

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

## LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE SUB-COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 1 May 2018 (0930-1200hrs).

**Present:** Mr F Antoniazzi (Convener), Mrs C Brooker, Ms M Buchan, Ms M Collie, Ms A Dixon, Ms H Douglas, Ms M Downie, Mr J Dunphy, Ms V Forbes, Mr M Ife, Dr J Isaacs, Mr M Shepherd and Dr H Vosper.

**Apologies:** Ms L Campbell, Dr M Dignan, Ms S Keast, Mr M Lewis, Ms S McManus, Ms S Millar, Ms R Pirie and Ms J Steed.

**In Attendance:** Mrs F Hall, Ms K Harrison (for item 9), Ms C Shaw (for item 3), Mrs A Smart (Secretary), Ms J Strachan (for item 8) and Mrs J Waddell (for item 9).

	Action
<p>1. <b>MINUTE</b></p>	
<p>The Minute of the Meeting held on 6 February 2018 [reference LISC/18/2] was approved and a matters arising report was considered. The following items which were not otherwise on the agenda were noted.</p>	
<p>1.1 <b><i>Academic Calendar and Local Holiday Dates (LISC/18/2/1.1)</i></b></p>	
<p>During the discussions around the change to the Academic Calendar in 2018/19 questions surrounding the appropriateness of the University having three fixed local holidays, two of which occurred in term time, were raised. The September holiday raised particular concerns as it required a large proportion of the University to close and no teaching to take place at an early stage in the academic year, which could have a negative impact upon students settling into university life as well as disrupting the flow of teaching.</p>	
<p>Following the last meeting of LISC, the Convener consulted with the Director of Human Resources to discuss the historical context of this holiday and to seek her views on taking forward a wider discourse on the matter. It was confirmed that the fixed holidays had been in place since the University was established and were re-confirmed when the new pay and grading arrangements were included as part of the national Framework Agreement in 2007. Since 2007 this matter had been raised informally with the unions on a number of occasions, however their view had always been that their members welcomed these additional fixed holidays and would not wish to see them being removed, even if they were compensated for by additional annual leave allowance. Should the University want to open a discussion on this matter more formally, a business case would have to be presented to the trade unions for consultation/discussion.</p>	
<p>The Sub-Committee considered the feedback provided by the Convener, in particular the perceived impact of the holidays on the learning infrastructure. The following points were noted:-</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The impact of the September holiday might be less evident once the revised Academic Calendar was implemented. It was agreed that, currently, it was quite inconvenient for new students in terms of the continuity of their experience.</li> <li>- The Sub-Committee agreed that looking at alternative set holiday dates would be preferable to leaving it open to staff to choose when to take the day off by, for example, giving additional leave allowance. Having fixed holidays where the University was closed to all were of more benefit to staff. Otherwise staff, academic in particular, would potentially struggle to take time off because they would likely be scheduled to teach if the University was open; taking time off</li> </ul>	

would require them to accommodate teaching on another day. Many academic staff already found that it was becoming more and more difficult to take leave during school holidays.

- The Library had, in the past, been required to open on a Monday holiday because students had assessment hand-ins on the Tuesday.
- It was suggested that IT Services might use public holidays, when the University was closed to all staff and students, to undertake upgrades. The Convener would seek clarification on this point.

F Antoniazzi

## 1.2 ***Student Experience Questionnaires (LISC/18/2/2.2)***

Informal feedback from staff had indicated that the pilot Semester 1 SEQ provided useful additional feedback and facilitated consideration of in-year interventions. Following consideration by the Personal Tutor System Working Group the questions for inclusion in the core SEQ for 2017/18 had been amended to: -

- I felt sufficient advice and support was available when required - from academic staff.
- I felt sufficient advice and support was available when required - from university support-services.

## 1.3 ***Review of Student-Facing Support Services: 2016/17 Theme (LISC/18/3/3.1)***

An update on progress with the recommendations/actions identified in the final report on the 2016/17 theme: *The Student Journey: from Enquiry to Enrolment* would be considered at a future meeting (normally such a review was undertaken approximately one year after the final report had been submitted).

Holding File

## 2. **APPRAISAL AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

### 2.1 ***Annual Appraisal Process for Student-Facing Support Services***

The Convener gave an oral update on progress with revisions to the annual appraisal process for student-facing support services. A small working group comprised of service representatives had met to discuss the process and members noted the minute of the final meeting of that group, which was held on 27 March 2018.

A draft list of services to be appraised, which had been agreed in consultation with Heads of Service, was noted (see below). As part of this consultation, consideration had been given to how the appraisal process addressed the contribution that several services made to one particular area or 'experience', for example, the student 'welcome'. It was agreed that this could be addressed on an annual basis by asking Heads of Service, as part of their appraisal, to demonstrate how they had contributed to a particular cross-cutting theme identified by the Convener of LISC e.g. student welcome, building campus community, resilience etc. Section 2 of the Academic Quality Handbook would be updated accordingly to reflect this.

