



ACADEMIC COUNCIL

APPROVED MINUTES OF MEETING OF 28 FEBRUARY 2020

14:00hrs, Boardroom, Sighthill Campus

Present: Iris Aitchison; Audrey Cumberland; Carla Ford; Julian Henderson; Ethelinda Lashley-Scott; Steph Logan; Ryan Quinn; Fiona Riddoch (Chair); Judith Sischy; Jeanette Stevenson

In attendance: Jon Buglass; Janet Campbell (Education Scotland); Kerry Heathcote; Monica Hoenigmann; Marcus Walker (Clerk)

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

- 1.1 The Committee NOTED apologies from Mike Cowley, Laura Craig, Seoras Hearon, Neil Manning; Kevin Maloney; Sandra Morrison, and Shannon Young.
- 1.2 The Committee NOTED apologies from Nick Croft, Secretary to the Board.
- 1.3 The Chair welcomed Steph Logan to the Committee as a co-opted student member.
- 1.4 The Chair welcomed Janet Campbell, HM Inspector (Education Scotland), to the Academic Council as an observer.

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 15 November 2019 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 *COUNSELLING AND SAFEGUARDING (Minute 6.1.6/ 13.09.19 refers)*

The Committee NOTED that, at the Academic Council's request, a presentation on counselling and safeguarding arrangements would be presented to the Board at its meeting on 24 March 2020.

4.1.3 *EXAM INVIGILATION UPDATE (Minute 6.2.4/ 15.11.19 refers)*

The Committee NOTED that, in order to assist those with additional support needs, all SQA examinations would be held at the Sighthill Campus. The Head of Curriculum Planning and Performance advised the Committee that holding examinations on a single campus provided more efficient and effective use of staffing resources and facilities to support additional support needs.

4.1.4 *CURRICULUM LEADER FORUM (Minute 7.2.6/ 15.11.19 refers)*

The Committee NOTED that forums for curriculum leaders at each of the College campuses would be held on a regular basis, to support the annual self-evaluation process and the continued sharing of best practice.

4.1.5 *DEFAULT WEB BROWSER (Minute 8.2.4/ 15.11.19 refers)*

The Committee NOTED that, to ensure student and staff had full access to Moodle, the College had updated its default web browser to Microsoft Edge.

5. HORIZON SCANNING REPORT

5.1 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 Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance advised the Committee that further to this, the report also indicated what the College was doing to address these impacts.

5.2 The Committee NOTED that, on 23 January 2020, the UK Parliament's European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 had been granted Royal Assent. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the College had not witnessed an adverse impact on EU student numbers as yet, although student recruitment from EU countries would continue to be monitored closely.

5.3 The Committee NOTED the Scottish Government announced its Draft Budget 2020/21 Proposal on 06 February 2020. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance informed the Committee that the Draft Budget proposed an increase in current levels of revenue funding for the college sector by 3.6%, in

real terms, which represented an additional £33.5m against the previous year's Draft Budget (2019/20).

- 5.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the proposed bus pass scheme for those of 18 years of age and under, as outlined in the Draft Budget 2020/21, and its potential benefits to support the College's strategic aims relating to Schools College Partnerships. Further to this, the Chair advised the Committee that the Draft Budget allocated £1.8bn investment in low emission infrastructure and over 100 million in low carbon investment. It was NOTED that this investment provided an indication of future areas of economic activity where the already College offered courses, and aligned with the College's Environmental Sustainability Strategy.
- 5.5 The Committee NOTED that in relation to 'Inspiring Our People', HR and organisational development matters were included in an HR Update to the Policy & Resources Committee. The Committee DISCUSSED the reporting of HR and organisational development matters to the Academic Council.

