ACADEMIC COUNCIL

APPROVED MINUTES OF MEETING OF 21 MAY 2021

14:00hrs, Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Present: Iris Aitchison; Victoria Browning; Audrey Cumberford; Mike Cowley; Laura Craig; Rose Dodgson; Ethelinda Lashley-Scott; Neil Manning; Sandra Morrison; Ryan Quinn; Fiona Riddoch (Chair); Jeanette Stevenson; Jordan Wylie

In attendance: Jon Buglass; Nick Croft; Kerry Heathcote; Monica Hoenigmann; Janyce Holmes; Emma Horrell (SDS); Jonny Pearson; Marcus Walker (Clerk); Kerry Wilkie (SDS)

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

1.1 The Committee NOTED apologies from Rebecca Agnew, Julian Henderson, Kevin Maloney and Judith Sischy.

1.2 The Chair welcomed Janyce Holmes, a Non-Executive Board Member, to the Academic Council as an observer.

1.3 The Chair welcomed Kerry Wilkie and Emma Horrell from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) for Item 5.

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 26 February 2021 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. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND REPORT

5.1 The Committee NOTED a presentation from SDS on the impact of Covid-19 on national and regional labour markets. The SDS Advisor informed the Committee that the Scottish economy had contracted by an estimated 9.6% in 2020 compared to 2019, and that the Scottish Fiscal Commission had forecast that the national economy would only recover to pre-pandemic levels of economic output by the beginning of 2024.

5.2 The Committee NOTED that, whilst businesses were more positive about their expanded volume of business in Quarter 1 (2021), it was predicted that unemployment rates in Scotland could reach 7.6% in Quarter 2 (2021) - and may remain elevated for several years. The SDS Advisor informed the Committee that the economic impacts of Covid-19 would not be felt equally across all groups in society, with people living on lower incomes, women, disable people, ethnic minority groups, lone parents, young people and care experienced individuals all more likely to be disproportionately affected.

5.3 The Committee NOTED the impact of the Pandemic on the Edinburgh, East and Midlothian region. The SDS Advisor informed the Committee that the region was expected to be less impacted upon than other regions of Scotland, in terms of both current and future employer demands, with the following industries expected to have the greatest requirement for workers:

    (i)   Wholesale and retail trade;
    (ii)   Human health and social work;
    (iii)   Accommodation and food services.

5.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the points raised within the presentation, and NOTED that the national / regional trends and movements highlighted resonated with the experience of the College. The Principal advised the Committee that such data and local intelligence would be essential for strategic decision-making by the Board and the Committee going forward.

5.5 The Committee, in groups, DISCUSSED the following question posed by the Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and Performance: *'How do you see this labour market information influencing curriculum design and delivery next year and beyond?'*. During a feedback session the following points were highlighted:

    (i)   The importance of part-time courses to keep individuals engaged with learning;
    (ii)   The skill sets required by future employers, and the interpretation of what is meant by the terms 'right' and 'wrong' skills;
    (iii)   The need for the College to reach out to schools, and educate learners where future job opportunities reside;
    (iv)   The need to engage further with the unemployed and the underemployed;
    (v)   Ensuring that courses have links to industries and potential future employers;
    (vi)   The pros and cons of fast-track courses to reskills and upskill leaners.

5.6   The Chair welcomed the opportunity to consider regional labour market insights, and hoped that points raised during the discussions would feedback into the development of a new Edinburgh College Curriculum Strategy (Paragraph 6 refers).

Kerry Wilkie and Emma Horrell left the meeting

6   CURRICULUM STRATEGY UPDATE

6.1   The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the Vice Principal Education & Skills on the development of a new Edinburgh College Curriculum Strategy. The Vice Principal advised the Committee that the College currently had a Curriculum Planning & Design Strategy 2017-20, however, the development of a new Edinburgh College Strategic Plan offered the opportunity to pause and reflect on the current curriculum offer.

6.2   The Committee NOTED that the College would shortly begin a consultation process with students, staff and other stakeholders to define the curriculum of the future. The Vice Principal informed the Committee that a series of engagement workshops would be conducted over the next six months to which a wide range of stakeholders would be invited.

6.3   The Committee DISCUSSED the consultation process, and AGREED that a workshop with ECSA Class Reps should be included in the process - to gather students' feedback from as broad a range of courses as possible.

6.4   The Chair advised the Committee that the development, and approval, of a new Curriculum Strategy would be a major strand of work for the Academic Council in the academic year 2021/22.

