POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING OF 31 AUGUST 2021

15:00 via Microsoft Teams

Present: Rose Dodgson; Lesley Drummond; Alex Killick; Ann Landels (Chair); Toni McAlindin; Nigel Paul; Jeanette Stevenson

In attendance: Jon Buglass; Sue Clyne; Audrey Cumberford; Jonny Pearson; Marcus Walker (Clerk); Alan Williamson

1.   **WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

   1.1   No apologies were received.

   1.2   The Chair welcomed Jeanette Stevenson to the Policy & Resource Committee as a Member, following her appointment as Chair of the Academic Council on 01 August 2021.

   1.3   The Chair welcomed Rose Dodgson, ECSA Student President, to the Policy & Resources Committee following her re-election as a Student Sabbatical Officer.

2.   **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

   2.1   No declarations of interested were noted.

3.   **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

   3.1   The Committee APPROVED the minutes from 18 May 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, with the exception of the following:

4.1.2 *Granton Waterfront Nursery [Minute Reference: 9.6/10.11.20]*

The Committee NOTED that a report on the financial sustainability of the Granton Waterfront Nursery would be reviewed by the Policy & Resources Committee at its next meeting on 16 November 2021.

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 01 September 2020 and AGREED that no further updates were required

6. PRINCIPAL & CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

6.1 The Committee NOTED an update from the Principal on developments at the College since its last meeting on 18 May 2021.

6.2 The Committee NOTED that an All-Staff Wellbeing Day had been hosted online on 18 August 2021, with more than 600 members of College staff in attendance. The Principal advised the Committee that sessions within the day aimed to maintain efforts to build a culture where the wellbeing of staff was of central importance, and to start the new academic year on a positive footing following such an unprecedented year.

6.3 The Committee NOTED that the College, through its 5R Hub, was engaged with national bodies and programmes regarding planning for the academic session 2021/22 in light of the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic. The Principal advised the Committee that, in response to the Scottish Government's guidance for colleges and universities, the 5R Hub had implemented a cautious approach to the start of the academic year with a phased model towards increasing the number of class groups on campus.

6.4 The Committee NOTED that the cautious approach to the start of the term would focus on priority groups attending on campus delivery and support, with a view to developing a hybrid model heading towards the October break. The Principal highlighted to the Committee that it remained important that the College complimented and reinforced the UK and Scottish Government's communications to young people under the age of 18 to get vaccinated.

6.5 The Committee DISCUSSED recent changes to the Scottish Government's guidance to colleges and universities due to concerns around the number of Covid-19 cases within the 16 to 25 age group. The Principal advised the Committee that the College would maintain a practical approach to ensure a safe return for more students over the academic session, whilst monitoring regional and local outbreaks of Covid-19 closely.

7. RECRUITMENT & RETENTION DASHBOARD

7.1 The Committee NOTED an overview, from the Vice Principal, Education & Skills, of the performance of the College against its 2020/21 activity targets. The Vice Principal Education & Skills reminded the Committee that the SFC had set the College an activity target of 187,869 for the 2020/21 academic year.

7.2 The Committee NOTED that the College had achieved and exceeded all its SFC targets in 2020/21, including its overall credit target by 6,276 credits. The Vice Principal Education & Skills advised the Committee that in previous years this achievement would not have generated any additional income, however, in 2020/21 the College was able to claim all additional credits against Covid-19 related funding – through both the Young Persons Guarantee (YPG) and the National Transition Training Fund (TTF) initiatives.

7.3 The Committee NOTED that the College had been set an activity target of 192,349 credits for the 2021/22 academic year. The Vice Principal Education & Skills advised the Committee that since applications opened there had been an increase of 24% in offers made and a 15% increase in offers accepted (as of August 2021) compared to the same point last year, due to improvements carried out internally to the applications process.

Alex Killick left the meeting.

8. FINANCE REPORT

8.1 END OF LIBOR UPDATE

8.1.1 The Committee NOTED an update on the options available to Edinburgh College as a result of the interbank borrowing rate, LIBOR, being phased out by the UK regulators in December 2021. The Chief Operating advised the Committee that the two viable alternative interest rates for the College were the Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA) and the Bank Base Rate.

8.1.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the risks associated with each borrowing rate and NOTED a recommendation from the Chief Operating Officer, given the limited choices available to the College, that the preferred loan variable reference rate would be the Bank Base Rate.

8.1.3 The Committee AGREED to endorse the interest rate reference change to a Bank Base Rate. Further to this, the Committee AGREED to endorse the signing of a Bank of Scotland Transition Agreement by the Chief Operating Officer.