6. STUDENT EXPERIENCE REPORT

6.1 STUDENT EXPERIENCE UPDATE

- 6.1.1 The Committee NOTED a report on recent developments to improve the experience and retention of students, since the last meeting of the Academic Council in November.
- 6.1.2 The Committee NOTED that the College had held two successful Open Day Events for August 2020 recruitment at both the Milton Road and Granton Campuses. The Head of Student Experience informed the Committee that there had been over 600 attendees at the events, with approximately 300 applications being started and/or completed at the open days.
- 6.1.3 The Committee NOTED that a request from the College for additional funding from the SFC, in redistribution, had been agreed. The Head of Student Experience welcomed the additional funding as it would allow the College to continue to support students' bursaries, childcare and discretionary funding.
- 6.1.4 The Committee NOTED that the MyEC App had now been launched, and it was available for all students to download. The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that the app provided access to all the key information a student would require, and work was continuing to develop its content and utilisation.

6.2 CLASS REP CONFERENCE REPORTS

- 6.2.1 The Committee NOTED that the first and second rounds of Class Reps Conferences had taken place across all four campuses between October and December 2019. The ECSA Student President advised the Committee that the first conference focussed on 'Induction & Retention', whilst the second conference considered 'Feedback & Assessment'.
- 6.2.2 The Committee NOTED that, as with previous years, the 'big five' issues raised by students at 'Induction & Retention' workshops were: (i) funding; (ii) transport; (iii) course organisation; (iv) mental health; and, (v) facilities. The

ECSA Student President outlined to the Committee of a number of suggested solutions put forward to help students' orientation at the College.

- 6.2.3 The Committee DISCUSSED transport and the proposed bus pass scheme outlined in the Draft Budget 2020/21 (Paragraph 5.4 refers). The Committee AGREED that the Principal should write to the SFC regarding the fact that the bursary travel fund provided to students did not cover the higher costs of train travel, which was the most convenient form of public transport for Midlothian Campus, and therefore the SFC Policy on bursary travel costs should be reviewed. The Committee Chair recommended that ECSA provide the Principal with supporting information from students' feedback, to support the case for reconsideration around the SFC travel policy.
- 6.2.4 The Committee NOTED that Class Rep responses at 'Feedback & Assessment' workshops were positive, with 72% of respondents rating their course 'Good' or 'Excellent'. The ECSA Student President advised the Committee that three areas of improvement had been highlighted through the Class Rep Conference, relating to: (i) flexible and varied learning styles; (ii) workspaces; and, (iii) assessment and feedback.
- 6.2.5 The Committee DISCUSSED the Class Rep Conference Feedback provided, and welcomed the reports as an excellent piece of learning / student experience research. The Committee AGREED that Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance should produce a follow-up report outlining what the College would do to address the areas of improvement highlighted in both reports.

7. COLLEGE SATISFACTION SURVEYS

7.1 INDUCTION SURVEY RESULTS 2019/20

- 7.1.1 The Committee NOTED a report on the results of the 2019/20 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 on campus.
- 7.1.2 The Committee NOTED the scope of the survey which was made available to 18,000 full-time and part-time students across all four campuses, via Moodle, during a four-week period from September and November 2019. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance informed the Committee that the response rate was 25.2% overall.
- 7.1.3 The Committee NOTED that in the majority of surveyed questions the College had received higher levels of satisfaction than in previous years. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the biggest improvement since last year was in relation to the question '*I have been able to connect to the College Wi-Fi network while on campus*', which 86% percent of students responded to positively (an increase of 26.4% on the previous year).
- 7.1.4 The Committee NOTED that the only question in the survey to receive a level of satisfaction below 80% related to the '*Financial support I was entitled to was in place at the start of my course*', however, the response rated higher than in the previous academic year.

- 7.1.5 The Committee DISCUSSED areas requiring development and further review arising from the 2019 Induction Survey, and AGREED that progress on these matters would be considered at the next meeting of the Academic Council. Further to this, the Committee AGREED it would welcome a presentation on the topic of timetabling, as it appeared as a reoccurring issue for students and was known to have a significant impact on retention rates.
- 7.2 LEARNING & TEACHING STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY 2019/20
 - 7.2.1 The Committee NOTED that given the comprehensive feedback provided by ECSA, following the recent Class Reps' Conferences, it was proposed that the Learning & Teaching Student Satisfaction Survey 2019/20 followed a revised and increasingly 'student-friendly' Moodle format.
 - 7.2.2 The Committee welcomed the new survey design and DISCUSSED points relating to the 10 questions it contained.
 - 7.2.3 The Committee APPROVED the Learning & Teaching Student Satisfaction Survey 2019/20 for dissemination by the Quality Team.

