



## **ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

### **APPROVED MINUTES OF MEETING OF 24 MAY 2019**

**14:00hrs, Boardroom, Granton Campus**

**Present:** Iris Aitchison; Beth Anderson; Laura Craig; Mike Cowley; Sarah Hay; Neil Manning; Judith Sischy; Jeanette Stevenson; Fiona Riddoch (Chair);

**In attendance:** Jon Buglass; Nick Croft; Kerry Heathcote; Monica Hoenigmann; Marcus Walker (Clerk)

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

- 1.1 The Committee NOTED apologies from Audrey Cumberland, Debbie Dow, Julian Henderson; Ethelinda Lashley-Scott; Kevin Maloney; Sandra Morrison, Ryan Quinn and Shannon Young.
- 1.2 The Committee Chair welcomed Judith Sischy to her first meeting of the Academic Council, following the appointment of Ms Sischy by the Board on 19 March.
- 1.3 The Committee Chair, on behalf of members, thanked Ann Landels for her service to the Academic Council over the past three years. The Committee Chair informed members that Ms Landels had become the Vice Chair of the Board on 01 March, and had therefore taken the role of Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee.

#### **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 19 February 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 *STUDENT FUNDING FOR TRANSPORT (Minute 5.2.3/ 22.02.19 refers)*

The Committee NOTED that a University of Edinburgh led group, which aimed to reduce student travel costs on public transport, was currently in the process of lobbying Lothian Bus Company management. The Head of Communications, Policy & Research advised the Committee that the group had met, and that further meetings were planned in summer 2019. Further to this, the Committee NOTED that ongoing large scale housing development at Granton would likely lead to a more frequent bus service for College students and staff.

4.1.3 *JOB ZONE WEBSITE (Minute 5.4.2/ 22.02.19 refers)*

The Committee NOTED an update on 'Job Zone' an online resource to help students find part-time employment whilst at College. The Head of Student Experience informed the Committee that a redeveloped Job Zone would be officially launched on 25 May<sup>1</sup>.

## 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.

5.2 The Committee NOTED progress on the 15-24 Learner Journey Review, and the continued engagement of the Executive and Senior Management Team with national working groups. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and Performance informed the Committee that a downloadable app was currently being developed by College students, on behalf of the Regional Learner Passport Steering Group (at the request of regional universities and colleges), to help students find out more about articulating courses and their entry requirements. The Committee DISCUSSED the Learner Journey Review and AGREED that it may be appropriate to focus on developments in more detail at a future meeting.

5.3 The Committee NOTED that the National Union of Students (NUS) had embarked on a significant savings programme, in light of recent financial difficulties. The Student President informed the Committee that ECSA were continuing to monitor the situation and assess its potential local impacts.

5.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the Horizon Scanning Report and NOTED that the report's cover sheet should be used to highlight specific points of interest for individual

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<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh College Job Zone website: <https://jobzone.edinburghcollege.ac.uk>

committees of the Board. The Committee Chair welcomed this development and hoped that the Committee would have an opportunity at future meetings to discuss key developments that may impact on strategic operations within its remit.

## **6 STUDENT EXPERIENCE REPORT**

### **6.1 STUDENT EXPERIENCE UPDATE**

- 6.1.1 The Committee NOTED a report on developments to improve the experience and retention of students, since the last meeting of the Academic Council in February.
- 6.1.2 The Committee NOTED that 'Registration Events' would replace 'Welcome Events' in the new academic year, and would include enrolment and induction. The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that 'Registration Events' would take place on the weeks beginning 12 & 19 August 2019.
- 6.1.3 The Committee NOTED that, following a review of the student counselling service, the College had decided to explore alternative ways to deliver a counselling and wellbeing service. The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that the existing service had only been open to referrals for three weeks this academic year leading to long waiting times. The Committee NOTED that the high cost service provided meant that very few of the 1,090 students declaring a mental health concern for 2018/19 could be supported by the service. Further to this, the Head of Student Experience informed the Committee that a more flexible model with a wider range of support options, including therapeutic group work, was being considered.
- 6.1.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the importance of an effective student counselling service, capable of supporting the student body and those who had declared mental health concerns. The Head of Student Experience informed the Committee that the College placed great importance on the delivery of such services, and had prioritised student counselling provisions within the 2018/19 College Budget.
- 6.1.5 The Committee NOTED its concerns that SFC funding to support student counselling services had not yet been made available to the College. The Committee AGREED that it would continue to monitor the implementation of a new student counselling model, and the availability of funding, going forward.
- 6.1.6 The Committee NOTED that the safeguarding concerns of students remained high with 357 referrals received in 2018/19 to date. The Head of Student Experience advised the Committee that consideration was now been given to increasing the Safeguarding Lead post from 0.5FTE to 1FTE until June 2020. The Committee DISCUSSED the need for further safeguarding provisions and AGREED that it would welcome a further update on this important matter at its next meeting.