8.2 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO JUNE 2021

8.2.1 The Committee NOTED the financial performance of the College as outlined in the Management Accounts to June 2021.

8.2.2 The Committee NOTED that the College would receive £1.8m of credit based unbudgeted YPG and NTT funding from the SFC to support 16-24 years and age 25+ years students, the unemployed and those at the risk of redundancy due to Covid-19. The Chief Operating Officer

advised the Committee that the College had also received £1.5m of additional non-recurring funds to address financial sustainability, protect jobs and help students finish their courses and gain qualifications.

8.3   FINANCIAL FORECAST RETURN JULY 2021

8.3.1   The Committee NOTED a presentation on the Financial Forecast Return (FFR) to July 2021 from the Chief Operating Officer. The Chief Operating Officer informed the Committee that the Return had been completed following the approval of the College Budget 2020/21 by the Board on 28 July 2021.

8.3.2   The Committee NOTED that a 5-year FFR would be submitted to the SFC on 15 October 2021 and would be considered by the Policy & Resources Committee at its next meeting.

Alex Killick returned to meeting.

9.   **HUMAN RESOURCES REPORT**

9.1   The Committee NOTED a Human Resources Report which included updates on employee relations, HR operations and organisational development.

9.2   The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the Chief Operating Officer on progress related to the Edinburgh College Workforce Plan, a 2021/22 priority objectives for the HR Team.

9.3   The Committee NOTED that some employees would return to campus working from mid-August until mid-October when arrangements were scheduled to be reviewed. The Head of HR advised the Committee that most employees had expressed a wish to have flexible working models including both working from home and working on campus. The Committee NOTED that this request was currently being considered, although it was emphasised that the needs of service would take precedence.

9.4   The Committee NOTED that the first phase of GTCS registration for lecturers had started in August 2021, and the OD Team were updated qualification records so that all staff eligible for registration would be contacted.

9.5   The Committee NOTED that it remained difficult to accurately assess anticipated sickness absence levels whilst Covid-19 restrictions remained in place, with the majority of staff working form home on a full-time basis. The Head of HR advised the Committee that Covid-19 absences were not recorded under sickness absence, so as not to disadvantage an employee in regard to their sick pay entitlement.

9.6   The Committee DISCUSSED sickness absence levels as a performance measure within the HR Dashboard and AGREED that, within the development of a People Strategy for the College, the Head of HR should consider new measures focussed on the wellbeing and health of staff.

10. ESTATES & DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE REPORT

10.1 ESTATES & DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE

10.1.1 The Committee NOTED an Estates & Digital Infrastructure Report which included updates on key estates and IT infrastructure matters.

10.1.2 The Committee NOTED an update on a legal matter relating to the student accommodation at the Granton Campus. The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that a further update on progress would be provided at its next meeting.

10.1.3 The Committee NOTED that the College had met with Gather & Gather on 10 August 2021 to discuss their strategic recovery plan for Edinburgh College. The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that since the first Covid-19 lockdown catering staff assigned to the College had been furloughed.

10.1.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the catering contract with Gather & Gather and NOTED that it would be extended by one-year to January 2023, to allow time for a full tender process to be completed. The Chief Operating Officer informed the Committee that the College would engage with a catering consultancy firm to support the tender process.

10.2 DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-25 PROGRESS REPORT

10.2.1 The Committee NOTED progress against the Digital Strategy 2020-25, which was approved by the Board in December 2019. The Vice Principal Innovation, Performance and Planning advised the Committee that the implementation of the Strategy had been rapidly accelerated due to Covid-19, as the College repositioned itself to a blended learning model.

10.2.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the progress made to implement the Strategy, and its central importance to ensure College business continued to operate effectively whilst Covid-19 restrictions remained in place. The Principal advised the Committee that continued financial support from the Scottish Government would be essential to improve digital infrastructure and tackle all aspects of digital poverty.

10.2.3 The Committee NOTED the strategic ambition of the College to become a 'High Performing Digital College', and acknowledged the excellent work undertaken to implement the Digital Strategy since its launch its launch in February 2020.

11. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

11.1 DEPARTURE OF NON-EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

11.1.1 The Committee NOTED that the tenure of Non-Executive Board Member, Toni McAlindin, would end on 29 September 2021. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee thanked Ms McAlindin for her contribution to the Policy & Resources Committee.

12.   FOR INFORMATION

    12.1 COMMITTEE PROGRAMME OF WORK 2020/21

        12.1.1   The Committee NOTED its proposed programme of work for the 2021/22 academic year.

13.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

    13.1 The next meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee will take place on 16 November 2021.

Meeting closed at 16:50