these either numerically or by seasons. It is felt that term is more meaningful internationally and would be most easily understood by our prospective and current students. It is proposed that numerical indicators are used as these are neutral rather than seasonal indicators given that seasons differ for our transnational education.

Table 2: Terminology

University	Terminology
Edinburgh Napier University	Trimester 1, 2 and 3 (latter ending at end of August)
Glasgow Caledonian University	Trimester A, B and C (latter ending at end of August)
University of Kent	Undergraduate Terms (Autumn, Spring, Summer); Postgraduate Terms (Autumn, Spring, Summer) (whole year academic calendar recognised)
Lancaster University	Michaelmas, Lent, Summer Terms (latter ends in June)
University of Leicester	Uses both Terms (1, 2 and 3) and Semesters (1 and 2) (term 2 and semester 2 end in June)
Loughborough University	Uses Term to refer to the period when students are on campus. Semesters refer to teaching periods for taught modules: Semesters 1, 2, 3 (PGT) (whole year academic calendar recognised through terms and semesters)

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[11] Study is defined as including contact teaching time, private study and assessment.
[12] QAC Minute of 24 February 2022
[13] Section 2.2-2.4 of Minute of 24 February 2022

University of Oxford	Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity Terms (latter ends in June)
UCL	Uses Terms with these being denoted as First, Second and Third Term (latter ending in June) though it is acknowledged that PGT students study beyond the third term and submit their dissertation in September
Warwick University	Autumn, Spring, Summer Terms (latter ends beginning July)
University of West of Scotland	Terms 1, 2 and 3 (whole year academic calendar recognised)

10. ACTION REQUIRED

10.1 UEC is asked to provide an academic view on the proposals to:

- Commence teaching w/c 23 September 2024 (week 9 of AY) with Welcome Week w/c 16 September 2024 (week 8 of AY) to optimise student recruitment activity.
- Put in place a three-term structure for the academic year (AY).
- Utilise 'term' as the terminology for the teaching periods
- Implement 13-week terms for terms 1 and 2, including one floating week; and a 12-week term 3 with no floating week (PGT teaching in term 3). (See Principle (ii) for explanation of reason for 12-week term 3).
- Align University holidays, as far as possible, with school holidays in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire for the Winter break and the Spring break.
- Implement an 'Induction/Transition and Employability Week' (ITEW) at the beginning of terms 1 and 2 for continuing UG students with this time being used for a Welcome Week for new UG and PGT entrants.

11. NEXT STEPS

11.1 Feedback from all Committees and other consultation will be taken into account for the further development of the proposal which will then be presented for approval to relevant Committees.

11.2 Depending on the overall feedback from the Committees including Senate, work will be progressed (as part of the final overall proposal) as follows:
- Updated Equality Impact Assessment
- Development of an implementation plan, identifying all actions required to put the new structure in place (e.g., changes to processes, regulations).
- Proposals around an employability and skills focused induction/transition and employability week (ITEW) for returning UG students will be brought forward (see 7.1(ii) above).
- A communications plan for students and new entrants will be developed with the aim of ensuring clarity around the structure for both continuing and new entrants.

12. FURTHER INFORMATION

12.1 Further information is available from Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education) ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk or Gillian Mackintosh, Director of Academic Services and Online Education g.mackintosh@abdn.ac.uk

11 May 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Closed

Proposed New Academic Year Structure

[The full set of options presented to Senate on 19 April 2023 are available here]

Week No.	Date (w/c)	Important Dates	Proposed Structure	
1	29.7.24			
2	5.8.24			
3	12.8.24			
4	19.8.24			
5	26.8.24			
6	2.9.24			
7	9.9.24		PGT Marking	
8	16.9.24		IEW*	PGT Marking
9	23.9.24	Sept Hol (Mon)	T1	
10	30.9.24		T1	
11	7.10.24		T1	
12	14.10.24	School Holidays	T1	
13	21.10.24	School Holidays	T1	
14	28.10.24		T1	
15	4.11.24		T1	
16	11.11.24		T1	
17	18.11.24		T1	
18	25.11.24		T1	Winter Grads
19	2.12.24		T1	Qatar Grads (TBC)
20	9.12.24		T1	
21	16.12.24		T1	
22	23.12.24	School Holidays	Uni Closed Period	
23	30.12.24	School Holidays	Uni Closed Period	
24	6.1.25		Marking	
25	13.1.25		Marking	
26	20.1.25		Marking	
27	27.1.25		IEW*	
28	3.2.25		T2	
29	10.2.25		T2	
30	17.2.25		T2	
31	24.2.25		T2	
32	3.3.25		T2	
33	10.3.25		T2	
34	17.3.25		T2	

35	24.3.25		T2	
36	31.3.25	School Holidays	Spring Break	
37	7.4.25	School Holidays	Spring Break	
38	14.4.25		Spring Break	
39	21.4.25	April Hol (Mon)	T2	
40	28.4.25		T2	
41	5.5.25	May Hol (Mon)	T2	
42	12.5.25		T2	
43	19.5.25		T2	
44	26.5.25		Marking	
45	2.6.25		Marking	
46	9.6.25		Marking	T3
47	16.6.25		T3	
48	23.6.25		T3	
49	30.6.25		T3	Summer Grads
50	7.7.25	School Holidays	T3	
51	14.7.25	School Holidays | July Hol (Mon)	T3	
52	21.7.25	School Holidays	T3	
1	28.7.25	School Holidays	T3	
2	4.8.25	School Holidays	T3	
3	11.8.25	School Holidays	T3	
4	18.8.25		T3	
5	25.8.25		T3	
6	1.9.25		Marking	

Mapping of Proposed Academic Year Structure to Principles

Principles	Proposed Structure
Provides a structure that supports our Aberdeen 2040 Education ambitions	Consistent structure supports work placement activity and mobility. Provides time for skills development to support employability. Completion of term 1 before Winter break may assist with student mobility.
A consistent structure of three equal terms across UG and PGT provision	Yes (13 weeks for Terms 1 and 2; 12 weeks for Term 3 (PGT) with the latter having no 'floating' week but same number of weeks available for teaching and assessment).
All first term assessment completed prior to winter break	Yes
Marking completed in 3 week marking window prior to start of next term	Yes
Alignment of University vacation periods with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire School holidays	Yes for Winter and Spring breaks but timing of City and Shire holidays do move and do not always align so cannot guarantee there will always be alignment. Summer school holidays: Annual leave should be managed in Schools so that staff can take their annual leave entitlement to support their childcare responsibilities. October School holidays fall in weeks 4 and 5 of teaching.
Academic year start as late as possible to support recruitment activity, including clearing, UKVI requirements and timing of release of school results	Induction starts on 16 September and teaching on 23 September – aligns with 2023/24 timeline. For January starts, induction starts on 27 January and teaching on 2 February.
Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion	Supports childcare through school holiday alignment (see above) for Winter and Spring breaks. Assessment completion before Winter break would provide opportunity for employment and could support childcare responsibilities for students with school-aged children. Induction and orientation at all years to provide sense of belonging for all students.

Former Academic Year Structures

Week No.	Pre-Covid Structure	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6	Induction				
7				Induction	Induction
8	S1 Teaching & Assessment (14 weeks)	Induction	Induction	S1 Teaching & Assessment (13 Weeks)	S1 Teaching & Assessment (13 Weeks)
9					
10					
11		S1 Teaching & Assessment (12 Weeks)	S1 Teaching & Assessment (12 Weeks)		
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					
21	Marking	Marking	Marking	Marking	Marking
22	Vacation	Vacation	Vacation	Vacation	Vacation
23					
24	Marking	Marking	Marking	Marking	Marking
25	S2 Teaching & Assessment (11 weeks)	Marking / Induction	Marking / Induction		Marking / Induction
26					
27				S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)	
28					S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)
29		S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)	S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)		
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35					
36	Vacation	Vacation	Vacation	Vacation	Vacation
37					
38					
39	S2 Teaching & Assessment (4 weeks)	S2 Teaching & Assessment (3 Weeks)	S2 Teaching & Assessment (3 Weeks)	S2 Teaching Assessment (3 weeks)	S2 Teaching & Assessment (3 weeks)
40					
41					
42	Marking	Marking	Marking	Marking	Marking
43					
44					
45					
46					
47					
48					
49	Resits	Resits	Resits	Resits	Resits
50					
51	Marking			Marking	Marking
52		Marking	Marking		
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

BACKGROUND TO STUDENT RECRUITMENT REQUIREMENTS

Optimise the conditions for recruitment to Intakes A and B for international students.

The University has taken a strategic decision to increase the number of international students, in particular postgraduate students. It is essential for the institution's financial sustainability that growth targets are achieved. It is therefore important that our academic year arrangements recognise the challenges and timelines that exist for international students.

It is apparent that there is a general perception that UK universities start teaching in late September from key bodies such as UKVI (in considering the timing for student Visa applications); external sponsorship bodies (in considering timing for scholarship awards that are required for us to issue CAS[14] to students) and our international applicants and recruitment agents. Applicants and agents will be applying/researching many different UK universities. They develop an understanding of when the sector as a whole starts and plan on the basis. Our University should therefore aim not to be an outlier with regard to academic year start date and to align with other UK institutions.

In short, this final stage of conversion, post acceptance and after CAS is issued but prior to registration, is complex and challenging and institutions across the UK are in strong competition for these students (who may well hold CAS from more than one university). It is essential to provide as much space as possible at this time to allow students to make the progress they require to register at the University of Aberdeen. Any attrition through the various stages has financial implications for the institution. These are dedicated, committed students who wish to join to study at the University of Aberdeen, but some simply will not be able to through no fault of their own based on the potentially restrictive timeframes involved here. A key aim is therefore to mitigate this attrition as much as possible.

Optimise the conditions for recruitment to Intakes A and B for UK students.

Timing of exam results for domestic students and impact on start dates

- Opportunities for those with conditional offers to achieve conditions. As well as in the UK, internationally prospective students are waiting for exam results (school and undergraduate degree) across late Spring and into summer. This impacts on those applicants being able to achieve conditions of their offer and any delay to exam periods eats into the time that applicants have to accept their offer and move to the next stage of the process.

- School exam results and impact on offering places in Clearing. A Level results day in 2023 is Thursday 17 August and the equivalent date in 2024 would be 15 August – only just over **two weeks** before a start date of 2 September. Yet offering places in Clearing extends until well after a week after A Level results day. Clearing applicants will probably be applying to Aberdeen for the first time; they will have very limited time to plan for moving to Aberdeen – asking them to make that decision in less than two weeks will inevitably impact on the conversion of these applicants. This Summer we made 428 Clearing offers to international and RUK applicants and had 173 acceptances (40% conversion rate). Every 10% of those 428 offers that converts (assuming that they are all RUK and not the higher-level international fees level) is equivalent to annual income of almost 400K (42.8 X 9250) and total income of £1.6M (42.8 * 37K).

- In respect of students joining us through College pathways with an HNC or HND, we require confirmation of exam results from Colleges which can also be delayed close to the start of term.

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[14] Certificate of Acceptance for Studies, the document we need to provide to applicants in order for them to apply for a Student Visa.

Future School Holiday Dates (Academic Year 2022/23 to 2024/25)

TERM 1	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**
In-Service Day	Mon 22/08/22	Mon 22/08/22	Mon 21/08/23	Mon 21/08/23	Mon 19/08/24	Mon 19/08/24
Term Starts	Tue 23/08/22	Tue 23/08/22	Tue 22/08/23	Tue 22/08/23	Tue 20/08/24	Tue 20/08/24
Sept Holiday	Fri 23/09/22 – Mon 26/09/22	Mon 19/09/22	Fri 22/09/23 – Mon 25/09/23		Fri 20/09/24 – Mon 23/09/24	
Term Ends	Fri 14/10/22	Fri 14/10/22	Fri 13/10/23	Fri 13/10/23	Fri 11/10/24	Fri 11/10/24
Oct Holiday	Mon 17/10/22 – Fri 28/10/22	Mon 17/10/22 – Fri 28/10/22	Mon 16/10/23 – Fri 27/10/23	Mon 16/10/23 – Fri 27/10/23	Mon 14/10/24 – Fri 25/10/24	Mon 14/10/24 – Fri 25/10/24

TERM 2	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**
Term Starts	Mon 31/10/22	Mon 31/10/22	Mon 30/10/23	Mon 30/10/23	Mon 28/10/24	Mon 28/10/24
In-Service Day	Fri 18/11/22	Thu 17/11/22 – Fri 18/11/22	Fri 17/11/23	Thu 16/11/23 – Fri 17/11/23	Fri 15/11/24	Thu 14/11/24 – Fri 15/11/24
Term Ends	Thu 22/12/22	Fri 23/12/22	Thu 21/12/23	Fri 22/12/23	Fri 20/12/24	Fri 20/12/24
Christmas Holiday	Fri 23/12/22 – Fri 06/01/23	Mon 26/12/22 – Fri 06/01/23	Fri 22/12/23 – Fri 05/01/24	Mon 25/12/23 – Fri 05/01/24	Mon 23/12/24 – Fri 03/01/25	Mon 23/12/24 – Fri 03/01/25

TERM 3	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**
Term Starts	Mon 09/01/23	Mon 09/01/23	Mon 08/01/24	Mon 08/01/24	Mon 06/01/25	Mon 06/01/25
Mid-Term Holiday	Mon 13/02/23	Mon 13/02/23	Mon 12/02/24	Mon 12/02/24	Mon 10/02/25	Mon 10/02/25
In-Service Day	Tue 14/02/23 – Wed 15/02/23	Tue 14/02/23 – Wed 15/02/23	Tue 13/02/24 – Wed 14/02/24	Tue 13/02/24 – Wed 14/02/24	Tue 11/02/25 – Wed 12/02/25	Tue 11/02/25 – Wed 12/02/25
Term Ends	Fri 31/03/23	Fri 31/03/23	Fri 29/03/24	Thu 28/03/24	Fri 28/03/25	Fri 28/03/25
Spring Holiday	Mon 04/04/23 – Fri 14/04/23	Mon 04/04/23 – Fri 14/04/23	Mon 01/04/24 – Fri 12/04/24	Fri 29/03/24 – Fri 12/04/24	Mon 31/03/25 – Fri 11/04/25	Mon 31/03/25 – Fri 11/04/25

TERM 4	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**	**CITY**	**SHIRE**
Term Starts	Mon 17/04/23	Mon 17/04/23	Mon 15/04/24	Mon 15/04/24	Mon 14/04/25	Mon 14/04/25
Good Friday					Fri 18/04/25	Fri 18/04/25
May Day Holiday	Mon 01/05/23	Mon 01/05/23	Mon 06/01/24	Mon 06/01/24	Mon 05/05/25	Mon 05/05/25
In-Service Day	Tue 02/05/23		Tue 07/05/24		Tue 06/05/25	Tue 06/05/25
Term Ends	Fri 07/07/23	Fri 07/07/23	Fri 05/07/24	Fri 05/07/24	Fri 04/07/25	Fri 04/07/25

<u>**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Impact Assessment**</u>

Title of Policy, Procedure, or Function: **FUTURE ACADEMIC YEAR STRUCTURE**	
School/Directorate: **Academic Services**	
Author/Position: **Jason Bohan, Dean for Student Support and Experience**	**Date created:** **11/5/23**

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1. Aims and purpose of Policy, Procedure, or Function:

The purpose of the paper is to agree an academic year structure for 2024/25 which will:

(vi)   Ensure appropriate allocation of time for the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment so that students are provided with sufficient time to undertake all programme requirements.
(vii) Facilitate opportunities to enhance workload planning through a transparent full-year structure, and provide opportunities to create further time for research.
(viii) Ensure that the structure facilitates the Aberdeen 2040 Education Commitments.
(ix)   Facilitate optimal student recruitment opportunities.
(x)   Provide opportunities to further enhance the student experience in relation to, for example, student preparedness and transition into university and subsequent study years.

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2. Stakeholders:

- Students
- Academics
- Professional Services

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3. Additional Consultation/Involvement

Organisation/person consulted or involved	Date, method, and by whom	Location of consultation records
SMT	23 March 2023	See associated minutes for these meetings
<u>Academic view</u> Joint Meeting of EEC and SSEC	27 March 2023	
Qatar Academic Planning Group	By circulation	
UEC	23 March 2023	
QAC	29 March 2023	
Heads of School	29 March 2023	
SRC	*Via Teams*	

a) **Brief summary of results of consultation indicating how this has affected the Policy, Procedure, or Function**

The current paper summarises the feedback received vi the last round of consultation. In the previous paper there were four options presented describing the academic year and the consultation proved effective in identifying a preferred structure with further amendments. This consultation was successful in identifying a preferred structure however did require further amendments. Based on the feedback from this round of consultations the revised recommendations to be further considered for an academic view are:

i. Put in place a three-term structure for the academic year (AY).
ii. Commence teaching w/c 23 September 2024 (week 9 of AY) with Welcome Week w/c 16 September 2024 (week 8 of AY) to optimise student recruitment activity.
iii. Implement 13-week terms for terms 1 and 2, including one floating week; and a 12 week term 3 with no floating week (PGT teaching in term 3). (See Principle (ii) for explanation of reason for 12-week term 3).
iv. Align University holidays, as far as possible, with school holidays in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire for the Winter break and the Spring break (see Principle (v) for comment on Summer school holidays).
v. Implement an 'Induction/Transition and Employability Week' (ITEW) at the beginning of terms 1 and 2.
vi. Complete all term 1 assessment prior to the Winter break.
vii. Complete marking in the 3-week window prior to the start of the next term.

Utilise 'term' as the terminology for the teaching periods. However, it was felt that more colleagues needed to be given the opportunity to comment and feedback on the proposed structure and so the attached paper is presented again for academic view.

4. Monitoring

a) **Detail method of monitoring of the Policy, Procedure or Function and by whom**

Consultation with colleagues in Student Support, Disability, and members of EDIC were consulted in preparing the EQIA. Ongoing monitoring will be conducted by Academic Services with further discussion at relevant committees, SMT, UEC, SSEC, QAC, and Senate overseen by the VP for Education and the EQIA revised accordingly if required.

b) **Detail how monitoring results will be utilised to develop the Policy, Procedure, or Function**

Ongoing feedback will be collated, analysed and discussed with appropriate committees, groups and networks.

c) **Timescale of monitoring including proposed dates**

Consultation is currently on-going and the paper will be discussed at various committees for further academic view prior to seeking approval, with the intention of being introduced for AY 2024, however equality impact concerns will continue to be considered at all stages of this project.