### **6.2 CLASS REP CONFERENCE REPORTS**

- 6.2.1 The Committee NOTED that the fourth round of Class Rep Conferences had taken place across all four campuses in April 2019. The Student President advised the Committee that the conference focussed on student 'Success and Progression'.

- 6.2.2 The Committee NOTED that the majority of responses and feedback gathered relating to support for progression was positive, with students indicating that they had obtained appropriate information on how to apply for their chosen progression routes. The Student President advised the Committee that constructive feedback had been provided on the more technical aspects of success and progression, such as funding arrangements, the online application system and personal statements.
- 6.2.3 The Committee DISCUSSED the relationship and interactions between class reps and lecturers, and the need to make sure that class reps meet with lecturers at the start of their course. The Committee AGREED that the Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance should oversee the coordination of events where lecturers and class reps could meet. Further to this, the Curriculum Manager Art & Design advised the Committee that he would be content for any new mechanism to support interaction between lecturers and class reps to be piloted within the School of Art & Design.
- 6.3 CLASS REP CONFERENCE: FOLLOW-UP
  - 6.3.1 The Committee NOTED the response of the College to actions arising from the ECSA Class Rep Conferences held in between December 2018 and February 2019, which considered 'Feedback & Self-Evaluation' and 'Belonging & Inclusion'.
  - 6.3.2 The Committee NOTED that the Senior Management Team had considered feedback from Class Rep Conferences and were in the process of taking key points forward. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance informed the Committee that the College would continue to publish 'you said, we did' information in response to Class Reps' feedback.

## **7 COLLEGE SATISFACTION SURVEYS**

- 7.1 STUDENT SATISFACTION AND ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS 2018
  - 7.1.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update on progress relating to the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2018. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that due to a poor response rate the deadline for survey responses had been extended to 10 May.
  - 7.1.2 The Committee NOTED that following a short extension response rates had improved significantly, and that the results of the Survey would be brought forward to the next meeting of the Academic Council in 2019/20. The Committee DISCUSSED the initial response rate and the measures taken by the College to ensure that the 50% response rate target, as set by the SFC, was achieved. The Committee NOTED that the 50% response rate had been achieved by a number of other colleges in the sector.

- 7.2 COLLEGE LEAVER DESTINATION SURVEY 2017/18 REPORT
- 7.2.1 The Committee NOTED a report on the results of the College Leaver Destination Survey carried out during February 2019. 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.
- 7.2.2 The Committee NOTED that the number of students surveyed increased by 2% compared to AY 2016/17, with the number of positive destinations remaining unchanged at 96%.
- 7.2.3 The Committee NOTED a dip between 2017/18 and 2016/17 survey results, which was indicative of a plateau rather than a negative trend - following a rapid rise in previous years due to the implementation of a new approach to gathering such data. For example, the number of FE students engaged in further study increasing by 25% from 2014/15 to 2016/17, but dropped by 5% in 2017/18. The Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the number of HE students at university increased by 32% from 2014/15 to 2016/17, however, a 0.5% decrease had been noted over the past year.
- 7.2.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the results of the College Leaver Destination Survey 2017/18, and AGREED that the Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance should continue to ensure that Curriculum Managers have access to information around student progression going forward.
- 7.2.5 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.
- 7.3 INDUCTION SURVEY 2019/20
- 7.3.1 The Committee NOTED the content and format of the draft Student Induction Survey 2019/20, which would be made available to new students in the next academic year.
- 7.3.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the Induction Survey 2019/20 and suggest minor amendments relating to questions of Wi-Fi access and registration events. The Committee AGREED that the Head of Curriculum Planning & Performance should review which questions were required by the SFC, for national statistics purposes, and (if appropriate) make additional alterations to questions as requested by the Academic Council.
- 7.3.3 The Committee APPROVED the Induction Survey 2019/20 for dissemination, subject the changes highlighted in Paragraph 7.3.2.

