UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY
STUDENTS VIEWS ON UNIVERSITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

1. **PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

   The purpose of the paper is to provide an overview of the results of the
   2023 Aberdeen Student Experience Survey (ASES) for information.

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

	Board/Committee	**Date**
Previously considered/approved by		
Further consideration by	University Education Committee	

3. **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

   The **UEC** is invited to view the survey results in 4.10 and
   departmental actions on feedback and pass to UEC for information.

4. **DISCUSSION**

   4.1. The Aberdeen Student Experience Survey (ASES) is conducted annually to collect feedback from all registered students at the University of Aberdeen. Scheduled in October for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, and in November for postgraduate research students, the survey aims to address student non-academic feedback in advance of the National Student Survey (NSS).

   4.2. Consultation was undertaken with stakeholders, such as Digital Information Services, Library, Career and Employability Service, Planning, as well as with Online and Qatar Campus teams, and the Postgraduate Research School. This collaborative approach ensured the survey gathered valuable and actionable insights.

   4.3. The survey routes the student by type (*UG, PGT, PGR*) and by campus (*Aberdeen, Online, Qatar*) to ensure students get a relevant and tailored question set for them.

   4.4. Students are given the opportunity to provide additional qualitative feedback on all topics. It is important to acknowledge that the qualitative entries in the reports remain unedited, though names have been redacted.

   4.5. Students are asked questions relating to belonging, sport and wellbeing, support services, communication, digital services, library, careers service, orientation, and School induction.

   4.6. In total, 1808 responses were submitted, representing an overall response rate of 12%, a decrease of 1.74% on 2022 (13.74%).

   4.7. The full report and individual School reports (available in section 4.9) have been shared with Heads of School. Schools have been invited to review the ASES reports and incorporate any pertinent insights into their School Action Plans when reviewing NSS results.

   4.8. Results have also been shared with Professional Service departments, the Qatar and Online Campuses, Students' Union who were asked to review the reports and submit a minimum of one key action that has been implemented or is planned to be introduced as a result of the

student feedback in the ASES. Some actions have already been identified and are detailed in section 5.0 Departmental Actions on Feedback.

4.9. Schools, Qatar and Online campus reports can view via the links below.

- **ASES 2023 OVERALL REPORT**

- School of Business
- School of Biological Sciences
- School of DHPA
- School of Engineering
- School of Education
- School of Geosciences
- School of LLMVC
- School of Law

- School of MMSN
- School of NCS
- School of Psychology
- School of Social Science

- Qatar
- Online
- Postgraduate Research School

5.0 DEPARTMENTAL ACTIONS ON FEEDBACK

5.1 Experience, Engagement and Wellbeing (EEW)

Feedback from ASES	Comment / Planned Actions
Theme: Communication Welcome emails were cited as not overly helpful for PGR students.	EEW will collaborate with PGR School to review program information and details of the academic journey for PGR students.
Theme: Welcome Experience Lack of awareness about pre-registration events Awareness and poor scheduling of School inductions	Analyse the necessity of pre-registration events, which were initially introduced to address COVID-related needs. EW will continue collaborating with schools for promotion, but late information receipt may limit promotional efforts.
Theme: Orientation Not specific to Qatar or Online campus Too long	EEW will explore the possibility of organising separate University online orientation for Aberdeen, Qatar, and online students to ensure streamlined and relevant content. EEW and DDIS teams will jointly review UG/PGT digital security topic, alongside a review of all other modules.
Theme: Social media Little desire for private Facebook Groups	EEW will review the relevance of existing Facebook communities and consider retiring those that no longer serve a specific purpose, unless they are essential, such as those related to accommodation.
Theme: Social media Preferred channels	EEW will adapt their social strategy, targeting Instagram as one of the primary channels for students and exploit stories, Threads, and Guides.
Theme: Buddy Scheme	A new format of the Buddy scheme will be launched for September, moving to a group model catering for up to 15 new students.
Theme: Student Mental Health More comprehensive and long-term solutions for students with enduring mental health difficulties	More promotion of established links with NHS Services.

