

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 22 September 2020 (1330-1500 hrs).

Present: V Nairn (Convener), E Akerele, F Antoniazzi, K Bullock, S Cameron, Dr D Cockburn, Dr E Gillibrand, L Jack, L Omoile, V Strachan and J-A Tait.

Apologies: J Bolger, J Dunphy and Dr N Emmison.

In Attendance: A Davidson, A Smart (Secretary), R Stuart and A Watson (item 3 (b)).

WELCOME AND CONVENER'S OPENING REMARKS

Action

The Convener welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee (EDSC).

1. REMIT, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP 2020/21

1.1 *Remit and Composition*

The remit and composition of EDSC for Session 2020/21 was considered; the Convener gave an overview of the role of this new committee which, along with the new Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF), would help to ensure that the work of both was embedded within the formal committee structure.

The changes, which saw the previous Equality and Diversity Advisory Group (EDAG) replaced by the two new committees, were designed to fully reflect the changes that had occurred within the University over the last few years both structurally and operationally, and to enable the visibility and alignment of institutional equality and widening access activities in the University's strategy and policy.

The EDF would report to the EDSC which, in turn, would report via the Executive to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) and provide reports as required to relevant Board Committees.

Concerns raised at the first EDF meeting about the new 2-tier system, which suggested to some members that the Forum was less important than the Sub-Committee, had been discussed at a recent UMG meeting. It was noted that the two groups would focus on different types of business. EDSC would focus on reporting, monitoring and strategic fit, reporting to QAEC and Board committees as appropriate to ensure action was taken and outcomes delivered. There had been mixed views in terms of how effective EDAG had been in getting real traction on issues in the past. Schools and services had recently been much more engaged in issues relating to equality and diversity with significant progress in certain areas, for example, dignity at work and study and gender based violence. There was also more awareness of what was going on across the University and it was important, in the current climate, to maintain this.

1.2 *Membership*

The membership of the Sub-Committee for Session 2020/21 was noted. Following discussion at UMG, four nominations (instead of two) from the QAEC membership had been accepted and the EDSC membership had been updated accordingly.

The EDF had suggested that 2 members of the Forum be elected to join EDSC in order to further strengthen communication across the two groups. It was noted that there was already shared membership across the two groups with six members sitting on both, however, this proposal would be considered, with the suggestion that EDF members might rotate on a relatively regular basis. It was noted that consideration should be given to continuity and also to ensuring that no particular area was over-represented over time.

V Nairn/
V Strachan

1.3 **Public Sector Quality Duty Guidance.**

Members noted the Guidance that was issued ahead of the meeting.

2. **HE ADVANCE**

Members noted that RGU was one of the Scottish universities and colleges that made a landmark commitment to support a declaration against racism, endorsed by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, which was launched via an [HE Advance webinar](#) on Friday 14 August 2020:

"Racism exists on our campuses and in our society. Call it what it is and reject it in all its forms. We stand united against racism."

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

Members noted an extract from the minute of the meeting of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 12 February 2020 [QAEC/20/2/1.2]:

"It had been confirmed consideration of the gender balance in the student population would be considered by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group at its next meeting."

Members received a presentation on *Student Equalities Data at Institutional Level 2019/20*, from A Watson, Planning Manager. The following issues were highlighted:

A Smart to
Members

- The format for presenting this data had changed and it was agreed that the PowerPoint presentation was much easier to digest.
- Each year, the University undertook equality monitoring of the whole student population at an institutional level by the following characteristics: age; disability; ethnicity; gender identity; religious belief; sex; and sexual orientation. These characteristics were usually analysed using six measures: enrolments; withdrawal; retention; student satisfaction; good honours; and employability.
- A further two measures had been added: applications and acceptances for 2020/21 entry; and the TEF Year 4 data. The former was already out of date but gave a flavour of what might happen in 20/21. The TEF data, published in 2019, was the most recent available.
- In previous years the analysis had included Student Achievement Rates (SARS) and Student Experience Questionnaires (SEQ) data. However, SARS data would not be confirmed until late September, and the SEQ had not run in full in 2019/20 and was therefore not included.