5. Impact assessment

Select what impact there will be on each group:

Characteristic	Positive Impact	No Impact	Negative Impact	Not Applicable
Race		X		
Disability (impact may differ according to physical, cognitive, and mental health conditions and impairments):			X	
British Sign Language (BSL)			X	
Neurodivergent			X	
Gender		X		
Age		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Religion, Belief or No Belief			X	
Gender Reassignment		X		
Non-Binary		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Parents and Carers	X			
Care Experienced or Estranged		X		
Socio-Economic Group		X		

a) For each negative impact identified above, please state your mitigating actions below with timescales.

There are potential impacts for current students with disabilities, particularly neurodivergence, in relation to learning styles and assessment preparation, where they transition from the current to a new academic year structure. Where there are such changes consideration will need to be given about the support required through our specialist teams (e.g. Student Support) and from Schools to overcome this potential impact and gap between learning and assessment. This will be particularly the case for UG students where this change may come part way through a programme and require a change to learning approaches in a single programme.

Students with disabilities need to be assessed by the student support team in term 1 for their exam provisions to be put in place or reviewed by late October/early November. This has implication for staff workload in this team and for Schools who also require clarity on provisions as early as possible. Whilst models offering a later assessment period are preferable, the proposed model is broadly similar to current provision and further thought may need to be given to how best to manage this workload. Failure to do so can result in increased volume of emails, student anxiety, and increased number of GC/MCs.

A later start date between students receiving their UF and the start of term is preferable for students with disabilities to allow the Disability Team to put in place the support that they require, for example technology and equipment funded by Disabled Students Allows (DSA) or arranging non-medical help such as BSL or note-taking.

There are potential impacts in relation to religious festivals and the interplay new term dates have on key festivals. This will need to be considered during any transition period and particularly with regard to flexibility for such festival in line with our normal processes. In reality any AY structure will benefit some and not others, however the universities Religion and Belief Policy addresses our commitment to fairness for all and implications on education and assessments should be considered throughout implementation to ensure that no groups are discriminated against.

b) How does this Policy, Procedure, or Function contribute to eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and advancing equality of opportunity?

This paper is aimed at establishing an inclusive educational experience for all students and supportive working conditions for staff. One goal of this paper has been to align academic weeks and holiday periods with local school holidays where possible. As such, this may advance equality of opportunity for staff and students who are parents, however providing a clear and transparent academic year structure, especially recognising the existing teaching that occurs during 'term 3' will be greatly beneficial for both staff and students.

c) How is the Policy, Procedure, or Function likely to promote good relations between people with different protected characteristics?

The current paper has developed a proposed new structure to the academic year that attempt to articulate our Aberdeen 2040 ambitions for Education through a set of principles underpinning the proposed structure. As such this paper aims to promote good relations between all members of the academic community, however principal (v) explicitly aims to address that EDI concerns when planning the AY. The 8 principles are:

(i) *Provide a structure that supports our Aberdeen 2040 Education ambitions*
(ii) *A consistent and transparent structure of three equal terms across UG and PGT provision to provide adequate time for teaching, learning and assessment*
(iii) *All first term assessment completed prior to the Winter break*
(iv) *Marking completed in 3-week window prior to start of next term*
(v) *Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 1: school, public and religious holidays*
(vi) *Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 2: optimal orientation and induction opportunities so as to enhance the preparation and readiness of students for university, their studies and wider student life*
(vii) *Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 3: Equality Impact Assessment*
(viii) *Academic year start date late enough to optimise recruitment activity, including the Clearing period following school exam results, timing of release of school results more generally, UKVI requirements and timing of the confirmation of external scholarships*

7. Publication

a) Provide details of arrangements to publish assessment:

This Equality Impact Assessment will be published on the Policy and Governance webpage where other EIAs sit. It will be shared with the staff and student equality networks and through the staff and student's newsletter.

8. Review Date: See paper

Author (Name and Position): Jason Bohan, Dean for Student Support
Authors signature:

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Team member (name):
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Team member signature:

9. Date of submission to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee: To be circulated to EDIC once comments/revisions of the paper have been made
Approval Yes ☐   **No** ☐

Feedback from Committees and Groups on the Academic Year Structure Options

Please note that, in the process of developing the options, a consultation took place as noted within the paper. This feedback is based on the options as presented in the Senate paper.

All feedback will be considered in the process of developing the final proposal for consideration at the relevant committees.

The feedback is summarised in this table, with further detail available in the minutes of the committee meetings. In addition, in italics, a response is provided to the comments.

University Education Committee
- Difference of views re timing of assessment/exams (before or after the Winter break) with similar points made to those in the paper. *Addressed in section 7.1(iii)*   - With respect to the above, options 3 and 4 could be difficult for students with children as it could be difficult for them to study during the school holidays while caring for their children. *Options 3 and 4 removed from proposal*   - Welcome the equal three terms and transparent recognition of the teaching that already goes on. One comment on the nomenclature (T1, T2, T3) for January starts. *Addressed in section 7.1(ii)*   - Option 4 overlays teaching and marking which is not seen as favourable. *Option 4 removed from proposal*   - Implications for the Library should assessment take place after the Winter break – staffing and other costs. Library would want to consider opening over the Winter break if this is required. *Not relevant to option 1*   - A number of comments on teaching after the Winter break – disjointed, lack of cohesive structure, concerns about attendance. Noted similar for Spring break [although options have longer teaching period after Spring break. Need to encourage students to attend for all teaching. *No teaching after Winter break. Longer period of teaching after Spring break.*   - Pushing taught content into later in the academic year (options 3 and 4) would be problematic for research activity. *Options 3 and 4 removed from proposal*   - Noted that Qatar has been part of the discussion, with preferences for option 3 or option 1 due to time available for recruitment. *Noted and addressed with option 1*   - The flexibility within the structure is welcome – for revision and reading weeks. *Noted and flexibility retained*   - Noted that some fieldwork takes place across the Spring break so some adjustments would need to be made to the timing of fieldwork (as part of a complex structure for fieldwork across the year in Geosciences, for example). *Further feedback provided from Senate and adjustment to length of Spring break has been proposed*   - Overall, options 3 and 4 were least popular, with option 1 being seen (overall) as the best compromise. Option 2 seen as not so suitable from a recruitment perspective. *Noted and reflected in proposal to go with option 1*

Student Support and Experience Committee/Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee
- The recognition of a clear three term structure was welcomed, including defined marking weeks. *Addressed in section 7.1(ii)*   - It was unanimous that completing the term one ahead of the Winter break was preferred. This was affirmed by AUSA representatives from a student perspective. *Addressed in option 1*   - Options 3 and 4 were the least popular, with Option 1 favourable in terms of student recruitment as opposed to Option 2. Option 1 was also favoured by colleagues in Qatar as a result of the additional recruitment time. *Option 1 presented in this proposal*   - Concerns that there is no clear timeframe for completion of marking ahead of sending to Registry, in time for them being processed for graduation. Similarly, the turnaround time for marking, moderation and examiner's meetings seems very tight across all options. *Noted – the marking timelines are approved annually by QAC and adhere to agreed 3 week turnaround for*

feedback to students as set out in the Feedback Framework. These timelines also align with the minimum 2 week timeframe necessary for graduation preparations.

- A couple of comments that it would be useful for T1 and T2 to follow the same pattern. *Comment is understood, but it is not possible due to the timing of the Winter and Spring breaks*
- Difference of views regarding the level of teaching/contact time, with some suggesting shorter teaching terms as is the case in other Universities, and others suggesting that the shorter teaching term would be impracticable for those with accreditation requirements. *13 week (T1 and T2) and 12 week (T3) terms*
- With the current proposed models there will be a week less teaching, suggestions that quality assurance processes need to take place to ensure the right number of contact teaching hours is embedded. *There is not a week less for teaching than the university has had in recent years. QAC reviews contact time as part of the approval process for new courses. Consistent three-term structure ensures consistency in teaching period for delivery of 60 credits across all three terms (noting no flexible week in Term 3 (PGT)).*
- Consideration should be given to the disability processes which can only be completed once a student has received an unconditional firm offer, thus a longer gap between school exam results and the start of term would be welcome. *Option 1 has a later start date than option 2 which should assist with this issue*
- From a student welfare viewpoint, it was proposed that a mapping exercise across the Schools could be carried out to see if/when there might be a culmination of assessments happening. *A project (Transforming the Student Experience Through Assessment, TESTA) is in place. Schools can review assessment across programmes and make adjustments as needed*

Quality Assurance Committee

- Generally, support for teaching and assessment in T1 completed before Winter break. Issues with student placements (education) will arise if teaching extends beyond the Winter break. *In place in option 1*
- Concerns that the recognition of a T3 will formalize more teaching across the summer months, particularly in relation to the fieldwork/field courses that already take place in the summer months. One comment that the recognition of a T3 might inspire Programme Leads to reorder January start programmes, which would not be preferable. *See section 7.1(ii)*
- Concerns that there will be a lack of engagement with any teaching after the Spring break. *Extended period of teaching after Spring break (compared to previously)*
- T3 ending late in the summer is problematic, particularly in terms of graduate schemes/employment. *Options 3 and 4 removed from proposal*
- Importance of considering the religious holidays, particularly in Qatar, where there may be restrictions on the activities that can take place during particular holidays/periods. *See* section 7.1(v)
- Avoiding an overlap between induction and marking would be useful, wherever possible – Option 4 not seen as favourable in this regard. *Option 4 removed from proposal*
- Generally, Options 3 and 4 were not seen as favourable. Options 1 and 2 appeared to be most popular. *Noted*

Senior Management Team

- Importance of ensuring adequate time for optimal recruitment. *Noted and option 1 allows for longer time for recruitment than option 2*
- Helpful to articulate the principles and evaluate the options against these principles. *Noted*
- The importance of ensuring that the paper is clear that the three terms proposal is about articulating what currently happens (i.e., teaching is delivered in the university across the full academic year), making that transparent but not proposing changes to current expectations around delivery of teaching, and the importance of appropriate workload management as part of an overall approach to address workload concerns and create further time for research. *See section 7.1(ii)*
- Naming of the terms as 1,2, and 3 is helpful. *Noted and in proposal*
- The structure presents opportunities for institution-wide activities with the induction/transition weeks. See section 7.1(i)
-

Heads of School

- A number of comments on the three terms and clarified that this is about formalising what is already taking place in areas across the university. *See section 7.1(ii)*

- Noted the need for Schools to manage workload. *See section 8.2*
- Terms are useful in making transparent the beginning and end of activities. *See section 9*
- Field trips and Spring break: Engineering identified that the reduction of a week may prove challenging, whereas SBS is managing field trips across a longer timeline and the proposed change should not impact in the same way. *Spring break adjusted in the proposal*
- Noted the need to not start too early to maximise student recruitment. *Option 1 identified as later than option 2 start date*
- The costs of travel for international travel for students traveling just before the Winter break are likely to be high (relates to the timing of the end of term). *Noted and considered in the context of all other feedback*

Student Recruitment Committee

- Importance of active management of teaching commitment and the relevant communication in the move to 3 Terms, as well as the potential for increased transparency to improve workload management. *Noted and will ensure communication is appropriate*
- The nomenclature of Term and an associated number may be confusing for students, particularly for January Start students. Suggested that Autumn Term, Spring Term, and Summer Term would be less confusing. *See section 9*
- The reduction by a week for Spring break might be problematic for fieldwork; would be useful to include an option which retains the three-week Spring break. *See section 7.1(ii)*
- While a very thorough evaluation of pros and cons are presented, there is little discussion on the impact that the various proposals will have on research activity. *Further sections on workload implications are provided*
- Some comments that Options 3 and 4 will not be able to deliver on principles (iii) and (iv). *Removed from proposal*
- Overall, Options 1 and 3 were favoured, particularly in relation to a student recruitment and student experience perspective, as well as the conclusion of teaching prior to the Winter break. Options 2 and 4 seen as not so suitable. *Option 1 is presented*

Qatar Academic Planning Group

- Importance in Options 3 and 4 for optimal recruitment opportunity. Support for Option 3, in particular, placing less stress on staff. *Considered along with all other comments relating to the latest start dates*
- Support for the nomenclature introducing three terms as opposed to half-sessions/ semesters. *Noted*

Other Feedback

- One School indicated a clear preference for models 1 and 2 with these being felt to be better for international students and ensuring completion of assessment before the break. *Noted*
- One School welcomed the focus on the 12-month PGT academic programme across three terms and also the proposals to support time within the academic year structure for induction and orientation in January. They noted some concern about the implications of the proposals in terms of teaching delivery and assessment and the impact on research time and staff workloads. The need for a revision period was also noted to allow students time to prepare for assessments and the tight turnaround times for marking. *Noted and addressed in various sections*

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND STANDARDS REVIEW: FINDINGS

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

> The purpose of this paper is to provide members of the UEC with the findings of the recent Quality Enhancement and Standards Review by the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS), which took place on 14 February 2023. In particular, the paper notes that the Review team is **confident** in the University's progress.
>
> Members of the Committee are invited to **discuss** the findings of the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	Court	26 April 2023
Further consideration/ approval required by	UEC	16 May 2023
	QAC	18 May 2023

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

> Members of the UEC are invited to discuss the findings of the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review detailed in the Report attached as **Appendix A**.

4.   BACKGROUND

4.1   The Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) review process, Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), completed its fourth and final cycle in 2021/22. ELIR has been replaced by a new external institutional review methodology which will be a two-phase approach as follows:

- **Phase 1:** Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR)/Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) (2022/23-2023/24)
- **Phase 2:** Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) (2024/25 onwards)

4.2   The new external institutional review method is being developed in the context of a major Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Review: *Coherent Provision and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research*. A key outcome of this review to date, has recommended the development of a new Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF). The TQEF will cover both Further and Higher Education provision under a single framework. The requirements to comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) also influenced the revised process along with a comprehensive evaluation of ELIR 4. The new TQEF is being developed in close consultation with the sector and is due for implementation in 2024/25.

4.3   Pending completion of the development of the TQEF, there is a need for continued external review of quality to ensure the SFC can fulfil its statutory obligations under section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* in regard to quality assurance and enhancement. As such, the QAAS have implemented a phased approach to quality enhancement arrangements, with Phase 1 commencing in

2022/23-2023/24, and Phase 2 commencing in 2024/25, coinciding with the publication and launch of the TQEF.

4.4   During the two academic years which comprise Phase 1 (2022/23 and 2023/24) an institution will undergo QESR during one and will have an Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) in the other. The relative timing of QESR and ILM are driven by the timing of ELIR 4 and, as an institution who underwent ELIR early in the cycle, the University's QESR visit took place in 2022/23 with an ILM being scheduled for 2023/24.

4.5   The Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) for the University took place on 14 February 2023, following a comprehensive submission of required documentation. On the day, a number of sessions took place with the Review panel:

- Session with HEI Key Contacts
- Session with Students
- Session with Quality Assurance-focused Staff
- Session with Quality Enhancement-focused Staff

5.   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.1   There are only two possible outcomes from this process: confident, or not confident. The Review team reached the following conclusion for the University of Aberdeen: "From the evidence presented, the review team is **confident** that the institution is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience." In addition, four areas of good practice were identified, and only two recommendations for action both of which the Review team understood were actions already being taken forward by the University. These are summarised below and outlined in detail in the report, attached as **Appendix A.**

5.2   The report has been reviewed for factual accuracy by the Vice-Principal (Education), Dean for Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Director of Academic Services and Online Education, and returned to QAA Scotland. The report was published on the QAAS website on 11 April 2023.

5.3   The QESR report identified the following areas of good practice:

5.3.1 *Effective implementation of University strategies:* the University has an effective approach to strategic planning in relation to teaching and learning, particularly the engagement with the strategy and its underpinning action plans.

5.3.2 *Engagement with Enhancement Themes:* the University has successfully embedded learning from the national Enhancement Themes, particularly in relation to institutional policy and practice.

5.3.3 *An Inclusive Approach to Blended Education/Learning and Teaching:* the University has made significant progress with its vision for blended education, effectively using learning and recommendations from its in-depth review and evaluation of blended and online learning to develop the vision for education.

5.3.4 *Student Partnership:* the University and Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) have a long-standing, embedded and collaborative relationship based on partnership working across all aspects of University life.

5.4   In terms of identified recommendations, the QESR report identified the following:

5.4.1 *Student Access to External Examiner Reports* (**QAC**)*:* ensuring the publication of External Examiner reports by the end of the academic year 2022/23. Progress is being made to develop communications to Schools and to students in this regard.

5.4.2 *Personal Tutoring* (**UEC, via SSEC**)*:* continuing work to finalise the University's approach to personal tutoring arrangements, ensuring the provision of equity of experience for all students, and that the

support is clearly communicated by the end of the academic year 2022/23. Progress is being made to consolidate this information and to present it to students in a meaningful way.

5.5   Next steps include the development of an action plan, which will follow from the recommendations made by the review team and will be approved through the University Education Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee, with ongoing monitoring taking place. The Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) which forms part of the follow-up to the QESR visit will take place on 23 January 2024.

6.   FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education (ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk) Steve Tucker, Dean for Quality Assurance and Enhancement (s.j.tucker@abdn.ac.uk), and Gillian Mackintosh, Director of Academic Services and Online Education (g.mackintosh@abdn.ac.uk)

4 April 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

University of Aberdeen

Review Report

February 2023

Contents

Introduction

This is a report of a review under the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review](#) (QESR) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of Phase 1 of the Scottish Quality Enhancement arrangements at the University of Aberdeen.

The review took place on 14 February 2023 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Mr Rory O'Neill (Student Reviewer)
- Ms Katrina Swanton (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Dr Gillian Thomson (Academic Reviewer)

QESR is Phase 1 of a two-phase approach that enables the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to ensure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies for academic quality and enhancement between 2022-24.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- provide assurance about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards to inform an enhancement-led full institutional review in Phase 2
- provide assurance about the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students to inform an enhancement-led full review in Phase 2
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

About the University of Aberdeen

Founded in 1495, the University of Aberdeen is one of Scotland's four ancient universities.

The Aberdeen 2040 Strategy states that the University remains committed to its foundational purpose of being open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others. The University achieves its purpose through excellence in its core activities of education and research. The 20 Commitments in Aberdeen 2040 are underpinned by its four Strategic Themes which, over the next 20 years, will shape the University's learning, discovery and actions. The Themes are inclusive, interdisciplinary, international and sustainable.

The University describes itself as offering a flexible undergraduate curriculum that encourages students to grow as independent learners, with its degree programmes combining breadth and depth. The postgraduate curriculum is growing and, as with the undergraduate curriculum, draws from the University's research.

The University currently offers over 600 undergraduate and over 380 taught postgraduate degree programmes, many of which are professionally accredited, across a wide range of disciplines, with the latest statistics showing it has approximately 21,500 students, with approximately 685 studying on transnational campuses and 1055 studying online. The University currently has 3,600 staff.