5.2 Directorate of Digital and Information Services

Feedback from ASES	Comment / Planned Actions
Theme: Collection development: Students are concerned about the high costs of textbooks and materials. They suggest expanding the eBook collection and adding course-specific materials. Involving students in the selection process is seen as a way to enhance the library's offerings.	DDIS are aware of some outstanding requirements for content which remains too expensive to purchase, unfortunately textbooks fall into this category. The Reading List Service team work closely with schools to encourage requests for essential reading to be flagged so that material, where affordable, can be added to our collections.
Theme: Group and individual Study Space Students requested more study space, both for groups and individuals. Noise levels in SDRL were a particular concern.	The Floor 2 refurb in SDRL has provided additional group study spaces. This has been designed to draw the noisier groups down from the quieter floors to introduce zoning of floors. (Silent Study, Quiet Study and Collaborative Zones).
Theme: Digital Accessibility Students faced difficulties accessing online resources, including issues with the Primo interface, broken links, and outdated information. Accessibility concerns were raised regarding difficulties logging in and navigating online platforms.	Primo Investigating adding Primo to Quick Links on all University pages. Recent UX improvement work has increased the visibility/contrast of the log in button and added a secondary login prompt. While certain issues like automatic logouts and broken links from supplier source records are beyond our control, DDIS will make efforts to rectify reported broken links. Navigating different platforms DDIS are working to incorporate single sign on as many systems as possible to enhance user experience. Accessibility Accessibility tools within classroom pcs are configured by default. The list will be reviewed to see if anything else can be added. DDIS has optimized the website for accessibility, including screen reader compatibility, colour palette choices, and regular scanning with QA Tool, Siteimprove. Dark Mode is being developed as part of a broader project to transition to a new UoA Design System. Additionally, a new menu system will soon launch with a new Content Management System, enhancing findability on the extensive website.
Theme: Sensory and Environmental Concerns Concerns on the absence of a 24/7 library option, was cited as an obstacle for studying during critical periods.	Data on 24/7 library usage doesn't justify year-round extended hours due to cost and sustainability concerns. DDIS will, however, continue to monitor usage.
Theme: Improved Communications Some students lacked awareness of key library services, including reading lists, Primo, and borrowing procedures.	DDIS believe some further engagement with Schools to ensure accurate student signposting. For example, APA published materials **are** available within the Library Collections. DDIS will also consider timeliness in providing tutorial and guide links. A Library chat service is being explored for potential implementation.

Theme: Digital Security	The University provides two types of Information Security
Some comments addressed Cyber Security training, focusing on course content and the timing of mandatory annual renewals.	Training: mandatory annual training for staff and PGRs (with a separate Data Protection course), and information security training for students.
	The UG/PGT orientation (digital security section) will be reviewed in 2024.
	The content and timing of the mandatory training for PGR students and staff is reviewed annually. with DDIS addressing this with the PGR School.

5.2 Student Advice and Support Office (SASO)

Feedback from ASES	Comment / Planned Actions

Theme: misconceptions
• Counselling service is difficult to access.
• limited appointments
• needs more promotion.
• all services are on King's campus.
• process to receive counselling could be streamlined.
	Enhance Promotion of University Counselling Service (UCS):
	1. Boost promotion efforts for UCS, outlining available services, operational procedures, and appointment arrangements.
	2. Address common misconceptions by clarifying UCS policies:
	    • UCS offers unlimited counselling sessions.
	    • In-person sessions available every Wednesday at Foresterhill, widely utilised.
	    • UCS does not provide crisis intervention; medical response required for emergencies.
	3. UCS team is developing a concise description of counselling services for website inclusion within a week.
	4. Coordinate with EEW wellbeing team to amplify UCS visibility among students.
	5. Share UCS policies and procedures overview with Student Support.
	6. Provide brief service outline in staff Ezine for wider awareness.

Theme: Counselling delivery Counselling should be available in booked blocks, or 3 appointments with reminders sent.	The Counselling Service's book-at-the-point-of-need system allows students to be seen with a minimal wait – usually withing a few days of their first enquiry. This approach will not suit everyone, but the UCS will not be reintroducing blocks of sessions, as this will inevitably lead to many weeks, or even months, of waiting for a first session. UCS do make an exception in rare cases where clinically assessed client need and/or risk suggests that offering a block of sessions would be advisable. All clients already receive an emailed reminder on the morning of their planned session. There is only a requirement to complete a self-referral form *once* per academic year, regardless of the number of sessions arranged – these two points raised may be another area where a more widespread understanding of how the UCS works could be helpful to students using our service.
Theme: Dissatisfaction Feeling invalidated or feeling rushed through appointments	It's very unfortunate that these students have not had the experience they wanted at the UCS. From now on the UCS team will let all students they meet with know that if the student has encountered any problems while using the service, or feels that something should have happened differently, then they would greatly welcome the chance to address the issue/s and improve things where they can. UCS

