



## **ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING OF 03 JUNE 2016**

**13:30hrs, Boardroom, Sighthill Campus**

**Present:** T Brown; A Bruton; S Cairncross (Chair); J Evans; J Jeffrey; K Just; A Landels; E Lee; J Sales; J Van Herk; A Wilson

**In attendance:** M Jeffrey; J McCran; K McGlynn; M Walker (Clerk); C Wilson

#### **1 WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

- 1.1 The Committee NOTED apologies from Colin Arthur, Jenni Behan, Juliet Harkin and Arran McMillian.
- 1.2 The Committee Chair welcomed Craig Wilson, Deputy Principal, to the Academic Council as the acting Executive Lead.
- 1.3 The Committee Chair informed the Academic Council that Elaine Lee would take over as Chairperson for Item 9; Review of Committee Operation, to support the process of the Committee's self-evaluation.

#### **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 11 March 2016 as an accurate record of the meeting.

#### **4 MATTERS ARISING**

- 4.1 The Committee NOTED actions from the last meeting of the Academic Council were either marked complete or on the agenda, with the exception of:
  - 4.1.1 **IMAGINE TOMORROW REPORT** (*Minute 7.1.3/19.09.14 refers*)

The Committee NOTED an update on the Imagine Tomorrow Report from the Head of Support for Learning. Members were informed that a number of strands relating to Imagine Tomorrow had moved forward, for instance the

ECSA-Illence Awards, and it was expected that other elements would be progressed through the Learning Engagement Framework. The Committee AGREED that it would be beneficial for the Academic Council to receive a presentation on the Learning Engagement Framework, from representatives of ECSA, at a future meeting.

The Committee AGREED that since the relevant aspects of the Imagine Tomorrow Report had been progressed that the action should be considered closed.

## **5 CORE & ESSENTIAL SKILLS STRATEGY**

- 5.1 The Committee NOTED a final draft of the Core & Essential Skills Strategy, which aimed to ensure that core and essential skills were given the level of priority required by the AEV action plan. The Head of Engineering, who had led the development of the Strategy, highlighted the importance of students' core and essential skills development for lifelong learning and employability – the backbone of Curriculum for Excellence.
- 5.2 The Committee NOTED that since the Academic Council last reviewed a draft of the Strategy, on 22 January, a number of amendments had been made. The Head of Engineering outlined these minor amendments and informed the Committee that an Essential Skills Advisory Board's statement of ambition would be included in the final document, once it had been signed off by the College Principals Group.
- 5.3 The Committee DISCUSSED the Core & Essential Skills Strategy and its implementation by 'suitably qualified and experienced in the subject area'. The Head of Engineering outlined the process of course validation and the training teaching staff received.
- 5.4 The Committee APPROVED the Core & Essential Skills Strategy, subject to the addition of the confirmed Essential Skills Advisory Board's statement of ambition. The Committee Chair, on behalf of the Academic Council, congratulated the Head of Engineering on the Strategy and the positive reaction the draft document had already received from Education Scotland.

***Mike Jeffrey left the meeting***

## **6 COLLEGE SURVEYS**

- 6.1 LEARNING & TEACHING SURVEY REPORT 2016
  - 6.1.1 The Committee NOTED a report on the results of the 2016 Learning & Teaching Survey, which was designed to assess students' opinions regarding key aspects of their classroom experience at the College.
  - 6.1.2 The Committee NOTED the scope of the survey, which was made available to 6600 full-time and part-time student across all four campuses via Moodle. The Head of Quality & Equalities informed the Committee that the response rate was 44.5% overall, 2.7% less than the previous year's survey.