F Antoniazzi/  
A Smart

- Accommodation
- Alumni
- Catering
- Counselling and Wellbeing Centre
- DELTA
- Disability and Dyslexia Centre
- Employability

- Enrolment
- Graduation
- IT Services
- Library
- Marketing and Communications
- ResLife
- RGU: SPORT
- Student Finance
- Student Immigration
- Student Recruitment
- Timetabling
- Travel and Transport

A revised form for completion by Heads of Service as part of the annual appraisal process was considered and **approved**. This was generally believed to be much clearer than the previous form in terms of the information that Heads of Service were asked to provide.

F Antoniazzi/  
A Smart

### 3. REVIEW OF STUDENT-FACING SUPPORT SERVICES

The 2017/18 theme *Alumni Services/Engagement* was being led by Mark Sollis, the Vice Principal for University Advancement. Ms Claire Shaw, Head of Alumni Relations, presented a paper which provided the proposed project outline. The following points were highlighted: -

- RGU Alumni was currently undergoing a phase of considerable development with the aim of developing alumni engagement programmes that benefited both alumni and the University. This significant period of change was likely to be ongoing for another 12 months.
- A survey had recently been issued to alumni; it was anticipated that this would help to define the activity of the service going forward. The results were expected late May/early June 2018.
- The team was undergoing expansion with a number of new positions being advertised.
- The intention was to develop collaborative partnerships across departments and Schools.
- Overall, the intention was to ensure that there was a more joined up approach towards external communications.

The following points came out of discussions: -

- It would be useful for the Alumni team to engage with the Student Association and DELTA to ensure students, as well as alumni, were involved in developments as appropriate.
- There was potential to showcase elements of good practice to external bodies e.g. the Funding Council and QAA.
- The paper would benefit from an 'evidence base' e.g. how the team had reached the conclusion that improvement was needed in certain areas.
- The Aberdeen Business School ran a mentoring programme for postgraduate students which matched suitable alumni with students.
- The review theme had been identified towards the end of summer 2017; the expectation was that the review would be undertaken during Session 2017/18 and completed in time to report the outcomes to the Scottish Funding Council in summer 2018 and to LISC at its first meeting of Session 2018/19.

C Shaw/  
M Collie/  
K Campbell

M Sollis/  
C Shaw

Ms Shaw confirmed that she would relook at the proposed methodology with the Vice Principal for University Advancement to take on board the issues raised in discussion with the Sub-Committee. A final report on the outcomes of the review would come to the Sub-Committee at its meeting in November.

M Sollis/  
C Shaw

#### 4. **STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (SPA) 2017**

The Sub-Committee noted an update on activities in relation to the objectives outlined in the Student Partnership Agreement for Session 2017/18. The Sub-Committee was pleased with progress described against the two objectives for Session 2017/18. A number of other issues were discussed:-

- It was queried whether or not all Heads of School were meeting with their School Officers (SO). The SO contract indicated that there should be a meeting with their Head of School three times per year.
- It was indicated that some students, particularly those in their honours year, often struggled to attend meetings.
- It was important for students to feel that they were contributing early in the academic year; the quality of the conversation between students and the School was often the most important aspect.
- The Convener would discuss the above issues with Heads of School.

F Antoniazzi

#### 5. **PERSONAL TUTOR SYSTEM REVIEW**

The Sub-Committee considered a draft revised *University Policy on Personal Tutoring* and noted the minute of the Working Group meeting held on 30 March 2018. It was noted that the draft *Policy* had also been considered by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Sub-Committee (TLASC) at its meeting in April.

The Convener gave an oral update on progress and the following was noted/agreed:-

- The revisions attempted to more clearly define responsibilities for implementing the *Policy* and for supporting academic staff acting as Personal Tutors.
- It was agreed that a footnote would be added to the *Policy* to indicate that, in some Schools, nomenclature may vary i.e. not all Schools used the term 'Personal Tutor', although all Schools were required to have an appropriate system in place.
- In terms of annual reporting, the Working Group had discussed the potential to issue a proforma for completion by each School Academic Board on an annual basis. The Convener would draft a proforma for consideration by academic staff members.
- It was noted that some changes had been made to a question in the *Student Evaluation Questionnaire*, following a recommendation by the Working Group (refer item 1.2 above).

F Antoniazzi/  
A Smart

F Antoniazzi

## 6. STUDENT LIFE PROJECT UPDATE – GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Sub-Committee received an oral update from the Convener which highlighted the following: -

- The recent development of a Scottish Government 'toolkit'.
- The intention to develop a "whole University" approach to include policy, prevention and intervention activities.
- The development and use of anonymous reporting systems.
- The need to encourage cultural change.
- Many students were reluctant to report instances of gender-based violence therefore it was important for the University to encourage a culture of reporting and to be aware of the signs that indicate someone might be at risk.
- Students would be involved in the design of any programme; the School Officer in attendance indicated she would be happy to get involved.

F Antoniazzi/  
V Forbes

## 7. DIGNITY AT WORK AND STUDY POLICY

The Convener confirmed that the above *Policy* was still under development and was a key piece of work in relation to the wellbeing agenda, led by colleagues from Human Resources and Planning and Policy. It was anticipated that the Vice-Principal for Corporate Operations would take the policy to the Executive for approval prior to it going to the Staff Governance Committee and the Board of Governors.