- High level points included:
 - *The performance of male students*: this was below females in all categories for protected characteristics, except professional employability and graduate level study where it was 5% higher.
 - *Enrolments/applications and acceptances*: those for black students and those with a declared disability were lower than in 2019-20 indicating the proportions of these groups would reduce in 2020/21.
 - *Withdrawals*: this rate continued to be higher for those with a declared disability than for any other group.
 - *Retention*: this had dropped for all protected characteristics except those with a declared disability.
 - *Student satisfaction*: overall satisfaction remained below the University average for all ethnic groups other than those who declared as White. Those with a disability had a significantly lower rate of satisfaction in certain areas.
 - *Good honours*: the rate of good honours awarded to Asian students had dropped to 51% which was 28% below the University average of 79%.
 - *Employability*: performance in Graduate Outcomes was lower than in the internal Leavers' Survey for all protected characteristics for both employment measures.
- Analysing performance against targets showed clear patterns and highlighted three key areas of concern in terms of protected characteristics (with negative results in red):
 - *Analysis by sex (m/f/other)*: there was clear differential performance across nearly every measure for male students.
 - *Analysis by ethnicity*: Asian students stood out in this category with the majority of measures in red.
 - *Analysis by disability*: all but one of the measures was red.
- Gender balance had been reviewed at school level, and would be reviewed at subject level as a next step and compared with Scottish sector averages. Currently, a number of subjects had a severe gender imbalance (75% or more of one sex) although improvements had been seen in a number of areas. This was the type of thing schools should be looking at as part of the annual appraisal process.

It was queried why some of the measures were used i.e. were these areas the University had to report to other bodies about and/or was there a legal requirement? It was noted that the data represented the student journey from application to admission, their experience whilst at the University, retention, good honours and employability after they left. From a legal perspective, the University only had to do employee monitoring, however guidance included student data, and the University undertook this as it was core to its mission as an inclusive university.

The University could choose to report around equality and diversity activity and include a wider data set that might enable services to understand the user experience. It was not clear what data might be available in that respect and it was agreed that further consideration should be given to this as the University looked at its wider range of activity. The current data set did not answer the questions that many services had, for example, what was the wider experience of being a disabled student at RGU? Were we asking the right questions? What did the data suggest we should be asking? Where were the gaps?

Some of the additional areas that might be considered included:

- Appeals and any correlations to protected characteristics.
- The annual appraisal process, should schools be asked to document E&D actions and data?
- Were there 'quick fixes' that could be made within the physical environment for those with disabilities?
- What were the best ways to draw information out from the data we already had?
- What did we need to investigate at institutional level?
- Methods of collection varied and were often impacted by permission restrictions.
- Were things similar at school level? It was easier to see trends in larger populations.
- Trends could be very course specific with even just one course skewing results for a whole school.

4. **GENDER ACTION PLAN**

The Director of Student Life gave an update on the Institutional Gender Action Plan (iGAP). The following points were highlighted:

- The University's iGAP had now been published. This set out the actions that the University would take to contribute to the SFC's stated ambitions in relation to achieving gender balance in relevant subject areas. The iGAP would be monitored as part of the Outcome Agreement.
- The iGAP had been developed by a Gender Working Group that reported to EDAG. The pandemic had affected the operation of the Working Group. It had not met recently nor had a handover of responsibilities taken place following changes in personnel involved in the various actions outlined in the iGAP.
- The Sub-Committee approved the recommendation to re-issue the iGAP across the University.
- It was agreed that progress with the iGAP would be monitored by EDSC with updates as appropriate to both EDF and EDSC.
- It was proposed that consideration be given to the composition and leadership of the Gender Working Group, as well as any representation on EDF and/or EDSC. The group had broad membership and the co-convenor was keen to continue, however, the Director of Student Life was not sure he was the most appropriate Convenor going forward.
- It was agreed that it would be desirable for Human Resources to work alongside colleagues / equality champions in the development of action plans for all protected characteristics.

F Antoniazzi

V Nairn/
F Antoniazzi

F Antoniazzi

S Cameron

5. **BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE ACTION PLAN**

The Disability and Inclusion Manager gave an update on the University's British Sign Language (BSL) action plan. The following points were highlighted:

- The BSL Scotland Act 2015 recognised BSL as an official language of Scotland and required institutions to produce an Action Plan detailing their plans to support the promotion of BSL as a language and to remove barriers to BSL users participation in public life including education.

- The University was aware of only extremely small numbers of students who were BSL users (less than 5 in the last 5 years) and was not aware of any staff users.
- The Working Group formed to complete the plan, which had been submitted in August, had not been operational for some time but it was important to make sure this issue was not forgotten and was captured formally in the University committee structure.
- As the plan and subsequent updates were legislative requirements, it was agreed that the EDSC supported the Plan as a standing item, to ensure commitment to these requirements and the duties under the legislation were taken into account as part of the wider equality and diversity actions of the University.

