## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2015

Present: Mrs J Shirreffs (Convener), Mr F Archibald, Mr L Bebbington, Ms E Beever, Ms M Chapman, Ms K Christie, Ms G Clarke, Ms B Farr, Dr L Foley, Mr L Forsyth, Mr R Henthorn, Ms V Hofmann, Rev D Hutchison, Mrs C Inglis, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr M McCorkell, Professor P McGeorge, Mr D O’Hagan,  Ms J Waters, Mr A Wight  and Ms E Forster (Clerk) with Mr P Fantom and Ms T Innes (for minute 15).

Apologies: Ms J Chalmers, Prof S Davies, Dr J Masthoff and Ms J McKay

11 WELCOME AND VOTE OF THANKS

The Convener welcomed the new Rector, Ms M Chapman, to her first meeting of the Committee.

She also expressed her thanks to the outgoing Clerk, Ms Katja Christie.

12 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Student Affairs Committee held on 20 October 2014 were approved.

13 MATTERS ARISING

13.1 **Personal Tutors (minute 4.3 refers)**

As the role of personal tutors was a pastoral one relating to the student experience, matters relating to this initiative would be considered by the Student Experience Committee in the first instance.

13.2 **Ethical Framework on the boundaries of confidentiality (minute 7 refers)**

The Committee would need to feed into any future review of the Framework.

14 HEALTH AND SAFETY

No Health and Safety issues were raised under this item (minutes 23 and 26 relate)

15 PROFESSIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The Committee received a presentation from Peter Fantom, Head of the Careers Service, and Tracey Innes, Careers Adviser, on an online course being developed for students by the Careers Service, to help students enhance their employability. The first topic of the course, *Developing your graduate attributes* was now available through the virtual learning environment MyAberdeen for students to trial.

The Committee commented on the style and approach of the online material, noting that it would be interesting to see feedback from students trialling it. It also discussed the integration of this type of activity with the student’s academic discipline and the role of the Personal Tutor. It was clarified that the online provision was additional to, and not instead of, existing face-to-face courses and interaction between students and staff on employability.

The Careers Service could make the course available to any Committee member interested in learning more.

The Director of Student Life reported that consideration was being given to developing online development tools for students in relation to Health and Safety and Equality and Diversity, and that the contribution of AUSA to this work would be welcome to ensure that the expectations of a student audience were met.

16 REMIT AND COMPOSITION

The Committee received and approved its remit and composition (SAC/160215/02) subject to correcting the membership list to include Dr Lucy Foley. It noted that Senate would now be asked to approve.

17 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Committee received and considered the action plan relating to risk Corp\_2011-10 *Failure to meet student expectations* (SAC/160215/03).

It agreed that the building of the students’ union should be added as a new action, led by the project sponsor, Professor Mike Greaves.

Subject to this additional action and the correction of a typographical error, it approved the action plan for inclusion in the register. **Action: Clerk**

18 SIR DUNCAN RICE LIBRARY: OPENING HOURS

The Committee received and considered a paper on a pilot project whereby the Library was open continuously during revision and exams from 23 November to 22 December 2014 (SAC/160215/04). There had been a positive response to the opening hours with significant library usage, and there had been no security or health and safety issues. It was intended to repeat the continuous opening hours during the revision and exam period in May 2015.

On an ongoing basis, the Library was piloting extending its opening until 2am from Sunday until Thursday.

Discussions were taking place on extending the opening hours of the Medical Library on the Foresterhill campus.

The Committee noted that external lighting around the Sir Duncan Rice Library was low, and Estates was reviewing the lighting required to support offering extended opening hours.

19 ACCOMMODATION FEES 2015/16

The Committee received and considered proposed accommodation fees for 2015/16 (SAC/160215/05).

It noted that it had not yet been possible to benchmark the University’s proposed fees with comparators as this information was not yet available, but it was hoped to include this information in future versions of the paper.

The proposed increases to accommodation fees reflected increased costs, on staffing in particular. The need to fund the significant investment that the University was making in improving residences was also noted. The Committee commented that percentage increases varied across different residences and that further information on the rationale for the increases would be helpful. **Action: Director of Student Life**

The Director of Student Life confirmed that where a student was in an Ardmuir residence (who were working in partnership with the University) the University, not Ardmuir, would manage the contract with the student.