7.   STUDENT EXPERIENCE REPORT

7.1   STUDENT EXPERIENCE UPDATE

7.1.1   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.

7.1.2   The Committee NOTED that there continued to be a shortage of Learning Development Tutors (LDTs) to cover all classes due to reductions and absence. The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that a temporary post had been created to support drop-ins, and those classes without an LDT, in the short-term.

7.1.3   The Committee DISCUSSED LDT provisions and the need to provide appropriate support to students across the College. The Head of Student Experience informed the Committee that a Short-Life Working Group, consisting of curriculum staff and LDTs, had been set-up to consider the approach of the College to pastoral care. The Committee AGREED that recommendation from the SLWG should be fed back to the Academic Council as part of a future Student Experience Report.

7.1.4   The Committee NOTED that a Student Counsellor Team (2.5fte equivalent) were now in place and were able to provide a full service. The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that, in order to maximise the service provided, students could now self-refer through Moodle.

7.1.5   The Committee NOTED that an additional £53k of SFC funding, to enhance wellbeing support at the College, had been used to recruit a Student Wellbeing Advisor and a Student Wellbeing Development Tutor on temporary contracts until the end of July 2022. The Committee DISCUSSED the funding available to respond to mental health and wellbeing concerns, and the need for all colleges to continue to highlight this important matter to the SFC and Scottish Government.

7.2   ECSA CLASS REPS CONFERENCE UPDATE

7.2.1   The Committee NOTED that the third and fourth rounds of Class Reps Conferences had taken place online between February and April 2021. The ECSA Student President advised the Committee that the third conference focussed on 'Student Experience and Learning & Teaching', whilst the fourth conference considered 'Success and Progression'.

7.2.2   The Committee NOTED that both Class Reps Conferences had been well attended, with student engagement on both occasions being higher than in previous years. The ESCA Student President advised the Committee that - given the high-levels of engagement - the Students' Association would continue to host Class Reps Conferences online once social distancing restrictions were eased.

7.2.3   The Committee NOTED that, due to the significant impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Class Reps had rated the student experience poorly. The ECSA Student President informed the Committee that, although the difficulties of remote learning had negatively affected the student experience, Class Reps had mostly found staff to be both knowledgeable and supportive.

7.2.4   The Committee NOTED that Class Reps had identified the many points of communication between the College and students as an issue. The ECSA Student President advised the Committee that the range of online platforms used for formal and informal communications had meant that some students had missed announcements and/or correspondence.

7.2.5   The Committee NOTED that in relation to 'Success and Progression' most Class Reps had indicated that students had received a 'good' level of support around progression from, or within, Edinburgh College. The ECSA Student President informed the Committee that, whilst student feedback in this area had been positive, it was highlighted that students with practical elements on their course would have welcomed demonstrations through remote lessons.

7.2.6   The Committee welcomed the feedback provided, and DISCUSSED online student engagement and the need for more guidance on how students should engage within online lessons. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance informed the Committee that feedback from Class Reps Conferences had been reviewed by the Senior Management Team, and points of action would be considered further and (if needed) acted upon.

8. COLLEGE SATISFACTION SURVEYS REPORT

8.1   COLLEGE LEAVER DESTINATION SURVEY OUTCOME 2019/20 REPORT

8.1.1   The Committee NOTED a report on the results of the College Leaver Destination Survey carried out during February 2021. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the SFC required all colleges to carry out the survey, with information being gathered from a range of sources including internal college data, UCAS and feedback from a telephone survey.

8.1.2   The Committee NOTED that data had successfully been collated from 88% of the targeted 4,940 leavers during March and April 2021. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance highlighted that the number of students achieving a positive destination stood at 94%, a 4% decrease on the previous year.

8.1.3   The Committee DISCUSSED the results of the College Leaver Destination Survey 2019/20. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that although 6% of College leavers had not achieved a 'positive destination' as defined by the SFC, a significant portion of those leavers had undoubtably been impacted upon by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

8.1.4   The Committee Chair welcomed the report and highlighted the positive impact of the College in preparing students for their next step in life, whether it be continued education or employment.

8.2   STUDENT INDUCTION SURVEY 2021/22

8.2.1   The Committee NOTED the content and format of the draft Induction Survey 2021/22, which would be made available to new and returning students in the new academic year.

8.2.2   The Committee DISCUSSED the need to engage with more students around the completion of the Survey, and AGREED that the Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance should continue to work closely with College staff to maximise the student response rate.