The University has two campuses: one is at King's College in Old Aberdeen; and a second campus, accommodating Medicine, Dentistry, Medical Science and Nutrition, is located

adjacent to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. The University established a partnership with Al Faleh Group (AFG) College in Doha in 2017 which sits alongside other transnational education partnerships.

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is **confident** that the University of Aberdeen is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Good practice

The QESR team found the following **features of good practice:**

- **Effective implementation of University strategies:** The University has an effective approach to strategic planning in relation to learning and teaching, with a particular strength being the widespread engagement with, and ownership of, the University Strategy and its underpinning action plans, by staff and students. Among all staff there is a clear understanding of how the strategy and action plans inform institutional priorities, supported by appropriate monitoring and evaluation of impact to ensure the achievement of strategic goals (paragraph 13).

- **Engagement with the Enhancement Themes:** The University has successfully embedded learning from the national Enhancement Themes, enabling Theme priorities to be realised in a wide range of institutional policy and practice including ongoing work to decolonise the curriculum. Student interns play active roles in the delivery of the University's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) of Themes-related projects and the institution adopts a range of approaches to effectively share practice including a cross-institutional community of practice which is valued by staff (paragraph 14).

- **An inclusive approach to blended education/learning and teaching:** The University has made significant progress with its vision for blended education. It has effectively used the learning and recommendations from its in-depth review and evaluation of blended and online learning and assessment practice to support the development of its vision for Education, its Principles for the Delivery of Education and a comprehensive suite of support materials and resources for both students and staff (paragraph 36).

- **Student partnership:** The University and Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) have a long-standing, embedded and collaborative relationship which is based on genuine and effective partnership working across all aspects of university life. This relationship brings a wide range of benefits including representative structures that support the diversity of the student population, students as engaged members of strategic Task and Finish Groups, and the successful development of the student intern role which provides effective opportunities for students to play a full part in the development of university policy and practice associated with learning, teaching and the wider student experience (paragraph 20).

Recommendations for action

The QESR team makes the following recommendations for action:

- **Student access to external examiner reports:** Ensure that all students have access to external examiner reports for their programme of study by the end of academic year 2022-23 (paragraph 30).

- **Personal tutoring:** Continue work to finalise the University's approach to personal tutoring arrangements, to ensure it provides equity of experience for the University's changing student population, particularly postgraduate taught students, and the support provided is clearly communicated to all students by the end of academic year 2022-23 (paragraph 29).

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

1   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to appropriately monitor and review its strategic approach to enhancement. The team considered a range of documents, including the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy and its implementation plan, the Education Action Plan, Principles for the Delivery of Education, SFC Outcome Agreement report, and minutes from meetings of key institutional committees with responsibility for quality and standards, and for learning, teaching and the wider student experience. In addition, the team met with staff and students during the review visit.

2   The University's Strategy - Aberdeen 2040 - sets out the direction of the University for the next 20 years and is focused on four strategic themes: 'inclusive, interdisciplinary, international and sustainable'. The Strategy also responds to five interdisciplinary challenges which the University is committed to tackling. Aberdeen 2040 sets out a range of commitments with respect to each of the strategic themes, with a core set of strategic themes for education and research. A comprehensive implementation plan to 2025 has been developed to facilitate the delivery of Aberdeen 2040 over an initial five-year period, along with a detailed action plan, which is updated on a rolling annual basis. The University Senior Management Team (SMT) has responsibility for the implementation plan and detailed action plan with progress reviewed at least twice per year. Each of the academic schools and professional services also produce annual plans with a focus on delivery and support for education and research.

3   Staff and students confirmed that a comprehensive and collaborative consultation was carried out to support the development of the Strategy with appropriate opportunities provided to contribute. Students who met the QESR team had a clear understanding of the aims of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy and its four strategic themes, and provided the QESR team with a number of examples where its implementation was already impacting positively on aspects of their studies and student life. These include students being involved in the University's project to decolonise the curriculum and the use of student interns in a number of the Task and Finish Groups (paragraph 6) which have been established to support the delivery of the University's vision for education.

4   The staff met by the QESR team also had a clear understanding of the aims and themes of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy and spoke very positively about the impact that the Principles for the Delivery of Education are having on their approaches to teaching and learning (paragraph 7). The team heard from staff that the themes contained within Aberdeen 2040 were, in a number of instances, seen as directly aligning with professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements for those disciplines undergoing accreditation. Staff also confirmed that the themes within the Strategy are being used by the academic schools during the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process, where staff found them useful to align to in order to effectively communicate work being done (paragraph 41).

5   The University's vision for education, aligning with the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy, is set out in a five-year, high-level Education Action Plan (to 2025), which has been developed to 'recognise that Education at the University of Aberdeen encompasses a broad range of areas and some of which go beyond the Aberdeen 2040 aims and actions'. In addition the University has developed a more detailed annual plan of activities which is updated on a rolling annual basis. This suite of documents explains the University's 'Education Strategy'. The Vice-Principal Education has responsibility for delivery of the Education Strategy, with oversight and monitoring provided by the University Education Committee (UEC). The University's vision for Education is based on five principles: 'Nurture active learning; Make

most effective use of in-person teaching; Assessment should be authentic and efficient; Provide timely and meaningful feedback; Ensure accessibility and inclusivity'. The QESR team notes the comprehensive nature of both the Education and Annual Action Plans which clearly set out the University's approach, and that their development has usefully drawn on reviews of the institution's practice implemented during the pandemic (paragraphs 32-36).

6   A number of Task and Finish Groups (TFGs) and Steering Groups, involving both staff and student interns (paragraph 17) from across the University, have been established to support the implementation of the Education Action Plan. These groups report progress and findings to a range of committees including UEC, and are used as an effective mechanism to share good practice across the University. The QESR team learned from staff that the Aberdeen 2040 Delivery of Education has been, and the Graduate Attributes and Skills TFGs will be, instrumental in the delivery of the education strategic objectives. The International Experience TFG is working in conjunction with other TFGs, to develop approaches to support virtual student mobility with the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) pilot being an early example of developing practice. In addition, the Transforming Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) pilot is already generating a real eagerness among the staff involved to try different forms of assessment. Staff outlined that the TESTA pilots are already starting to deliver practical changes including approaches to formative feedback, and inclusivity and accessibility within assessment design.

7   The QESR team learned that during 2020-21, a range of approaches was used to capture student and staff views on the blended delivery of teaching, learning and assessment, and the Evaluation of Blended Learning report was produced (paragraphs 3 and 32). The QESR team is impressed by how the University has used this information to develop its Principles for the Delivery of Education for Academic Year 2022-23, which have been designed to align to and support the education strand of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy (paragraph 2).

8   School Directors of Education play a key role, along with staff and student members of each School Education Committee, in embedding the University's vision for education and its associated action plans, including monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes. The School Director of Education role is an effective conduit for supporting the implementation of institutional strategy within the academic schools and supporting the sharing of good practice.

9   The QESR team can confirm that the University has appropriate plans and mechanisms in place to support it to effectively engage with the Scottish Enhancement Themes, including the current Resilient Learning Communities Theme, for which the University's Vice-Principal Education is Deputy Theme Leader and a member of the QAA Scotland Theme Leadership Team, providing strategic leadership to support the delivery of the Theme. The Dean for Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement and the student Vice-President Education are also members of the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG). The University's Year 3 plan outlines the University's cross-institutional approach to the delivery of its Themes' work, which is aligned to the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy (paragraphs 2-5), its approach to digital/online learning (paragraphs 32-36), and involves staff and students working in partnership.

10   At the time of this review, the University's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) was funding over 20 active projects related to the current Enhancement Theme including staff and student mental wellbeing and accessibility for all, with more projects planned for the final year of the Theme (2022-23). Many of the LTEP projects involve student interns, who are also part of the University's wider student intern network

(paragraph 17). Staff who met the QESR team discussed the specific example of a project where student interns were developing an evidence base on how care-experience students use the University student services.

11   The QESR team understands that outcomes from the LTEP projects will be presented at the University's annual Academic Symposium on Resilient Learning Communities in April 2023. Both the annual Academic Symposium and an institution Community of Practice (with representation from all the academic schools and the professional services areas) are being used to share developments in policy and practice related to the University's Enhancement Themes work and the implementation of the Education Strategy.

12   The University also contributes to wider Themes work including the 'Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland' project, the 'Anti-Racist Curriculum Project' and the 'Valuing and Recognising Prior Learning and Experience' project. The QESR team heard that staff have been actively encouraged to share the Enhancement Themes projects and resources they are working on by submitting proposals to conferences, and in June 2023 the University will host an international sector conference which aims to share practice and celebrate higher education, focusing on compassionate approaches to education, and will positively promote the achievements of the current Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme. The team understands that through linkages with the sector-wide Anti-Racist Curriculum Project, the University's Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group is developing a set of principles and working on a suite of resources to support the academic schools to make changes to their curriculums. The University is also continuing to work on the development of a toolkit of case studies and resources from its Theme-related projects.

13   The QESR team has identified as **good practice** the University's effective approach to strategic planning in relation to learning and teaching, with a particular strength being the widespread engagement with, and ownership of, the University Strategy and its underpinning action plans, by staff and students. Among all staff there is a clear understanding of how the strategy and action plans inform institutional priorities, supported by appropriate monitoring and evaluation of impact to ensure the achievement of strategic goals (paragraphs 2-5).

14   The University has successfully embedded learning from the national Enhancement Themes, enabling Theme priorities to be realised in a wide range of institutional policy and practice including ongoing work to decolonise the curriculum. Student interns play active roles in the delivery of the University's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) of Themes-related projects. The institution also adopts a range of approaches to effectively share practice including a cross-institutional community of practice, as part of its annual Academic Symposium and through the production of a range of toolkits and resources. The University actively contributes to a range of sector-level Theme work including the 'Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland' project, the 'Anti-Racist Curriculum Project' and the 'Valuing and Recognising Prior Learning and Experience' project. The QESR team has identified the University's approach as **good practice**.

Student partnership

15   The QESR team is confident that the University has an effective approach to developing and maintaining student engagement and partnership arrangements. The team considered the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) for session 2021-22, the review documents for the SPA, key committee minutes, and meetings with staff and students. The team noted that, at the time of this visit, the SPA was being reviewed by a joint working group consisting of representatives from the University and the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA). In meeting staff involved in the SPA development, the team learned that AUSA and the University are currently working together to ensure that, in the future, the SPA is more objective-focused and identifies priority actions. In meetings with the team, student representatives recognised the value of the SPA as a tool for embedding the ethos of partnership with the University and the associated engagement in supporting student partnership working between both organisations.

16   The QESR team considers the University of Aberdeen's approach to student engagement to be a particular strength, with evidence of student feedback and participation across all key processes linked to the management of quality and standards. The University has in place appropriate policies and procedures to ensure appropriate representation of students on key university committees related to quality assurance and enhancement including University Court, and Senate and its sub-committees including the University Education and Quality Assurance Committees. Students have ex-officio membership of these committees from the AUSA President and Vice-President (Education) or their nominees. Students confirmed that the University provides appropriate training to support students undertaking committee representation roles.

17   From the documentation supplied by the University on its Education Strategy (paragraphs 5 and 6), the QESR team view student involvement in each of the Task and Finish Groups (TFGs) and working groups, and the establishment of the role of student intern as particularly positive because this allows students to be equals in the decision-making associated with these groups. The team heard in meetings with staff and students, that student engagement in this way is supporting a strong culture of partnership working - for example, in areas such as Decolonising the Curriculum (paragraph 12), and appointing student interns to support on aspects of developments such as the Principles for Delivery of Education (paragraphs 33 and 34) and the TESTA pilot project (paragraph 6). Student interns who met the team expressed a great amount of ownership for the work that they are engaged with including, for example, running student focus groups, and staff also commented positively on the levels of student engagement that the institution is currently experiencing in key enhancement projects.

18   At academic school level, undergraduate and postgraduate taught student representation is through elected Class Reps who attend the Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs), and elected Student Association School Convenors who are the lead student representative for each School. Student Association School Convenors support elected class representatives and attend academic school-level committees - for example, School Education Committees. The QESR team understands that elected Postgraduate Research (PGR) student representatives are also members of the Doctoral Reps Group, which meets regularly with the PGR School to discuss PGR matters. The Doctoral Reps group provides a platform for School PGR representatives to collectively represent the PGR community. It provides a direct line of engagement between all PGR students, the PGR School and university committees. Members of the Doctoral Reps Group attend various university committees and working groups including the PGR Committee, Research Policy Committee and the PGR Task and Finish Group. Based on evidence from committee minutes and meetings with staff and students, academic staff clearly demonstrated an

openness to receiving feedback from students and addressing issues raised quickly and fully. Students commented positively on their experience as representatives, confirmed they had appropriate opportunities to give feedback on strategy and policy development and on key decisions. Students also confirmed that the class representative training provided by the AUSA had been useful and accessible to engage with and had effectively prepared them for their role.

19   The QESR team can confirm that the University offers an appropriate range of formal and informal mechanisms to allow all students, regardless of place, mode and stage of study, to feed back on their experience including participating in the National Student Survey (NSS), the Aberdeen Student Experience Survey (ASES), SSLCs, focus groups and Course Feedback Forms. Students confirmed that they are confident that this data is effectively used in decision-making across the University to improve the student experience.

20   The University and AUSA have a long-standing, embedded and collaborative relationship which is based on genuine and effective partnership working across all aspects of university life and was identified by the QESR team as **good practice**. This relationship brings a wide range of benefits to the student experience including representative structures that support the diversity of the student population and students as engaged members of strategic Task and Finish Groups. The development of the student intern role provides effective opportunities for students to play a full part in the development of university policy and practice associated with learning, teaching and the wider student experience with students often taking leadership roles in the work with which they engage. Students are clear that their contributions are valued and acted upon.

Action taken since ELIR 4

21   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review the actions taken in response to ELIR 4. The team considered the ELIR 4 follow-up report, action plan and minutes from key university committees and followed up on key areas in meetings with staff and students.

22   The evidence submitted allowed the QESR team to conclude that the University has continued to enhance and embed the commendations made during the last ELIR. For example, the University remains dedicated to its commitment to fair access and supporting student transition, linking their overarching strategic direction to their strategy for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as outlined in the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy. Examples of successfully completed initiatives include the North of Scotland University Collaborative Project and the University of Aberdeen Business School Outreach Project.

23   The QESR team learned, through meeting with senior staff, that progress with the recommendations from ELIR 4 was considered by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and presented to University Senate. The University Education Committee (UEC) has been responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the changes made in response to ELIR 4 and has ongoing responsibility to monitor and evaluate the implementation of further actions arising.

24   ELIR 4 identified seven recommendations, on each of which it is evident that the University has taken action in a systematic way, with the University's action plan providing a detailed record of progress and the status of each action. The QESR team note that three recommendations remain ongoing and no specific completion dates for these were provided in the documentation supplied. Senior university staff acknowledged that these recommendations remain ongoing and that an action plan has been compiled to ensure these would be completed by the end of this academic year.

25   Based on the evidence supplied by the University, the QESR team are content that the four completed ELIR recommendations have been appropriately addressed. The relationship between the Postgraduate Research School and the academic schools has been further developed through a range of changes including: harmonising and improving processes for recruitment, induction, training and monitoring the progress of PGR students; rebuilding the PGR website; the establishment of a 'Doctoral Researchers Group (DRG)'; a professional development programme for PGR supervisors; a supervisor's handbook; a workshop for those who are new to the supervision of PGR students; and regular update training sessions for experienced supervisors. The team heard that these developments, particularly the training for PGR supervisors, has been very positively received by academic staff.

26   The QESR team is satisfied, based on the information provided, that appropriate progress has been made with respect to the management of arrangements for collaborative partnerships to allow the University to ensure that the Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision is current and complete. The University's Academic Services team has responsibility for maintaining this register. The team learned that all collaborative agreements are approved by the Programme Management Committee before progressing through standard university quality processes for programme approval, annual monitoring and Internal Teaching Review (ITR). Staff involved in supporting the delivery of collaborative partner programmes confirmed that external examiners have responsibilities for both home and collaborative partner versions of programmes.

27   The University has established appropriate mechanisms to ensure that all new staff complete its 'Learning and Teaching in HE' course within one year of joining the institution and receive a range of support information from the Centre for Academic Development (CAD). PGR students who teach are also required to complete a professional development programme. Finally, the QESR team concluded having considered a range of documented evidence, including a sample of ITR reports and school Critical Analysis reports, that the role of professional services has been strengthened within the University's ITR process and is consistent with sector expectations (paragraph 41).

28   In response to the ELIR 4 recommendation, the University is currently undertaking an extensive review of its personal tutoring system, which senior university staff recognised had taken longer to carry out than expected. Early positive outcomes of this review have been greater clarity of, and support for, the role of the Senior Personal Tutor and a website containing support information for staff and students, which has been well received by those who met the QESR team. The current personal tutor arrangements for undergraduate (UG) students are well understood by staff and students. However, arrangements for postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students appear to be more bespoke and vary depending on subject area. The ELIR team noted that the term 'personal tutor' is not consistently adopted with a variety of other roles used to fulfil the function of a personal tutor.

29   While all students assured the team that they knew they could approach academic staff and access the University's centralised student support services when they needed help, the QESR team **recommends** that the University continues work to finalise its approach to personal tutoring arrangements, to ensure it provides equity of experience for the University's changing student population - particularly postgraduate taught students - and the support provided is clearly communicated to all students by the end of academic year 2022-23.

30   Since ELIR 4, the University has reviewed its arrangements for the monitoring, training and induction of external examiners (EEs), setting out a model where training delivery is split, carried out centrally for university-wide aspects of the role and followed by

training in academic schools for specific discipline requirements. Further clarification has been provided to EEs regarding training responsibilities and there is now a dedicated area within the University's virtual learning environment which contains policy and institutional information and training requirements. The QESR team understands that providing students with access to EE reports for their programmes is an ongoing matter. The team found in meeting with students, they had some knowledge of the role of external examiners through their course handbooks but very little understanding of the external examiners reports for their programmes - that these reports should be available to them, how to access the reports and how external examiner feedback informs practice. The QESR team therefore **recommends** that the University ensures that all students have access to external examiner reports for their programme of study by the end of academic year 2022-23.

Sector-wide enhancement topic

31   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering effective and inclusive digital/blended learning. The team considered the update paper provided by the University, the Evaluation of Blended Learning report, minutes from key institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

32   The QESR team is able to confirm that the University has been further developing its online and blended learning approaches as a result of digital developments accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The University's approach is grounded in the recommendations made following a wide-ranging and comprehensive evaluation of blended teaching, learning and assessment across the institution conducted in 2021. The resulting evaluation report is comprehensive in its consideration of data, including feedback from both students and staff, and informed by sector-wide practice and evidence. Work to action all of the recommendations in the evaluation report remains ongoing.

