



ACADEMIC COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING OF 26 FEBRUARY 2021

14:00hrs, Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Present: Rebecca Agnew; Victoria Browning; Audrey Cumberland; Mike Cowley; Laura Craig; Rose Dodgson; Ethelinda Lashley-Scott; Neil Manning; Sandra Morrison; Fiona Riddoch (Chair); Judith Sischy; Jeanette Stevenson; Jordan Wylie

In attendance: Jon Buglass; Nick Croft; Kerry Heathcote; Monica Hoenigmann; Toni McAlindin David McLachlan; Jonny Pearson; Anne-Marie Sturrock; Marcus Walker (Clerk)

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

- 1.1 The Committee NOTED apologies from Iris Aitchison, Julian Henderson, Ryan Quinn and Kevin Maloney.
- 1.2 Chair welcomed Rebecca Agnew to the Committee as a Co-opted Student Member.
- 1.3 The Chair welcomed Toni McAlindin, a Non-Executive Board Member, to the Academic Council as an observer.
- 1.4 The Chair welcomed Anne-Marie Sturrock, Head of Health, Wellbeing & Social Sciences, to the meeting for *Item 5.2; Student Work Experience Update*.
- 1.5 The Chair welcomed David McLachlan, Learning Technology & Resource Manager, to the meeting for *Item 7; Academic Staff Experience Report*.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 No declarations of interest were received.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- 3.1 The Committee APPROVED the minutes of the Academic Council from 13 November 2020 as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 MATTERS ARISING REPORT

4.1.1 Actions from the previous meeting were complete, overtaken or on the agenda, with the exception of the following:

4.1.2 *POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE UPDATE [Minute 5.1.3 / 13.11.20 refers]*

The Committee NOTED that an update on matters of interest within the remit of the Policy & Resources Committee, including staff mental health and the re-launch of Enhance, would be reported to the next meeting of the Academic Council.

4.1.3 *INTERNAL AUDIT: STUDENT REPRESENTATION [Minute 11.1/13.11.20 refers]*

The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the ECSA Vice President (Welfare) on the response of the Students' Association to recommendations highlighted through a recent internal audit on student representation - as reviewed by the Academic Council at its last meeting. The Chair welcomed the positive progress towards implementing the actions outlined with the audit report.

5. STUDENT EXPERIENCE REPORT

5.1 STUDENT EXPERIENCE UPDATE

5.1.1 The Committee NOTED that the Student Experience Team had continued to provide support to students remotely through online student services. The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that the Team were continuing to consider ways of improving communications and support for students.

5.1.2 The Committee NOTED that due to the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on student finances there had been an increase in the number of discretionary applications at the start of the academic year, which had subsequent implications for the processing time of funding requests.

5.1.3 The Committee NOTED that the following actions had been implemented to improve the processing of bursary payments from November 2020 onwards:

- (i) Weekly meetings with ECSA to review the effectiveness of amendments to funding processes;
- (ii) An additional online support hub to assist with urgent funding cases;
- (iii) The deployment of additional staff to ensure that emergency payments were made whilst assessment were ongoing;
- (iv) Daily reporting on progress from the Student Funding Manager to the Executive Team.

5.1.4 The Committee NOTED that the measures adopted in November 2020, as outlined in Minute 5.1.3, had allowed the Student Funding Team to ensure that all subsequent bursary applications were allocated within an agreed timeframe.

The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that a further review of the student funding system would conclude by March 2021, with a view to further enhancements being implemented by the start of the 2021/22 academic session.

- 5.1.5 The Committee NOTED that two virtual open days had been held on 19 & 20 February 2021. The Committee DISCUSSED the benefits of holding virtual open days, and the significant efforts of associated support staff to organise and facilitate both days successfully.

5.2 STUDENT WORK EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS UPDATE

- 5.2.1 The Committee NOTED a presentation from the Head of Health, Wellbeing & Social Sciences (HWSS) on the work undertaken to implement work experience placements for the 2020/21 academic year. The Head of HWSS outlined the significant number of issues around work placements raised by the Covid-19 Pandemic, including the deferral of students, restrictions in healthcare settings and other services (e.g. childcare and sports facilities), and the impact of indemnity cover not being available for college students in healthcare settings.

- 5.2.2 The Committee NOTED that across the range of HWSS courses a total of 1091 'priority' students - who must complete placement to progress, register or practice – had been identified as requiring a work experience placement. The Head of HWSS advised the Committee that a number of actions were being undertaken by the College to ensure priority students progressed, and a Short-Term Working Group (STWG) had been established to ensure that appropriate work placement arrangements were in place.