- 6.1.3 The Committee NOTED the key message from the 2016 survey results, which showed that respondents were 'moderately' satisfied with their courses (80.9%) and the development of their knowledge and skills (83.9%). The Head of Quality & Equalities highlighted that students were also satisfied with learning and teaching on their courses, with 83.6% of respondents feeling confident that their lecturers were 'helping them to learn'. Similarly, students were satisfied with their learning environment, with 85.3% of respondents reporting that they felt comfortable asking their lecturers for help.
- 6.1.3 The Committee NOTED that although 88.1% of respondents reported that they 'know when their assessments are due', satisfaction rates with regard to other aspects of assessment could be improved. The Head of Quality & Equalities informed the Committee that particular aspects of learning and teaching could also be developed further, as could the opportunities provided for student input (for example, only 63.8% of respondents felt that they could influence the planning and delivery of subjects on their course). The Committee NOTED the College would review arrangements for covering lectures absence as only 62.7% of respondents had stated that suitable arrangements were made when their lecturers were away.
- 6.1.4 The Committee NOTED that the College ranked in the lowest quartile for 17 of the 19 questions when compared with an external benchmark, which included UK-wide sixth forms and private colleges. The Committee DISCUSSED benchmarking and the College's proposal to move to a towards the SFC's 10 question as a quality benchmark (Minute 6.3.4 refers).
- 6.1.5 The Committee DISCUSSED the areas of strength and improvement identified, and the recommendation put forward to develop aspects of assessment, the learning and teaching process and the opportunities for students to provide input into their learning experience. The Head of Quality & Equalities informed the Committee that these aspects would be highlighted in the June 2016 self-evaluation process, whereby curriculum teams would be asked to consider actions that would lead to improvements.
- 6.1.6 The Committee NOTED that the appropriate resourcing of curriculum managers was fundamental to the Business Transformation Plan, and that the additional support would assist the improvement of academic quality across the College. Further to this, the Head of Support for Learning informed the Committee that the continued development of the class reps system, through ECSA, would allow students to participate further in the planning and delivery of their course.
- 6.1.7 The Committee AGREED that the Head of Quality & Equalities should develop a summary of actions arising from survey results, to allow the Academic Council to monitor progress on their implementation.
- 6.2 STUDENT INDUCTION SURVEY 2016
- 6.2.1 The Committee NOTED the content and format of the draft Student Induction Survey 2016, which would be made available to new students in the 2016/17 academic year. The Head of Quality & Equalities advised the Committee that the survey would be conducted entirely online and, if required, drop-in session would be held to support students in completing the form.

- 6.2.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the induction survey and were generally content with its format and presentation. The Student President informed the Committee that he believed some of the questions were leading. In response, the Head of Quality & Equalities advised members that current research suggested that such questions were not leading, and had been adopted widely across the education sector.
- 6.2.3 The Committee APPROVED the Student Induction Survey 2016 for dissemination in the next academic year.

***Annette Bruton, Principal & Chief Executive, joined the meeting***

6.3 REVIEW OF COLLEGE SURVEYS

- 6.3.1 The Committee NOTED a paper summarising the proposed changes to the College's student satisfaction surveys and proposed improvements to further capture the student voice. The Head of Quality & Equalities advised the Committee that a review of surveys had taken place in May, which included a review of purpose, content, methodology and feedback from teaching staff, curriculum managers and ECSA.
- 6.3.2 The Committee NOTED that feedback suggested that surveys were too long, the language was often inaccessible and a number of questions were not reflective of the learning experience. Consequently, the Head of Quality & Equalities proposed to the Committee that the number of survey questions would be limited to approximately 20, and these would be specific to the learning experience, or key services or process – depending on the survey's purpose.
- 6.3.3 The Committee NOTED that the capture of equality data had been identified as an issue because of the amount of questions asked. The Head of Quality & Equalities highlighted that linking or transposing student's equality data to the survey would contravene the Data Protection Act (1998), therefore it was proposed that equality data capture remained in all student satisfaction surveys.
- 6.3.4 The Committee NOTED that to facilitate and manage student satisfaction surveys a third party online survey provider was used. The provider, QDP, also provided the College with benchmarking data from across Scotland and the UK. The Head of Quality & Equalities informed the Committee that, through the Priority Based Budgeting (PBB) process, it was proposed that a free mobile friendly software (as tested for the Induction Survey) should be used to facilitate surveys. The Committee NOTED that with regards to benchmarking it was proposed that the SFC's 10 questions were measured against as a quality benchmark going forward.
- 6.3.5 The Committee DISCUSSED additional feedback mechanisms such as 'pulse' surveys to collate feedback on key themes around learning and teaching. The Head of Support for learning highlighted his own experiences of using Twitter surveys, whilst acknowledging the risks for the College associated with social media.
- 6.3.6 The Committee AGREED to endorse the approach to surveys outlined by the Head of Quality & Equalities. The Committee Chair advised the Academic

Council that the implementation of proposals and their effectiveness would be monitored by the Committee in 2016/17 academic year.