	will encourage all students using the service to share any feedback they have with their counsellor/with an alternative counsellor/with the HoS/with another member of staff within the University.
Theme: Additional Services Offer more wellbeing activities or conversation circle therapy	The UCS team have recently been discussing the therapeutic benefits of offering group therapy sessions and may decide to introduce some groups later this year.
Theme: Resident activities and events There was a strong sense that residents were keen to engage in activities geared towards getting to know people in their blocks	Feedback has been shared with the Student Resident Assistant team and will be discussed with the Students' Union, when preparing events for the term ahead and for the next academic year.
Theme: International student experience	The team took some feedback from international students and their experiences and have **fed this into the** discussions of our Student Support International working group for their consideration, having created this group in late 2023 to focus on reviewing general way our support impacts this group.
Theme: Services or support not geared towards PGR or online students	SASO will consider how they can work more closely with the PGR School to address. In terms of online, SASO will also give some thought to ensuring that services are inclusive and clearly highlighted as being open for online learners.
Theme: Cost of living and money matters	There were comments around cost of living and money matters which have prompted SASO to consider how they can better promote the hardship funds and support for money matters. This has been discussed with the money team as an action and will be considered in the planning for National Student Money Week 2024.
Theme: processes to access support for disabled students	SASO reflected that some of these have already been enhanced and streamlined in the first term but have continued to consider how they can make it easier for disabled students to quickly access the support they need to engage with their studies.

SASO have already streamlined their initial contact process, reducing the requirement for students to always complete the online contact form, in the hope of achieving this. They also now follow up with disabled students receiving support to review this on a rolling basis. |
Theme: Campus accessibility	Comments should be fed through the Reimagining the Campus discussions for consideration.
Theme: Dissatisfaction about the full return to on-campus learning	There was quite a lot of negative feedback about the return to fully on campus learning and assessment, which is reflective of the discussions SASO have had in the services with students. This isn't specific to support services, but has been their experience when support students, especially those who are disabled, carers, lower income, rural, etc.
Theme: Selection of appointment times available	The service will be introducing Microsoft Bookings this term, which will address these comments and hopefully improve the experience.
Theme: Negative comments	The team have recognised a couple of the negative comments, having since managed the concerns through the relevant frontline complaints processes, when case reviews have been conducted to inform learning.
Theme: Positive comments	There were some positive comments around the support services, and support generally from lots of different departments. SASO particularly highlighted a comment from a returning student commenting that they felt support services had improved since they previously studied here, and another PG who noted they felt the services were better

	than at their UG institution. This provided context in comparison.

5.3 Online Campus

Feedback from ASES	Comment / Planned Actions
Theme: Teaching and course delivery • Lack of flexibility e.g. lectures all scheduled during the working day • Lack of interactivity	The Online team will incorporate this feedback into their action plan and ensure that accurate expectations are set for the online study experience. If necessary, guidance will be communicated through OEDC School Representatives, who can also provide feedback on the adoption of these measures.
Theme: Quality of course content • Quality and accessibility of content – poor audio, lack of closed captions/transcripts on recordings	The Online team will develop a best-practice guide and distribute it through School channels. The aim will be to enhance the quality of online study materials, thereby improving the overall experience for students across online courses.
Theme: Online materials Library access – online materials	Online team to share library processes for making reading lists available online ahead of the September term. This proactive approach aims to ensure that necessary materials are readily accessible to students at the beginning of the academic term.
Theme: Assessment and feedback: • Insufficient information regarding assessment and exam dates • Lack of communication, slow to respond to queries. • Timeliness and quality of feedback	The Online team will collaborate closely with the e-Learning team to address this feedback effectively. Additionally, the Online team will develop a best-practice guide and distribute it through school channels.
Theme: Belonging and experience • Lack of community, one way learning • Students felt detached and isolated from both the student community and staff • School Induction should be tailored to online students	The Online Team will conduct a thorough review of the onboarding communications they directly send out, encompassing both the initial welcome email and subsequent follow-up check-in email. Furthermore, the Online Team will collaborate with EEW colleagues to ensure that online-specific activities are integrated into Welcome Week events.
Theme: Orientation Orientation is not specific to Online campus	The Online Team will partner with EEW to investigate the feasibility of arranging a separate orientation program tailored specifically for online students. This initiative aims to deliver streamlined and relevant content that meets the unique needs of online learners.