33   The QESR team was impressed by the manner in which the University has effectively used this evaluation information to support the development of its 'Principles for the Delivery of Education for Academic Year 2022-23', which have been designed to align to and support the education strand of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy. The team note that these Principles were developed through work supported by one of the student interns (paragraphs 10 and 17), discussed across all the academic schools through mechanisms like School Education Committees, were formalised through the University committee structure, and are framed in terms of commitments to learning and teaching from both staff and students.

34   These Principles have been designed to be both student and staff-facing, and a set of resources and toolkits has been developed for both groups to facilitate a community of learning, with the University setting out its commitment to delivery and outlining the expectations for student engagement with the process. Staff spoke positively about the support that had been developed for them and outlined a number of specific resources that have influenced and supported changes in their learning and teaching practice. These include a micro-credentials upskilling course (Delivering Tutoring for Online Courses) which has been offered in advance of each academic year since the pandemic, focusing on the Principles for the Delivery of Education, and a range of detailed case study examples to support implementation of the evaluation recommendations.

35   The Aberdeen 2040 Strategy and the Principles for the Delivery of Education make clear the importance of embedding inclusivity and accessibility throughout the overarching strategy. The Digital Accessibility Working Group supports the institution to be compliant with regulations in this area. Regular Equality and Diversity Impact assessments will continue as part of the delivery of learning and teaching across the institution. Working groups have also

been established to embed work-integrated learning opportunities for students incorporating online delivery methods and to raise the awareness of contract cheating among students and provide additional support.

36   The University has made significant progress with its vision for blended education. It has effectively used the learning and recommendations from its in-depth review and evaluation of blended and online learning and assessment practice to support the development of its vision for Education, its Principles for the Delivery of Education and a comprehensive suite of support materials and resources for both students and staff. The QESR team considers this to be a feature of **good practice**. Staff and students spoke about the positive impact on the learning, teaching and assessment experience of students and provided a range of examples of changes to practice including more variety of assessment formats, direct linkage of teaching material to the four pillars of the Strategy, and students in Aberdeen working collaboratively with students in international partner campuses and with professionals overseas.

Academic standards and quality processes

Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

37   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements for the monitoring and review of its approach to managing quality and to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards. The team considered the University's Academic Quality Handbook; samples from the annual monitoring process; internal teaching review documentation; papers and minutes from institutional committees; and met with staff and students. There was a high level of consistency across the sources of evidence considered by the team, which demonstrates processes that are well understood and had clear outcomes.

38   The QESR team found that the University's arrangements for managing quality and setting standards meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and align with the guidance issued by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Institutional policies relating to programme and course development and approval are aligned to sector expectations expressed in the Quality Code, take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF) and relevant qualification frameworks. The team was assured that the University had a robust plan for reviewing and updating the policies under the remit of UEC up to 2024-25, including incorporating recommendations from current Task and Finish Groups (paragraph 6). In addition, a new working group (Academic Policy and Regulations Group (APRG)) is responsible for the development and regular review of education policy and regulations and for ensuring their alignment with the Quality Code and wider academic infrastructure. Any recommended changes to the University's education policies and regulations arising from APRG's work would be approved by the University Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

39   The University's Academic Quality Handbook contains the University's policies, procedures and regulations relating to all aspects of teaching and learning. The effectiveness of these policies and procedures is overseen by the QAC chaired by the Dean of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, which has representation from each school and the student body. The University uses three processes to monitor and review academic standards across all its taught provision: Annual Course Review (ACR), Annual Programme Review (APR) and Internal Teaching Review (ITR).

40   Each of the academic schools manage the ACR process, reviewing these forms internally. All ACR forms are also submitted to QAC and a sample of these are considered, typically targeting higher risk courses - such as those delivered by a partner, new courses or courses where problems have been previously identified. APRs are submitted by the academic schools to QAC and are discussed, with the sample of minutes considered by the QESR team demonstrating that any policy issues identified are referred to relevant committees for consideration, as appropriate.

41   ITR is conducted at school-level by panels comprising internal and external academic peers and student members, informed by an evidence-based critical analysis, and supported by the school's quality assurance repository (which is prepopulated with course and programme annual monitoring reports and their responses; professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reports and responses; past ITR submissions and follow-up reporting; and the School Plan, quality assurance metrics and action plans). Since the last ELIR, the ITR process has been amended to integrate professional services review and reflect the extent and quality of interactions between student-facing professional services, and the academic school and its students to identify areas for enhancement (paragraph 27). Staff from relevant professional services, including Registry, the Careers and Employability Service, Student Experience and Student Support engage in each school's ITR. Based on the sample of ILR documents supplied, the QESR team is assured that the ITR process is robust and effectively supported by the University.

42   The University has effective arrangements in place for the management of assessment. The University's Academic Quality Handbook details the Code of Practice on Assessment which lists the University's Common Grading Scale and undergraduate degree classifications and awards within postgraduate programmes. The QESR team was assured that students knew how to access information relating to assessment and degree outcomes. The University has recently begun piloting TESTA (paragraph 6) in two of its Schools and the team was assured that the University has been moving to incorporate more authentic and flexible assessment approaches through the Principles for the Delivery of Education as part of the Education Strategy overseen by the University Education Committee (UEC) (paragraphs 33 and 34). External examiners are required to comment on the appropriateness of assessment processes and the comparability of provision at other institutions. Based on the sample of reports supplied, the team can confirm that EEs are generally positive about the University's management of assessment. The external examiner report template clearly allows for responses to be made at school and university level and returned to the examiner to close the loop on their feedback.

43   The University has recently completed a Senate Effectiveness Review undertaken by Advance HE. This Review recommended changes to the remit and memberships of UEC and its sub-committees, and recommended that the QAC be established as a direct Committee of Senate, rather than as a sub-committee of UEC. Documents provided by the University qualify that UEC will have focus on the strategic oversight of education provision and its alignment to Aberdeen 2040. The committee will also have oversight of innovation, academic development and enhancement, together with focus on the wider student experience including employability and entrepreneurship, student mobility and student support. QAC will have focus on the quality assurance of UG, PGT and taught elements of PGR provision together with oversight of the development, review and monitoring of university policy relating to education provision. This change came into effect in academic session 2022-23, and the QESR team noted that it was already being positively received by staff; in particular, the development of a new Academic Regulations and Policy Group, and the support being provided to QAC members by the Academic Services team in helping to summarise and produce university-wide thematic information for consideration by QAC (paragraph 46).

44   Collaborative programmes are subject to the same quality processes as on-campus programmes. In addition to this, further detailed reports related to the University's transnational education (TNE) and partnerships are presented and discussed at QAC annually, allowing greater institutional oversight of any themes or concerns that might emerge across the University's collaborative provision. The University has signed up to QAA's new TNE quality evaluation and enhancement scheme - 'QE-TNE'. It was reported to UEC that, by registering for the QAA QE-TNE Scheme, the University is investing in the quality of the students' academic experience and demonstrating its commitment to the advancement of UK higher education delivered overseas.

Use of external reference points in quality processes

45   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and regularly review its approach to the use of external reference points in quality processes. As part of the review, the team considered the mapping of policies, procedures and quality processes against the Quality Code, minutes of key committees, external examiner reports, annual SFC reporting and met with staff.

46   The QESR team noted the comprehensive and clear mapping of the University's policies, procedures and quality processes against the Quality Code, and this mapping is published on the University website. The team heard that the mapping is intended to be a 'live' document and can confirm that plans are in place to ensure that the Academic Regulations and Policy Group considers and updates one mapping section at each meeting to ensure that it remains up-to-date (paragraph 43). Staff confirmed that the mapping exercise had usefully highlighted areas of practice which would benefit from improvement - for example, enhancements to the University's placement policy, which are subsequently being incorporated into the work of the Student Placement Task and Finish Group.

47   The University's programme development, monitoring and review processes take account of, and remain current with, key external reference points, including the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF). Programmes are also expected to align with PSRB requirements where appropriate. The QESR team saw evidence of the use of key reference points in ITR processes. In meeting with staff with recent experience of the University's ITR process, the Subject Benchmark Statements (SBS) in particular, were highlighted as a useful reference point in devising the structures for programmes.

48   The QESR team noted in the evidence provided that, as part of the University's ITR process, course-level curriculum maps to the relevant SBS are produced by programme teams and these mappings also detail how students will meet the University's Graduate Attributes. Feedback from external examiners, in addition to industry experts and other key external stakeholders, is gathered as part of programme development and review, and also where programme teams are progressing significant amendments to existing courses and programmes.

49   External examiners comment on academic standards and assessment arrangements, in addition to drawing comparisons with provision at other institutions, providing ongoing assurance on the use of external reference points. Staff spoke positively about how external examiner reports are used during the Annual Programme Review (APR) process to support enhancements to programmes and courses. The QESR team understands that, at the time of this review, the University's analysis of external examiner reports was underway for session 2020-21 with the final report scheduled to be considered by the QAC in March 2023.

Use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making

50   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making. The team considered evidence from the institution including the Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation, the University's use of data on continuation, degree outcomes/classifications, academic complaints and appeals, samples of Annual Programme and Course Review forms, feedback from students through survey responses to the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Aberdeen Student Experience Survey (ASES), and meetings with staff and students.

51   The University has clear processes for considering student survey and feedback information that is monitored and used to enhance practice. The University uses a range of survey mechanisms including course-level feedback forms which are administered during each term, the ASES and NSS. The University's analysis of its NSS results is benchmarked against the sector and compared with previous results, with issues arising discussed at the University Education Committee (UEC), along with an action plan to take forward enhancements across the University. The data from the ASES is considered by both UEC and its sub-committee - the Student Support and Experience Committee (SSEC) - and the academic schools are asked to prepare responses to matters arising from this survey. In meeting with staff and students from across the institution, the QESR team learned that additional informal approaches were being used to gather student feedback including discussion boards. Staff viewed these informal approaches as helpful mechanisms for 'identifying quick wins' in terms of responding to student feedback in session (paragraph 19).

52   Course Feedback forms, along with student performance information, feedback from Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and focus groups, external examiners, Programme Advisory Boards and, where applicable, PSRBs are considered and reported on in key university quality processes including Annual Course and Programme Review (ACR and APR) and Internal Teaching Review (ITR). The sample of documents provided to the team demonstrated that this information is reflected on by staff and used to support enhancements to courses and programmes - for example, subsequent amendments to assessment formats. As part of the University's annual monitoring processes, ACRs and APRs are considered at school level and at university level by the QAC, which provides feedback to the academic schools on the sample of ACRs it considers and identifies areas for development and good practice from across the APRs.

53   The UEC is responsible for oversight of academic appeals and complaints, academic misconduct and continuation data. It is evident to the QESR team that such overview reports are used to identify and action areas to enhance the student experience. For example, the QESR team noted from the documents provided that University Senate had received an analysis of degree classifications which illustrated an increase in the numbers of first or upper-second-class honours classifications awarded by the University since 2016-17. The team explored with senior staff the University's understanding of possible reasons for this and how the University intends to continue to monitor this. Senior staff outlined that based on its analysis, its high standard of applicants, and its use of Grade Point Average (GPA) and Grade Spectrum during the COVID-19 pandemic - as part of the 'no detriment' policies for students, have influenced the increase. However, the introduction of the new GPA system as the only measure of degree classification is likely to impact on the number of good honours going forward. Staff also discussed how having information on degree outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups (BAME) had identified an awarding gap for these students, with the University currently working on plans to address this. The QESR team views this development positively and understands that this

information will continue to be kept under review by the University Senate.

54   The QESR team also explored with senior staff, the University's response to an increase in Academic Misconduct Cases, which will involve working in partnership with students to understand how these situations arise, in order to develop further support for students. The team heard that a student intern is currently working on improving understanding of students' attitudes to misconduct and views around contract cheating and artificial intelligence (AI).

55   The QESR team learned from staff that a project is ongoing to extend access and use of the new business intelligence platform across the University. Priority has been given to the development of university-level information, analysis and reporting such as NSS and degree classifications. The team understands that a recent development means Directors of Education can access data pertinent to their own school on areas such as non-continuation, student progress and enrolments.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND STANDARDS REVIEW: ACTION PLAN
MAY 2023

Overarching Area for Action	Associated Actions	Timelines	Responsible Person(s)	Responsible Committee and Monitoring	Update on Progress
External Examiners	Communication to Schools to ensure upload of External Examiner Reports to organisation/course pages on MyAberdeen.	June 2023	Clerk to QAC	QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.	**Pending:** a communication is being prepared to be issued in due course.
	Communication to Students to advise of uploaded External Examiner Reports to MyAberdeen.	June 2023	Schools	QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.	**Pending:** a communication is being prepared to be issued in due course.
	Amendments to the External Examiner Annual Report form to advise that reports will be published.	April 2023	Clerk to QAC	QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.	**Complete:** the amended report was approved by Senate on 19 April 2023.
Pastoral Support	Review and restructuring of public-facing pastoral UG and PGT support webpages to enhance the purpose and clarity of the personal tutor and pastoral guidance roles.	June 2023	Dean for Student Support and Experience	UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.	**Pending**: actions will be completed September 2023 for start of new academic year
	Restructuring of staff pastoral guidance staff web resources to aid staff in locating appropriate information for UG and PGT pastoral support.	June 2023	Dean for Student Support and Experience	UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.	**Pending**: actions will be completed September 2023 for start of new academic year
	Introduction of in-person staff training for pastoral support and guidance role.	June 2023	Dean for Student Support and Experience	UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.	**Pending**: actions will be completed September 2023 for start of new academic year
	Introduction of an annual pastoral support and guidance staff/student information event to be included as part of Mental Health Awareness week.	June 2023	Dean for Student Support and Experience	UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.	**Pending**: actions will be completed September 2023 for start of new academic year
	Review of PGT pastoral support to enhance consistency of provision and enhance student understanding and access to appropriate support networks.	June 2023	Dean for Student Support and Experience	UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.	**Pending**: actions will be completed September 2023 for start of new academic year

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FINAL NSS RESPONSE RATE UPDATE

1.   **PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

The paper provides an update on the final NSS 2023 response rates (the survey had closed on 30th April 2023).

The analysis gives final response rates at overall institutional level, individual School level and at individual subject level (CAH-subject level). Key findings include:

- The final institutional response rate was 67.38% which is -0,42% below the final response rate for the previous year (67.80%) and meets the institutional publication threshold of 50%.
- In total 47 subjects (CAH3 subject-level) and an 'Other'[1] category submitted responses. We met the publication threshold for 46 subjects, including the 'Other' category. Only two subjects (Chemistry and Counselling, psychotherapy and occupational therapy) did not achieve thresholds for publication of results. It should be noted, these two subjects were unlikely to have met threshold levels as they had with very small cohorts (10 and 11 respectively) and would have required to achieve 10 responses apiece.
- All subjects achieved over 50% response rates, a major achievement.
- Aggregated to School level, ten Schools reached the required number of interviews for the publication of results at subject level. The two Schools where response levels did not meet the threshold for publication at subject level were: NCS (Chemistry) and Psychology (Counselling, Psychotherapy & Occupational Therapy).

Various efforts were undertaken to promote NSS and enhance response rates. Some of these included: promotion of NSS via social media by Marketing, including offer of a free sustainable water bottle for completing the NSS; close liaison between Vice-Principal for Education and Heads of School; provision of regular progress reports being issued to Heads of School highlighting areas where minimum thresholds had not yet been met to enable internal promotion of NSS in key subjects.

At this current time, a date for publication of the NSS 2023 results have not been issued but OfS has intimated they will be published sometime in late summer. Result headlines will be provided shortly after results are known, and these will be followed by a report on the results within a couple of days.

2.   **PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED**

	Board/Committee	**Date**
Previously considered/approved by	n/a	
Further consideration/ approval required by	SSEC	7 June 2023

3.   **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

UEC is invited to note the analysis of the final 2023 response rates for NSS and note that a date for publication of the NSS 2023 has yet to be announced. Result headlines will be provided shortly after results are known, and these will be followed by a report on the results within a couple of days.

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[1] Where the number of students is less than 10 for an individual subject, these are grouped under Other.

4. **BACKGROUND**

4.1 This report is divided into three main parts:
- A brief overview of NSS – publication thresholds, importance of NSS.
- A short analysis of the University's final response rates for NSS 2023.
- Planning and support around NSS.

5. **OVERVIEW OF NSS**

5.1 The National Student Survey (NSS) is a high-profile annual census of nearly half a million students across the UK. Conducted each year since 2005, the NSS has become renowned for producing robust and reliable data. All students studying on courses leading to undergraduate credits or qualifications which are longer than one-year full-time study or its part-time equivalent (such as bachelor's degrees, foundation degrees, higher education diplomas) will be surveyed in their final year of study.

5.2 In order for results to be made public, a minimum of both 50% response rate and 10 respondents is required. This threshold applies per cohort (at overall provider level and at CAH3-subject level). NSS data is an important tool for helping prospective students make decisions about where and what to study. The higher the response rate, the greater the likelihood of course-level data being made publicly available to these students.

5.3 The OfS supplies Ipsos MORI with the subject codes for each student in the survey target list based on each provider's data return. These are then mapped into the NSS CAH groups (CAH Level 3 subjects – these are Common Aggregation Hierarchy groups which are mapped from HECoS codes[2]).

5.3 For the NSS to be useful as many eligible students as possible need to take part. This means that it's important to promote the survey. Ipsos MORI run a national publicity campaign. Providers are also encouraged to run their own campaigns with their students and staff in a number of different ways:

- Promoting on social media
- Placing posters around the campus
- Engaging departments and teaching staff to give NSS information through lecture shout-outs

5.4 The response rates are updated three times a week and made available to providers on the NSS Extranet homepage during the fieldwork period. The response rate reports are provided to help providers target awareness and promotion to specific CAH-subject/department areas that are yet to reach threshold levels.

6. **FINAL 2022 NSS RESPONSE RATES ANALYSIS**

6.1 This section provides an overview of the final NSS response rates (as published on the 3rd May) on the NSS Extranet homepage (www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extrantet).

6.2 Table 1 below gives an institutional overview of our final response rate:

Table 1 2023 Final NSS Institutional Response Rate

	Sample Eligible	Interviews Achieved	Response Rate 2023 (%)	Interviews to Threshold	Final Response Rate 2022 (%)	% Diff Respone Rate from Prev Year
10007783 University of Aberdeen	2011	1355	67.38	0	67.80	-0.42

6.3 The final institutional response rate was 67.38% which is 17.38% above the required threshold for publication of results. The final response rate is -0,4% below the final response rate for the previous year and above our set target response rate (65%).

