

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 15 February 2021 (1000-1130 hrs).

**Present:** V Nairn (Convener), E Akerele, F Antoniazzi, J Bolger, K Bullock, S Cameron, Dr D Cockburn, L Jack, J Meighan, G Millar, Professor S Pedersen, J Strachan and V Strachan.

**Apologies:** Dr N Emmison, Dr E Gillibrand and J-A Tait.

**In Attendance:** E Devlin (for item 3), Dr R McGregor (for item 10) and A Smart (Secretary).

	<b>Action</b>
<p>1. <b>MINUTE</b></p> <p>The Minute of the Meeting held on 23 November 2020 was approved. The following matters arising, not covered elsewhere on the agenda, were noted:</p>	
<p>1.1 <b>Stand Alone: Supporting Estranged Students (EDSC/21/2/2.2)</b></p> <p>A press release on the signing of the Pledge was covered in both local and national media, and activity on social media received considerable engagement on all platforms. This was followed up with a thought leadership piece on widening access by Professor Liz Hancock and a community story by Brian Webb for RGU's internal audience. As a result of the communications activity, the widening access team received their first calls from estranged students and social workers, who were enquiring to find out more about RGU's offering.</p>	
<p>1.2 <b>Equalities Data (EDSC/21/2/4)</b></p> <p>There was an identified need to improve the data sets available for the appraisal process, particularly in respect of Services, to enable future monitoring. The Learning Infrastructure Sub-Committee (LISC) would be taking forward discussions on this with Heads of Service, ahead of its meeting on 11th February.</p>	
<p>2. <b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY FORUM</b></p> <p>The Sub-Committee noted that the next meeting of the Forum had been rescheduled from 1 February to 22 March 2021.</p>	
<p>3. <b>EQUALITY OUTCOMES</b></p> <p>The Sub-Committee considered a progress update from the Director of Planning and Policy Development on Equality Outcomes, and other updates relating to public sector equality duties, which highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the University's statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010, the University was subject to the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 of the Public Sector Equality Duties.</li> <li>• The public sector equality duty covered the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, as well as marriage and civil partnerships, with regards to eliminating unlawful discrimination in employment. The Scotland specific duties required that all listed authorities published a series of reports on</li> </ul>	

a cycle of four years. This included: a set of equality outcomes; a report on Mainstreaming and Equality Duty; a gender pay gap report; and an equal pay statement, with various 2 and 4-year reporting deadlines throughout the cycle. The Sub-Committee noted an update on the progress and development of each.

- The University's current equality reports were for the period 2017 – 2021 and as such a new set of reports would be required to be published no later than 30 April 2021 to cover the period 2021 – 2025.
- The University's equality outcomes for the period to April 2021 were as follows:
  1. Our University: actively embrace diversity and equality through the student and staff experience;
  2. Breaking down barriers: increase access for learners traditionally facing greater barriers to higher education;
  3. Achieving graduate employability: shape creative, professional and engaged individuals;
  4. Supporting student success: support learners through each step of their educational pathways; and
  5. Enriching the student experience: unleashing individual potential through a complete RGU experience.
- A new set of equality outcomes for the period 2021-2025 were currently under development. There were four draft outcomes relating to student inequalities and a number of draft outcomes relating to staff inequalities were in development. Together, these would form the University's suite of equality outcomes for the forthcoming period. These had been developed in line with guidance from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to ensure from the outset that they met the publication requirements.
- The advanced draft outcomes relating to students were as follows, with further detail in an Annex to the report:
  1. An improved retention rate for those more likely to withdraw (male students, mature students and disabled students);
  2. An increase in the proportion of disabled, black, Asian and male students who achieve Good Honours;
  3. An increase in the overall satisfaction of students with characteristics that have a satisfaction rate below that of the University average (students with a declared disability, Black, Asian and Other students);
  4. An increase in the proportion of male students who take up a place at the University.
- These outcomes had been developed through the annual equality monitoring process, undertaken as part of the University's annual institutional appraisal, and reflected key trends that had been identified through reporting over the past five years.
- The final stage to complete these outcomes was to develop a series of actions, some of which may come from the course appraisal process.

The Sub-Committee welcomed the report and the following further observations were made/discussed:

- Closing the BME attainment gaps and 'de-colonising' the curriculum.
- Reporting on equality data at course and school level through annual appraisal action and enhancement plans; there was evidence of much more positive identification of equality and diversity issues in appraisal reporting.
- Ensuring an equal sense of belonging.
- Links with other areas of work across the University, for example, the QAA Enhancement Theme: Resilient Learning Communities.

