

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 20 September 2021 (0930-1145 hrs).

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

Apologies: D Adesanya and G Millar.

In Attendance: H Castle and A Smart (Secretary).

		Action
1.	<p>MINUTE</p> <p>The Minute of the Meeting held on 15 February 2021 was approved. The following matters arising, not covered elsewhere on the agenda, were noted and would be picked up at an appropriate point in the future:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility Statements (item 4 of the minute refers) • Impact Assessment (item 5 of the minute refers) • Policy around gender expression (item 6 of the minute refers) • Gender Action Plan (item 8 of the minute refers) • Athena Swan (item 9 of the minute refers) • British Sign Language Action Plan • Diversity on Board and University Committees 	
2.	<p>REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP 2021/22</p> <p>The Sub-Committee noted the remit and composition of the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee along with the membership for Session 2021/22. It was noted that the remit and composition (Organisational Regulation O4: Standing Committees of Academic Council, Section 1.4) required to be updated to reflect some recent changes i.e. there were four members nominated from the membership of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), two from the membership of the Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF), and the new role of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Adviser also needed to be added.</p> <p>In terms of the remit, it was agreed that this would be reviewed to ensure it adequately captured the development of matters of policy around equality, diversity and inclusion. Any updates would go forward to QAEC for approval.</p>	<p>F McLean Whyte</p> <p>V Strachan QAEC Report</p>
3.	EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY VISION, STRATEGY AND POLICY	
3.1	<p><i>The University's Vision and Strategy for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)</i></p> <p>The Sub-Committee considered the above with a view to beginning to clarify future actions and activity. The following was noted:</p>	

- The EDF reported to EDSC, which subsequently reported to QAEC, ensuring an audit trail of activity through committee minutes.
- Members of both EDF and EDSC needed to actively engage in the agenda and to contribute where possible to support the work and initiatives that were being driven, primarily by the Forum.
- The Equality and Diversity Policy required to be updated; this would be taken forward by Dr Cockburn with an update to the next meeting.
- The new role of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Adviser was a key one but it was important to remember that it would not be appropriate to channel all activity through one individual.
- Communication was key to the University's work around EDI issues. Ensuring activity was captured and expressed as part of the Universities strategy and values was hugely important in terms of understanding what it wished to achieve.
- It was reported, by the Women's Network, that members were overwhelmed and unable to take on some of the responsibilities involved, for example, communicating with members and keeping webpages up to date. Lack of time was a key issue. It was agreed that this was likely to be an issue for many of the networks and that mainstreaming some network reporting might be beneficial. The Head of Marketing agreed to discuss these challenges further as there may be ways to support some of the work in respect of website updates and developments.
- In terms of the Staff Equality Champion roles, it was confirmed that a recruitment and associated communication strategy was being drawn up with the aim of recruiting staff who could actively take on these roles. A decision had been taken to expand the eligibility of staff members to cover all staff; in addition, consideration was being given to ring-fencing time and setting a 3-year term, with the option to re-apply for a second term as part of a competitive process. Existing champions would remain in post if they wished to with the first round of appointments focussing on vacant roles. All staff concerned would be communicated with.
- It was important to recognise the unique role that some of the Staff Champions played in terms of being a point of contact for staff to raise issues anonymously. Their lived experience would be important in this respect, in terms of their ability to represent issues. It would be important to be clear on what was, and what wasn't expected of them.
- Instead of a gender champion, it might be necessary to have separate champions for males and females given that sex, not gender, was the protected characteristic.
- It would be useful to have a central point of information for enhancement activity around EDI so that staff could be clear on where efforts should be focussed, and access relevant information about particular projects. There was a plethora of activity around the University and there was a danger that this was becoming increasingly amorphous.

All members

Dr D Cockburn

C Thompson/
Prof S
Pedersen/
E AkereleS Cameron/
E Akerele

An overview of policies and reports was noted.