20 NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATIONS

The Committee received and noted a paper summarising action being taken by the University to promote to students the opportunity to register to vote in parliamentary general elections, referendums, and local government elections (SAC/160215/06).

21 PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The Committee noted that the agreement was currently being reviewed by AUSA, who would then feedback to the University Secretary. **Action: President of AUSA**

22 STUDENT MATERNITY GUIDELINES

The Committee received and approved *Information and guidance for students who become pregnant during their studies* (SAC/160215/08). In approving the guidelines it noted that the prevention of discriminatory practices in relation to pregnancy was covered by the University’s Equality and Diversity Policy. However, it was agreed that the Head of Student Support would consult with the Equality and Diversity Policy Adviser on whether an additional policy statement was required. **Action: Head of Student Support**

23 SMOKING CESSATION

The Committee received an update on actions being put in place by AUSA and the Directorate of Student Life to support students and staff to stop smoking (SAC/160215/09). An NHS Grampian Smoking Cessation Advisor had agreed to hold stalls on both the University’s main campuses, and possibly group sessions. In addition it was intended to mark National No Smoking Day on 12 March 2015.

24 DRAFT COUNTER TERRORISM AND SECURITY BILL

The Committee received and considered a paper on the UK parliament’s draft counter-terrorism and security bill, now released for consultation (SAC/160215/10).

It discussed the duty that the bill would place on specified authorities, including universities, “to have due regard in the exercise of its functions, to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism.” If the bill was enacted, the University would be required to strengthen and add to its current counter-terrorism activities and put in place a framework to support, monitor and report on compliance with the legislation.

The Committee questioned how the University would assess and monitor non-violent extremism, which it would be required to do. There was a potential tension between this obligation and the University’s legal obligation to secure freedom of speech within the law.

On balance, the Committee felt there might be a case to argue for the exclusion of universities from the legislation, and it agreed that consideration should be given to this in reviewing the draft University response. **Action: University Secretary**

However it noted that the requirements for Scottish HEIs were still under some discussion; the Scottish Guidance currently proposed that the local CONTEST forum and national Prevent and CONTEST groups would be tasked with overseeing compliance the proposed legislation.

25 REPORT FROM AUSA

The Committee received and considered a report from AUSA (SAC/160215/11). .

It noted that AUSA was currently working on a project to review its structures and processes, with the aim of achieving a higher and more diverse level of student engagement. It was suggested that it might be useful to compare information arising from this review with any demographic information about student/University engagement more generally.

**Action: VP Learning & Teaching/President for Sport**

The Committee noted the events taking place in March 2015, including the Installation of the Rector on 23 March 2015.

26 REPORT FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF STUDENT LIFE

The Committee received and considered a report from the Directorate of Student Life (SAC/160215/12), and in particular noted the following issues:

26.1 **Sport**

The Director of Student Life and President for Sport had now established a joint committee to discuss operational issues around sport

26.2 **Counselling Service**

Demand for the Counselling service had increased, with an 18% increase in the number of clients for the first semester in 2014/15 compared to the same period last year. This reflected the trend across the sector, and it was necessary to manage this demand, including directing clients to other specialist services where appropriate.

The Big White Wall initiative was referred to. This was an online community of people who needed support, guided by trained professionals. Anecdotal feedback on this had been positive, but it was too early to make an informed assessment of its impact.

To provide sources of help, the Director of Student Life reported that telephone numbers for Niteline and University Security were to be printed on the back of student ID cards.

27 REPORT FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

The Committee received and noted a report from the Director of Academic Affairs (SAC/160215/13).

28 FRESHERS’ WEEK

The Committee discussed how the separate Freshers Week activities offered by AUSA and Directorate of Student Life could complement each other and provide a positive welcoming experience to students had. It was agreed that a Group should be brought together to take this forward. **Action: Director of Student Life/President of AUSA**

29 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the first meeting of the Student Experience Committee would be held onMonday, 11 May 2015 at **2.00 pm** in Committee Room 2, University Office.

EF

04.03.15