## 7 BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PLAN

***Jon Buglass and Jonny Pearson, Associate Principals, entered the meeting***

### 7.1 BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PLAN UPDATE

- 7.1.1 The Committee NOTED an update from the Principal on progress relating to the Business Transformation Plan. The Principal informed the Committee that the first meeting of the Strategic Programme Board, the project governance body of the transformation plan, met on 02 June and would report to the Board through the Policy & Resources Committee.
- 7.1.2 The Committee NOTED the SFC had provided financial support to facilitate the first tranche of the voluntary severance scheme. The Principal advised the Committee that prior to decision-making on the SFC's support for other aspects of the transformation plan the College's internal auditors would review the plan and feedback to the SFC.
- 7.1.3 The Committee NOTED that the Principal was keen for staff and students to become involved in each of the transformation plan strands, and encouraged staff to read the plan and identify any particular areas of interest. The Principals advised the Committee that the Associate Principals would address the Academic Council on the two strands of the transformation plan which were of particular interest to its members; *Recruitment, Retention & Productivity* and *Curriculum Relevance*.

### 7.2 2015/16 RECRUITMENT & CREDITS UPDATE

- 7.2.1 The Committee NOTED an update on the College's performance against its 2016/17 recruitment and credits targets, as of 20 May. The Associate Principal (Recruitment & Retention) confirmed that he was confident that the College would exceed its recruitment targets, and by November surpass its 2016/17 credits targets.
- 7.2.2 The Committee NOTED that both College Community and International recruitment appeared low in comparison with other areas. The Associate Principal highlighted that this was due, respectively, to the receipt of paper applications in College Communities which required more administrative time and International courses not opening for recruitment until 04 April.
- 7.2.3 The Committee welcomed the positive recruitment shown for 2016/17 and DISCUSSED the following:
  - (i) The process of dealing with applicants once the 2016/17 credit target was reached;
  - (ii) a scheduled surgery event where applicants can enrol on recruiting courses on the day;
  - (iii) the changing of courses if no or limited applications were received;
  - (iv) applicant queries received by ECSA regarding discrepancies between the course and the website, and the need for these to be communicated to the College.

- 7.2.4 The Committee NOTED the Associate Principal Recruitment & Retention's high level of confidence in the data presented to the Board and its committees, and that drawn on by curriculum managers and teaching staff for planning purposes.

***Jonny Pearson left the meeting***

7.3 CURRICIULUM PLANNING REPORT

- 7.3.1 The Committee a report from the Associate Principal (Curriculum Planning) following the Curriculum Health Check Review in August 2015. The Associate Principal highlighted progress made since his last update to the Academic Council in January, including:
- (i) The publications of SDS Regional Skills Assessment Matrices;
  - (ii) the use of the matrices and KPI/recruitment data to 'largely complete' the 2016/17 curriculum planning process;
  - (iii) the development of a new curriculum planning tool to capture and communicate curriculum data, to aid strategic and financial planning;
  - (iv) the presentation of planning targets (including 'credits by department') on the Reports Pathway, for access by all staff;
  - (v) the development of a new planning matrix to record and track curriculum changes.
- 7.3.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the new planning matrix, an essential tool which allows the College to form a 3 year overview and plan of Estates and Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The Associate Principal highlighted that the EIA process and sign-off would be overseen by the Chief Operating Officer as part of the new senior management structure.
- 7.3.3 The Committee NOTED a summary of the curriculum changes for 2016/17, including the initialisation of 12 new courses in Entry Level provision (a 3% increase). The Associate Principal informed the Committee that the process of planning curriculum changes for 2017/18 had also now begun. Members DISCUSSED the widening access agenda and its prioritisation on the newly formed Scottish Government's agenda. The Committee AGREED that the Associate Principal should liaise with Ann Landels, a non-executive member of the Board, with regards to her involvement with the Inclusive Edinburgh Partnership.
- 7.3.4 The Committee NOTED the need for a College-wide approach to curriculum changes in order to move credits to areas of demand, for instance, ICT (digital), financial services, energy and health & care. Further to this, the Associate Principal provided a summary of the future of individual curriculum areas.
- 7.3.5 The Committee DISCUSSED the proposed Curriculum Planning Programme for 2017/18 and 2018/19, which aimed to ensure accountability and clarity on the various stages of the process. The Committee AGREED to endorse the proposed planning process, and looked forward to monitoring progress against the plan.

