## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 19 OCTOBER 2015

Present: Mrs J Shirreffs (Convener), Ms M Burgoyne, Ms H Bruce, Ms D Bruxvoort, Ms G Clarke, Professor B Connolly, Ms L Cristea, Professor S Davies, Mr D Haywood, Dr L Foley, Mr L Forsyth, Mr L Fuller, Ms V Hofmann, Professor A Lumsden, Dr G Mackintosh, Professor P McGeorge, Ms J McKay, Mr J McManus, Professor J Masthoff, Mr S Small, and Ms E Forster (Clerk)

Apologies were received from Mrs J Chalmers and Dr C Kee.

1 CONVENER’S OPENING REMARKS

The Convener welcomed members to the first meeting of the Student Experience Committee, now formally established in place of the Student Affairs Committee.

2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Student Affairs Committee held on 11 May 2015 were approved subject to paragraph 32.1, Accommodation Fees, being amended to include the following sentence:

*Sabbatical Officers expressed their disappointment at the lack of consultation with AUSA in the setting of Accommodation Fees for 2015/16.*

3 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee received a report on matters arising from its previous meeting (SEC191015/01) from which the following points were noted:

3.1 **Accommodation fees (minute 32.1 refers)**

Information on the benchmarking of the University’s accommodation fees had been circulated to Committee members on 12 June 2015.

3.2 **Student Barometer (minute 34.1 refers)**

The presentation on the results of the Autumn 2014 Student Barometer had been circulated to Committee members on 12 June 2015; a paper on the launch of the 2015 Barometer, which had taken place on Tuesday 13 October, was included on today’s agenda.

3.3 **Hillhead central building: meeting location (minute 36 refers)**

A meeting of the Committee would take place in the Hillhead Central building as soon as was practicable.

3.4 **Revised Code of Practice to Ensure Compliance with Part II of the Education Act 1994 (minute 37 refers)**

The Court had received and approved the revised Code of Practice at its meeting on 30 June 2015.

3.5 **Title options on University forms (minute 41 refers)**

Where paper forms (or online forms that did not link to core systems) required the selection of a title from a prescribed list, the non-gender specific Mx could be added to this list, although where a title was required, this was usually a free text field and therefore any title could be entered. Any changes which impacted on core systems would require development work, and this would be included within the scope of future work around Student Records.

4 REMIT AND COMPOSITION

The Committee received and considered its remit and composition (SEC191015/02) as approved by Court at its meeting on 30 June 2015.

The Committee agreed that in light of the late resignation of the AUSA President for Welfare (which was not being filled given the timescale of the resignation) the Vice President for Equal Opportunities should be co-opted onto the Committee for 2015/16. **Action: Clerk**

5 HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Director of Student Life reported on the new academic year re-launch of the student safety campaign *Clued-Up*. He also reported that a Campus Safety Day was scheduled to take place on 27 October.

6 STUDENT UNION BUILDING AND HILLHEAD CENTRAL BUILDING

The Committee received updates on progress with the above capital projects.

It noted that the Hillhead Central Building was scheduled to open in January 2015.

In respect of the new Student Union Building, a proposal centred on the re-development of the Butchart Centre would be presented to the Student Union Project Board on 10 November. This would include retail and commercial options and associated business case. There was some pressure to progress this proposal in order to allow the brief for the project design team to be finalised.

The Committee discussed a number of issues in relation to the project, including:

* The commercial viability of the new proposals
* The timescale for re-development
* Any other options that had been considered.

While acknowledging that the proposals aimed to address the requirements of students over the longer-term, the Committee noted that the University consistently received negative feedback from students on the lack of social space and that addressing these concerns was a high priority. It therefore asked if consideration could be given to implementing a temporary solution for current students, while the longer-term vision was being taken forward. It noted that to some degree this was already happening, with AUSA looking at a temporary café in Johnston, and also now able to have access to occasional alcohol licences for events.

It agreed that a meeting should be held involving the Director of Student Life, Student President or other representative(s), and AUSA CEO to discuss temporary solutions. This meeting should be held before the Project Board on 10 November. **Action: LForsyth**

7 REPORT FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF STUDENT LIFE

The Committee received and considered a report from the Directorate of Student Life (SEC191015/03). It discussed the following matters arising from the report:

7.1 **Accommodation**

The Committee noted that local economic factors appeared to have resulted in a drop in demand for student accommodation, with more private accommodation available in the city.

7.2 **Student Support**

The Committee discussed the increase in the numbers using the University Counselling Service. The President of AUSA reported that Niteline had also seen a significant increase in calls and changing trends in relation to the type of issue affecting callers. It was acknowledged that this could be partly because the Niteline number was printed on the back of ID cards.

However, the Committee expressed concern at this increase, and the possible impact that changes to the provision of NHS Services might have had.