- Ensuring institutional awareness and ownership; mainstreaming equality was the challenge, with a focus on daily interactions with colleagues and students.
- The importance of equality of experience as well as equality of access. There was often a tendency to focus on the latter and there was a need to also consider equality from a learning and teaching perspective once students were enrolled.
- Strengthening the focus on equality and diversity at the point of course proposal approval.
- The need to consider the effect of the pandemic, particularly on women, in terms of the additional constraints faced in terms of performance, promotion opportunities etc.
- The desire to establish better connections between student and staff equality champions. A range of podcasts had started which staff could join.
- The need to consider where equality champions might engage with different groups and panels across the University.

EDF

Once the staff equality outcomes were developed, and associated actions determined for both staff and student outcomes, these would be submitted to the Executive for consideration, prior to coming back to the Sub-Committee. There was an obligation to consult widely with both staff and students prior to seeking final approval from the Board in April. Members were asked to submit any further feedback to Dr Cockburn by the following week.

Dr Cockburn

Members to Dr  
Cockburn

#### 4. **ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENTS**

The Convener provided an update and the following was noted:

- The Marketing Team continued to work on content and styles with the Gatehouse; this had proved to be a steep learning curve.
- DELTA and the Inclusion Centre were working in collaboration to support Schools to implement accessibility within their online learning resources in order to create an inclusive online learning experience for all students. Resources had been developed in an [Accessibility Guidance](#) area on CampusMoodle. The area provided advice to enhance the accessibility of online learning materials as well as instructions for RGU learning technologies to help make implementing inclusive and accessible online learning as simple as possible.
- The guidance was very much welcomed; the focus to date had been to support staff who were captioning online learning materials as this was time consuming as well as stressful. It was noted that captioning was much more difficult for more technical subjects. There were resource implications over the longer-term in order to be able to continue to support staff in this way, and in terms of adding to the academic staff workload. This was an issue that would be considered further by the Executive.
- Consideration was being given to various aspects, for example, the potential to use automated captioning, and the costs involved in making sure the University met its legal obligations. There was, however, no desire to push staff any harder than absolutely necessary in order to meet these.
- The changes had proved challenging for many in terms of updating the website and teaching and learning materials. It was suggested that this topic should perhaps be considered further at the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) and remain 'on the radar'.

V Nairn

QAEC Report

It was agreed that V Nairn and J Strachan would liaise in order to try to quantify what the ongoing resource requirement might be, in advance of a meeting that V Nairn had with the Principal on 4 March 2021 about resource bids.

V Nairn/  
J Strachan

## 5. **IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Action was required by the Sub-Committee in respect of the undernoted extract from the Institutional Annual Appraisal Meeting on 15 October 2020:

"Acknowledging that impact assessment was integral to good teaching, learning and assessment practice, it was **agreed** the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee would be asked to consider an appropriate means of ensuring every course in the University was impact-assessed, by incorporating it into course validation and re-approval quality procedures."

It was proposed that a short-life working group be created, with 4/5 representatives to consider the University's approach to undertaking equalities impact assessment (what/where/how?). Members were asked to note any interest in participating in this with the Secretary.

Members to A  
Smart

## 6. **STUDENT LIFE**

An oral update from the Director of Student Life on matters not covered elsewhere on the agenda highlighted the following:

- Reporting rates in 'Report and Support' had reduced dramatically. Hate crime was also now reportable via this platform although there had been no reports yet; development and promotion of this would be prioritised. Enhancement plans were being considered in liaison with the Student Union.
- Training for staff and students around GBV, as well as a staff LGBT Awareness module, were available on Moodle.
- Terminology and best practice around equality and diversity as part of University processes and procedures, for example, student discipline and misconduct. A small group was being established to look at this further.
- Progress had stalled in respect of policy development around gender expression; this required wide debate and would come back for consideration at a future meeting, with a presentation on various aspects, including: the national picture; influences; gaps and thoughts on where we needed to be. This was a difficult subject area and various members indicated a willingness to be involved. The Director of Student Life agreed to set up a small working group to commence discussions prior to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee. Professor Pedersen indicated that a funded project was doing work in this area and she would share this with members.

F Antoniazzi/  
E Akerele

F Antoniazzi

Dr Cockburn  
G Miller  
Prof Pedersen

## 7. **REVIEW OF POLICIES**

### 7.1 ***Dignity at Work and Study Policy***

Revisions to the *Dignity at Work and Study Policy* were in progress, with a target date of June 2021. An update would go to the Forum and then the Sub-Committee.

S Cameron

It would be important to ensure that any revisions that impacted on the Academic Regulations, for example, around student misconduct, were captured. It was confirmed that the Regulations would be updated and published by the first week of August 2021.

