## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 9 MAY 2016

**Present:** Mrs J Shireffs (Convener), Mrs M Anderson, Dr A Arnason, Ms H Bruce, Ms M Burgoyne, Mrs J Chalmers (until minute 31), Ms K Christie (for Dr Mackintosh), Ms G Clarke, Professor B Connolly (until minute 32), Ms L Cristea, Professor S Davies, Mr L Forsyth, Mr L Fuller, Ms V Hofmann, Mrs C Inglis, Professor P McGeorge, Professor J Masthoff and Professor J Morrison (until minute 32), with Ms E Forster (Clerk), Mr A Donaldson (minute 30), Dr S Tucker (minute 31), Ms K Allan and Mr I McCartney

**Apologies** were received from Ms D Bruxvoort, Ms M Chapman, Mr D Haywood and Dr G Mackintosh

28. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 15 February 2016 were approved.

29. MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted the following matters arising from the previous minutes, which were not reported under other items on the agenda.

29.1 **Hillhead Community Centre (minute 23.1 refers)**

Positive feedback had been received on the new facility which was now complete and would be open to students from September 2016.

29.2 **Counselling Service (minute 23.2 refers)**

Additional counsellors had been recruited to address the backlog of appointments. Consideration was now being given to the future structure of the service and the best way to address the needs of students and staff.

30. PREVENT STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation from Mr A Donaldson, Director of Estates and University Prevent Co-ordinator, on Prevent. This was a duty placed on the University by the Counter Terrorism & Security Act 2015 and the UK Government’s associated Prevent strategy, which required higher education institutions to take appropriate measures to prevent people being drawn into terrorism.

The University’s Prevent strategy included enhanced central processes for managing events that involved external speakers. Ensuring that there was co-ordinated oversight of events taking place on campus was a key part of the University’s commitment to the welfare of all its students and staff.

While acknowledging that new processes were part of a wider duty of care and that Prevent was a legal obligation placed on the University, members of the Committee expressed concerns that the process could be perceived as targeting particular groups and stressed that this would need to be carefully managed to provide reassurance that this was not the intention.

It was intended to present a Prevent Implementation Plan for approval to the University Management Group in May 2016. The associated training plan was central to appropriate implementation.

31. STUDENT RETENTION

The Committee received and considered a report from the University’s Student Retention Taskforce. This group had been formed as part of the Strategic Plan implementation, as retention was an important performance indicator, to identify and address issues surrounding student non-continuation across the University.

Current initiatives emerging from the Taskforce included enhancing data collection and analysis, and reviewing the student withdrawal process with a view to enabling more effective recording of reasons for withdrawal.

The Committee noted that although the University was committed to improving student retention, we did perform reasonably well when measured against benchmark data.

The Committee discussed the lower retention rates for entrants with widening participation characteristics, and the work being carried out to support the transition of students articulating into years two or three from FE Colleges. The University’s Widening Participation Group was considering these issues.

The Committee also discussed the possibility of a link between increased mental health issues being experienced by students and retention.

32. REPORT FROM AUSA

The Committee received and considered a report from the President of AUSA.

It noted that following a democratic review, AUSA had re-structured and from 2016/17 would have five sabbatical officers (who had now been elected). Other democratic structures were currently being finalised.

The Committee discussed the significant legal issues that AUSA had faced this year in relation to misappropriation of funds by the previous CEO. With support from the University, AUSA was working with Pinsent Masons to recoup these funds, and also with the police as criminal proceedings had been implemented.

The Committee noted a number of recent successes, including the nomination of the Nightline Service for a number of awards, and the sabbatical team winning NUS Scotland’s Officer Team of the year. Although the 2016 Student Show had raised significantly more funds than in previous years (over £100K) the Torcher Parade did not go ahead following logistical issues with the City Council. However it was intended to re-introduce it next year.

The Committee also discussed the project to develop a new Student Union, noting the importance of this to support the student experience, and the continued negative reputational impact of not having such a facility. Work was ongoing to identify suitable space in the short to medium term.

33. REPORT FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

The Committee received and considered a report from the Directorate of Academic Affairs. It noted the project to issue all students with new-style ID cards, the intention being that these cards would act as a Smart card, allowing easy access to a wider range of services.

34. REPORT FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF STUDENT LIFE

The Committee received and considered a report from the Directorate of Student Life.

As referred to in minute 29.2, the structure of Counselling was being reviewed, and a way forward identified that would allow the needs of students and staff to be met.

The Committee noted that Accommodation fees for 2016/17 were being maintained at 2015/16 levels.

35. FUTURE SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Meetings of the Student Experience Committee in 2016/17 had been scheduled as follows: (all held at **2.00 pm**):

Monday 17 October 2016

Wednesday 15 February 2017

Tuesday 9 May 2017

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25.05.16