6.4 The table below provides a visual summary of response rates at individual subject level (CAH-subject level). The subjects are sorted with the highest number of interviews required to meet

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[2]More information on the mapping can be found at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/filesHECoS_CAH_Version_1.3.3.xlsx

the threshold highlighted in red at the top. The table further highlights subjects where final response rates are much lower or higher than final response rate for the previous year.

Table 2 Breakdown of NSS 2023 Response Rates by subject (CAH-subject level).
(Table sorted by largest no interviews required to meet threshold)

Discipline (CAH3-subject level)	Sample Eligible	Intvws Achvd	Response Rate 2023 (%)	Intvws to Threshold	Final Response Rate 2022 (%)	% Diff Respone Rate from Prev Year
07-02-01 chemistry	10	6	60.00	4	70.37	-10.37
02-06-07 counselling, psychotherapy and occupational therapy	11	7	63.64	3	40.00	23.64
03-02-01 sport and exercise sciences	27	15	55.56	-	63.16	-7.6
26-01-06 earth sciences	17	13	76.47	-	76.47	0
07-01-01 physics	15	11	73.33	-	72.41	0.92
04-01-01 psychology (non-specific)	185	110	59.46	-	60.66	-1.2
03-01-07 genetics	17	15	88.24	-	57.89	30.35
20-01-01 history	118	71	60.17	-	67.72	-7.55
03-01-06 zoology	77	53	68.83	-	64.06	4.77
16-01-01 law	266	174	65.41	-	66.23	-0.82
Other	71	45	63.38	-	69.33	-5.95
20-02-01 philosophy	39	27	69.23	-	78.38	-9.15
03-01-02 biology (non-specific)	21	15	71.43	-	63.33	8.1
15-01-02 sociology	55	39	70.91	-	66.13	4.78
10-01-08 electrical and electronic engineering	18	12	66.67	-	63.33	3.34
10-01-07 civil engineering	26	15	57.69	-	59.26	-1.57
13-01-02 building	15	10	66.67	-	57.14	9.53
15-01-04 anthropology	33	25	75.76	-	82.76	-7
25-01-04 cinematics and photography	24	17	70.83	-	68.18	2.65
20-02-02 theology and religious studies	16	11	68.75	-	63.16	5.59
17-01-04 management studies	77	51	66.23	-	66.42	-0.19
03-01-08 molecular biology, biophysics and biochemistry	39	25	64.10	-	51.35	12.75
20-01-02 history of art, architecture and design	17	11	64.71	-	66.67	-1.96
17-01-08 accounting	49	33	67.35	-	69.49	-2.14
02-05-03 biomedical sciences (non-specific)	34	21	61.76	-	61.90	-0.14
03-01-10 others in biosciences	34	21	61.76	-	61.90	-0.14
02-05-04 anatomy, physiology and pathology	32	21	65.62	-	64.52	1.1
15-03-01 politics	134	86	64.18	-	66.32	-2.14
10-01-02 mechanical engineering	51	37	72.55	-	56.00	16.55
01-01-02 medicine (non-specific)	140	97	69.29	-	-	-
26-01-02 physical geographical sciences	27	19	70.37	-	74.07	-3.7
17-01-07 finance	148	102	68.92	-	61.64	7.28
26-01-03 human geography	24	17	70.83	-	60.00	10.83
03-01-04 microbiology and cell science	18	12	66.67	-	55.56	11.11
15-02-01 economics	109	77	70.64	-	71.68	-1.04
19-01-01 English studies (non-specific)	78	52	66.67	-	59.78	6.89
25-02-02 music	23	17	73.91	-	67.86	6.05
19-04-04 Iberian studies	17	13	76.47	-	63.64	12.83
19-04-01 French studies	26	18	69.23	-	73.68	-4.45
19-01-05 creative writing	20	12	60.00	-	53.85	6.15
11-01-01 computer science	54	38	70.37	-	70.27	0.1
09-01-01 mathematics	32	23	71.88	-	62.86	9.02
02-02-01 pharmacology	29	20	68.97	-	79.17	-10.2
10-01-09 chemical, process and energy engineering	54	37	68.52	-	67.50	1.02
22-01-01 education	36	31	86.11	-	82.05	4.06
19-01-07 linguistics	16	16	100.00	-	80.00	20
22-01-02 teacher training	104	77	74.04	-	78.32	-4.28

For data protection, Ipsos MORI is only permitted to report on cohorts of at least 10 students. Where the number of students is less than this for an individual subject, these students are instead grouped under CAH-subject Other.

- Publication thresholds for 46 subjects (including the 'Other' category) out of a total of 48 subjects (also including the 'Other' category) were achieved. While two subjects (Chemistry

and Counselling, Psychotherapy and Occupational Therapy) with small cohorts (10 and 11 respectively) did not achieve thresholds for publication of results, all subjects have achieved over 50% response rates, a major achievement.

- Appendix 1 provides a visual summary of final response rates at individual subject level (CAH-subject level) within the various Schools. Aggregated to School level, ten Schools reached the required number of interviews for the publication of results at subject level. The two Schools where response levels did not meet the threshold for publication at subject level were: NCS (Chemistry); Psychology (Counselling, Psychotherapy and Occupational Therapy).

7. **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information is available from Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education (ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk) and Linda Murdoch, Planning Analyst (linda.murdoch@abdn.ac.uk).

4 May 2023
Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

APPENDIX 1:

School breakdown of NSS 2022 Final Response Rates by subject (CAH-subject level).

Discipline (CAH-subject level)	School	Sample Eligible	Intvws Achvd	Response Rate 2023 (%)	Final Response Rate 2022 (%)	% Diff Resp Rate from prev year	Intvws to Threshold
10007783 University of Aberdeen		2011	1355	67.38	67.8	-0.42	0
17-01-08 accounting	Bus	49	33	67.35	69.49	-2.14	0
15-02-01 economics	Bus	109	77	70.64	71.68	-1.04	0
17-01-07 finance	Bus	148	102	68.92	61.64	7.28	0
17-01-04 management studies	Bus	77	51	66.23	66.42	-0.19	0
17-01-02 business studies	Bus	18	15	83.33	37.5	45.83	0
13-01-02 building	Bus	15	10	66.67	57.14	9.53	0
20-01-01 history	DHPA	118	71	60.17	67.72	-7.55	0
20-01-02 history of art, architecture and design	DHPA	17	11	64.71	66.67	-1.96	0
20-02-01 philosophy	DHPA	39	27	69.23	78.38	-9.15	0
20-02-02 theology and religious studies	DHPA	16	11	68.75	63.16	5.59	0
22-01-01 education	EDU	36	31	86.11	82.05	4.06	0
22-01-02 teacher training	EDU	104	77	74.04	78.32	-4.28	0
10-01-09 chemical, process and energy engineering	ENG	54	37	68.52	67.5	1.02	0
10-01-07 civil engineering	ENG	26	15	57.69	59.26	-1.57	0
10-01-08 electrical and electronic engineering	ENG	18	12	66.67	63.33	3.34	0
10-01-02 mechanical engineering	ENG	51	37	72.55	56	16.55	0
26-01-06 earth sciences	GEO	17	13	76.47	76.47	0	0
26-01-03 human geography	GEO	24	17	70.83	60	10.83	0
26-01-02 physical geographical sciences	GEO	27	19	70.37	74.07	-3.7	0
16-01-01 law	LAW	266	174	65.41	66.23	-0.82	0
25-01-04 cinematics and photography	LLMVC	24	17	70.83	68.18	2.65	0
19-01-05 creative writing	LLMVC	20	12	60.00	53.85	6.15	0
19-01-01 English studies (non-specific)	LLMVC	78	52	66.67	59.78	6.89	0
19-04-01 French studies	LLMVC	26	18	69.23	73.68	-4.45	0
19-04-04 Iberian studies	LLMVC	17	13	76.47	63.64	12.83	0
19-01-07 linguistics	LLMVC	16	16	100.00	80	20	0
25-02-02 music	LLMVC	23	17	73.91	67.86	6.05	0
02-05-04 anatomy, physiology and pathology	MMSN	32	21	65.62	64.52	1.1	0
02-05-03 biomedical sciences (non-specific)	MMSN	34	21	61.76	61.9	-0.14	0
03-01-07 genetics	MMSN	17	15	88.24	57.89	30.35	0
01-01-02 medicine (non-specific)	MMSN	140	97	69.29	-	-	0
03-01-04 microbiology and cell science	MMSN	18	12	66.67	55.56	11.11	0
03-01-08 molecular biology, biophysics and biochemistry	MMSN	39	25	64.10	51.35	12.75	0
03-01-10 others in biosciences	MMSN	34	21	61.76	61.9	-0.14	0
02-02-01 pharmacology	MMSN	29	20	68.97	79.17	-10.2	0
03-02-01 sport and exercise sciences	MMSN	27	15	55.56	63.16	-7.6	0
07-02-01 chemistry	NCS	10	6	60.00	70.37	-10.37	4
11-01-01 computer science	NCS	54	38	70.37	70.27	0.1	0
09-01-01 mathematics	NCS	32	23	71.88	62.86	9.02	0
07-01-01 physics	NCS	15	11	73.33	72.41	0.92	0
02-06-07 counselling, psychotherapy and occupational therapy	PSY	11	7	63.64	40	23.64	3
04-01-01 psychology (non-specific)	PSY	185	110	59.46	60.66	-1.2	0
03-01-02 biology (non-specific)	SBS	21	15	71.43	63.33	8.1	0
03-01-06 zoology	SBS	77	53	68.83	64.06	4.77	0
15-01-04 anthropology	SOCSCI	33	25	75.76	82.76	-7	0
15-03-01 politics	SOCSCI	134	86	64.18	66.32	-2.14	0
15-01-02 sociology	SOCSCI	55	39	70.91	66.13	4.78	0
Other		71	45	63.38	69.33	-5.95	0

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM STEERING GROUP

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

> The purpose of the paper is to provide UEC with an update on the work of the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group, and the actions agreed as part of the next steps in relation to the Decolonising the Curriculum Principles and Timeline following approval at Senate.
>
> UEC is asked to discuss and note the paper.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	N/A	
Further consideration/ approval required by	N/A	

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

> The **UEC** is invited to discuss and note the paper.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1   At the meeting of the Senate on 08 February 2023, the Principles and Timeline for the implementation of the University's work on Decolonising the Curriculum was approved.

4.2   The Web resources and the Toolkit are in development with the aim of launching them in June 2023.

4.3   A number of actions were identified as part of the paper as follows (with information on progress provided).

4.3.1   Communication to Schools through DtCSG
Communication will be developed for the launch of the Web resources and Toolkit which will go to Schools through the DtCSG members, Directors of Education, and the ezine. Information about Reading Lists will be provided as part of that (see also 4.2.4). **Action: Kirsty Kiezebrink/Ruth Taylor, June 2023**

4.3.2   Curriculum and Programme Management: Discussions to take place regarding ensuring that a process is in place is in place including information on how the curriculum will address the principle of decolonisation.
Work is in progress to ensure that relevant wording is in place for both existing courses through our current processes, and for any new course/programme proposals. **Action: Gillian Mackintosh/Ruth Taylor, June 2023**

4.3.3   Students as active partners: Guidance to be developed.
This work has been completed and the resources are in development.

4.3.4   Reading Lists: Communication to be issued alongside main communication regarding reading lists.
See 4.3.1.

4.3.5   Quality assurance processes: Timelines and requirements to be discussed.
This work is in progress and information will be presented to QAC at an appropriate point. **Action: Gillian Mackintosh, August 2023**

4.3.6   Training: Consolidation of training currently available to be issued alongside main communication to Schools.
Training is in place, with a pilot of repeated training running currently. Further information on relevant training will be provided as part of the Web resources, and the aim will be responsive to need. In addition, it should be noted that a number of Schools are proactively developing their own initiatives to support staff and students in the development their discipline-based work in this area. **Action: Aaron Thom, ongoing**

4.4   Once this phase of the work is completed, the DtCSG will review what the next phase of the work should look like (e.g., in relation to PGR students). In addition, the DtCSG will consider an approach to evaluation of the work.

5.   FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Ruth Taylor, ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk

10 May 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)

INSTITUTIONAL PLAN FOR UPSCALING WORK-BASED LEARNING INCLUDING PLACEMENTS

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

> This final paper sets out approved short (March-August 2023), medium (March 2023-September 2024) and long (5 year) term proposals to implement the recommendations presented by external consultants to achieve our ambition to upscale work-based learning. The paper includes a vision and menu for work-based learning provision and a set of actions and timescales for information and discussion.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	SMT Work Placements TFG	03/11/2023 01/02/2023
Further consideration/ approval required by	EEC UEC	EEC (04/05/23) UEC (16/05/23)

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

> The approved vision, strategy and underpinning action plan to achieve our Aberdeen 2040 commitment 12 objective "to enable all students to have access to placement or equivalent experience" is provided for information. The committee is asked to consider and discuss next steps in relation to implementation.

4.   BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

4.1   Aberdeen 2040 Education commitments state "***We will provide more work-based learning, through placements and volunteering***". Following a paper to SMT in May, an institutional placement and work-based learning (WBL) review report, produced by external consultants Gradconsult, was presented in November 2022. The report provided a set of recommendations, using an evidence-base of relevant research and sector knowledge and experience, to achieve upscaling of work-based learning (WBL). The full range of recommendations informs the proposals set out in this paper, including the following infrastructure and resource requirements to upscale provision of WBL:

4.1.1   Develop a diverse WBL offer by developing scalable experiential learning and embedded project-based employer learning initiatives.
4.1.2   Create clear School-level accountability to grow WBL provision.
4.1.3   Create a clear, concise, robust institutional placement policy.
4.1.4   Establish infrastructure, systems, and processes to deliver WBL at scale.

4.2   The upscaling plan and actions relate to non-statutory placements and do not include approaches to statutory placements required in subjects such as Health and Education.

4.3   The following definitions of different types of work-based learning are used throughout the paper. HESA definitions are used for work-based learning types which we are required to report on (from May 2023).

4.3.1   Work-based learning (WBL) is an overarching term for any type of experience gained in the workplace / working for an external organisation.

4.3.2 HESA require us to report on WBL that is assessed for academic credit using the following categories and definitions:

- Thin placements (HESA definition: a placement that does not cause a continuous absence from full-time study of at least one year of the course, but the cumulative total of placements undertaken is 30 weeks or longer)
- Thick placements: (HESA definition: a placement that causes a continuous absence from full-time study of at least one year of the course).
- Other placements: (HESA definition: a placement has been undertaken but it does not meet the definition of a thick or thin placement)

4.3.3 Work-related learning (WRL) refers to opportunities which take place outside of a work-place setting / without requiring the student to be 'employed' by a host organisation. WRL provides students with opportunities to apply learning to 'real-world' challenges or in professional contexts. WRL can be embedded in the curriculum, or delivered as an optional co-curricular programme. Examples of WRL include consultancy projects, live briefs and case studies. WRL can be completed by individual or groups of students.

4.4 This paper sets out a five year approach to upscaling WBL, but it is important to note current ongoing work to increase provision in the short-term. Short-term activities and projects to ensure increased provision can be reported in the current academic year (2022-23) are outlined here for information:

4.4.1 Upscaling Work Related Learning Project: following approval of a business case submitted to the Digital Strategy Committee (12/01/23, see appendix 1) a virtual work integrated learning platform (Riipen) will be piloted with 2-3 Schools from March to August 2023, to facilitate work-based project learning for 300 students.

4.4.2 Wood Foundation Third Sector Internships Project: following successful bid for funding (£150k over three years), a new internships programme will be established, with the first internships expected to be available to students by Summer 2023. The programme will provide fully funded paid 10-week internships for 32 students (available to all students to apply) in the third sector during the 3-year period.

4.4.3 Introduction of placement reporting (HESA Data Futures Project): More accurate reporting of current provision will result from the mapping exercise outlined in table 2. The new requirement by HESA to report on placement activity will give more accurate data.

4.5 This paper presents a set of proposals to significantly upscale provision of WBL for discussion and approval. It sets out a proposed vision (section 5), a proposed menu of WBL (section 6) and a phased approach to upscaling WBL over a five year period (section 7). Resource indications to deliver the proposed approach to upscaling WBL are set out in section 8 for consideration.

5.   ESTABLISHING OUR VISION FOR UPSCALING WBL PROVISION

5.1 Agreeing our ambition and level of commitment to upscaling WBL is vital to provide clarity about what we are looking to achieve and to provide a strong and consistent message for our staff and our student communities. Setting out a clear vision enables us to demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the employability of our students and provides a common goal to collectively work towards, focussing our efforts to upscale WBL across the institution. Our vision should balance providing a clear level of ambition with a commitment that is achievable. Including a range of WBL types in our vision is important to ensure we can achieve the scale of ambition.

5.2 The following vision is approved by SMT:

"By 2028, all undergraduate and postgraduate taught University of Aberdeen students will have the option to gain experience via a flexible menu of work-based and work-related learning opportunities".

This vision sets out a clear ambition to ensure all taught UG and PG students can gain a work-based learning opportunity but gives flexibility around the types of WBL opportunity provided.

This flexibility ensures the WBL types offered fit with the needs of our programmes and our students, and includes WBL types which can be delivered at scale.

6. UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN WORK BASED LEARNING MENU

6.1 To deliver the vision to provide the option of WBL and WRL for all taught students, a menu of WBL and WRL types should be clearly defined. This approach aligns to the Gradconsult report recommendation to build a wide offer of opportunities. The menu provides a flexible set of defined WBL and WRL opportunity types for Schools to select from as appropriate for their UG and PGT programmes.

6.2 The menu of WBL and WRL includes the placement activity types defined by HESA reporting requirements and wider work-related learning activities (defined in section 4.2). The intention would be for students to be given the option to gain experience of at least one type of WBL activity as a part of their programme of study. It may be appropriate to make more than one type of WBL and WRL activity available to students, particularly for undergraduate programmes. A wide range of in person and online delivery options should be considered. Providing a range of WBL and WRL types available will ensure our provision is inclusive, minimising barriers to our diverse student community engaging in meaningful opportunities within their programme.

