



Equality and Diversity Strategy Committee

Minutes of Meeting held on 6 December 2023 at 13:00

Zoom Meeting

- Present:** Dr David Duncan (Convener, vice Prof Sir Anton Muscatelli), Mrs Christine Barr, Prof Sara Carter, Ms Hailie Pentleton-Owens, Prof Moira Fischbacher-Smith, Ms Kirsteen Fraser, Mrs Emma Gilmartin, Miss Rachel Sandison, Ms Mhairi Taylor
- Apologies:** Prof Sir Anton Muscatelli, Mr Tony Anderson, Prof Muffy Calder, Ms Uzma Khan, Prof Iain McInnes
- Attending:** Dr Katie Farrell, Dr Nighet Riaz, Martin Hendry, Mrs Janell Kelly (clerk)

Welcome and Apologies

D Duncan welcomed members, noting he was chairing the meeting in place of the Principal, who was unable to attend. Members noted the other apologies received.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting – EDSC/20230714/Minutes 1.0

The minutes were approved.

2. Matters arising – Paper 1

M Taylor provided relevant information and updates on the following items:

Action 2 – SFC’s ‘Persistent Inequalities’ and National Equality Outcomes (NEOs);

M Taylor will follow up with Planning, Insight & Analytics and Gregor Caldwell, Executive Director of Finance, on the potential to include reporting on SFC’s NEOs within the University’s Annual Report.

ACTION: EDU

Action 3 – Unions involvement in future equality related campaigns

K Fraser confirmed she would approach EDU to discuss this, as required. Item removed from EDSC actions.

Action 4 – 42 Bute Gardens (old Adam Smith Building)

M Taylor reported that C Elsby had been investigating the options for upgrading the lift in the building. He had requested a general accessibility review and asked that the external ramp repairs/improvements are brought forward, as part of the cladding works.

Action 6 - Addressing the lack of disability understanding across the colleague community in the University

M Taylor reported this item had been taken forward by K Farrell, Clare Craig and Dafydd Waters from the Disability Service and would be marked as complete.

Action 7 – Online Reporting Systems

M Taylor reported both the EDU and new Safeguarding Team had been collaborating to review, develop and streamline the respective staff and student reporting systems. Further work will look at the outward facing webpage interface and content.

Action 8 – Student Wellbeing Framework Review – West Report

EDU to ensure EDSC receive an update from the Student Support & Wellbeing Framework Implementation Group at a future meeting.

ACTION: EDU

Action 9 – Mandatory Consent Training for Students

M Taylor noted that D Duncan and H Pentleton-Owens issued an all-student email on 16 October 2023 confirming the SRC's 'Let's Talk: Online GBV Training Module' was mandatory for all students. M Taylor to request a note of the number of current student completions undertaken.

ACTION: EDU

3. Terms of Reference Review – Paper 2

Members approved the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) as shown in Paper 2. D Duncan reported that one recommendation from the recent Court Effectiveness Review Report is for the University to review the Terms of References, and potentially streamline the structure, of the committees which report into Court. This may require future changes to the EDSC ToR.

4. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Governance

M Taylor set out the current ED&I structure at the University during her presentation. She highlighted the growth in ED&I related groups within Colleges/University Services, noting while this increased awareness and focus on ED&I issues is very welcome, it has also resulted in a lack of strategic cohesion, with poor visibility of College and centralised projects/outputs meaning there have been some missed opportunities.

Members noted the varied feedback from M Taylor's consultation with the College-based EDI leads, College/University Service Heads of People and Organisational Development (P&OD), current Equality Champions and Student Representative Council (SRC).

M Taylor took members through three potential options for addressing the feedback received and highlighted some of the known structural and communication issues. Members noted the three options would represent progressive changes the current model; with the first two retaining the existing Equality Group structure with some changes in Group and EDSC membership; while the third option, which would align work around strategic aims, represented a more radical change.

Members discussed the various proposed options, however no one option was highlighted as the way forward. Members comments included the following:

- Support for incorporating College EDI Group voices on Equality Groups and potentially EDSC.
- Support for reducing the administrative burden of minuting the Equality Groups.
- Need to avoid 'report & update' style meetings/groups – must be action/decision/strategy orientated.
- Rejection of renaming and narrowing the focus of Equality Groups to the current Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- Solutions may be a 'pick and mix' of all suggested options.
- Demand for intersectional approach.
- The need to wait for the Court Effectiveness Review Report recommendations.

S Carter also suggested the potential to base a new structure on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) terminology of People, Culture and Environment.