V Nairn/
A Davidson

6. **STAND ALONE: SUPPORTING ESTRANGED STUDENTS**

The Director of Planning and Policy updated members on the above. The following points were highlighted:

- As part of the University's commitment to widening access, the paper outlined a proposal to sign the Stand Alone Pledge as a public commitment of the support the University would provide to estranged students. The term 'estranged students' referred to individuals who applied for university and enrolled on a course of study without the approval or support of a family network. These individuals were likely to have limited contact with family and may face particular challenges in accessing and continuing in higher education and as such may benefit from bespoke support and advice tailored to their individual circumstances.
- It was not clear how many students at RGU were in this category. However, an initial discussion had been had with the Directors of Student Life and DELTA around what support the University could provide prior to application and subsequent to enrolment.
- Although it was believed that SAAS gave support to some students, there was no systematic monitoring around this although this was possibly being collected now for enrolled students.
- The Sub-Committee endorsed the proposal that the University sign the Stand Alone Pledge and that this would go forward to the Executive for approval.

D Cockburn to
Executive

7. **DIVERSITY ON BOARD AND UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES**

The Sub-Committee received an update on the diversity on the Board and gender diversity on University committees from the Secretary to the Board. The following points were highlighted:

- A number of characteristics were monitored across the Board and the University had been successful in achieving a gender balance in respect of Board membership. The intention was now to look at all Board committees and other University committees in order to achieve as good a balance as possible across all memberships, including convenership.
- In terms of wider diversity, there were shortcomings in relation to other aspects, for example, ethnicity, and this was under review. In particular, Academic Council membership was being refreshed through a process of election and nomination with the aim of developing a wider and more diverse membership.

- The signing of the Advance HE declaration in August demonstrated the University's commitment to anti-racism. Consideration would need to be given to other characteristics that required more focus.
- It was agreed that monitoring questionnaires submitted to Board members would be extended to other committees as part of annual monitoring. Consideration would be given as to how best to progress this, including the collation and storage of sensitive data.

V Strachan
Dr D Cockburn

8. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY FORUM**

The Sub-Committee noted the Minute of the Meeting of the Forum held on 9 September 2020.

With reference to item 3.3.1, it was confirmed that HR had already started to develop a BAME staff forum and Dr Bassam, Staff Race Champion, had been invited to be involved. There had not been a full group meeting yet.

9. **ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENTS**

The Disability and Inclusion Manager updated the Sub-Committee on the Public Sector Bodies (Website and Mobile) Accessibility Regulations 2018 requirements. The following points were highlighted:

- The duties included ensuring that course content was accessible to students who may use technology such as screen readers to access their course and for those who may require captioning to access audio content. It required recorded materials to be captioned and documents to be made accessible to the use of assistive technology.
- It was desirable for the University to look strategically at its responsibilities under this legislation, rather than have different areas doing this individually.
- With regards to the Campus Moodle element of the Plan, the Inclusion Centre and DELTA had been working collaboratively on the Accessibility Statement and a programme of actions to support academic colleagues' awareness and implementation of the legislation. To this end, a number of actions had been taken, including the switch-on of automatic live-captioning in Panopto.
- The measures implemented were intended to meet the University's duties under the legislation but would not necessarily meet the needs of all disabled students under the Equality Act 2010. There had to be a balance between increasing overall accessibility and meeting the specific needs of individuals, which we were required to do. The challenge was how to better support colleagues to build in accessibility.
- It was confirmed that there was a requirement to caption material that had already been recorded and published. The requirements of the legislation were challenging, not least because of variability in the accessibility of the platforms currently in use and the quality of the captioning produced; some had the facility to produce live captions (subtitles), and transcribe recorded materials, whereas others required human intervention to produce these resources, which was time-consuming and onerous and was placing a burden on staff in many areas.

- An issue with accessible fonts was highlighted; there appeared to be a discrepancy in that the font used in templates by the Gatehouse was not listed as one of the accessible fonts. It was confirmed that there were differences in accessibility across printed and digital content. Further clarity in this regard would be sought.
- It was agreed this item should remain on the Sub-Committee's agenda for now.

Dr E
Gillibrand/
K Bullock
Holding File

10. **AOB**

It was confirmed there was no update in respect of Athena Swan. It was agreed this required proper resourcing and the Convener would discuss this with the Principal.

V Nairn

11. **MEETING SCHEDULE FOR SESSION 2020/21**

The remaining dates for the Session were as follows:

- 23 November 2020 at 2:00pm
- 15 February 2021 at 10:00am

V Nairn, C