6.3 The menu of WBL and WRL for undergraduate programmes is as follows:

- Placements (one year) (Thick placements, HESA), taken as an extra year of an undergraduate degree programme. This WBL type is currently available to students on a small number of undergraduate MSci programmes. The opportunity for any undergraduate student to take an additional placement year should be developed by adding an optional "with placement" pathway to our programmes. The option to offer a placement year as part of a 4 year programme needs further investigation.
- Placements (less than one year) (Thin Placements or Other Placements depending on length of placement(s) accumulated, HESA) taken as a credit-bearing course delivered by the School or delivered centrally as a Professional Development course. Placements could vary in length, number of hours per week and timing to suit the needs of students, employers and the undergraduate programme or course. This type is already available to some undergraduate students.
- Work-based project (Other Placements, HESA), credit-bearing alternative to a dissertation or research. Projects are generally 8 -16 weeks and usually start from May/June. Projects may be based primarily onsite (the student works at the organisation) or offsite (the student is based at their university doing research on behalf of the organisation). Currently, this type is not usually available to undergraduate students. The option to offer this for UG students needs further investigation before including it in our 5-year upscaling plan.
- Work-related course (Other Placements, HESA), taken as a credit-bearing course, or part of an existing course, delivered by the School or delivered centrally as an interdisciplinary professional development course. These courses would involve groups of students working together on the challenges set by external organisations. This WBL type is already available to some undergraduate students. Embedding employer-led projects in courses is a resource efficient way to engage large numbers of students.

6.4 The menu of WBL and WRL for postgraduate taught programmes is as follows:

- Placements (less than one year) (Thin Placements or Other Placements depending on length of placement(s) accumulated, HESA) taken as a credit-bearing course delivered by the School or delivered centrally as a Professional Development course. Placements could vary in length, number of hours per week and timing to suit the needs of students, staff and employers. This type of WBL is already available to some postgraduate taught students.
- Work-based project (Other Placements, HESA), credit-bearing alternative to a dissertation. Projects are generally 8 -16 weeks and usually start from May/June. WBPs may be based primarily onsite (the student works at the organisation) or offsite (the student is based at their university doing research on behalf of the organisation). This type is already available as an option for some postgraduate taught students (Note lessons learned from the Making the Most of Masters project).

- Work-related course (Other Placements, HESA), taken as a credit-bearing course, or part of a course, delivered by the School or delivered centrally as an interdisciplinary professional development course. These courses would involve groups of students working together on the challenges set by external organisations. This WBL type is already available to some postgraduate students. Embedding employer-led projects in courses is a resource efficient way to engage large numbers of students.

6.5 To prepare for and support delivery of the WBL and WRL menu outlined above, the following will be required (further detail listed in Appendix 1):

6.5.1 Policy development from an academic services perspective, to ensure all menu types fit within our regulations, meet QAC requirements and are supported by curriculum management process. The development of our provision will be underpinned by the QAA Quality Code.

6.5.2 Take a proactive approach to embedding and mainstreaming the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion, taking into account principles to decolonizing the curriculum, in building our menu of WBL opportunities.

6.5.3 Establish mechanism, structure and resource model for centrally providing credit-bearing WBL courses at scale.

7. PLANNING FOR DELIVERING WORK-BASED LEARNING AT SCALE

7.1 The Gradconsult report recommended a phased approach to upscaling WBL provision, emphasising the importance of establishing infrastructure, systems and processes and a clear, concise, robust institutional placement policy. It recommends the need for clear School-level accountability to drive growth of WBL, warning that scaled WBL provision can't be delivered by the careers service in isolation. Significant collaboration with academic colleagues is required to build provision, support students and develop sustainable work-based learning partnerships with external partners. A range of roles will be needed to support growth of each of the types of work-based learning. The report notes that the skillset required to design and support delivery of work related learning within the curriculum is often very different to the skillset required to deliver traditional placements and internships, and that sufficient resource should be in place to support the administrative processes associated with work-based learning provision.

7.2 A partnership approach between the Careers and Employability Service and Schools is proposed to upscaling WBL across our undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. To ensure students engage with our WBL offer, Schools are best placed to inform and make decisions about which of the WBL types (from the defined WBL menu) and methods of delivery suit their programmes. Schools are also best placed to inform and make decisions about the timescales for upscaling and determining appropriate short, medium and 5-year WBL growth plans. The defined menu of WBL types and a common approach and timeframe to the development of WBL upscaling plans by Schools, will ensure our WBL offer for students is simple to navigate and engage in, given some of our students are completing programmes which sit across more than one School. Support to develop these upscaling plans will initially be provided by existing careers and employability staff.

7.3 Planned approach for upscaling of WBL over the next 5 years:

7.3.1 For AY 2022-23: Current WBL activity report detailing all WBL delivered during 2022-23 by School to be completed by end April 2023. Gathering this information will provide a baseline to inform the development of School upscaling plans and will provide the data required by HESA (new reporting requirement from May 2023). Current records are being compiled on this template.

7.3.2 For AY 2023-24: 1-year upscaling WBL action plan detailing planned WBL for delivery during 2023-24 to be completed by Schools by end August 2023. During this planning phase, Schools will be encouraged to establish % increases in students engaged in WBL for this academic year, and for future years.

7.3.3 For AY 2024-28: 4-year WBL upscaling plan detailing the planned WBL for delivery by year for 2024/25 to 2027/28 to deliver our vision to provide the option of WBL for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students by 2028. Overarching 4-year plan to be

completed by end April 2024, then reviewed and adjusted annually. A template will be provided to capture the type(s) of WBL to be embedded, the delivery method and timeframe for implementation for each programme.

7.4 In the short term the following people will work in partnership to deliver 7.3.1:
- School Roles: Director of Education (Undergraduate and PGT); School Admin Manager; School Employability and Skills Champion
- Professional Services Roles: Careers Adviser School lead and Employer Engagement School lead.

7.5 Dedicated additional resource to support Schools to develop and implement WBL upscaling plans in the medium to long term (to deliver 7.3.2 and 7.3.3) is needed. In the medium term, a central work-based learning team will be established, with a phased growth to provide the support needed by Schools to reach the longer term vision to deliver WBL at scale. The proposed structure, and phased growth of this central WBL team is set out in section 8.

7.6 A communications plan, to ensure Schools and central teams are able to discuss and feedback about the proposed upscaling WBL vision, planning approach and implementation timescales is important to identify any issues, make improvements to ensure the plans can be implemented and to gain buy in. Following feedback, any adjustments will be made in advance of commencing the phased approach to developing and implementing upscaling plans. The following approach has been agreed to communicate, evaluate and finalise the upscaling WBL vision, planning approach and timelines:

7.6.1 Paper to be circulated to Directors of Education and/or Heads of School meeting(s) to discuss the upscaling WBL vision, planning approach and timelines. Coordinated by Tracey Innes and John Barrow. Feedback will be taken and used to inform any revisions to the vision, planning approach and timelines. (May/June 2023)

7.6.2 Papers to be submitted to next EEC (04/05/23) and UEC (16/05/23) to discuss and feedback on the upscaling WBL vision, planning approach and timelines.

7.6.3 Paper to be submitted to SMT to provide an update on discussions, highlighting any changes made to the upscaling WBL vision, planning approach and timelines. (June 2023)

8. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS TO SUPPORT PHASED APPROACH TO UPSCALING WBL

8.1 The Gradconsult report highlighted a range of infrastructure and resource requirements to successfully deliver WBL at scale. Recommendations and actions to meet these needs are outlined as follows:

8.1.1 Create an institutional placement policy: This is a short term priority (current risk highlighted by the Gradconsult report). There are currently a range of systems and internal processes utilised to monitor placement and work-based learning provision. If work-based learning is being completed as a formal part of the course, the university is liable to complete the relevant processes as part of the expectations of the QAA Quality Code, specifically that "work-based learning opportunities are underpinned by formal agreements between education organisations, employers and students". Current documents make some very subjective statements referencing individual judgement which is unlikely to hold up to external scrutiny should an issue occur with a student on placement and existing processes be audited. Appointment of a consultant with sector knowledge and experience in developing placement policy to achieve this quickly is approved.

Approved: Appoint consultant May 2023 to complete work July 2023. Approximate cost: £9,000.

8.1.2 Establish infrastructure, systems, and processes to manage work-based learning delivery. A system which supports delivery of the range of WBL types at scale would be widely welcomed by staff currently running projects using a manual system (such as Health Sciences), and by areas keen to introduce WBL opportunities at scale (such as the Business School). Following approval of a business case submitted to the Digital Strategy Committee (12/01/23, appendix 2), a Project Board is established to manage our involvement in the co-design of an experiential learning platform. The platform is intended

to facilitate delivery of the full range of WBL types, to be accessible to all University of Aberdeen students from September 2024. As part of our involvement in this project, the University of Aberdeen will become a founding member of a new Institute for Experiential and Work Integrated Learning. The costs of this project are already in allocated in the digital budget for 2022-23 and 2023-24. A full business case outlining projected costings beyond 2024 was approved at Digital Strategy Committee in February 2023.

8.1.3 <u>Establish an institutional reporting process</u>. This is a short-term priority to meet the new requirement for the Institution to formally report to HESA on institution placement activity in new fields via SRS from May 2023. This is not currently reported in this way. This is being managed via the HESA Data Futures Project. While there are no financial costs for this work, there are staff resource implications to gather and input data in the short term. The recommendation in 7.3.1 will deliver the requirements for this in the short-term. In the longer term, the ability to report placement activity should be built into the WBL platform being developed (outlined in 8.1.2).

8.1.4 <u>Establish a work-based learning hub</u> centrally to provide the staff resource to support the phased growth of our menu of WBL outlined in section 6. The following roles and levels are agreed to build the support needed to implement the phased approach to upscaling WBL over the next five years:

- **Employer engagement roles**: 3 FTE employer engagement staff will be in place by end February 2023 to support initial growth of employer connections and growth of opportunities in the short term. The team will be allocated a school caseload each to support the development of upscaling plans and support growth of opportunities.
- **Work-Based Learning student adviser roles**: This new role will be student facing, providing support to students in all aspects of the process of securing, onboarding and completing a WBL opportunity. 3 FTE at grade 5 are to be recruited by September 2023 to support delivery in 2023-24. The WBL student advisers will be allocated a school caseload each to support the delivery of WBL as provision is upscaled.
- **Work-Based Learning designers**: This new role would sit between academic and professional services, working with students, staff and employers to design high quality, impactful WBL learning experiences within the curriculum. Future WBL design resource needs, as upscaling plans are established, should be considered by Schools.
- **Administrative support**: This new role would support all aspects of WBL delivery, assisting staff in setting up WBL opportunities, assisting students in all aspects of their WBL experience and managing the processes associated with students being out in the workplace such as health and safety documentation and risk assessments. Future administrative support needs, as upscaling plans are established, should be considered by Schools.

The dedicated WBL team structure and size includes growth of existing roles, and the introduction of roles we do not currently have at the Institution. A phased approach to establishing a work based learning hub is approved, with priority in 2023/24 being given to recruiting three work-based learning student advisers (£116,178). This student facing role will ensure we can provide support to students in all aspects of the process of securing, onboarding and completing a WBL opportunity in the next academic year. Each will be allocated a caseload of four schools and will work in partnership with the employer engagement and wider careers team. Beyond 2023-24, resource needs within Schools will be established to inform further growth of the work based learning hub team and this will be considered in the next school and directorate planning round.

Summary of resource to establish a work-based learning function in 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial year:

Staff resource requirements	Posts in place 2022-2023	2023-2024 (number and cost)
Grade 7 Employer Engagement Manager	1 Post (in place February 2023)	
Grade 6 Employer Engagement Advisers	2 Posts including 1 new (in place February 2023)	
Grade 5 Work-Based Learning Student Advisers		3 New posts: £116,178 (to be recruited August 2023)
Total		**£116,178**
Other Costs and Considerations		
Pilot licence for Riipen: 60 virtual group projects	£27,500 (approximate): Covered by Digital Strategy Committee Budget	
Experiential learning platform (Ginkgo) to support all WBL types	£23,750: Covered by Digital Strategy Committee Budget	£23,750: Covered by Digital Strategy Committee Budget
Professional Services	Support will be required from across a range of professional service areas. In particular: • Careers and Employability • Registry • Centre for Academic Development • Alumni Relations	Support will be required from across a range of professional service areas. In particular: • Careers and Employability • Registry • Centre for Academic Development • Alumni Relations

9. **Summary and Conclusion**: this paper sets out the SMT approved vision for WBL provision and 5 year plan for upscaling WBL provision and achieving our vision. Resource for 2022/23 and 2023/24 is agreed to support implementing the plan in the short and medium term.

Discussion at relevant committees and with key stakeholders, and feedback regarding implementation of the short, medium and long term plan set out in this paper, is welcome.

10. **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information is available from Tracey Innes, Head of Careers and Employability Service, (t.innes@abdn.ac.uk), John Barrow, Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship (j.barrow@abdn.ac.uk), Debbie Dyker (d.j.dyker@abdn.ac.uk) and Ruth Taylor (ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk)

8th May 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

Appendix 1: Menu of work-based learning

Type of opportunity	Delivery methods	Required actions to support upscaling	Timescale
<u>Curricular Work Based Learning (WBL)</u> Placement experience gained in the workplace / working for an external organisation that are assessed for academic credit. Previously included in SFC reporting. HESA reporting is required using their categories: • Thick Placements • Thin Placements • Other Placements	Optional or compulsory course as part of a programme, delivered by the School or in partnership with/supported by Careers. Option to take placement via course available to all students, delivered by Careers. Option for all UG students to take a year-long placement.	Create an institutional placement policy Establish infrastructure, systems, and processes to manage placements delivery and reporting. Determine School and central staffing resource and structure requirements. Develop common minimum set of learning outcomes for placement courses. Develop centrally available credit-bearing placements course(s)	2022/23 2022/23 and 2023/24 2022/23 2023/24 Pilot from January 2024
<u>Curricular Work Related Learning (WRL)</u> Experience gained within studies to apply learning to 'real-world' challenges or in professional contexts. These opportunities take place outside of a work-place setting and don't require the student to be 'employed' by a host organisation. (Included in SFC reporting. HESA reporting not required)	Optional or compulsory course, or part of a course, delivered by the School or in partnership with Careers. Option to take an interdisciplinary work-related course, available to all students, delivered centrally (for example, using Professional Development course code)	Establish infrastructure, systems, and processes to manage scaled Work Related Learning provision delivery and reporting. Determine School and central staffing resource and structure requirements. Develop common minimum set of learning outcomes for Work Related Learning courses. Develop centrally available credit-bearing Work Related Learning course(s)	2022/23 and 2023/24 2022/23 2023/24 Pilot from January 2024

Appendix 2:

BUSINESS CASE SUBMISSION TO
DIGITAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE

Project Details:

Project Name:	Delivering work-based learning at scale
Project Sponsor:	Tracey Innes, Head of Careers and Employability
Project Manager:	Kate Robertson, Senior Careers and Employability Adviser

Submitted for (*delete as applicable***):**

Approval

Detail of Approval being sought:

The Digital Strategy Committee is asked to approve the proposal to procure a system to support delivery of a range of existing and new work-based project courses and programmes for 300 students between March 2023 and July 2023 (Phase one).

The Digital Strategy Committee is asked to approve the proposal to submit an expression of interest for the opportunity to become a University Development Partner to develop a platform to facilitate delivery of a full menu of work-based learning opportunity types at scale, to be accessible to all University of Aberdeen students from September 2024 (Phase two).

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

DIGITAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE

PROJECT PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP DIGITAL SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF WORK-BASED LEARNING AND VOLUNTEERING (Updated January 2023)

11. Purpose of the Paper

> This paper outlines the business case to secure and develop appropriate systems to facilitate delivery of the Aberdeen 2040 Education commitment to "provide more work-based learning, through placements and volunteering". The governance arrangements have been updated following feedback from DSC January 2023 (section 12).

12. Previous Consideration By /Further Approval Required

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	Work Placements TFG UEC 2040 EEC SMT DSC	May 2022 May 2022 September 2022 November 2022 January 2023
Further consideration/ approval required by	N/A	

13. Recommended Action

> Following approval for the spend from the Digital budget to implement the phased approach being taken to pilot a system to support the delivery of work-based learning, the Committee is asked to approve the updated governance arrangements set out in section 12.

14. Introduction

4.1 Brief – Aberdeen 2040 Education commitments state "We will provide more work-based learning, through placements and volunteering". This project is being established to secure and develop appropriate systems to facilitate this upscaling in the short term (January 2023 to July 2023) and in the medium to long term (March 2023 to September 2024).

4.2 Aim – To develop a diverse work-based learning offer by developing scalable experiential learning and a host of embedded project-based learning initiatives with employers and establish infrastructure, systems, and processes to deliver placements at scale.

4.3 Overarching Purpose – To maximise the proportion of students able to engage in work-based learning activities during their time at University, substantially increasing their chances of future career success and therefore improving graduate outcomes performance.

4.4 Key Objectives – To develop the system and opportunities to provide students with work-based learning (WBL) opportunities at scale, both within the curriculum, and alongside curriculum, for University of Aberdeen students at all stages.

15. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

5.1 Aberdeen 2040 Education commitments state "We will provide more work-based learning, through placements and volunteering".

5.2 The Work Placements and Volunteering Task and Finish Group was established as a workstream within the Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee in January 2022. The TFG remit included conducting a scoping exercise and presenting recommendations and resource requirements to SMT.

5.3 Initial findings and recommendations were submitted to SMT in May 2022. The three recommendations were:

Recommendation 1 – A clear vision for what we want to achieve as an institution is required. Schools are currently considering WBL activity individually, and there are a wide range of perspectives on the level of ambition. Current plans for WBL in Schools are for relatively small numbers. Whilst it will be crucial to provide a flexible structure for embedding WBL across our curriculum, an overarching vision for what we would like to achieve will give consistent and strong messaging to our prospective students and parity of experience for our students. Consideration should be given to our vision for UG, PGT and PGR students.

Recommendation 2 – Delivering WBL at scale will require dedicated resource. Building WBL at scale in the University of Aberdeen curriculum would provide huge opportunities for our students and their career success. Delivering WBL at scale is a significant strategic change for the University and whilst there are areas of excellence and delivery at scale via courses with professional requirements (14% of undergraduates), only 2% of our remaining undergraduates currently engage in WBL across our curriculum.

Recommendation 3 – Digital resource is required to support and manage WBL activity efficiently. This resource requirement over the next three years is captured within the Directorate of Digital and Information Services budget. Enabling the reporting of WBL activity is essential to fully understand current activity, inform strategy, planning and monitoring progress.

5.4 Following the paper to SMT in May 2022, a consultant has worked on an institutional placement and work-based learning review report. The report was presented to SMT (November 2022). The report provides recommendations to achieve upscaling of placements and other types of work-based learning. The report also highlights a range of infrastructure and resource requirements to deliver this. The report provides the following recommendations to upscale work-based learning at the University of Aberdeen:

5.4.1 Develop a diverse work-based learning offer by developing scalable experiential learning and a host of embedded project-based learning initiatives with employers
5.4.2 Establish infrastructure, systems, and processes to deliver placements at scale.
5.4.3 Create a clear, concise but robust institutional placement policy document which makes clear the responsibilities of all stakeholders in the delivery work-based learning provision.
5.4.4 Create clear school-level accountability to grow work-based learning provision.