5.1 Qatar Campus

Feedback from ASES	Comment / Planned Actions
Theme: Orientation Orientation is not specific to Qatar campus	The Qatar campus will collaborate with EEW to explore the feasibility of organising a separate orientation specifically for Qatar students. This aims to ensure that the content is streamlined and relevant to the needs of students based in Qatar.
Theme: Orientation Lack of completion of Orientation	1. **Promotion during MyCurriculum registration**: AFG will look to Integrate information about orientation and its benefits into the MyC registration process so it ensures that individuals are aware of it right from the start when they're engaging with the appropriate systems and support. 2. **Announcements during the first week of classes**: AFG will liaise with faculty to making announcements during the first week of classes, as it's a time when

| | everyone is likely to be present and attentive. Enlisting faculty also emphasises its importance within the academic community and encourage participation.

By implementing these strategies, AFG will be looking to increase awareness and participation in orientation, ensuring that all members are equipped with the necessary information and resources for a successful experience. |
|---|---|
| **Theme: satisfaction of support services** | To expedite response times and enhance support services for students, AFT are recruiting a new Student Services Admin Officer (UoA) who will have access to UoA systems. |
| **Theme: social activities** | AFG are working closely with the Students' Union to ensure that in-person events are aligned with student interest and add to the overall student experience.

AFG will explore available online events offered by UoA that students in Qatar can participate in. |
| **Theme: <u>Wellbeing and Inclusion</u>** | The Disability and Wellbeing Officer is presently engaged in developing a Wellbeing podcast series. This initiative aims to invite both staff and students to share their insights and experiences on various aspects of wellbeing.

Additionally, the Student Events Officer has successfully negotiated student discounts at several local gyms, offering students an opportunity to enjoy these benefits. They are in communication with the AFG Marketing department to discuss the creation of a student discount brochure. |
| **Theme: <u>communications</u>** | Work with UoA to ensure that students in Qatar do not receive communications that are UoA specific |
| **Theme: <u>Inductions</u>** | To work with PG Programme Leader to include an icebreaker session during induction |

5.2 Students' Union

Feedback from ASES	Comment / Planned Actions
Theme: Campus orientation Improve Aberdeen campus orientation	Work with University and ambassadors to ensure SU services including Union Brew and Students' Union Building are being included especially during move in weekends.
Theme: Social media Instagram most referred choice	Review SU social media channels used e.g. 50% prefer Instagram, only 11% YouTube & !0% Facebook & TikTok
Theme: Welcome Week Offer non-drinking events

Promote events minimum of 1 month in advance.

Review variety of events- welcome Ball/ceilidh, Fayre durations/times, quiz, games night etc. | Promote specific events that do not include any alcohol or suitable for -18yrs or mature students in marketing materials.

Release schedule in advance to maximise awareness and increase attendances. Also include promotion of sports & societies upcoming events on website.

Ensure inclusive and promote LGBTQ+ welcome, PG and family events etc. Review days, times and locations of events inc increasing use of Hillhead/Halls of Res, Foresterhill and online events. |
| **Theme: Wellbeing & Inclusion**
High fees/ simplify admissions process/ bank accounts/ Passport/ documentations / PhD orientation | Progress with Borderless Campaign e.g. UK Hostile Environment and Polices; Culture - Monitoring and interpretation of UKVI policy; Induction/Arrival; Funding/finance; Academic misconduct; Academic Structures; Academic Flexibility and Access and understanding of non-academic support. |
| **Theme: Regular student feedback** | Promote /relaunch the ideas function on SU website to receive regular feedback and engagement from students as |

So many additional comments received, offer this opportunity all year round to all students	to how we can improve their lives while at university including reviewing Class Rep system.
Theme: Mental Health Support services to be more accessible	Reviewing the resources and signposting students accordingly including self-care. Launch and promote Mental Health Agreement (MHA) including appointment of student welfare champions.

6 FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Morag Beedie, Marketing & Engagement Manager, Experience, Engagement & Wellbeing Team; morag.beedie@abdn.ac.uk or Duncan Stuart, Assistant Director of People and Head of Experience, Engagement & Wellbeing; d.stuart@abdn.ac.uk.

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