8.2.3   The Committee APPROVED the content and format of the Induction Survey 2021/21, for circulation to student in October 2021.

9.   ACADEMIC STAFF EXPERIENCE REPORT: RESEARCH, INNOVATION & IMPROVEMENT PROJECT FORUM

9.1   The Committee NOTED an update on the Edinburgh College Research, Innovation & Improvement Project Forum, which aimed to promote research within the College and support staff engagement in research for the benefit of both students and the community. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee of the governance arrangements for the Forum, and it position as a sub-group of the Edinburgh College Research Unit.

9.2   The Committee NOTED the progress achieved by the Forum since its first meeting in October 2019, and the wide rage of students, staff and stakeholders

the group had engaged with. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the Forum aimed to engage with more students, and drive forward improvements in the context of the student journey - including progression opportunities.

9.3   The Committee welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the Research, Innovation & Improvement Project Forum, and DISCUSSED the benefits of research for both staff and students' development.

10. HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? REPORT

10.1   HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? UPDATE

10.1.1 The Committee NOTED information pertaining to the performance and self-evaluation of the College in the context of the Education Scotland Progress and Support Visits. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that recent Progress and Support Visits had taken into account temporary amendments to the external scrutiny agenda and format, in light of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

10.1.2 The Committee NOTED that, given the high-levels of quality compliance and positive outcomes relating to SQA external verification, the College calendar of external scrutiny had been significantly reduced for the remainder of the academic session. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance informed the Committee that there had been no notable quality assurance issues raised across the remits of the twenty-one awarding bodies engaging with the College during the academic year (- to date).

10.2   EQUALITY OUTCOMES & MAINSTREAMING REPORT 2021-25

10.2.1 The Committee NOTED that, in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, the College had published its Equality Outcomes & Mainstreaming Report 2021-25. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the Report had been approved by the Board, following a significant period of consultation with students, staff and other stakeholders.

10.2.1 The Committee NOTED the substantial progress reported on the 2017-2021 Equality Outcomes, and the seven updated Equality Outcomes agreed for the period 2021-25. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance highlighted the rationale for each Outcome, the measurable success metrics, and examples of actions that would be undertaken by the College.

10.2.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the Equality Outcomes & Mainstreaming Report 2021-25, and NOTED that a substantial progress report on each of the Equality Outcomes would be published by the College in 2023.

11. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

11.1 REVIEW OF COMMMITTE OPERATION 2020/21

11.1.1 The Committee NOTED that at the end of each academic year the Committee is required to review its annual activity. The Committee Chair advised the Academic Council that the same evaluation form, which asked

members to consider the committee's operation and its performance monitoring and strategic roles, would be completed by all committees of the Board.

11.1.2 The Committee AGREED that its operation was compliant with its terms of reference, as outlined in 'Part 1' of the evaluation form.

11.1.3 The Committee DISCUSSED its performance over the academic year, and AGREED that members' feedback should be relayed directly to the Chair and the Clerk to the Board, prior to a finalised version of the report being recirculated to the Academic Council (outwith the meeting cycle) for approval.

11.2 CO-OPTED MEMBERSHIP

11.2.1 The Committee NOTED that the Nominations Committee of the Board had agreed that all current co-opted members of the Academic Council should be offered a further year to their tenure as members. The Chair advised the Committee that the Clerk to the Board would be in contact with co-opted members to confirm arrangements for Academic Council membership in 2021/22.

11.3 DEPARTURE OF THE CHAIR OF THE ACADEMIC COUNCIL

11.3.1 The Committee NOTED that the tenure of the Chair of the Academic Council and Non-Executive Board Member, Fiona Riddoch, would end on 20 October 2021. The Chair advised the Committee that, in order to ensure appropriate transition arrangements were in place, she would step down from the Academic Council at the end of the academic year.

11.3.2 The Principal, on behalf of the Board and the Committee, thanked Ms Riddoch for her significant contribution to the Academic Council as convener.

11.3.3 The Committee NOTED Jeanette Stevenson, a Non-Executive Board Member, would become Chair of the Academic Council from 01 August 2021 onwards,

12. FOR INFORMATION

12.1 HORIZON SCANNING REPORT

12.1.1 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.

12.2 COMMITTEE PROGRAMME OF WORK 2021/22

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

13.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13.1   The next meeting of the Academic Council will take place on 10 September 2021.

The meeting closed at 15:55