5.5 Across the Higher Education sector, there are good examples of developing skills through experiential and work integrated learning. The challenges have been in capturing skills development and scaling programmes across the complex operations of a university.

5.6 There are a number of existing work-based project courses across the institution, for example in Social Sciences and in Medical Sciences.

5.7 One of the main challenges commonly cited is scaling the number of projects students can undertake. A system which facilitates running work-based projects at scale would be widely welcomed by staff currently running projects using a manual system (such as Health Sciences), and by areas keen to introduce work-based projects at scale (such as the Business School).

5.8 The key objectives for this project proposal and business case relate to recommendation 3, (and those listed at 5.4.1 and 5.4.2) to develop the digital solutions to supporting and managing WBL activity efficiently and building in scale, including establishing infrastructure, systems, and processes to deliver placements at scale

16. PROJECT SCOPE: HIGH-LEVEL DESCRIPTION

6.1 This business case presents the digital solutions to fully deliver against the recommendation to develop a diverse work-based learning offer by developing scalable experiential learning and a host of embedded project-based learning initiatives with employers. The proposal also presents aspects of the digital solutions required to meet the recommendation to build the infrastructure for managing the delivery of placements as part of our WBL menu, at scale.

6.2 Phase one of the project is to procure a system to support the upscaling of existing work-based project courses and those interested in piloting a system in the short term (March 2023-July 2023).

6.3 Phase two of the project is to develop a platform to facilitate delivery of a wide menu of work-based learning opportunity types at scale, to be accessible to all University of Aberdeen students in the medium to long term (March 2023 to full platform launch in September 2024).

6.4 Phase three of the project will seek to roll out a platform to support a wide menu of work-based learning opportunity types, across all Schools, to ensure opportunities are accessible to all University of Aberdeen students (from September 2024).

6.5 Phase one project summary (March 2023-July 2023): procure a system to support the upscaling of existing work-based project courses and those interested in piloting a system in the short term. Phase one will be delivered by piloting the Riipen platform. Riipen is an online work-based learning platform which provides virtual projects for teams of students to complete as part of a programme or course. There are currently no other platforms delivering the type, size and range of project opportunities. The platform has supported over 155,000 learner experiences in over 430 institutions to gain over 7 million hours of experiential learning with a network of over 25,000 employers since launch in 2017.

6.5.1 During the pilot Riipen will:
 a) Launch a branded Aberdeen University portal, which can be accessed by educators, students, and organisations to design, launch and collaborate on micro-experiential learning opportunities.
 b) Leverage Riipen's design wizard and extensive template library to accelerate the creation of new experiences.
 c) Support the Aberdeen University portal in connecting with organizations that want to engage with students through in-class projects and virtual internships.
 d) Use the Riipen platform to introduce the program's existing alumni and employer network to micro-experiential learning opportunities, and manage those experiences in one place.
 e) Once projects are underway, support student-industry collaboration and educator oversight with Riipen's project management tools (in-app chat, file sharing, milestone tracking, and video conferencing).
 f) Gather industry partner feedback on student performance with Riipen's assessment tools.
 g) Track and report on experiences with quantitative and qualitative data.

6.5.2 Technical Considerations:
 a) Riipen's platform can be used as an entirely standalone software platform, accessed over the web with no integration or installation required from the institution.
 b) Learning Management System (LMS) integration is available as part of the setup process at no additional cost. Riipen's LMS integration uses the LTI standard and is currently available for

Blackboard, Moodle, Canvas, and D2L. With this integration, an educator can link their course page in their LMS with their Riipen course page. Students in that course can access Riipen through their LMS without needing new credentials.

c) Riipen complies with all the relevant federal and provincial data privacy regulations. Riipen complies with PIPEDA, PIPA and GDPR standards for collecting and analysing data; Riipen is also SOC-2 compliant. All of Riipen's servers are in Canada, compliant with relevant privacy and other standard legislation.

d) Riipen provides an end-user privacy notice that identifies the purposes for which personal information is collected, used, retained, and disclosed: https://riipen.com/privacy-policy/.

6.6 Phase two project summary (March 2023-September 2024): develop a platform to facilitate delivery of a wide menu of work-based learning opportunity types at scale, to be accessible to all University of Aberdeen students in the medium to long term. Phase two will be delivered by signing up to the Gingko project as a University Development Partner. The Gingko Project is being delivered by GTI, who work with over 90 universities, in careers education and employability development. GTI provide the Target Connect system currently used by the University. The Gingko project is seeking partnership with around six Universities for the next 18 months. University Development Partners will support some of the upfront platform development costs and partner in platform development.

6.6.1 The Gingko Project will develop a platform during the 2023/24 academic year. As a University Development Partner we will:
a) Directly input on design and underlying logic.
b) Co-create features and help prioritise product roadmap.
c) Share knowledge in both directions.
d) Road test methodologies for delivering EL/WIL at scale within our institution.
e) Deploy instances of Ginkgo in test environments with interested schools/colleges/faculties or institution wide.
f) Receive support to create employer led projects.
g) Participate in research exploring EL/WIL at scale
h) Become founding members of the Institute for Experiential and Work Integrated Learning*
i) Benefit from being part of a forum of careers, academic and student experience leaders to shape the future of EL/WIL in UK.
j) Have 12 months use of the MVP included September 2023 – September 2024.
k) 100% credit to be available on future licence fees after Ginkgo development is complete over a three year licence agreement

6.6.2 Costs for partnership have been quoted based on institution size. Exact costs and associated outputs will be further defined following submission of an expression of interest by the end of December 2022. Costs can be divided out to cover part of the current financial year (March to July 2023) and then August 2023 to July 2024). Deliverables during the partnership period include use of MVP from Q1 2024. Following partnership development, a product licencing arrangement is to be determined during which the investment during partnership will be discounted from a licence over a three year period.

6.6.3 Submitting an expression of interest in the University Development Partner role will provide the opportunity to gather more detailed information for a full business case to be submitted to DSC in February 2023.

6.7 This business case seeks:

a) approval for phase one, following which the standard procurement process will be followed.
b) approval to submit an expression of interest in the University Development Partner opportunity for phase two. Following approval, a further fully scoped business case for phase two will be submitted to DSC in February 2023. Phase three is currently presented for information. A

business case would be made during phase two should we proceed as a University Development Partner.

7   RATIONALE AND EXPECTED BENEFITS

7.1   Aberdeen 2040 Education commitments state "We will provide more work-based learning, through placements and volunteering".

7.2   The University Court and the Senior Management Team see the growth of WBL as a critical element to enhancing Graduate Outcomes performance. Procurement and development of the systems to facilitate delivery of WBL within curriculum, and to provide a ready made pool of employers with projects to offer will enable us to progress our growth more quickly in the short term, while building a system which will fit our long term requirements.

7.3   There are various benefits this project is expected to deliver that support the following strategic priorities:

Graduate Outcomes KPI – Enhanced student employability outcomes through provision of work based learning experiences for students which enables better informed career decision making, gives insight into the world of work and connects students with employers, generating future career opportunities.

Financial sustainability and reputation – Enhanced student recruitment offering through highlighting our work based learning provision which prospective students require.

7.4   Phase one provides a solution which will support the immediate needs of the University to deliver current work based learning courses at a greater scale in the short term. This need has been identified from course providers who have seen great expansion in course numbers (such as in Masters in Health Science) and a number of course providers (Social Science, Business School) have highlighted the difficulty in building WBL into courses, and scaling numbers without a platform.

7.5   Phase two provides a long term solution to facilitate delivery of a wide menu of work-based learning opportunity types at scale, to be accessible to all University of Aberdeen students.

8   BUSINESS IMPACT

8.1   If phase one of the project does not go ahead, as an institution we will be unable to progress the 2040 ambition to upscale work based learning and volunteering across the institution in the short term. In addition, staff who are currently running work based learning courses will have to continue to manage increased numbers manually, creating pressure and risking their ability to deliver for the number of students on their course.

8.2   If phase one of the project is delayed, we will be unable to progress the 2040 ambition to upscale work based learning and volunteering across the institution in the short term.

8.3   If phase two of the project does not go ahead, as an institution we will be unable to progress the 2040 ambition to upscale work based learning and volunteering across the institution in the long term. Growth of WBL activities is required in relation to student recruitment and to improve graduate outcomes performance.

8.4   If phase two of the project is delayed we will be unable to take up the opportunity to work with a range of partner institutions on the Gingko project which is seeking to develop a sector wide solution. Delaying would also mean we cannot leverage the reputational benefits of becoming a founding partner of the Institute for Experiential and Work Integrated Learning. More widely, we will be unable to progress the 2040 ambition to upscale work based learning and volunteering across the institution.

9   PROJECT FINANCE

9.1   Phase One: This business case requests approval to utilise the allocated funds for academic year 2022-23 (approximately £27,500 of the £50,000 revenue budget allocated) to cover costs for a pilot licence for up to 300 students between March 2023 and July 2023. Costs for pilot have been quoted as follows (Pricing is in USD and is valid until December 31, 2022):

Pilot licence for up to 300 student experiences: Academic licence and account management ($30,000.00), onboarding and implementation fee ($3,750.00)

This funding will deliver phase one of the project, following the standard procurement process.

9.2   Phase Two: This business case requests approval to utilise a proportion (totalling in the region of £47,500) of the allocated capital funds for academic year 2022-23 (£50,000) and academic year 2023-24 (£50,000) to sign up to the Gingko project as a University Development Partner. Approval in principle would enable the institution to submit an expression of interest in becoming a University Development Partner. This funding would deliver phase two of the project from March 2023 to September 2024, following the standard procurement process.

9.3   Phase Three: A further business case will be submitted for academic year 2024-27 following phase two, when the Gingko project will be implemented via a licensing model. At this stage the partnership funds contributed by the University (£47,500) will be discounted from the licence fee over a three year contract.

10   PROJECT SCHEDULE

Milestone	Details	Forecast Completion Date
Phase 1	Phase one (March 2023-July 2023): conduct a pilot utilising a system which is already available to support delivery of a range of existing and new work-based project courses and programmes for 300 students by August 2023. Lessons learned and experience of the system would inform development of a longer term solution during phase two. Staff and student numbers will be finalised following approval of this business case, completion of a successful procurement process and a full demonstration of the product to key stakeholders. The following staff members have expressed firm interest in running existing or new work based learning projects for students: • Heather Morgan, Lecturer (Scholarship), Institute of Applied Health Sciences: Projects for 100 postgraduate taught students. • Stephanie Morgan, Director of Accreditations, Business School: level, courses and numbers to be determined following product demonstration. • Oliver Hamlet, Teaching Fellow, School of Psychology: level, courses and numbers to be determined following product demonstration.	July 2023

	• Tracey Innes, Head of Careers and Employability: co-curricular projects available to all students (any discipline/year of study) to work in teams and complete the ABDN Connect Experience Programme. Following approval for phase one of this business case, the next steps to launch pilot in March 2023 are: a) Meeting of key University stakeholders for product demonstration and Q&A (January 2023). Following this, work-based learning courses, programmes and numbers for the pilot will be agreed. b) Completion of Enhanced Supplier Cyber and Data Assessment (IS17: Enhanced Supplier Cyber and Data Assessment (abdn.ac.uk) and Data protection impact assessment (DPIA) c) Standard procurement process followed (including Single Supplier Justification submission). d) Contract approval and sign off (February 2023) e) Staff training (3-5 max hours).	
Phase 2	Phase two (March 2023 to launch September 2024): develop a platform to facilitate delivery of a full menu of work-based learning opportunity types at scale, to be accessible to all University of Aberdeen students from September 2024. Next steps: a) Submit an expression of interest in becoming a University Development Partner to Gingko (by end December 2022) b) Meeting with Gingko project representatives and University stakeholders for project discussion and Q&A (January 2023). c) Develop full business case for DSC for partnership from March 2023 to September 2024 (February 2023). d) Completion of Standard Supplier Cyber and Data Assessment and Data protection impact assessment (DPIA) (March 2023). e) Standard procurement process completed (March 2023)	September 2024
Phase 3	Phase three (from September 2024): roll out use of work-related learning platform to support wide menu of work-based learning opportunity types, across all Schools, as required, and centrally to ensure opportunities are accessible to all University of Aberdeen students.	Throughout AY 2024-25

11   HIGH-LEVEL RISKS AND ISSUES

11.1 Staff resource of both academic and professional services staff involved in the piloting of the Riipen platform and in the partnership activities to co-design the Gingko platform.

11.2 Lack of engagement from key stakeholders (internally and externally).

11.3 Timescales are short for implementing phase one and for submitting an expression of interest for implementing phase two.

12   GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

12.1 A project board will be established to deliver all phases of work outlined. The project board will be structured as follows:

Proposed Composition and Membership

Project Role	Membership
Sponsor	Tracey Innes, Head of Careers and Employability Service
Senior User	Heather Morgan, Lecturer (Scholarship) in Applied Health Sciences
Senior Supplier	TBC (requested via Ian Robotham)
Project Manager	Kate Robertson, Senior Careers and Employability Adviser
User	David McCausland (Director of Education, Business School)
Suppliers	Fiona Stuart, Data Protection Officer, Information Governance Team
	Sara Preston, Centre for Academic Development
	Gary Coull, Employer Engagement Manager, Careers and Employability Service (in post from 30/01/2023)
	John Barrow, Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship
Procurement Adviser	Leon Mouat to advise as required through duration of project.
Project Support	Andrew Mackie, Information Manager, Careers and Employability Service

12.2 A project user group will be established. Membership of the user group will include relevant members of the work placements task and finish group, and additional members to incorporate course leads from Schools involved in the pilot and upscaling plans. The project user group will be chaired by the Project Board Senior User.

12.3 The project board will be accountable and formally report to the Digital Strategy Committee. The project board will also report to the Employability & Entrepreneurship Committee and University Education Committee as required.

13. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Tracey Innes (t.innes@abdn.ac.uk).

January 2023

Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

TOOLS FOR THE DELIVERY OF EDUCATION

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper provides an update on the digital tools that have been piloted during the AY 2022-23 to support the delivery of Education, two of which were funded through the "Tools for the Delivery of Education" strand of the Digital Strategy Committee (DSC) budget.

These digital tools are:
- Respondus LockDown Browser, for enhancing the integrity of online assessments.
- Individualised Peer Assessed Contribution (IPAC), for supporting peer evaluation in group work.
- Authorship, a tool developed by Turnitin, for supporting the investigation of suspected cases of contract cheating.

This paper is for discussion and for approving the recommendations set out further below, before approaching DSC with cases to secure funding for such tools in AY 2023-24 and beyond.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	N/A	
Further consideration/ approval required by	Digital Strategy Committee	Email circulation

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

The University Education Committee is invited to approve the following:
- Recommendation 1: The submission of a business case to DSC for procuring Respondus LockDown Browser, for the following 3 years.
- Recommendation 2: The submission of a business case to DSC for procuring a tool to support peer evaluation in group work, for the following 3 years.
- Recommendation 3: The approach to developing a business case for continuing to pilot Authorship, a tool developed by Turnitin, to support the investigation of suspected cases of contract cheating, for a further year.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1 RESPONDUS LOCKDOWN BROWSER

The return to on-campus teaching has provided the opportunity to run invigilated online assessments delivered through MyAberdeen. In these situations, it is desirable to enhance the integrity of the assessment process by locking down the online assessment so that students are not able to access other applications during the test or examination.

In February 2023 the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) started a free trial of Respondus LockDown Browser, a custom browser that is deeply integrated within Blackboard Learn (MyAberdeen), which locks down the testing environment. Respondus LockDown

Browser is used by over 2000 higher educational institutional worldwide to enhance the integrity of invigilated online assessments.

The key features of Respondus LockDown Browser are:

- o Limited Toolbar - Only has Forward, Back, Refresh, and Stop buttons.
- o Assessment Mode - Assessments are full-screen and can't be minimized or closed until they're submitted.
- o Disabled Controls - Printing, certain keyboard shortcuts, screenshots, function keys, and right-click menus can't be used.
- o Blocked Features and Applications - Some usual features like the Start button (for Windows users), system tray, and menu bars are removed. Several screen capture, messaging, screen-sharing, and network monitoring applications are also blocked.
- o Advanced settings – access during the online assessment to a list of specified web domains can be enabled

CAD liaised with colleagues in the Directorate of Digital & Information Services (DDIS) to install the Respondus LockDown Browser in managed PC classrooms in the Old Aberdeen campus and in the Doha campus, for courses that were trialling Respondus LockDown Browser.

Academic staff trialling the Respondus LockDown Browser said it was easy to use and it performed as expected. Evaluations of students' experiences were run by CAD and by Dr Nigel Beacham, both of which concluded that students found it easy to use.

The Classroom Support Team that installed the Respondus LockDown Browser in specific classrooms PCs confirmed that it was straightforward to install and could be incorporated into the classroom build for AY 2023-24, thus ensuring it was made available in all classroom PCs in the future.

The alternative open-source solution, Safe Exam Browser, was reviewed but it did not enable an individual assessment to be locked down in MyAberdeen, nor did it provide options for specifying specific web domains that students could access during a test.

The expected benefits of implementing Respondus LockDown Browser institutionally are:

- o Enhance academic integrity by preventing cheating during on-campus online assessments.
- o Increase staff confidence in on-campus online assessment security.
- o Reduce the administrative burden of monitoring and addressing academic misconduct in on-campus online assessments.
- o Ensure continuous updates and maintenance of the software.

In addition, it provides an opportunity to explore options for students to use their own devices for invigilated online assessments, as they can also install the software on their computers.

For information, the costs for procuring Respondus LockDown Browser institution wide are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Costs for Procuring Respondus LockDown Browser (LDB), excluding VAT

	Cost of Respondus LDB in USD	Cost of Respondus LDB in GBP
Year 1 – AY 2023-24	$5,045	~ £4,000
Year 2 – AY 2024-25	$5,221	~ £4,135
Year 3 – AY 2025-26	$5,403	~ £4,280

On the basis of the above, the committee is being asked to approve Recommendation 1, which recommends the submission of a business case to DSC for procuring Respondus LockDown Browser, for the following 3 years, based on the costs in Table 1.

4.2 Peer evaluation in Group Work

Collaborative learning through group work has been shown to enhance learning and develop teamwork skills which are highly valued by employers. However, one of the challenges with group work revolves around ensuring fairness, when it comes to assessment. An effective approach to this involves incorporating peer evaluation into the assessment process. This involves students in a group assessing the contribution of their peers to the group work, which can then be used to provide individual grades for the group work.

