Edinburgh College

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ACADEMIC COUNCIL

DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING OF 11 SEPTEMBER 2020

14:00hrs, Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Present:	Audrey Cumberford; Mike Cowley; Laura Craig; Rose Dodgson; Julian Henderson; Ethelinda Lashley-Scott; Neil Manning; Sandra Morrison; Ryan Quinn; Fiona Riddoch (Chair); Judith Sischy; Jeanette Stevenson; Jordan Wylie
In attendance:	Jon Buglass; Nick Croft; Kerry Heathcote; Bethany Parsons; Caryn Smith; Marcus Walker (Clerk)

1. **WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

    1.1 The Committee NOTED apologies from Iris Aitchison, Victoria Browning and Kevin Maloney.

    1.2 The Chair welcomed Jordan Wyllie (ECSA Student President) and Rose Dodgson (ECSA Vice President Welfare Officer) to their first meeting of the Academic Council, following their appointment to the Board on 01 July 2020.

    1.3 The Chair welcomed Caryn Smith, Student Funding Manager, the Academic Council to present Item 6.1; Student Experience Update.

    1.4 The Committee NOTED that Bethany Parsons, Equalities Officer, would be joining the Committee for Item 8.3 - to update members on the work of the Widening Access, Equality and Diversity (WAX-ED) Group

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 22 May 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.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE

5.1   The Committee NOTED that the Code of Good Governance dictated that committees of the Board should regularly review their terms of reference to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

5.2   The Committee NOTED its Terms of Reference as previously agreed on 24 September 2019, and AGREED that no further updates were required.

6. STUDENT EXPERIENCE REPORT

6.1   STUDENT EXPERIENCE UPDATE

6.1.1   The Committee NOTED that the Student Experience Team had continued to provide support to students remotely through a virtual student services. The Student Funding Manager advised the Committee that students could now access the full range of support online, including guidance on funding and learning support.

6.1.2   The Committee NOTED that staff across the Student Experience Team had been actively engaged in sub-groups of the 5R Working Group, on matters such as: advice and support; hard to reach students; financial hardship; applications; enrolment and induction; and, student digital capability.

6.1.3   The Committee NOTED that the College had been allocated £224,086 of funding to support students experiencing digital poverty. The Student Funding Manager advised the Committee that a Digital Access Survey had initially identified over 200 students as having no digital access, and would be highlighted to curriculum teams for extra support and the distribution of resources and equipment. The Committee NOTED that once the Survey had closed it was expected there would be significantly more students identified as requiring digital resources.

6.1.4   The Committee NOTED that hard to reach students had been contacted by staff by phone or text, to assess their digital access needs. The Student Funding Manager informed the Committee that a range of additional support had been developed to reach out to all students, including the establishment of a College helpline and an enhanced induction process.

6.1.5   The Committee DISCUSSED the following in relation to points highlighted within the Student Experience Report:

(i)   The positive response to ECSA virtual drop-in sessions, and the potential use of such sessions by the Student Experience Team;

(ii)   issues relating to digital poverty and the distribution of equipment in a timely manner;

(iii)   the extent to which digital poverty funding could be used to help students requiring specialist software as part of their course requirement;

(iv)   Learning Development Tutor (LDT) allocation and their important role, especially on courses with a fitness to practice element;

(v)   Student log-in and access issues and the guidance required for a wide range of tablet/phone devices.

6.1.6   The Committee DISCUSSED the potential for future funding to close the gap on digital inequalities. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and Performance advised the Committee that whilst the future of funding was unknown, the Scottish Government would continue to monitor the allocation of funds and its impact at a regional and national level.

6.2   ECSA ANNUAL LEARNING & TEACHING REPORT 2019/20

6.2.1   The Committee NOTED a report from ECSA which accumulated information from the 2019/20 academic year's Class Reps Conference Reports, and highlighted various areas of good practice within learning and teaching at Edinburgh College. The Student President advised the Committee that the report was produced in a way that linked directly with other Quality and Governance structures, and specifically aligned with 'How Good is Our College?'.

6.2.2   The Committee NOTED that due to the Covid-19 pandemic only three of the four planned Class Reps Conferences took place in 2019/20. The Student President informed the Committee that given the cancelation of the final Class Reps Conference, the majority of feedback provided related to pre-Covid-19 issues.

6.2.3   The Committee welcomed the report and DISCUSSED the following points:

(i)   The social isolation of some students as highlighted through the report, and how this could be impacted by the transition to remote learning;

(ii)   the virtual campus set-up by ECSA to support students working remotely and foster a sense of community;

(iii)   the process of identifying and training class reps whilst courses remained online.

6.2.4   The Committee NOTED that initial feedback provided by new students to ECSA in 2020/21 was positive, following some apprehension prior to courses starting online. The Academic Board Member highlighted to the Committee that in his opinion many students were confident working online and had adapted well to the new learning environment.

7.   COLLEGE SATISFACTION SURVEYS

7.1   The Committee NOTED that qualitative data collated from the 2019/20 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey had now been analysed. The Committee AGREED that the Head of Curriculum Performance and Planning

should present this data, and responses to actions arising from the Survey, to the next meeting of the Academic Council.

8. ACADEMIC STAFF EXPERIENCE REPORT: BLENDED LEARNING

8.1 The Committee NOTED that prior to the Academic Council a short survey was circulated to Co-opted Staff Members regarding the transition to a blended learning approach, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chair informed the Committee that the feedback provided would help guide the focus of the Academic Council for its meetings in 2020/21.

8.2 The Committee NOTED the challenges highlighted by Co-opted Staff Members, which included the speed of transition to working online and the difficulties engaging with students and colleagues from home. The Vice Principal Innovation, Performance and Planning advised the Committee that a number of positive changes were also highlighted, including: the upskilling of lecturing staff; the efforts and support of QE, IT, LRC and LDT colleagues; enhanced procedures and guidance; and, the potential for further investment in Digital.

