

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 10 November 2021.

Present: V Strachan (Convener), D Adesanya, E Akerele, F Antoniazzi, J Bolger, S Cameron, H Castle, Dr D Cockburn, Dr E Gillibrand, L Jack, Professor S Pedersen, J Strachan, J-A Tait and C Thomson.

Apologies: Dr N Emmison and G Millar.

In Attendance: A Smart (Secretary).

	Action
<p>1. MINUTE</p>	
<p>The Minute of the Meeting held on 20 September 2021 was approved. The following matters arising, not covered elsewhere on the agenda, were noted:</p>	
<p>1.1 <i>The University's Vision and Strategy for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)</i></p>	
<p><i>Staff Networks:</i> Members of the staff networks were not always able to take on all of the responsibilities involved and it had been suggested that mainstreaming aspects of reporting might be beneficial. Additional detail in respect of time commitments and external relationship building would be helpful. C Thompson would meet with Prof Pedersen and E Akerele to discuss ways of addressing this.</p>	<p>C Thompson/ Prof Pedersen/ E Akerele</p>
<p>The EDI Adviser had been in touch with network leads to offer support where requested. The HR Equality Strand leads would also be available to offer advice to staff. The immediate focus was establishing the infrastructure for all equality strands, including the appointment of champions, but once a base line position had been established it would be easier to understand what the capacity for ongoing support was.</p>	
<p><i>Staff Equality Champion Roles:</i> Recruitment to Staff Equality Champion vacancies was currently underway with a promising response, albeit no applications to date. Members were encouraged to highlight the roles to colleagues.</p> <p>The role of Staff Gender Equality Champion would be retitled 'Equality Champion (Sex)' in order to accurately reflect that sex, not gender, was the protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, as well as the legal definition. It was confirmed that the term 'gender-based violence' remained appropriate as this was the nationally recognised term that was used in this regard.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>1.2 <i>Athena Swan</i></p>	
<p>There continued to be support for Athena Swan. Although Schools could pursue this independently, an institutional approach was preferable in the first instance; this would also avoid any additional pressure at School level. Timescales would be considered by the Executive in due course.</p>	

2. REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP 2021/22

It had been agreed that the remit would be reviewed to ensure it adequately captured the development of matters of policy around equality, diversity and inclusion and that any updates would go forward to QAEC for approval.

V Strachan

3. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY FORUM

The Sub-Committee noted the minute of the meeting of the Forum held on 29 September 2021. Members discussed the following:

- It was evident that a considerable amount of work was being undertaken around the University.
- *Black History Month*: October had been an exciting month of celebration with various events, including the first 'human library' discussion around different types of racism and how, as an institution, this could be prevented and tackled. Several members had attended and indicated that hearing about others lived experience in this regard had been very powerful; a video link would be shared when this was available. Those who had organised the events, in partnership with the Student Union, were commended for their efforts.
- *Accessibility*: It was queried whether there was any update in respect of the availability of technology to assist staff to meet accessibility requirements. It was confirmed that this was being addressed by various teams including funding to invest in new technology (Blackboard Ally) to provide alternative formats. It was recognised that captioning, in particular, was a significant burden on staff time. Unfortunately, there was no perfect solution available for that.
- Some Schools were reporting high numbers of students with additional needs. It was also suggested that the condensed assessment timetable was having an impact on students with disabilities, and also on inclusion and study skills services and teaching staff.

E Akerele

4. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY AND POLICIES

4.1 Equality and Diversity Policy

The Sub-Committee considered the updated Policy and accompanying paper which provided EDSC with an overview of the proposed changes following a benchmarking exercise and review of legislation requirement. The following was noted:

- As part of the annual policy framework review, the policy team had introduced standardisation to the University's policies including: a branded template, a version control table, a compliance section, a review header, accessibility compliance checks, and a policy impact assessment.
- The Policy had been updated to capture recent changes to E&D committee structures and the change in ownership of the Policy from the Vice Principal for Corporate Operations to the University Secretary.
- A number of minor amendments had been made following a benchmarking exercise which compared the University's Policy with that of other HEIs.
- Alignment with the Academic Regulations had been considered when making updates.
- Further embedding of equality and diversity into both academic and non-academic induction and training courses had been a suggestion by the Executive and was an area for further enhancement.