Members suggested further work is required on this before EDSC can make any concrete recommendation on what changes are needed.

ACTION: EDU

5. Israeli/Palestinian Update

5.1 Support for University Community

D Duncan acknowledged the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and emphasised the University's support for those expressing both their concerns and sympathies, in line with the institution's values, noting the focus has been on practical support for those affected. He cited the recent vigils and fund-raising appeals and confirmed the University had maintained good dialogue with both Jewish and Muslim student groups.

R Sandison advised that External Relations has also been in contact with colleagues impacted by the conflict. She also noted the recent sad loss of alumni, Dima Alhaj, in the conflict. R Sandison provided members with an overview of other related activities:

- Two vigils held on campus, creating space and time for all to come together to connect, pray, and grieve.
- Additional support offered to CARA (Council for At Risk Academics).
- Potential expansion of the University of Sanctuary Scholarships.
- Engagement with Prof Alison Phipps in her role as UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts.
- Contact made with our partner institution, the Islamic University of Gaza, who also sadly lost their President.

Members expressed concern for all those caught up in the conflict and noted the challenges faced by the University responding to it.

5.2 UCU-requested discussion on the IHRA 'Definition' of Antisemitism

D Duncan reminded members of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism: **“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”** D Duncan noted that while it may not be a 'perfect' definition, it is accepted by significant parts of the Jewish community. He confirmed the University had adopted the main IHRA definition following extensive discussions at the November 2020 EDSC meeting.

Members noted the University and College Union (UCU) had now requested further discussion on the University's decision. C Barr confirmed she had recently advised all the Trades Union that the University had not taken the original decision to adopt the IHRA definition lightly, with lengthy debate at the time, and had also reminded them that the University had not formally adopted the IHRA's "Contemporary examples" as these were contentious.

K Fraser reminded members that her role on EDSC was to represent the Trades Unions voices. She stated that not all Trade Unions are in accord on this subject, but confirmed UCU colleagues had shared their real concerns for academic freedom and freedom of speech at the University. She reported some colleagues have decided to self-censor or remove content for fear of being labelled as antisemitic. They had cited the

[British Society of Middle Eastern Studies report on the impact of the adoption of IHRA definition](#), the International Studies Association and the European International Studies Association, all of whom had highlighted significant consequences for those who had, as part of their area of academic expertise and research, legitimately criticised Israeli government actions and policy. She stated academic colleagues' perception is that institutional reputation had been put ahead of protecting them as individuals, as well as their academic freedom.

S Carter highlighted the need for a clear definition of academic freedom, as opposed to freedom of speech which may be a personal opinion and not be based on expertise on the academic subject matter. M Taylor stated it may be wise to wait and see how the recently introduced Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 affected this landscape in English and Welsh institutions.

Members agreed the current conflict meant that taking any decision to rescind the adoption of the IHRA definition is problematic but time should be taken to review the IHRA definition at a future date.

M Fischbacher-Smith proposed that to help facilitate the future discussions, anonymised examples where academic colleagues have had concerns about publishing materials or content should be compiled. She also noted that once a final decision is made, the University must clearly articulate its position and how that is interlinked with the University's Social Media Policy and then support colleagues to have open, respectful and scholarly debate.

Members thanked K Fraser for her considered thoughts on this difficult issue. K Fraser agreed to report EDSC's comments and request for examples to UCU representative colleagues. **ACTION: K Fraser**

D Duncan, C Barr and K Fraser agreed more discussion should initially take place with all the Trade Unions at the Policy Review Group (PRG) and the topic discussed again at a future EDSC meeting.

ACTION: C Barr/K Fraser/D Duncan

6. Staff Related Items

6.1 Annual Monitoring Report 2022-23 – Paper 3

Members welcomed the reduction in rates of 'unknown' as a result of sustained efforts by the P&OD Systems team in encouraging disclosures. M Taylor highlighted all three figures relating to the University's diversity related KPI targets have increased. She referred member to the Executive Summary for other important changes. M Taylor called attention to the 93% increase in the recorded number of Managing Attendance, Discipline and Grievance cases. This appears to be a result of the introduction of improved management information, rather than any specific increase in the actual case load.

M Taylor noted that while the KPI relating to the percentage of Senior Women had increased to 33.8%, the slow pace of gains made over the last few years makes it unlikely the target figure of 50% will be met within the set timescale. She suggested significant gains could be made by implementing Positive Action initiatives within in the College of Science and Engineering to try to address the Sex imbalance across that College's population (Chart 35). K Farrell noted the James Watt School of Engineering have begun work on this by looking to introduce targeted Fellowships.