3.2 ***Policy Update: Dignity at RGU***

The above Policy had been renamed (previously *Dignity at Work and Study*) and it was anticipated that it would be relaunched by the end of the year following approval by the Executive and circulation to EDSC. It would be important to ensure that it was widely publicised to staff, as the foundation of staff and student behaviour. Further consideration would be given to the best mechanisms for this, for example, school/departmental workshops, equality training modules etc.

F Antoniazzi

The updates had been undertaken as an iterative process involving a huge number of contributions from both staff and students. The updates had consisted of tidying/updating language, linking directly with current legislation, and framing the issues as positively as possible with a balanced view that reflected the values of the University as an organisation, whilst accepting there were different views across the community. Thanks were extended to Fiona Hall, Project Co-ordinator, Student Life, for her role in producing the final Policy.

F Hall

4. **EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2021-2025**

Equality and diversity reporting which the University was obliged, under the Equality Act, to publish every four years on its website, consisted of the undernoted reports which were available on the University's website – [Equality Reports & Staff Statistics](#):

- Mainstreaming Report
- Progress Report
- Equality Outcomes for the period 2021/25
- A series of reports on gender pay gap and equal pay statement

The following issues were highlighted/discussed:

Equality Outcomes had been identified in relation to both the student and staff experience, drawing on experience and data. These were:

1. Improved retention rates for those more likely to withdraw.
2. Increased achievement of good honours for students with characteristics with achievement below that of the University average.
3. Increase the overall satisfaction of students with characteristics that have a satisfaction rate below that of the University average.
4. Increase the proportion of male student who take up a place at the University.
5. Greater flexibility for staff, creating opportunity and maintaining an inclusive working environment.
6. Increased and more purposeful engagement with staff across all equality strands.
7. The number of applications from candidates for senior positions to reflect the demographics of the University.

A number of actions had been identified in relation to each of the Equality Outcomes, which the Sub-Committee considered. It was agreed that regular updates would come to the Sub-Committee.

Holding File

It was also agreed that awareness of the activity ongoing in terms of taking these actions forward could be better highlighted and promoted across the University as there was currently a perceived lack of knowledge and awareness around this.

Consideration would 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.

V Strachan/
Dr D Cockburn

Senior staff had a role in terms of championing and communicating equality, diversity and inclusion activity and also in supporting staff to connect and link this to the student experience.

It was confirmed that similar data on staffing statistics was available and that all staff were able to update their personal details; the facility to do this online would soon be available.

The new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser role would be an important one in terms of reviewing the interface with staff, including support for networks and equality champions, as well as the means of communicating with both staff and students on EDI issues, for example, through the development of the web pages.

E Akerele

5. **EQUALITIES DATA AND INSTITUTIONAL ANNUAL APPRAISAL REPORT**

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from Alison Watson, Planning Manager Strategy, Planning and Policy Development, on *Student Equalities Monitoring Data at Institutional Level*. The following issues were highlighted:

- Each year, the University undertook equality monitoring of the student population at an institutional level by the following characteristics: age; disability; ethnicity; gender identity; religious belief; sex; and sexual orientation.
- Data presented information on: applications, offers and acceptances; enrolments; withdrawal; good honours; satisfaction; and employability.
- Data relating to Student Achievement Rates (SARS) would not be confirmed until late September.
- A 'heat map' of measures and characteristics highlighted areas where results were above or below benchmark.
- High level points included:
 - *The performance of male students*: this continued to be below females and had declined in some measures, including Good Honours. The exception was, once again, professional employability where performance was above the University average. The male student population was therefore an area where the University still had a significant issue.
 - *Enrolments/applications and acceptances*: in line with last year, those for black students had continue to fall. However, unlike last year, there had been a small increase for students with a declared disability.
 - *Withdrawals*: this rate had declined for those with a declared disability and was no longer above the University average. Above average withdrawal rates were recorded for a number of categories.
 - *Satisfaction*: overall satisfaction had declined in both the NSS 2021 and the internal SEQ across all characteristics.
 - *Good honours*: the rate of good honours for Asian students had increased to 55.1% but remained significantly below the University average, as did almost all other measures. The achievement rate for Black students had declined to 40.7% and was the lowest across all characteristics.
 - *Employability*: as with satisfaction, this had been particularly impacted by the pandemic.