- Section 4.2 had been enhanced to help make all staff members aware of their responsibilities.
- It was queried whether there had been a conscious move to use the term 'gender identity' as opposed to 'gender reassignment' which was the protected characteristic in the Equality Act. It was agreed that this would be amended for accuracy (para 2.2.2). There was also at least one reference to 'EDAG' which would be updated.
- It was suggested that the Policy should include reference to the fact that some Schools might need to consider professional, regulatory and statutory body requirements in relation to EDI, with paragraph 5.6.1.3 a potential point in the document to capture this.
- Members indicated it would be helpful if training around this Policy, as well as the *Dignity at RGU* and the *Research Data Management* policies was also made available to existing staff. Dr Gillibrand confirmed that training on the latter was being offered to active researchers and this could be offered more widely. There might also be potential to feed in to Academic Regulations Seminars, for example through case studies; the desire was to instil in staff a common understanding of all these issues.

Dr Cockburn

Dr Cockburn

S Cameron/
J Strachan/
Dr Gillibrand/
L Jack

4.2 **Research Data Management Policy**

The *Research Data Management Policy*, recently launched, covering items including GDPR and the use of personal data in research activities, was noted. It was agreed that this was really useful, particularly as staff engaged in enhancement projects and it would be helpful to update some of the language to be more inclusive of support staff.

Dr Gillibrand

5. **EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2021-2025**

The Equality Outcomes 2021-2025 were noted. It was agreed that regular updates on the actions identified in relation to each of the Equality Outcomes would come to the Sub-Committee. Consideration would also be given to how the plan and progress against the actions would be reported more widely, for example via QAEC, UMG and through staff communications.

The Sub-Committee received an oral update from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser on progress against actions, which highlighted the following:

- Action plans had been developed and other intersecting projects across the University had been identified, for example, institution-wide enhancement projects. In terms of monitoring progress, owners had been identified for each action.
- Regular updates would be sought from each owner so that the Sub-Committee could be kept informed on a regular basis so that areas where progress was, or was not, being made could be identified.
- It would be important to make all staff aware where they were undertaking equality and diversity activity.

E Akerele

6. **ANNUAL APPRAISAL PROCESS**

The Sub-Committee received an oral update from the Convener who gave an overview of the annual appraisal process and highlighted the following:

- Around half of the School annual appraisal meetings with Heads of School had taken place so far.

- Data dashboards could be used to drill down and identify performance issues in certain groups, for example, some Schools and courses had higher numbers of students with a declared disability.
- Feedback on equality and diversity issues arising from the appraisal process would be reported back at the next meeting. It was however clear that due consideration was being given to this data at school level. This was, in part, a result of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) giving Schools a strong steer on expectations in this regard.

V Strachan

Although there was now enhanced University level data available to Schools to help them monitor protected characteristics, this was not the case for student-facing services who continued to ask for better data around these issues so that they could better tackle any barriers to access. The Director of Student Life confirmed that he was working with the Executive Director of Strategy and Planning in this regard.

It was recognised that there was an ongoing need to strengthen the links between services and schools, particularly how the former might help the latter to resolve student related issues.

It was noted that Heads of School had been issued with a template to complete as part of a Portfolio Review. This would be populated using data available on RGU Insight.

7. **AOB**

Professor Pedersen reported that the Women's Network was working with Student Life to arrange an event on 30 November to mark the annual '16 Days of Violence'. An online panel would be held with representatives from various organisations including Police Scotland and Rape Crisis. The event was for both staff and students and further information would be circulated in due course to encourage attendance. It was important to promote these activities and the Convener would liaise with Professor Pedersen in order for an update to go to the Executive the following week.

Prof Pedersen/
V Strachan

It was noted that the plans to light up the Sir Ian Wood Building to mark specific days was currently not possible due to water ingress; this was currently being addressed.

8. **ADVANCE HE**

[Advance HE](#) offered a range of webinars, many of which related to equality and diversity issues, and were likely to be of interest to members.

Resources from the Scottish cross-sector, SFC funded, Anti-Racist Curriculum project (in collaboration with QAA Scotland and the Enhancement Themes) are available [here](#).

9. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled for 7 February 2022.