8.3 The Committee NOTED that IT upskilling encouraged staff to share best practice, however, the limited time to develop new/existing IT skills was considered an issue. The Vice Principal Innovation, Performance and Planning informed the Committee that the College continued to work closely with lecturers to assess IT training requirements, and accessibility to such resources.

8.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the range of approaches used by lecturers to transition students towards blended learning. The Principal commended academic staff members for their adaptation to remote learning, and recognised that lecturers needed to be realistic about the expectations they placed on themselves and others during a challenging period for staff and students.

8.5 The Committee DISCUSSED the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on specific industries, and the challenges some curriculum areas faced to teach technical and vocational subjects.

8.6 The Committee NOTED that members would welcome greater focus on the following challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic:

(i)   The online delivery of learning and teaching;
(ii)   the impact of remote working on staff workload;
(iii)   staff mental health;
(iv)   digital inequalities;
(v)   IT capacity and infrastructure;
(vi)   Staff training and development to support online learning.

8.7 The Committee AGREED that the Chair and the Executive Lead should consider further the inclusion of items listed under Paragraph 8.6, for consideration at future meeting of the Academic Council.

9. HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? REPORT

9.1   HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? UPDATE

9.1.1   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.

9.1.2   The Committee NOTED that Education Scotland were currently undertaking a series of support meetings, to explore the impact of specific actions as part of the Progress Visit Agenda. The Head of Curriculum Performance and Planning advised the Committee that the first of these visits took place on 23 April 2020, and was followed by a second visit on 08 July 2020 - which focussed on collaborative developments between Education Scotland and the College Development Network to produce resources for Scotland's college.

9.1.3   The Committee NOTED that initial feedback from progress visits had provided reassurance regarding the ability of the College to support both continuing and new students in achieving successful outcomes, and in the continued delivery of support services for students. The Head of Curriculum Performance and Planning advised the Committee that the next Education Scotland visit would take place on 31 August 2020.

9.2   RETENTION-FRIENDLY TIMETABLING OVERVIEW

9.2.1   The Committee NOTED a presentation on the process of timetabling at the College, with a view to supporting improved retention. The Head of Curriculum Performance and Planning highlighted that timetabling had been a topic raised frequently to the Academic Council through ECSA feedback and student's satisfaction survey recommendations.

9.2.2   The Committee NOTED that, as part of the Curriculum Planning & Performance Teams operational planning process, it was agreed that an internal audit would be carried out to review arrangements in place to consistently make effective use of timetabling mechanisms, accommodation and resourcing - in line with student expectations. The Head of Curriculum Performance and Planning advised the Committee that timetabling was essential to support the integration of face-to-face teaching with digital technologies, and was a strategic theme within the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

9.2.3   The Committee DISCUSSED the progress made to improve timetabling and programme delivery. The Head of Curriculum Performance and Planning informed the Committee that enhanced timetabling processes could have implications for early and further withdrawals going forward, which could potentially support the College in achieving its annual credit activity targets

9.3   WIDENING ACCESS, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY GROUP UPDATE

The Equalities Officer joined the meeting

9.3.1   The Committee NOTED an update from the WAX-ED Group, following its creation 18 months ago from the merger of the Widening Access Group and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group. The Equalities Officer advised the Committee that the Widening Access Group was originally created in response to increased focus in the Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) to set and track targets on widening participation and attainment of learners in minority groups.

9.3.2   The Committee NOTED the governance arrangements for the WAX-ED Group and its role and responsibilities. The Equalities Officer informed the Committee that the Group was the focal point of equalities work within the College, setting actions that addressed the College's Equality Outcomes, ROA commitments and Access and Inclusion Strategy commitments, along with the work of other statutory reporting such as the iGAP and BSL Plan.

9.3.3   The Committee NOTED that all colleges had a responsibility to meet requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The Equalities Officer highlighted that one of the Scottish Specific Duties, within the PSED, was the requirement to set Equalities Outcomes and produce Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Reports. The Committee NOTED that the fulfilment of Equalities Outcomes was largely achieved through actions set and monitored by the WAX-ED Group.

9.3.4   The Committee welcomed the update provided and DISCUSSED the following:

(i)   The unconscious bias training delivered to staff during August 2020;
(ii)   collaborative initiatives with other colleges and universities to tackle equality, diversity and inclusion issues;
(iii)   the decolonialisation of college curriculums, and discussion currently taking place with the qualification authority;
(iv)   initiatives at a curricular level, and how teams across the College are engaging with these issues.

9.3.5   The Committee NOTED that it would continue to receive oversight of actions from the WAX-ED Group not covered by the Policy & Resources Committee. The Chair advised the Committee that the Equalities Officer would be invited back to the Academic Council in 2020/21, to provide a further update on progress against key actions.

The Equalities Officer left the meeting

10.   ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

10.1 EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

10.1.1 The Committee NOTED the role of the Academic Council in engaging with employers and employer organisations. The Chair advised the Committee that an appropriate external representative would be invited to discuss curriculum developments and the needs of industry / employers.

11. FOR INFORMATION

11.1 REVIEW OF COMMITTEE OPERATION 2019/20

11.1.1 The Committee NOTED a final version of the Review of Committee Operation 2019/20, as agreed by members outwith the meeting on 25 June 2020.

11.2 HORIZON SCANNING REPORT

11.2.1 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. The Head of Communications, Policy and Research advised the Academic Council that the specific focus of this edition of the report was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

11.3 COMMITTEE PROGRAMME OF WORK 2020/21

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

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12.1 The next meeting of the Academic Council will take place on 13 November 2020.

The meeting closed at 16:00