- 5.2.3 The Committee NOTED that the main aim of the STWG was to develop a consistent approach to placements, review existing health & safety measures, and disseminate information to colleagues on national guidance. The Committee welcomed the formation of the Working Group, and DISCUSSED its progress to date.

- 5.2.4 The Committee NOTED that both the communication and the consistency of approaches across the College towards placements had improved since the formation of the STWG. The Head of HWSS advised the Committee that enhanced external communications with employers had also supported greater understanding of the key role colleges play in the workforce supply chain.

5.3 ECSA CLASS REPS CONFERENCE UPDATE

- 5.3.1 The Committee NOTED that the first and second rounds of Class Reps Conferences had taken place online between November and December 2020. The ECSA Vice President (Welfare) advised the Committee that the first conference focussed on 'Induction & Retention', whilst the second conference considered 'Online Learning and Student Engagement'.

- 5.3.2 The Committee NOTED that students' feedback on their induction, which most new starters had found both 'useful and efficient'. The ECSA Vice President (Welfare) advised the Committee that, whilst some students believed they were unprepared with regards to what to expect of their course, the majority had appreciated the number of points of contact available to answer any queries and concerns.

- 5.3.3 The Committee NOTED that students had embraced online learning, and their concerns that student engagement would decrease whilst working at home had subsided. The ECSA Vice President (Activities) highlighted that many students had received peer-to-peer support to troubleshoot online learning issues, and that the increased functionality of Microsoft Teams (e.g. breakout rooms) over Semester 1 had improved the learning experience.
- 5.3.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the feedback provided through both Class Reps Conferences, and the proposed response of the Students' Association and the Senior Management Team. The ECSA Vice President (Welfare) informed the Committee that the level of student engagement through online Class Reps Conferences had been very positive, and it was expected that future conferences would be facilitated remotely.
- 5.3.5 The Committee NOTED that Class Reps Conferences in Semester 2 would focus on formative and summative assessments. The ECSA Vice President (Activities) advised the Committee that many students remained anxious around the form that their assessments would take, especially those who had practical elements within their course. The Committee NOTED that reports from upcoming Class Reps Conferences would be reviewed by the Academic Council on 21 May 2021.

6. COLLEGE SATISFACTION SURVEYS REPORT

6.1 STUDENT INDUCTION SURVEY 2020/21 REPORT

- 6.1.1 The Committee NOTED a report on the results of the 2020/21 Induction Survey, which was designed to assess students' opinions regarding key aspects of their experience before starting at the College, and during their first few weeks of study.
- 6.1.2 The Committee NOTED the scope of the survey which was made available to 14,000, via Moodle, during a four-week period from October and November 2020. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance acknowledged that the response rate of 14% was significantly less than recorded in 2019/20, which had a 25% response rate, as on campus promotion was not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions.
- 6.1.3 The Committee NOTED that in the majority of surveyed questions the College had recorded high levels of satisfaction. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the questions around course information on the Edinburgh College website scored highly, with 94% of respondents indicated that the '*website contained enough information about my chosen courses*' (an increase of 2% on the previous year).
- 6.1.4 The Committee NOTED that the poorest performing question within the Induction Survey responses was, the '*financial support I was entitled to was in place at the start of my courses*'. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised informed the Committee that only 72% of respondents agreed with this statement (a decrease of 3% on the previous year).

- 6.1.5 The Committee DISCUSSED the results of the 2020/21 Induction Survey, and NOTED the significant efforts of the College to rectify issues around student funding encountered at the start of the academic year (Minute 5.1.3 refers).
- 6.1.6 The Committee NOTED that the information gleaned from the Survey presented an opportunity to implement improvements to the 2021/21 induction process. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that data from the report would be incorporated within the information pack circulated to curriculum teams in order to inform their self-evaluation meetings - in terms of analysis, discussion and action planning.