6.2 Colleague Engagement Survey 2023 Results

M Taylor presented the results from the 2023 survey, detailing actions taken since the last survey.

Members noted the Dignity and Diversity themed questions continue to have the highest percentage of favourable responses (76%), while Culture and Values again show the lowest (39%). M Taylor outlined the results by specific protected characteristics (race, disability, and sexual orientation) and provided a summary of comments where bullying, harassment and equality were referenced. She detailed priority actions, for both the University and EDU, designed to address the issues raised by the survey results.

6.3 Domestic Violence & Abuse (DV&A) discussion

K Fraser noted while the University's Equality and Diversity Policy already includes reference to DV&A, all Trades Unions are united in calling for work to increase awareness across the institution of the practical support which can be put in place for those experiencing DV&A and to ensure any resulting policy or guidance is written in inclusive language, recognising that DV&A can be experienced by both women and men and within same sex relationships. K Fraser stated numbers benefitting from such a policy will likely be small but emphasised the support it would provide would make a significant difference to those affected.

Members supported this and noted initial discussions will be held with the Unions through PRG, with the Gender Equality Group and EDSC having sight of any policy/guidance once further developed.

ACTION: EDU/K Fraser

7. **Student Related Items**

No student related issues were raised.

8. **Equality Champions Updates**

8.1 Age

M Taylor confirmed there was nothing to report in this area.

8.2 Disability

C Barr updated members on the positive progress made in addressing many of the legacy Estates-related issues. She highlighted Admissions and Registry changes allowing the Disability Service to make early contact with disabled offer holders, thus ensuring their support provisions were put in place in a timely manner.

8.3 Gender (Sex)

S Carter reported that the Gender Equality Group continued to focus on the Ross Report Recommendations (RRR) but noted recent focus has been on the University's ['Together Against Gender Based Violence' campaign](#) which was launched at the start of the UN's 16 days of Activism on GBV. E Gilmartin provided members with an extensive update on the campaign activities and related resources.

8.4 Mental Health

D Duncan reported good progress was being made through the work of the Mental Health Group.

8.5 LGBT+

M Fischbacher-Smith reported the University had renewed its membership of Stonewall. The LGBT+ Equality Group members had decided this should be renewed for the subsequent two years, when with a fuller consultation will take place on any future renewals.

8.6 Race

M Taylor advised the Race Equality Group meeting had a very full agenda, including discussions on the ethnicity awarding gap and decolonising the curriculum. She reported Black History Month was again marked by many events across the University. She also advised KPMG have been auditing the implementation of the Understanding Racism, Transforming University Culture (URTUC) Action Plan and confirmed Audit Committee will received the final report.

8.7 Religion and Belief

M Taylor referred to earlier discussions on the current Middle East conflict and highlighted the University Chaplain, Rev Dr Carolyn Kelly, continues to do great work, supporting all members of the University community during this difficult time.

8.8 Sanctuary

R Sandison reported the University had joined the [UK Higher Education Humanitarian Group](#) and hoped to submit a pledge to both that and the UNHCR Global Refugee Forum. Work had also begun on a similar pledge relating to Gypsy, Traveller, Roma and Showmen and Boater community inclusion.

9. **Items for Information**

9.1 Letter from Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees – PSED in Scotland Review – Paper 4

Members noted, as no technical guidance had yet been provided by the Scottish Government, Paper 4 which was provide for information only.

10. **Any Other Business**

10.1 Request to review Equality and Diversity Policy - Appendix H

M Hendry advised a recent case, involving a student's request for adjustments to assignment deadlines due to religious observance, had resulted in the view that the University's policy should be amended slightly to provide more clarity in this area. M Taylor confirmed EDU and the University Chaplain would be able to assist and facilitate an update.

10.2 Keystone Building – Drive for Inclusive and Accessible Buildings

M Fischbacher-Smith highlighted the work of Claire Craig, Head of Student Wellbeing & Inclusion, and Dafydd Waters, Disability & Inclusion Lead, who had championed and pushed on the design standards for the planned new building to ensure the University delivers on a truly inclusive experience for its students.

10.3 Vote of Thanks

The Convener noted this was the last EDSC meeting for M Taylor, as she was leaving the University in early 2024. Members expressed their thanks for her significant contribution in advancing the equality agenda over her 18 years at the University and wished her well in her new role at the University of Dundee.

Date of Next Meeting: 18 March 2024