

**Minutes of the Meeting of Senate Education Committee
held via Microsoft Teams at 2.00pm on Wednesday 18 November 2020**

1. Attendance

Present	Position
Colm Harmon	Vice-Principal Students (Convener) – Ex Officio
Tina Harrison	Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance (Vice-Convener) – Ex Officio
Sabine Rolle	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)
Lisa Kendall	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)
Stephen Bowd	Representative of CAHSS (Postgraduate Research)
Judy Hardy	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)
Michael Seery	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)
Antony Maciocia	Representative of CSE (Postgraduate Research)
Neil Turner	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching, UG)
Sarah Henderson	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching, PGT)
Paddy Hadoke	Representative of CMVM (Postgraduate Research)
Richard Andrews	Head of School, CAHSS
Iain Gordon	Head of School, CSE
Fizzy Abou Jawad	Edinburgh University Students' Association, Vice President Education
Stuart Lamont	Edinburgh University Students' Association, Permanent Staff Member
Sue MacGregor	Director of Academic Services – Ex Officio
Velda McCune	Representing Director of Institute for Academic Development – Ex Officio
Shelagh Green	Director for Careers & Employability – Ex Officio
Melissa Highton	Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services Division of Information Services – Ex Officio
Rebecca Gaukroger	Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions – Ex Officio
Sian Bayne	Assistant Principal Digital Education
Philippa Ward	Academic Services (Secretary)
Apologies	
Mike Shipston	Head of Deanery, CMVM
In Attendance	
Robbie Nicol	Professor of Place-Based Education
Andy Shanks	Director of Student Wellbeing
Paula Webster	Head of Student Data and Surveys

2. Minutes of Meeting held on November 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2020 were approved. Members were provided with an update on item 4.5, 'Recommendations for Online Examinations and Assessment': it was noted that progress in advancing the recommendations was being

made. Information for staff and students about Semester 1 assessment would be circulated shortly and information about Semester 2 arrangements would follow.

3. Convener's Communications

The Convener provided members with an update on planning assumptions for academic year 2021/22. He noted that the working assumption at this stage was that it would be possible to return to face to face teaching for the majority of students in 2021/22, whilst recognising that there would also be value in capturing and carrying forward some of the positives from the University's 2020/21 digital offering. The University was also working on the assumption that some constraints on large group teaching would remain and this would need to be factored into the 2021/22 timetabling model.

The Convener advised members that the Adaptation and Renewal Team (ART) would remain in place for the time being to oversee arrangements for the Christmas period and planning for Semester 2 2020/21 and academic year 2021/22.

4. For Discussion

4.1 Space, Place and Pedagogy: 'Beyond Digital' Learning and Teaching

The Professor of Place-Based Education, Moray House School of Education and Sport, attended to present the item. Members welcomed the paper, which was considered innovative and timely. The Committee noted:

- the link between the ideas outlined in the paper and work being undertaken by the 'Edinburgh Earth Initiative' and 'IntoUniversity' partnership in Craigmillar. It was agreed that there would be benefit in the paper's author and the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) discussing this further.
- the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach in order to take forward the paper's recommendations.

The Committee expressed 'in principle' support for the paper's recommendations and agreed to a further paper being submitted to Education Committee once Objectives 1 and 2 ('Discussion and Guidance' and 'Identifying and Mapping') as outlined in the original paper had been met. It was noted that the work would best be taken forward as part of the 'Curriculum Transformation' agenda, and the paper's author would be invited to contribute to these discussions.

4.2 Curriculum Review

The Convener presented on curriculum review and transformation. Members noted that the aim was not to present a fixed model, but to pose questions for consideration. These included questions around:

- The complexity of the University's offer – both the scale of the offer and variability across the institution. The University had around 16,000 unique course pathways in academic year 2017/18. In theory, students should have the flexibility to move between programmes, but this is often difficult in practice. How does the University

bring greater consistency across disciplines to ensure that students are anchored in their home discipline, but have the option of adding a second discipline?

- Whether or not the University is embracing the diversity of its applicants fully in its offer, and the way in which prospective applicants view the University.
- How comprehensible the University's offer is to its students – students report very positively about the teaching, but find many of the University's rubrics impenetrable.
- The level of responsibility placed on the Personal Tutor in the current system of course choice – students want to be able to take more responsibility in this area.
- Whether or not the University's curriculum reflects its philosophy.
- Whether the University is currently teaching and examining too much.
- Whether or not we are concerned about what happens to our students after they graduate.

The Committee considered:

- ways in which students might be given the option of undertaking major and minor subjects;
- ways in which the first and second years of study might be used to provide more 'scaffolding' and skills development for students, with the third year providing a greater focus on rigour and speciality, and the fourth year, stretch.