7. ACADEMIC STAFF EXPERIENCE REPORT: ONLINE LEARNING / TEACHING DEVELOPMENT

- 7.1 The Committee NOTED a presentation from the Learning Technology & Resource Manager on learning online support and development, following the move to online teaching in light of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Learning Technology & Resource Manager outlined the short to mid-term schedule for academic staff development which the College had followed:
- (i) Prior to the commencement of Semester 1, a three-week induction to online learning and teach was provided;
 - (ii) During Semester 1 engagement with staff was mainly reactive, and focussed on support and development;
 - (iii) In Semester 2, advancements were made on basic knowledge/skills and new practices were introduced;
 - (iv) Moving into the next academic year, staff development would focus on expansion, innovation and adaptation.
- 7.2 The Committee NOTED the long-term choices that the College would be required to consider, to effectively utilise and integrate both Moodle and Microsoft Teams for online learning and teaching purposes. Further to this, the Learning Technology & Resource Manager advised the Committee that his Team were currently engaging with Curriculum Leaders and their teams to assess support, resources and training needs, and to create more specific engagement and support plans.
- 7.3 The Committee DISCUSSED a range of new developments proposed to support online teaching, and the continued development of a blended learning approach going forward. The Learning Technology & Resource Manager highlighted to the Committee that a Staff Academy would be created to provide a custom-built Moodle space where a culture of learning and professional development could be nurtured.
- 7.4 The Committee welcomed the presentation and NOTED the significant amount of work undertaken by the Learning Technology & Resources Team over the past year. The Chair acknowledged the positive evolution of developments over the course of the academic year to support a significant number of staff members with varying degrees of online teaching knowledge and experience.

8. HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? REPORT

8.1 HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? UPDATE

8.1.1 The Committee NOTED the Edinburgh College Quality Enhancement Plan 2018-21 (QUEP), and reviewed progress against the areas of improvement highlighted within the Plan. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance outlined the primary drivers of the Enhancement Plan, which included: recruitment; retention; attainment; student satisfaction; learning, teaching and assessment; work-integrated learning; and, future proofing of the College curriculum.

8.1.2 The Committee NOTED that Education Scotland were currently undertaking a series of support meetings, in order to explore evidence around the impact of specific action as part of the Progress Visit Agenda. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the next support visit would focus on 'complaint and compliment' activity, and the revised Self-Evaluation Process introduced by the College.

Judith Sischy left the meeting

8.2 INTERIM REGIONAL OUTCOME AGREEMENT REPORT 2021/22

8.2.1 The Committee NOTED the Interim Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) 2021/22, as endorsed by the Edinburgh College Board of Management and submitted to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on 29 January 2021. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the College was currently awaiting a response from the SFC, to confirm that the 2021/22 Interim ROA had been approved.

8.2.2 The Committee NOTED that the focus of the ROA outlined the response of the College to the immediate challenges posed by the Covid-19 Pandemic, and how the College would continue to contribute to the economic recovery within the Edinburgh and Lothians region. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance highlighted to the Committee that the ROA was an essential tool to provide the SFC with a line of accountability for the use of funding by the College - for the 2021/22 academic year.

8.3 SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION GROUP UPDATE

8.3.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance on the work of the Sustainability Education (SusEd) Group, which was established to support the aim of a more sustainable curriculum in line with the Edinburgh College Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance outlined a number of sustainability related projects, including a proposed Festival of Learning, to engage with students, staff and stakeholders in the build up to the 2021 United National Climate Change Conference (COP26) - which would take place in Glasgow from 01 November to 12 November 2021.

8.3.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the work of the SusEd Group in promoting sustainability within the College curriculum, and the shared use of resources with regional partners. The Chair welcomed the developments outlined by the Vice Principal, and invited further updates on sustainability related projects in the leading up to the COP26.

9. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

9.1 ANTI-RACISM CURRICULUM PROJECT UPDATE

9.1.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update from Co-opted Staff Member, Ethelinda Lashley-Scott, on an Anti-Racism Curriculum Project led by the SFC and Advance HE. The Co-opted Staff Member advised the Committee that the project aimed to review current curriculum materials, and engage with staff and students, to create anti-racism guidelines for curriculum leads.

9.1.2 The Committee welcomed the update and AGREED that once the project had concluded the Co-opted Staff Members should be invited to provide a further update to the Academic Council.

10. FOR INFORMATION

10.1 HORIZON SCANNING REPORT

10.1.1 The Committee NOTED a Horizon Scanning Report which outlined major political, economic, social, technological, legal and/or environmental developments that could impact on the five strategic plan aims of the College.

10.2 COMMITTEE PROGRAMME OF WORK 2020/21

10.2.1 The Committee NOTED its proposed programme of work for the upcoming academic year

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

11.1 The next meeting of the Academic Council will take place on 21 May 2021.

The meeting closed at 16:00