The possibility of working in partnership with RGU and NESCol on this issue was discussed. The Committee asked that the University’s Mental Health Group take this matter forward.

**Action: LFoley**

The Committee also raised the issue of the reduction, by the Scottish Government, of discretionary funds, due to the way in which allocations are calculated, which was based on a combination of historical student numbers and eligibility for the maximum student loan. This was not yet a matter for concern but would be kept under review.

7.3 **Personal Tutoring**

The Committee noted that the Personal Tutoring scheme was working well in some areas, and that any issues arising would be taken forward with the Senior Personal Tutors Forum. Where there were issues these seemed to relate to a lack of full engagement and communication by tutees and/or tutors.

7.4 **Widening Participation**

The Committee noted that despite a range of actions the University was unlikely to meet the targets it had set with the Scottish Funding Council for recruitment of students from the most deprived postcodes according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). It discussed the challenging nature of the postcode indicator given the low number of the most deprived postcodes in the local region. The Scottish Government’s Commission for Widening Access was currently reviewing issues in this area, including appropriate metrics.

8 REPORT FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

The Committee received and considered a report from the Directorate of Academic Affairs (SEC191015/04). It discussed the following matters arising from the report:

8.1 **Implementation of *MyCurriculum* and *MyTimetable***

The Committee noted that September student registrations had seen the first year of implementation of *MyCurriculum* and *MyTimetable*. It noted that as with any new system issues had arisen and that these were being reviewed and feedback sought from users. The outcome of this review would be reported back to the Student Experience Committee.

**Action: GM**

The Director of Academic Affairs thanked AUSA for its work in promoting the new system.

8.2 **E-learning support**

The Committee noted that the eLearning Team was operating with a reduced staff complement but the recruitment of a further staff member was in progress

9 REFUGEE SCHOLARSHIPS

The Committee received and noted a paper on the scholarship scheme for refugees recently launched by the University (SEC191015/05).

10 REPORT FROM AUSA

The Committee received and considered a report from AUSA (SEC191015/06). It discussed the following matters arising from the report:

10.1 **Sabbatical Officers**

The President for Equal Opportunities had resigned over Summer 2015, and in order to continue momentum with ongoing activity it had been decided to not replace him, but progress with the support of the Vice President.

10.2 **Alcohol Impact Accreditation**

AUSA was working with the University towards NUS Alcohol Impact Accreditation, with the first steering group meeting having taken place on 15 October.

10.3 **UN Climate Talks Campaign**

AUSA is engaging with the UN Climate Talks Campaign, which focussed on action in advance of the UN Climate Talks in Paris in December 2015.

11 ACADEMIC FLEXIBILITY

The Committee received and considered a paper on the policy to ensure academic flexibility to allow students to take part in sporting activities at the elite level (SEC191015/06). This was a pilot scheme which could be extended to other areas e.g. music, or volunteering. Such schemes were important to support and retain students.

12 STUDENT BAROMETER 2015

The Committee received and considered a paper on progress with participation in the 2015 Student Barometer Survey. This was a student satisfaction survey run by the company i-graduate, in which a number of UK and international institutions participated. In 2014 the University had had a 12% response rate from its student population; it hoped to increase this to the average response rate for all institutions which was 23%. Following launch events earlier that week including offering various incentives, the Committee noted that the response rate was already 20% with several weeks of the survey still to run.

13SHARED PLANET

The Committee noted that the decant of AUSA to Butchart had created issues for some activity because of the nature of the lease arrangement, in particular there had been discussion about the operation of the Shared Planet co-operative. These issues were being worked through and a solution identified. The Director of Student Life would follow-up with AUSA and report back to the next meeting of the Committee. **Action: LForsyth**

14 STUDENT SOCIETIES ON CAMPUS

The President of AUSA reported that the Aberdeen University Muslim Students Association, AUMSA, had booked a University room for a series of Saturday morning talks, and as part of the room booking process had been asked to provide a risk assessment. As this was a new process with room bookings, not experienced before by AUSA groups, concern was expressed that this approach had been driven by the University’s obligations under the under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015). and that AUMSA had been treated differently from other groups in this respect. However, it was reported to the Committee that this was not the case.

*Note from Clerk:*

Subsequent to the meeting it was confirmed that Estates and the Central Timetabling Team had introduced risk assessments for all bookings for events open to members of the public to ensure that the University was meeting its health and safety obligations for example ensuring attendee numbers do not exceed room capacity and that consideration has been given to managing events in case of fire/emergency. Although not the primary driver, the events risk assessment would also assist the University to fulfil its duties under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015).

15 FUTURE SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Future meetings of the Student Experience Committee in 2015/16 had been scheduled as follows: (all held at **2.00 pm**):

Monday 15 February 2016

Monday 9 May 2016

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28.10.15