Members noted that the aim of any curriculum transformation work undertaken was to improve the overall student experience and sustainability. It was hoped that it would be possible to develop a set of potential models for the curriculum for further testing by summer 2021, but was noted that any changes made now would be implemented in academic year 2024/25 at the earliest.

Further issues discussed by the Committee included:

- The way in which wellbeing might be embedded within the curriculum
- The importance of not seeing 'soft skills' and discipline-specific content as a dichotomy
- The importance of co-design
- The need to ensure that any changes that were made did not inadvertently disrupt successful existing, non-standard degree programmes (eg. MChem with a year in industry or abroad)
- The extent to which a model based on a 4-year degree programme was future-proofed
- The desirability of offering models both for accelerated and slower-paced learning, including continuing to offer pathways for direct entrance into second year
- The importance of not overreaching in any changes that were made
- The fact that prospective undergraduates consistently report viewing the University of Edinburgh as a traditional and prestigious institution in a highly desirable location. This will continue irrespective of any changes the University makes, but finding alternative ways of delivering the curriculum will allow Edinburgh to attract those who don't currently feel that they would fit in here.

4.3 Doctoral College: Operational Plan 2020/21 Update

The Committee noted the Doctoral College Operational Plan and approved a change of name from the PGR Steering Group to the Doctoral College Operational Group. It was noted that the Operational Plan would become a live and accessible document.

4.4 Providing an Excellent Learning Experience for our International Students: Opportunities and Challenges

The paper's author advised members that there were some areas of excellent practice in relation to the learning experience provided for the University's international students, but there were also some areas of concern. These included:

- Over-generalisation about international learners
- Sudden changes in cohort sizes making it difficult for teachers to teach effectively
- The diversity of the student group
- Lack of time for teachers to undertake the CPD that would help them to overcome some of these difficulties

Members discussed the importance of:

- Undertaking more work to understand underlying cultures and the different ways in which students have previously been taught, and offering an inclusive curriculum.
- Ensuring diverse student involvement in upcoming curriculum review discussions to assist with the above.
- Ensuring that we do not assume that 'Western' ways are the best ways.
- Improving the coordination of market intelligence and forecasting tools to assist with issues around variation in cohort sizes.

4.5 Office for Students National Student Survey (OfS NSS) Consultation

Members were advised that the University had responded to the consultation and that its response had been in line with the Universities Scotland response. The Head of Student Data and Surveys was thanked for the work put into the consultation.

4.6 Student Mental Health Strategy Update

The paper was presented by the Director of Student Wellbeing, who advised members that he had been very pleased with the way in which the University's student mental health services had responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, primarily due to excellent collaboration across the institution. Services had never been more accessible, including to international students in different time zones.

Work had been undertaken not only to address the consequences of the pandemic but also to continue developing the University's mental health services strategically. Members noted that the focus of the University's Student Mental Health Strategy was on preventing mental health difficulties, and then on providing high quality support for those students requiring help. The Strategy was due for review in academic year 2020/21, but major overhaul was not considered necessary on the basis that the Strategy was continuing to underpin services well. The Committee noted section 12 of the paper which detailed the areas of the Strategy requiring further development.

Education Committee thanked the Director of Student Wellbeing for the very high quality work undertaken by him and his team in difficult circumstances in 2020.

Members discussed the following:

- the benefits of building on the mental health training provided for PGR supervisors, and on developing Schedules of Adjustments for PGR students to ensure that these are both practical and consistently implemented.
- the potential benefit of sharing some of the report's highlights with colleagues across the University to increase awareness of services.
- the importance of gathering accurate data to ensure that the services can evidence their provision and therefore ensure that they receive adequate resource.
- the importance of also focusing on staff mental health. It was noted that the University's Listening Service is available to both staff and students.

4.7 Updating and Embedding the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy

Members recognised that the existing Policy required updating and agreed that it should, in the short term, be reworked as a set of principles coupled with detailed guidance. The existing provisions would be updated to form an initial part of the guidance. The Committee noted the importance of ensuring that this change did not, however, inadvertently undermine the criticality of the document. It was also agreed that the new document should focus more on 'empowerment' than on 'levelling the playing field'. The new document would be brought back to the Committee for approval in due course.

4.8 Internal Periodic Review Themes 2019/20

The Committee was advised that ten Internal Periodic Reviews (IPRs) were undertaken in academic year 2019/20. The paper outlined the areas for further development identified by the Reviews, but did not reflect the many areas of positive practice that had also been identified. In many cases, themes were both areas of good practice and areas for further development eg. community development and curriculum building. Members were advised that a good practice-sharing forum was planned for those directly involved in the 2019/20 IPRs.

5. For Approval

5.1 National Student Survey (NSS) 2021 – Optional Questions

Members approved the proposed questions, recognising the benefit of using the same questions as were used in 2020 to provide continuity.

Philippa Ward
Academic Services
10 December 2020