On the 13 October 2022, funding (£7,500 excluding VAT) was approved by the Digital Strategy Committee (DSC) to pilot the peer evaluation tool IPAC (Individual Peer Assessed Contribution), a tool developed and maintained by University College London (UCL), in order to assess the institution's requirements and potential usage for such a tool, and to inform a business case for procuring this type of peer evaluation tool for a period of 3 years starting in AY 2023-24.

There were 19 courses that used IPAC as part of group work, which have provided valuable feedback on the requirements for using such a tool as part of the assessment of group work. In one of the courses where students were surveyed on their views of IPAC, those that responded (10 in total) indicated that the peer evaluation process was simple and straightforward, with 8 agreeing that the group peer review exercise was worthwhile and provided them with confidence in the final assessment grade.

The expected benefits of implementing a peer evaluation tool institutionally are:
- o Greater student satisfaction with group work, as the assessment process is seen to be fair and transparent.
- o Time-saving and increased efficiency in the assessment process.
- o Enhanced collaboration and accountability among students.
- o Improved accuracy and objectivity in peer evaluations.

Based on the costs of using IPAC during AY 2022-23, it has been estimated that it could cost between £7,500 and £12,500 per year, excluding VAT, for 3 years, depending on usage.

Based on the above, the committee is being asked to approve Recommendation 2, which is to submit a business case to DSC to procure a tool to support peer evaluation in group work, for 3 years, starting in AY 2023-24. An evaluation of potential solutions will take place, based on the requirements identified by academic staff involved in piloting IPAC during this academic year. This will ensure a tool is procured that meets the needs of academic staff and is cost-effective for the institution, for the following 3 years.

4.3 Authorship, a tool developed by Turnitin, to investigate potential contract cheating

The University has two tools that it uses to support the detection of plagiarism, which includes self-plagiarism, and collusion: Turnitin Feedback Studio and Blackboard's SafeAssign. These are text-matching tools, which check for text similarity between any assessments previously submitted to their databases, libraries of publications and online content available on the internet.

Following the UEC paper (UEC/230622/010) last year, on institutional approaches to addressing contract cheating in assessments, funding (£25,708.55) to pilot Authorship during AY 2022-23, a tool developed by Turnitin, was approved by the Digital Strategy Committee on the 13 October 2022.

The Turnitin Authorship tool assists staff investigating potential cases of contract cheating to gather evidence to support or contest the case(s) brought to their attention. The reports produced by Authorship provide details of document properties and writing consistency across submissions made by the student in various courses.

A Task and Finish Group (TFG) was established to provide governance and ultimately make recommendations about future University-wide implementation of Authorship. The membership and remit of the group is detailed in Appendix 1. To date there have been no potential cases of contract cheating brought to the attention of Schools piloting the Authorship tool, which has

made it impossible to conduct an evaluation of the benefits of using Authorship. The last meeting of the TFG will be on the 23 May, at which point it will make recommendations on whether the Authorship pilot should be extended by a year or not, and what governance arrangements should be put in place for AY 2023-24 and beyond.

It is proposed that the approach to developing a business case for continuing to pilot Authorship for a further year should involve the following:

- o A recommendation, in May, from the TFG on whether the Authorship pilot should be extended for a further year or not.
- o Approval, by the middle of June, by UEC of the recommendation made by the TFG
- o If the Authorship pilot is to be extended by a year, a business case is submitted to DSC before the end of June.

The committee is therefore being asked to approve Recommendation 3, which is the approach detailed above to developing a business case for continuing to pilot Authorship for a further year.

5.   FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Professor Kirsty Kiezebrink, (k.kiezebrink@abdn.ac.uk), Dean for Educational Innovation, or Dr Sara Preston (s.preston@abdn.ac.uk), Senior eLearning Adviser.

10 May 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

Task and Finish Group: Turnitin Authorship and Academic Integrity - Policy and Practice

Membership and Remit

Group Membership
- Dean for Educational Innovation: Kirsty Kiezebrink
- Assistant Registrar (Academic Services): Liam Dyker (acting)
- Deputy Academic Registrar: Yvonne Gordon
- Director of Education, NCS: Bill Harrison
- Director of Education, Biological Sciences: Michelle Pinard
- Director of Education, Geosciences: Josh Wright
- Director of Education, LLMVC: Shona Potts
- Director of Studies at the Qatar Campus: Lyn Batchelor
- Dean for Quality Assurance & Enhancement: Steve Tucker
- eLearning Team Leader: Sara Preston
- eLearning Adviser: Gavin Innes
- Student representative: Felicia Ileladewa

Remit
- Oversee the evaluation of Turnitin Authorship software, ensuring input from Schools involved in the initial pilot.
- Identify effective approaches to using Turnitin Authorship and produce guidelines to share for wider implementation.
- Develop and review current processes on how Turnitin Authorship can be used alongside current practices and systems.
- Engage more broadly with other institutions regarding their approach to gathering evidence of contract cheating and whether they use tools such as Turnitin Authorship
- To provide recommendations to QAC for incorporation into revised policies on academic integrity.
- Reporting to the University Education Committee and the Digital Strategy Committee, making recommendations about University-wide implementation of Authorship.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY UPDATE

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

> This paper provides an update on the response to developments in artificial intelligence and their potential impact on assessment practices. The committee is asked to:
>
> - Note the approval by Senate to changes to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic), for AY 2023-24, to address developments in artificial intelligence tools, and approve the refinements made in response to queries raised.
>
> - Discuss the proposal to establish a "Academic Integrity and Teaching Practice Advisory Group", or appropriate equivalent.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	University Education Committee Quality Assurance Committee Senate	23 March 2023 29 March 2023 19 April 2023
Further consideration/ approval required by		

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

> The committee is invited to approve the following:
>
> - The refinements made to the proposed amendment to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) following discussions in Senate.
>
> - The proposal to establish a "Academic Integrity and Teaching Practice Advisory Group", or appropriate equivalent.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1 Changes to Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic)

On the 19 April Senate approved the proposed change to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic), which involved adding text to Section 3.2 of the Code to explicitly state that unacknowledged use of artificial intelligence constitutes plagiarism. The final version of the text, which has been refined based on comments at Senate, is as follows:

> "Plagiarism also includes the use of Artificial Intelligence tools to generate content without appropriate acknowledgment of the source"

The guidance for staff on artificial intelligence tools and assessment practices has also been revised to place greater emphasis on the guidance for students on how to acknowledge the use of AI tools.

4.2 Establishment of a "Academic Integrity and Teaching Practice Advisory Group"

There have been significant challenges to educational practice, assessment design and academic integrity over the past three years, in particular due to the challenges and opportunities that arose due to Covid-19 followed shortly after by advances in artificial intelligence tools.

These challenges have resulted in significant changes in teaching and assessment approaches across the higher education sector. However, many of these changes have been implemented in a "response to crisis" type approach.

We propose that in order to take a more proactive approach to enhancing educational practice and ensuring academic integrity in such a rapidly evolving landscape there is a need to establish a "Academic Integrity and Teaching Practice Advisory Group", or appropriate equivalent. This Advisory Group would replace the need for groups such as the short-life working group to address the recommendations made to UEC to address contract cheating, the Task and Finish Group on Turnitin Authorship and Academic Integrity – Policy and Practice.

The purpose of having a "Academic Integrity and Teaching Practice Advisory Group" is to monitor, advise and provide strategic direction in relation to emerging trends in Higher Education that could impact or enhance learning, teaching and assessment.

The proposed remit of a "Academic Integrity and Teaching Practice Advisory Group" is:

- Conduct horizon scanning of the digital learning landscape, identifying emerging trends, opportunities and challenges, such as artificial intelligence, and providing guidance on implications to educational practice.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact and outcomes of digital learning, teaching and assessment initiatives and projects, respecting individual learners and diverse groups of learners.
- Develop strategies to ensure academic integrity in the face of advancing digital technologies and artificial intelligence, making recommendations to UEC.
- Evaluate documentation and support available to staff on addressing the challenges to assessment integrity, overseeing the provision of up to date, evidence-based support to enhance assessment practice to improve the quality, reliability, and validity of assessments.
- Advocate for and assist in the creation of professional development opportunities for academic and support staff to improve their pedagogy skills and understanding of the ethical use of technology and artificial intelligence in education as a basis for effective practice.
- Contribute to the development and refinement of policies related to learning, teaching and assessment, making recommendations to QAC and UEC, as appropriate.
- Engage and consult widely with academic, support and professional services staff on matters under review that can impact their practice.
- Collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, including staff, students, alumni, employers, professional bodies, regulators and other organisations, to enhance practice.

The "Academic Integrity and Teaching Practice Advisory Group" would be chaired by the Dean for Educational Innovation and would include representatives from Schools, Professional Services and Students, and supported, administratively, by the Centre for Academic Development.

The committee is asked to discuss and provide comments on this as the approach going forwards and approve the proposal to establish such an Advisory Group, or equivalent, to ensure as an institution we can be proactive rather than reactive to the constantly evolving learning landscape.

5. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Professor Kirsty Kiezebrink, (k.kiezebrink@abdn.ac.uk), Dean for Educational Innovation, or Dr Sara Preston (s.preston@abdn.ac.uk), Senior eLearning Adviser.

9 May 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

EMPLOYABILITY & ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMMITTEE (EEC)

Minutes of the Meeting held on 04th May, 2023

Present: John Barrow (Co-Chair), Tracey Innes (Co-Chair), Alisdair McKibben (Clerk), Oliver Hamlet, David Green, Danielle Grieve, Lorna Cruickshank, Alyson Young, Alisdair Macpherson, Rafael Cardoso, Jenna Stuart, Susan Halfpenny, Lenka Mbadugha (required to leave early), Amir Siddiq (required to leave early)

Apologies: Stuart Durkin, Heather May Morgan, Helen Pierce, Lucy Leiper.

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1. Approval of the minutes (February 28th, 2023)   (EEC/040523/001)
Minutes of the meeting approved.

2. Matters Arising including review of Action Log   (EEC/040523/002)
Action log reviewed. Update on outstanding actions and progress being made.

3. Work Based Learning (WBL)   (EEC/040523/003)
  (i)   Tracey gave update on ongoing upscaling of WBL including *draft* paper EEC/040523/003. The paper showcased the vision being set up to upscale WBL and the 5-year plan to achieve this. Resource requested to support development across the institution may not be met in full in which case adjustments to original goals will need to be made.
  (ii) (see 8.1.1) As highlighted within the Gradconsult report, UoA don't currently have robust Placement Policy Guidance in place. As such, one of the resource requirements within the paper has been approved and Gradconsult will conduct a piece of work over the summer period to build a placement policy.
  (iii) Update on Wood Foundation Internship Progress from Alisdair McKibben. Currently in conversation with local third-sector organisations to create 4 internship opportunities for this summer as part of the pilot programme. Once projects are finalised, call to EEC members to highlight roles to students.
  (iv) School Employability and Skills Champions (SESC): Committee had the chance to hear from Rafael Cardoso regarding the scoping exercise he has carried out as part of his role as SESC within the School of NCS. Rafael highlighted the impact of having Head of Department support regarding implementing employability across the department. Rafael spoke highly of the positive colleague engagement he experienced and recommended bringing the Careers Team (Careers & Employability Adviser and Employer Engagement Lead) into those meetings/conversations.

4. GO Update
  (i)   Update from Action Log (item 31): Due to limited resource within Planning the request for individual school data has been noted but will be challenging to execute.
  (ii) A need has arisen within GO steering group for School representatives. The commitment would include attending 4-6 meetings each year. It is not an expectation that EEC school representatives take on this additional role (though they are welcome to if they wish). Instead, EEC representatives to disseminate a call to colleagues to join GO steering group.

5. Approval of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills   (EEC/040523/004)

John gave overview of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills paper. The paper was discussed within the committee with comments from various members. It was noted the title "Active Citizenship" may be changed to "Global Citizenship" but otherwise, outside of minor word changes the skills framework will stay the same as is currently. The committee also spoke positively regarding the second recommendation found in the paper (7.2) commenting on the fact that the new proposed process will be student-led, more flexible and will support the students in articulating the skills gained from their cocurricular activities.
The committee unanimously approved the recommendations.

> **Action: AMcK** to email out SWAY survey to all EEC members and ask to share across departments and externally with industry contacts.

6. Risk Register   (EEC/040523/005)
The committee reviewed Risk Register. There were no comments.

7. AOB
No other business.

8. Date of Next Meeting
Date of next meeting to be reschedule. Date to be determined and TEAMS meeting to be scheduled.

> **Action: AMcK** to reschedule next meeting and send TEAMS invitation.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REPORT FROM THE STUDENT SUPPORT & EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE
03rd May 2023

1.   Approval of Minutes of meeting held on 07 March 2023
1.1: Minutes approved
1.2: No outstanding actions

2.   Welcome and Chair's Update

Nick Edwards (NE) welcomed members to the meeting and began by reminding the group that Student Support Services will be open as usual over the summer, and also they can be contacted for any issues around the cost of living, where students require financial support or advice. Jason Bohan (JB) said a meeting took place with the School Disability Coordinators to discuss revising provisions and there will be further updates on this matter at future meetings. JB also updated on discussions around developing an extension policy and this is an ongoing discussion with the Registry Team to decide where it would sit, as it would be a large piece of work, plus the absence reporting procedures would likely be included in the review.

3.   Withdrawals Report 2022/23 First Semester

JB introduced the paper, which summaries student withdrawals for the first semester and this data is broken down by several categories, including by month, to identify key trends. The majority of the withdrawals tend to be for health or personal reasons but there is not currently enough data available to know how schools can be supported to intervene and the committee held a discussion with varying opinions on the withdrawal form's value, as many students tick one box and do not include any additional information. Protected characteristic data will be included in the next report, which is due in three months' time. The group agreed any additional data would be very useful to inform action plans and aid retention.

4.   Student Engagement Post-Pandemic

NE introduced the item as a discussion and follow-up on general issues raised at the previous SSEC meeting on levels of student engagement post-pandemic and also any specific issues which the group wished to discuss. JB added that the item was on the agenda partly as a follow-up from the discussion about withdrawals, but also to get more information from schools on trends they have identified around whether students are generally happy in their studies.

Tim Baker (TB) noted attendance and non-engagement seemed to be a particular issue in Year 2 students at the moment in his school and Sai Shraddha S Viswanathan (SV) noted the many factors affecting students, such as the cost of living, students adjusting to being on campus after several years of remote learning, support for disabilities and hidden disabilities. It was also noted that friendship networks in class and in student accommodation do not seem to be as strong for current students compared to previous cohorts. International students also

face an increasing number of unpredictable or volatile circumstances. JB suggested reviewing opportunities for community events and ensuring all activities were inclusive would be useful, while it would be worth seeing how the Buddy Scheme can be supported and expanded.

5.   **Assessment Period and Exam Arrangements**

JB noted the agenda item was included as a discussion point to allow schools to feedback on any issues around the current assessment period. On the marking boycott, JB noted is a concerning situation and causing anxiety for students. The situation is being monitored very closely but the impact on students is not clear at the moment.

Discussions have been had with schools, Registry, Estates and others around exam arrangements, particularly where provisions mean some students need a separate room or access to computing facilities. Many schools have reported not having enough rooms to meet all the requirements, while there have been issues with not having printing facilities in the rooms where a student is using a computer. These issues were discussed prior to this exam diet and will be reviewed once the assessment period has concluded. The aim is to minimise disruption for students and schools.

JB also mentioned that Old Aberdeen medical practice is now refusing to write medical notes for students due to the workload involved. Jemma Murdoch (JM) is in communication with them and this will have an impact not only on absence reporting and assessments, but for disability provisions as well. Conversations have been had with the Directors of Education in each school and we will need to be more flexible by accepting other forms of evidence where possible. Going forwards, this issue is likely to mean the University will need to review its policies around medical evidence for absences, assessments and provisions. This has been discussed with Registry and will be developed over the summer.

6.   **Risk Register**

NE introduced the University's Risk Register, with no immediate concerns after mitigation for areas relevant to this committee. The issue of AI producing coursework for students was raised and JB confirmed this was being looked at as a priority and was likely to appear on the Risk Register in the future.

7.   **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**

Janine Chalmers (JCh), Head of Organisational Development, joined the meeting as a guest and introduced a review of existing policies, starting with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. The review group was made up of staff and students and overall it was found it matched well with best practice across the sector. There were some areas for enhancement, such as the addition of more comprehensive support documents at the end and also some additional appendices to cover definitions, as this is an area which is evolving quickly and needs to be kept up to date. The committee praised the document and, in particular, the resources section in the Appendices, which were felt to be very useful.

8.   **Religion and Belief Policy**

JCh introduced a 2nd policy which has been updated, which is the Religion and Belief Policy. Much of the review has been around the tone of the policy and was partly a result of academic

colleagues raising concerns about students not engaging with their studies during times of religious festivals and this led to the creation of the policy in 2014.

The previous version lacked a definition of religion and belief, which has now been included, and the revised version has more information on freedom of speech and more support included. JCh also noted the University has adopted the Young Academy of Scotland's Charter for Responsible Debate, so this information has been added to the document.

9. **Postgraduate Survey**

JB introduced the item and informed the committee there are surveys for postgraduate research students and postgraduate taught students and the Student Experience team have been ensuring students are aware of the surveys and the benefits of filling these out. Similar to the NSS, there will be a report produced afterwards which will then go to relevant committees and will inform individual school action plans. The postgraduate research survey is currently open and has had a 12% response rate so far, but still has a few weeks to run. The postgraduate Taught survey will open slightly later, from the 26th of May to the 16th of June. Results will be discussed at future SSEC meetings, hopefully by September.

10. **Reflection on SSEC Task and Finish Groups (TFGs)**

NE said the Code of Practice on Student Discipline has been approved at Court and will come into effect from August the 1st. It will be added to the webpages on Student Discipline over the next few weeks alongside the existing code, which is still in place until July 31st. The TFG will have one more meeting and then report back to committee at the beginning of the new academic year.

JB informed the committee that more work is being done on the business case for developing IT systems to improve the Monitoring process. Within the Pastoral Review TFG, JB said a small group is working to simplify the webpage structure and the proposals will be discussed at the forthcoming Senior Personal Tutor Forum to ensure wider consultation.

11. **AOCB**

Committee Clerk, Stevie Kearney (SK), informed the committee the calendar invites for SSEC meetings for the 2023/24 academic year will be sent out this week to allow members to plan ahead.

12. **Further information**
10.1: Further information may be obtained from Nick Edwards, Co-Chair, (n.edwards@abdn.ac.uk), Jason Bohan, Co-Chair (jason.bohan@abdn.ac.uk) or Stevie Kearney, Clerk, (steven.kearney@abdn.ac.uk).