8. ACADEMIC STAFF EXPERIENCE REPORT

- 8.1 The Committee NOTED the Principal had embarked on an extensive round of staff briefings across all four campuses over the past two months, and had engaged with over 1000 members of staff. The Principal informed the Committee that the briefings had been made as informal as possible to ensure that staff had an opportunity to ask questions and raise issues which were more personal to their teams and areas.
- 8.2 The Committee NOTED that the primary purpose of the briefings was to engage with staff, and reflect on the College's core strap line; For the Future We Want' and the following three themes: (i) Realising our full potential; (ii) considering our current state; and, (iii) discussing our future state. The Committee DISCUSSED broad areas of feedback provided by academic staff through the briefing sessions.
- 8.3 The Committee NOTED that the Principal would be working closely with the Senior Management Team to review outcomes of the staff sessions, and a follow-up staff survey would be completed along with a detailed action plan. The Committee Chair advised the Academic Council that following analysis of feedback from the briefing session and the proposed staff survey, more detailed information of the experiences of academic staff would be considered by members.

Ryan Quinn left the meeting

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 DISCUSSED the implementation of Promonitor, which would provide weekly trend-forecasting on all enrolled students regardless of mode of study, and ongoing work to ensure greater access to Learning Development Tutors for part-time students.

9.2 REGIONAL OUTCOME AGREEMENT SELF-EVALUATION UPDATE

- 9.2.1 The Committee NOTED a presentation from the Vice Principal Innovation Planning & Performance on progress against key performance measures contained in the Edinburgh College Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) Self-Evaluation Report, and the associated Short-Term Action Plan.

- 9.2.2 The Committee NOTED that there had been a significant reduction in 'Further Withdrawal' for full-time further education (<10%) and higher education (<8%) students since last year. The Vice Principal Innovation Planning & Performance advised the Committee that these reductions related to the transition arrangements implemented by the College to provide prospective students with better course information and curb levels of overassessment.

- 9.2.3 The Committee NOTED that there had also been as significant improvement in Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) figures, which illustrated a 56% improvement in recruitment. The Vice Principal Innovation Planning & Performance advised the Committee that such improvements were an indicator of improved links with communities through the Schools College Partnerships.

- 9.2.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the improvements outlined, and other positive developments relating to student satisfaction (as measured through satisfaction surveys) and full-time further education recruitment and retention. The Committee AGREED that the Vice Principal Innovation Planning & Performance should share this information with the Senior Management Team for cascading amongst members of staff in appropriate existing exchanges.

9.3 VERBAL UPDATE FROM HM INSPECTOR (EDUCATION SCOTLAND)

- 9.3.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the HM Inspector on the upcoming Education Scotland Progress Visit at the College, which was due to take place on 31 March and 01 April. The HMI Inspector advised the Committee that the Progress Visit would allow a team of assessors to consider the advancement of the College against its 2018/19 Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan.

- 9.3.2 The Committee NOTED that, once the Progress Visit was completed, the HM Inspector would be invited to a future meeting of the Board to present an outcome report to members. The Committee Chair, on behalf of the Academic Council, thanked the HM Inspector for attending the meetings as an observer, and welcomed the opportunity to receive feedback on the Progress Visit Report in due course.

10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

10.1 ACADEMIC COUNCIL AGENDA PLANNER 2019/20

- 10.1.1 The Committee NOTED an agenda planner for the academic year, which aimed to provide members with an opportunity to review upcoming items of business.

10.2 FIFE COLLEGE VISIT 19.02.20

- 10.2.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the Chair following her recent visit to Fife College to attend their Learning & Teaching Committee, a sub-committee of the Board of Management.
- 10.2.2 The Committee NOTED the broad similarities and difference in the approach taken by the Learning & Teaching Committee in comparison to the Academic Council. The Chair advised members that the Chair of the Learning & Teaching Committee at Fife College would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Academic Council, as a means to continue the sharing of best practice.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 11.1 The next meeting of the Academic Council will take place on 22 May 2020, in the Boardroom, Granton Campus.

The meeting closed at 16:00