F Antoniazzi

## 8. GRADUATE APPRENTICESHIPS

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from Julie Strachan, Graduate Apprenticeship Development Lead, on the rollout of graduate apprenticeships. The following points were highlighted: -

- It was anticipated that approximately 135 students would join the University in Session 2018/19 through graduate apprenticeships in four Schools following a validation event scheduled for June 2018. This would be a considerable increase on 30 students in one School in 2017/18.
- It was important that staff (academic and support) started to give consideration to the type of student that would be on these courses e.g. they would be full-time students whilst also working full-time for their employer; the average age was around 34 and they were generally working at mid to senior management level, with varying levels of educational experience and confidence. Their needs would be quite different to a typical full-time, on-campus student.
- Ms Strachan provided an overview of the background to the development of graduate apprenticeships in Scotland, including the competitive tendering process, quality control mechanisms and the recruitment model, which was very different for these students.
- Students would be supported primarily through the online campus and by a workplace mentor (who would also undertake induction at the University). Affiliate student status would ensure that students had access to all resources that on-campus students were privy to.
- The Student Union would have a part to play in terms of helping these students feel integrated and engaged with their cohort and the wider University. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Union to attend their induction session. It

J Strachan/

was also possible that the Union might be able to help with regard to identifying a room that could be used for these students e.g. on a once per week timetabled basis.

A Dixon/  
M Collie

It was agreed that Ms Strachan would be invited back to speak to the Sub-Committee at its meeting in May 2019.

J Strachan/  
F Antoniazzi

## 9. SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION: WELLBEING

The Sub-committee received a presentation from the Convener which highlighted the following, leading to further discussion amongst members: -

- The issue of wellbeing was embedded in many aspects of the University's current strategy which included reference to: identity; embracing diversity and equality; cultivating student success; enriching the student experience; and engaging our communities.
- Current and future issues, which impacted on wellbeing, included: equality and diversity; access; gender based violence; mental health; intersectionality; British Sign Language; and Prevent.
- The considerable amount of work that had already been undertaken in relation to wellbeing, including: objectives within the Student Partnership Agreement; policy review e.g. personal tutoring.
- The Student Mental Health Agreement had been revised substantially in time for Session 2018/19 and it was anticipated that much of the work being undertaken would also have a positive impact on staff wellbeing and provide a framework for everyone to be involved in, creating a culture that supported positive wellbeing within the University community.
- The University's first 'resilience day' had taken place in November 2017 and had been relatively successful. A staff 'resilience network' was being developed with the intention of supporting staff with further knowledge and guidance in their efforts to promote resilience amongst students.
- It was noted that there was often a waiting list for student counselling.
- Clubs and societies were thriving and provided a vital resource for students, contributing significantly to their general wellbeing.
- It was vital that students were able to find out about activity within the University community; student representatives would be targeted for appropriate training.
- It was clear there needed to be a 'whole university' approach to the issue of wellbeing in terms of, for example: curriculum design;
- Wellbeing would remain an item on the Sub-Committee's agenda, with consideration given to any alignment with the work being undertaken by TLASC.

F Antoniazzi/  
J Dunphy

## 10. OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE

Members considered a summary of Sub-Committee evaluations for Session 2017/18. The responses were largely positive. There was a suggestion that one of the Sub-Committee's annual meetings might be a joint meeting with TLASC given that there were certain overlaps and issues of mutual interest. It was agreed that it might be worth giving consideration to having certain joint items.

F Antoniazzi/  
J Dunphy

It was proposed that the Head of Employability and Professional Enrichment be added to the Sub-Committee membership for Session 2018/19.

QAEC Report

11. **ANNUAL LEARNING AND TEACHING CONFERENCE**

Members noted that the 2017/18 conference would be held on 2 May 2018. The main theme would be 'Future Work, Future Graduates: Forging the Link'.

12. **STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES/SURVEYS**

DELTA had advised that the following short survey has been issued to students:

A Smart

**Lecture Capture** – the survey is being sent to students where lecture capture has been used in at least one of their modules - typically students on one stage of one course in 8 Schools. Feedback will be used to inform further use and rollout of lecture capture across the university.

13. **NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) 2018**

The results of the survey would be available in August 2018.

14. **MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

The Committee met on Tuesday 13 March 2018. Minutes of the meeting would be circulated when available.

A Smart

15. **OPERATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (OAC)**

The OAC (ICRGU) will meet on Tuesday 1 May 2018. Minutes of this meeting would be circulated when available.

A Smart

16. **SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Members were welcome to forward possible topics for substantive discussion to the Convener and/or Secretary.

ALL

17. **MEETING SCHEDULE FOR SESSION 2018/19**

To note: Proposed Sub-Committee dates for next Session are as follows:

ALL

- Tuesday 30 October 2018
- Tuesday 5 February 2019
- Tuesday 30 April 2019