## 7.4 INNOVATION IN LEARNING, TEACHING & ASSESSMENT

- 7.4.1 The Committee NOTED an update from the Associate Principal (Curriculum Planning) on proposed innovations within learning, teaching and assessment at the College, through a blended learning approach.
- 7.4.2 The Committee NOTED that a refocused, Teaching & Assessment Strategy would lead to the College becoming future facing, with a workforce prepared for and embracing new technology and innovative pedagogical practice. The Associate Principal informed the Committee that students would experience education that was consistently engaging, challenging and fulfilling, the success of which would be measured by improvements in the Colleges KPIs over the 3 year transformation period.
- 7.4.3 The Committee NOTED the planned outputs and milestones, starting with the re-launch of a refocused Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy in 2016/17. The Associate Principal also highlighted the essential requirements for implementing and adopting blended learning at the College, based around 'sufficient and targeted investment' in areas such as: curriculum design; virtual learning environments; IT infrastructure; learning resources; and, staff/student training.
- 7.4.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the proposed innovations in learning, teaching and assessment and a 3 year action grid provided by the Associate Principal. The Committee Chair appreciated the opportunity for Academic Council to view the detailed actions outlined and welcomed the range of College staff involved in these important area of work.

***Jon Buglass left the meeting***

## 8 EDUCATION SCOTLAND ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT VISIT

- 8.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the Principal regarding the Education Scotland Annual Engagement Visit on 09 & 10 May, and the matters arising from the visit. The Principal informed the Committee that a report from Education Scotland had been received on 01 June, and was currently being accuracy checked by the Senior Management Team.
- 8.2 The Committee NOTED the process of the review conducted by Education Scotland and a summary of the outcomes of the visit. The Head of Quality & Equalities informed the Committee that overall the review had been positive, with Education Scotland recognising the College's work to improve the planning and delivery of core and essential skills. The Committee NOTED that the initial report had indicated that more could be done to develop the use of LDTs across the College and improve consistency with quality processes.
- 8.3 The Committee NOTED that the full Education Scotland report would be brought to the next meeting of the Academic Council for review. The Principal informed the Committee that she hoped the final report would include further positive statements, as the original report was drafted at a time when many of the proposals within the transformation plan (e.g. changes to further support curriculum managers) remained confidential.

## 9 REVIEW OF COMMITTEE OPERATION

### *Elaine Lee acted as Committee Chair for item 9 (Minute 1.3 refers)*

- 9.1 The Committee NOTED that at the end of each academic year the Committee is required to review its annual activity. The Acting Committee Chair advised the Academic 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.
- 9.2 The Committee NOTED that its operation was compliant with its terms of reference, and DISCUSSED the following aspects of its membership:
- (i) The representation of LDTs through the Head of Support for Learning;
  - (ii) trade union representation on the Committee;
  - (iii) the role of the Academic Board Member.
- 9.3 The Committee DISCUSSED members and co-opted members role in putting forward agenda items for consideration, and the Acting Committee Chair encouraged member to raise proposals to the Clerk. The Committee NOTED that the Student President's wished for matters such as student funding to be discussed at Academic Council. The Principal highlighted that such discussions were part of the Policy & Resources Committee's remit, but accepted that the Board may wish to provide further clarity on the Academic Council's role in consider such matters as tuition fees.
- 9.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the following with regards to its achievements in relation to its performance monitoring, strategic roles, decision-making and relationship:
- 9.4.1 The Committee AGREED that to effectively monitor performance it should, at its next meeting, review a schedule of available College KPIs.
  - 9.4.2 The Committee NOTED positive comments from members on the opportunities the Academic Council provides for strategic input. The Acting Committee Chair advised members that, at the first meeting of 2016/17, the Committee's strategic roles would be reiterated to members.
  - 9.4.3 The Committee AGREED that papers presented to Academic Council should avoid 'jargon' and abbreviations where possible.
  - 9.4.4 The Committee AGREED that to support decision-making it would be beneficial for members to receive a short presentation on the College governance structure. Further to this, the Acting Committee Chair requested that a link to the Board of Management WebPages was circulated to all members.
  - 9.4.5 The Committee AGREED that to develop co-opted members relationship with the Board further opportunities to attend events would be disseminated, including visits to various departments.

- 9.5 The Acting Committee Chair thanked members for their comments and hoped that the actions outlined as part of the review process could be implemented for the start of the 2016/17 academic year.

## **10 ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

### **10.1 ECSA SABBATICAL OFFICERS**

10.1.1 The Committee NOTED that all four current Sabbatical Officers tenures would end on 30 June, along with their co-opted membership of the Academic Council. The Committee Chair, on behalf of the Academic Council, thanked Jeroen Van Herk, Jenni Behan, Arran McMillian and Taylor Brown for their contribution to the Committee over the past year.

10.1.2 The Committee NOTED that three new Sabbatical Officers, Neal Black, Amanda Clark and David Tait would join the Academic Council in coming academic year.

## **11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 11.1 The date of the next meeting is 04 November 2016 at 14:00, in the Boardroom, Sighthill Campus.

***The meeting closed at 16:00***