S Cameron

L Jack

## 7.2 **Equality and Diversity Policy**

Members considered a report from Dr Cockburn who gave an update on progress with revisions to the *Equality and Diversity Policy* following a benchmarking exercise and review of legislation requirements, highlighting the following:

- The University was obliged, by the end of April 2021, to publish a fresh mainstreaming report including a progress report on its equality outcomes, new outcomes and a range of data. This was currently being worked on and the review of the Equality and Diversity Policy formed part of that review process.
- It was proposed that the Policy would continue to be reviewed on a two-yearly cycle in line with the mainstreaming report.
- As part of the annual policy framework review, the policy team had been introducing standardisation to the University's policies, for example, around the use of branded templates, version control, compliance, and accessibility.
- The revised Policy was presented for comment prior to its submission to the Board for approval.

The Sub-Committee was happy to recommend the Policy for approval and thanked Dr Cockburn and his team for their efforts. Consideration would then be given to any training and/or awareness raising requirements.

Dr Cockburn

## 8. **GENDER ACTION PLAN**

The Director of Student Life gave an update on progress with the Institutional Gender Action Plan (iGAP). A meeting had yet to take place before a further report came back to the Forum and the Sub-Committee.

F Antoniazzi

## 9. **ATHENA SWAN**

The Convener provided an update on progress noting that she had attended a meeting at the end of 2020. The next application round had been extended from April to May 2021, with expressions of interest required by March; the University would not be in a position to make a submission.

Strategic priorities around equality and diversity would be discussed at the Executive prior to a fuller update at the next meeting.

V Nairn

## 10. **QAA ENHANCEMENT THEME: RESILIENT LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

Dr Rachel McGregor, Academic Support Lead, DELTA, delivered a presentation on the plans for Year 1 of the Theme, including a strand on 'Promoting retention and success through inclusive practice', which she was co-ordinating at institutional level. The following was highlighted:

- The 2020-2023 Theme aimed to explore the changing needs and values of an increasingly diverse student community, and a rapidly changing external environment.
- There were four sector stands: equality and diversity; community and belonging; supporting staff and student success, future professions and preparedness, and flexible, accessible learning.
- A number of priorities had been identified for the Theme, including issues around the student experience, staff wellbeing, and recovery from the pandemic.
- Year 1 projects mapped against sector themes were:
  - Evolving RGU's approach to online learning post-Covid.
  - Supporting whole person education throughout the learner journey.
  - Promoting retention and success through inclusive practice.
  - Supporting RGU's Course Leader Community.
- Key to the above would be:
  - Supporting student engagement with services as part of a 'whole person learning' approach.
  - A focus on equality and diversity.
  - Supporting colleagues to ensure the digital accessibility of their teaching and learning resources.
  - Engagement with work ongoing around equality outcomes, for example, supporting male students who typically performed less well across a range of metrics.
  - Building on work undertaken as part of the previous year's Theme, recognising the role of Course Leaders as a lynchpin.
  - Establishing a community of Course Leaders in order to enrich their work in meaningful ways.

Members made the following observations:

- From a student perspective, there was a desire to (post-Covid) for all lecture notes to continue to be made available. Variability in practice had been an issue at times and it was hoped that this could be resolved in future, for example, graphics showing through notes making them unreadable, parts of lectures missing from the notes, blank slides. It was acknowledged there was still work to do in terms of making digital learning resources accessible to all.
- E Akerele gave an overview of the positive partnership working arrangements around the Theme, which included the Student School Officers and Student Representatives and using a similar Chat Comment Change format to last year. A particular focus was obtaining student views on what blended learning might look like in the future. It was hoped that the Chat Comment Change sessions would help to inform a lot of the work that was ongoing around the University.
- The Theme was a significant piece of work and there was a huge amount of enthusiasm around it. There would be a lot of dialogue to capture and share.
- Marketing had received an email from Universities Scotland in respect of 'learning and teaching under Covid' and innovations that might be retained. This would be discussed with DELTA.

K Bullock  
to  
J Strachan

Secretary's Note:

Subsequent to the meeting, Dr McGregor shared information about a Collaborative Cluster, led by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), looking at mental wellbeing among BAME and LGBTQ as part of the Theme, which may be relevant to the work of the Committee. Further information was available on the webpage below:

<https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resilient-learning-communities/collaborative-clusters/student-mental-wellbeing-within-our-bame-and-lgbtq-learner-communities>

GCU would be running a series of staff development webinars around this theme between now and May.

Members

11. **ADVANCE HE RESOURCES**

**Advance HE** offered a range of webinars, many of which related to equality and diversity issues, and likely to be of interest to members. Members were encouraged to access these and were also reminded that the member benefits were institutional, not individual, therefore any member of staff could access these.

Members

12. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The dates for meetings next Session would be advised in due course.

A Smart

V Nairn, C