- There were some positive trends for *mature* students. Students aged 36 and over had the highest satisfaction across all age groups in the SEQ.
- Some positive progress had been made across a number of measures for students with a *declared disability* including a reduced withdrawal rate and an increase in Good Honours achievement. However across almost all measures the performance for students with a declared disability remained below the overall University performance.
- An overview was given of performance against Student Equality Outcomes.

It was noted that this data would go to the Institutional Annual Appraisal Meeting (IAAM) in October, to ensure that all Schools were aware of the performance of students in different categories, and the issues highlighted in the reporting. Many of these issues would also be explored through the annual appraisal process and feedback on relevant actions at school level, perceived gaps, projects etc. would be reported back to the Sub-Committee at its next meeting.

V Strachan

There was discussion around whether there was also awareness of achievement and performance at postgraduate level in order to identify where the issues lay across the student population. For example, where were the differences in performance in terms of achieving merit and distinction? There may also be issues to consider with regard to research students.

Although the data was currently at institutional level, with a focus on the undergraduate population, every effort would be made to provide more clarity on where the causes of specific outcomes might lie. Data from other institutions might also be helpful in this regard, although it was noted that HESA data for the current year was not yet available, and even then, this was only provided against certain measures. It was agreed that it would still be useful to look at what could be shared in this respect.

Dr D Cockburn/
A Watson

An action plan around students' 'lived experience' in order to target meaningful actions would be helpful.

F Antoniazzi/
E Akerele

It was noted that there was a QA Enhancement Theme project taking place to explore the male student experience and understand what could be done to close the gap. It was agreed that an update should come to a future EDSC meeting.

J Strachan

6. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY FORUM**

The Sub-Committee noted the minute of the meeting of the Forum held on 22 March 2021. Members discussed the following:

- E Akerele updated the Sub-Committee on the key areas he was currently working on, including preparations to mark Black History Month and World Mental Health Day. Conversations around themes were ongoing with the identification of a global theme of 'proud to be emerging stronger'. He was working alongside different department to develop a plan.
- E Akerele was also working with Advance HE leadership to review institutional progress with actions around, for example, the Race Equality Charter and AthenaSWAN.

- It was not believed that all staff would recognise and know how to respond to an online Signal for Help.
- Partnership opportunities with the Chaplain, Director of Student Life and Student President (Education and Welfare) had not yet taken place but would be progressed by the new President.
- Consideration was currently being given to the online training modules that were available for staff and students, particularly those that could be used as part of the staff induction process.
- There were ongoing debates around citizenship in terms of training and working out the best strategy to ensure best uptake.
- It was acknowledged that it was not possible for the University to mark every type of awareness raising day or week, however there were areas that an enormous amount of support and guidance were provided, albeit this was not always documented. Suicide awareness was one such area and members indicated that staff would welcome more guidance on dealing with someone who disclosed that they had had/were having suicidal thoughts.
- A calendar of dates was maintained and discussed regularly with the Communications team. Going forward there was a desire to make strategic decisions with regard to marking certain days. The calendar would be shared with the new Head of Marketing.

S Cameron/
F Antoniazzi

E Akerele/
C Thomson

7. **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. Feedback and updates were noted with regard to the following, some of which had been attended by staff:

- SPARQS/Advance HE Students as Partners Session (24 March 2021)
- Webinar: Public Sector Equality Duty and Data Protection (24 June 2021)
- Webinar: BAME Attainment Gap (1 July 2021)
- Update: Advance HE in Partnership (13 July 2021)

8. **PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY PROGRESS REPORT (SFC)**

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) had published its [equality mainstreaming report](#) for the period 2021-2025. It detailed activity to support funded colleges and universities to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

9. **MEETING SCHEDULE FOR SESSION 2021/22**

The remaining meeting dates for the Session were as follows:

- 10 November 2021
- 7 February 2022
- 27 April 2022

ALL