## **8 HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? REPORT**

### **8.1 HOW GOOD IS OUR COLLEGE? UPDATE**

- 8.1.1 The Committee NOTED the Edinburgh College Enhancement Plan 2018-21, and reviewed progress against the areas of improvement highlighted within the Plan. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and 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.
- 8.1.2 The Committee NOTED a RAG rated overview of progress against key actions within the Enhancement Plan. The Committee Chair, on behalf of members, welcomed the presentation of key actions in a manner which supported members of the Academic Council in their performance monitoring role.
- 8.1.3 The Committee DISCUSSED individual Enhancement Plan actions and AGREED that selected projects should be focused on at Academic Council meetings in 2019/20, to provide the Committee with a better understanding of individual project aims and the progress achieved to date.

### ***Iris Aitchison left the meeting***

### **8.2 EXTERNAL VERIFICATION: AREAS OF POSITIVE PRACTICE**

- 8.2.1 The Committee NOTED information pertaining to recent positive external verification visits conducted by the SQA and other awarding bodies. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and Performance informed the Committee that the College was proactively reviewing areas of positive practice in order to share examples, and to thank staff for their commitment to maintaining high standards of quality.
- 8.2.2 The Committee NOTED that evidence of good practice was important, as it allowed the College to measure progress against the '*Delivery of Learning and Services to Support to Learning*' elements of the Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan.
- 8.2.3 The Committee DISCUSSED the positive feedback provided through the external verification visits, and welcomed its wider dissemination to staff, students and other stakeholders. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and Performance informed the Committee that he had personally received a very positive response to the letters of recognition sent to individual staff members.

### ***Jeanette Stevenson left the meeting***

### **8.3 STUDENT RETENTION SUMMARY REPORT**

- 8.3.1 The Committee NOTED a summary of departmental retention status across the College, as of April 2019, which had been developed to share best practice and identify areas where additional support may be required. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and Performance advised the Committee that student retention was key to the College achieving its 2018/19 credits target, as agreed

with the SFC through the Edinburgh College Regional Outcome Agreement 2018/19.

- 8.3.2 The Committee NOTED that reviewing departmental retention offered the College the opportunity to identify areas of best practice where withdrawal rates were low. Similarly, departments where withdrawal rates were high could be offered additional support to boost student retention going forward. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning and Performance informed the Committee that the information provided aimed to illustrate that the College had a process in place for the academic year 2019/20, to help Curriculum Managers and Curriculum Leaders identify areas where further intervention might be required.
- 8.3.3 The Committee Chair welcomed the level of information provided, and the Committee DISCUSSED the development of a benchmarking system to identify departments / courses requiring additional support. The Committee NOTED that the development of live information on retention status was a positive step forward for the College.

## **9 REVIEW OF COMMITTEE OPERATION 2018/19**

- 9.1 The Committee NOTED that at the end of each academic year the Committee is required to review its annual activity. The Clerk 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.
- 9.2 The Committee NOTED that its operation was compliant with its terms of reference, and DISCUSSED matters in relation to its performance monitoring, strategic role and decision-making.
- 9.3 The Committee AGREED that the Committee Chair should work with the Clerk to finalise the review of committee operation checklist, prior to its recirculation to the Committee for additional comments.

## **10 ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

- 10.1 DEPARTURE OF STUDENT MEMBERS
  - 10.1.1 The Committee NOTED that the Student President and ECSA Vice President (Welfare) would be stepping down from their roles on 01 July 2019. The Committee Chair, on behalf of members, thanked both student representatives for their contribution to the Academic Council over the past year.
- 10.2 CO-OPTED MEMBERS TENURES
  - 10.2.1 The Committee NOTED that the Clerk to the Board would contact all co-opted members of the Academic Council in June to confirm tenure details for the new academic year.

**11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

11.1 To be confirmed.

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